

**Comments on the Report of the Committee for the
Evaluation of Political Science and International Relations Programs**

The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo

The School of Government and Society

Introductory Comments

The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo and the School of Government and Society¹ would like to thank the members of the Committee for the Evaluation of Political Science and International Relations Programs for their detailed, constructive and helpful report. The draft report was circulated to the regular faculty in the School of Government and Society and several meetings were held with the Administration (the incoming President of the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo, Professor Nehemia Friedland, and the executive director, Mr. Dror Amir) to review its findings and agree on action items for the implementation of its recommendations. The following comments and reactions reflect this collective effort.

1. Goals, Aims and Mission Statement

The overall findings regarding the mission of the program and progress towards achievement of these goals are gratifying. The specific comments regarding the criteria for hiring and promotion of faculty, graduate studies and community involvement will be discussed in detail within the context in which they were elaborated.

¹ Please note that the name of the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo and of the School of Government and Society are incorrectly rendered both in the title and the body of the report.

2. Study Program

The Report, while generally commending the study program, makes several concrete suggestions for improvement; some of these have already been implemented, a few are under consideration, and others may require further clarification.

Program Coherence

The program of studies in the School of Government and Society consists of three central types: introductory courses (in the first and second year); cluster courses (in one of the five existing clusters) and electives (including up to 6 hours in general courses or courses in other schools at the Academic College). While there is, as the Committee correctly notes, a certain amount of eclecticism, the array of choice offered is consistent with the worldview of the School of Government and Society that its mission is to lay the rigorous foundations for graduates in political science (and sociology), as well as to offer a sampling of the rich variety in the field. To attenuate the potential diffuseness of the study program, specialized clusters were introduced (see below). Nevertheless, in future planning a more structured approach that will differentiate more clearly between introductory, advanced and specialized courses will be adopted.

a. Clusters

In the wake of the discussion with members of the Review Committee during their visit—as confirmed in the Report—the School of Government and Society has decided to retain the clusters.

b. Course Offerings

The recommendation to make the Introduction to International Relations a compulsory course has already been implemented; so, too, has the recommendation to increase the elective offerings in this field.

The School requires 13 hours of courses in research methods and also offers an elective in statistical applications (which is not noted by Committee, which recommends the addition of just such a course), as well as an elective in survey methods (also not acknowledged in the Report). Most of the recurring complaints of students relate to the heavy mandatory load; the electives are sparsely populated. The suggestion to add to this research training, except on a voluntary basis, would be difficult to implement at this juncture.

The Report criticizes the paucity of courses on Middle East politics. This comment does not reflect the fact that for the past several years the program consists of at least six courses (including two seminars) in Middle East politics. A course on Arabs in Israel is offered on a bi-yearly basis. It is important to note that this topic is also

included as a key chapter in required courses such as Introduction to Sociology, the Israeli Political System and Introduction to Political Science.

The School of Government is well aware of the need to increase the courses in political economy and intends to integrate such courses in the curriculum in the coming years.

The School of Government and Society is pleased to note the suggestion on the inclusion of courses in English and is exploring ways to incorporate at least one such course in the coming year.

The Committee suggests weighing the addition of an integrative course that could bring together the diverse threads of the program in such a way as to highlight the interconnection between the various social sciences. This is the explicit purpose of the unique compulsory course on The Intellectual Roots of the Social Sciences for first year students (modeled on the contemporary civilization core curriculum course at Columbia University). In light of the recommendation of the Committee, the content of this course will be reviewed to ensure that it effectively serves its integrative purpose.

In contrast to what may be inferred from the Report, The School encourages students to take up to six hours of elective courses in general studies or in courses from other schools.

c. Internships

The internships are a critical part of the course of studies at the School of Government and Society; the commendation of the Report is therefore particularly reinforcing.

The evaluation of students by the host organization/institution is carried out by a series of written criteria that are discussed with host institutions and with the students. The other part of the overall evaluation (the written report) is also closely supervised by accompanying faculty. In light of the comments included in the Report, these guidelines will be made even more explicit in the coming year.

The internships *are* designed to serve the study clusters and with one exception (the cluster on Israeli society and politics) the connection is inherent. In view of the suggestion to consider reducing the number of clusters, it might be possible to ensure an even greater linkage in the future.

d. Course Size and Instruction

The Report evinces a possible contradiction between its praise for the policy of limitation of class size and the encouragement of an intimate teaching environment on the one hand, and its recommendation to substantially increase the size of introductory courses, currently taught in parallel sections, on the other hand. While

there are some problems of coordination in these courses, each introductory course has a coordinator and the reading lists and examinations allow for standardization as well as for individual instructor expression. In addition, the School feels strongly that introductory courses must be taught by veteran faculty in order to provide a sound foundation for further studies. This principle makes it difficult to adopt the Report's recommendation to substantially increase the number of students in these classes, as there is general consensus among the faculty and the administration that such a move would compromise the mission of excellence in teaching.

At the same time, we are well aware that the reliance on adjunct faculty is unwise. The faculty of the School of Government and Society has therefore been at the forefront of the countrywide campaign to standardize these positions. For this reason, too, even under the current untenable conditions of adjunct faculty, a consistent effort has been made to ensure a modicum of stability for this group. Most of the adjunct faculty has been an integral part of the staff for years.

e. Program Balance

The School of Government and Society offers an integrated undergraduate program in politics and society, incorporating offerings in anthropology, sociology, political science, international relations and public policy. It acknowledges a mild imbalance between the sociological and political components of the program, as highlighted in the Report. The current imbalance is an outcome both of the fact that the sociological dimension of the program services students from both the School of Government and Society and the School of Behavioral Sciences and of its corollary—that the number of permanent faculty in sociology is greater than that in political science. To redress this imbalance additional appointments in political science are planned and are in the process of implementation (see below). This boost will help rectify the situation over time.

f. Graduate Programs

The comments of the Review Committee on the advisability of establishing an M.A. program may be the outcome of discussions conducted with students and faculty during the site visit, but reflect neither the substance of the written report nor any particular request in this regard. We do not, at this juncture, concur with the Committee's recommendation on this topic nor can we acquiesce to the proposal that private colleges endowed with substantial resources be given priority over public colleges in the development of graduate programs. We request that no prior position be taken on this matter that might prejudice our standing in advance of the submission of a specific request by the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo at some point in the not too distant future.

3. Faculty

The School of Government and Society notes with satisfaction the Committee's assessment of the dedication, enthusiasm and cooperative spirit of the faculty, which in its view is essential for nurturing a climate of innovation in teaching and research. It is also well aware of the need for improvement in the areas indicated in the Report.

a. Faculty Hiring Policy

Faculty hiring policy has followed the following criteria (in this order): 1) field of expertise; 2) academic qualifications and 3) teaching experience. Contracts of faculty members who do not evince sufficient proficiency in the classroom are not extended. Future hiring will spell out the balance between these criteria more overtly as recommended in the Report.

b. Criteria for Promotion and Tenure

The Committee devotes particular attention to the role of the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo in taking a lead role in spelling out the distinct standards for promotion and tenure in the academic college system (as distinct from research universities). These suggestions apply not only to the School of Government and Society, but to the College as a whole. The administration of the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo is currently in the process of affirming and updating such measures (which could be applicable to other colleges in the country as well) and disseminating them to all faculty members.

c. Adjunct Faculty

The over-reliance on adjunct faculty is a result of budgetary constraints and is by no means desirable either from an academic or a human viewpoint. The School of Government and Society does put two offices at the disposal of adjunct faculty and provides access to the faculty club and its kitchen. Nevertheless, this may be insufficient to meet the needs of this group. Note must also be taken of the need to standardize the rights of adjunct faculty and to advance the countrywide call to move adjunct faculty into full-time positions as soon as possible.

d. Hiring and Tenure-Track Positions

In this context, as per the Committee's recommendations, the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo has decided to open a search for a tenure-track position in international relations immediately. It also foresees the need to plan for additional senior positions in political science in the years ahead.

4. Students and Alumni

The School of Government and Society is dedicated to providing superior education to students through the creation of a friendly and constructive learning environment. Recognition of these efforts by students and faculty—as well as its notation by the Review Committee—is heartening.

a. Student Feedback

Students in the courses offered by the School of Government and Society also include those drawn from the School of Behavioral Sciences, who participate in the sociology component of the program. There is, as correctly noted, a certain imbalance between the entry qualifications to the two schools (those in Behavioral Sciences have higher requirements). It is the feeling of the faculty, however, that this imbalance is mostly redressed as time progresses and is negligible in the final year of studies.

The insistence on academic rigor and excellence does not countenance the sentiment that some courses are "too easy". Lecturers will be reminded to insist on the highest standards and to provide more challenges.

The charge of political bias amongst some faculty as noted by the Committee has not been a major issue in the past and has been brought to the attention of the Dean or the College of administration only infrequently (in most of these cases, the emphasis by lecturers on democratic rights and the separation of powers has, disconcertingly, been termed "political"). Should charges of substantive political bias in the classroom recur in the future, they will be dealt with firmly.

b. Student Diversity

The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo makes a special effort to encourage diversity both in its student body and its faculty. It has and will continue to expend special resources to achieve this end.

c. Career Counseling

The suggestions to formalize career counseling within the School of Government and Society and to consider the formation of a job placement center are excellent. In the coming months, a plan will be drawn up to implement these recommendations.

d. Alumni Relations

The administration takes note of the recommendation to maintain closer relations with alumni and will devise a plan to do so in the coming year.

5. Research

The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo is justifiably proud of its support for faculty research and its encouragement of ongoing (both basic and policy-oriented) research by both senior and junior faculty. It takes note of the need to even further encourage junior faculty in this regard.

a. Research Record

The School of Government and Society is a young school, still in the process of formation. Most appointments have been made during the past six years. The School has also been fortunate to be able to hire some excellent veteran lecturers to launch the program. The unusually heavy teaching load, as noted in the Report, also constitutes a serious impediment to superior research performance. Under these circumstances, the School is proud of the research achievements of its faculty. It hopes that these will further improve with the introduction of incentives for research excellence in the academic college system beginning in the 2011-2012 academic year.

b. Research Emphases

As promotion and tenure requirements are standardized, in line with the suggestions in other parts of the Report, some of the imbalance between teaching and research can be redressed. Nevertheless, the College and the School will continue to promote continuous research activity and encourage research excellence within the parameters imposed by heavy teaching loads. The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo will continue to explore ways to incorporate academic activity (including policy-oriented research and curriculum development) into the conventional criteria for tenure and promotion. The points raised by the Committee on professional activity (p. 12) will be weighed in this context.

6. Broader Organizational Structure

The Report of the Committee underlines the close integration of the School of Government and Society into the overall structure of the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo. The only concrete suggestion in this regard—to consider the appointment of a Vice-Dean to share the administrative burdens—may be weighed in the years ahead as the student body and the program expand (it is important to note that the Dean is currently assisted by a coordinator for sociological studies, who also plays a central role in the various committees of the School).

7. Infrastructure

The Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo is justifiably proud of its classroom, office, administrative and library facilities. The need for more designated space faculty is under advisement.

8. Quality Assessment

To further improve the already developed mechanisms for quality assessment noted by the Review Committee, the criteria for judgment of course quality will be made even more transparent and the Dean will conduct occasional classroom visits in the future.

Concluding Remarks

The School of Government and Society and the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo would like to thank the Committee for the Evaluation of Political Science and International Relations Programs both for its insightful comments and for the opportunity to carefully consider its recommendations. The main suggestions regarding the study program, the hiring of new faculty and the tightening of course requirements have been adopted and most of these are now in the process of being implemented. Other recommendations, especially regarding course size and mode of instruction, have not been embraced at this juncture as they might stand in contradiction to the proven strengths of the program as noted in the Report.

We greatly appreciate the serious work put into helping improve the performance of the School of Government and Society and thank the Committee warmly for this effort.

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