

Response to the follow-up committee review over the implementation of the recommendations made by the External Evaluation Team of Statistics Departments in Israel (February 2013)

Committee's recommendations (May, 2010)	Department's Response (July 2012)	The follow-up committee Opinion Regarding Implementation of the Recommendation (January 2013)	Department's Response (February 2013)
Specific Report			
<p>1. In view of the Administration's support and the change and development of the field we urge the Department to formulate plans with a view to the future. As they have done, in hiring new faculty members, the Department should first and foremost aim for excellence. It should not focus too strongly on hiring for a particular program. The collaborative atmosphere of the Department and the environment are such that strong researchers are likely to gravitate towards one of the key programs of the Department. (Also see general report - recommendation no. 3)</p>	<p>In line with the Evaluation Committee's recommendation to hire promising new members with excellence in research and teaching, we have hired Dr. Yair Goldberg. We are looking forward to hiring additional young faculty members with high research potential in statistics and applied probability. We intend to integrate all new faculty members in teaching in all the department's programs.</p>	<p>An excellent start.</p>	
<p>2. If no person is hired who is able to lead the quality studies program after the retirement of the present program leader, then one should consider the option of discontinuing that program in the Department of Statistics. The program is running well and is attracting a fair number of students, but it does not fit very naturally in the Department, and is not a critical program.</p>	<p>The quality program will continue next year. Prof. Halevi agreed to lead the program for at least one year after his retirement. We are presently looking to hire an applied statistician to lead the program. However, if we are unable, and Prof. Halevi will not be able to serve as the head of the program, we will probably discontinue the program.</p>	<p>Appropriate response.</p>	

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<p>3. The Department should take additional measures to handle the strong heterogeneity in background knowledge and quality of students, in both the BA and Masters programs. In the BA programs, we recommend to have honors classes for excellent students. In the Masters programs, good students could be paid to tutor student who are weak or lack background. As a side benefit, this will create a stronger sense of community.</p>	<p>We continually increase the quality level of our candidates and the acceptance score for next year is 580. We intend to examine the effect this has on the number and quality of students admitted to the BA program. As for the Masters students, last year we accepted 4 good students, all of whom will probably do a research thesis. We strongly advertise the MA program, also to students in related disciplines such as Mathematics, Computer Science and Economics. We advertise the program on Internet sites, and organized an open day for MA candidates. During the open day we presented the MA programs and the department members presented their research interests. We will continue with this course of action in the future.</p>	<p>Quality of students was perhaps the most serious issue the Committee felt was facing the Haifa Department. There is serious national competition in Israel for graduate students in Statistics, as well local competition from Computer Science, and the Haifa department has not fared well in the past. The moves taken so far are in the right direction, but the gains have been small. Nevertheless, it is hard to see what else can be done.</p>	<p>This year 10 students have started the MA program in Statistics, all of whom either have a BA in Statistics or have taken the required Statistics supplementary courses. This is a tremendous increase both in quantity and quality. We hope that the majority of these students will opt for the thesis track. We will do our best to ensure that this trend continues.</p>
<p>4. The Department of Statistics should seek a bigger involvement in service courses for other departments; faculty members of the Department should at least review the syllabi and material of statistics courses in other departments, but these courses would be best taught by the Department of Statistics. (Also see general report - recommendation no. 5)</p>	<p>We give service courses to the Departments of Economics and Information Systems. Right now we do not have enough teachers to teach more service courses. Other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences such as Psychology, Sociology, etc. prefer teachers from their own programs to teach the statistics courses.</p>	<p>There is a "chicken and egg" issue here, in that it may be necessary to volunteer and devote scarce resources to teaching some service oriented courses in order to generate demand that will impress on other disciplines the advantages of having statisticians teach Statistics, which would later lead to more slots. This is something the Department should reconsider.</p>	<p>As said before, there is no demand for these courses. On the other hand, the Department's faculty members are not enthusiastic about teaching service courses, and the Department does not have the budget to hire PhD students or external teachers to teach these courses.</p>

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<p>5. All efforts should be made to increase the number of PhD students interested in academic careers. This is important not only for this Department, but for all statistics departments in Israel. Only this will ensure the continuity of statistics and related subjects, so crucial to all areas of research, in Israel.</p>	<p>We have now three PhD students in the quality program who are in the stage of writing their dissertation (Stage B); one student in actuarial program is also in Stage B, and 3 PhD students in statistics, one of whom is in the final stage of writing his dissertation. Asides from the above students, we have one student in the direct PhD program who is working now on her research proposal.</p>	<p>More would be better. All agree. Nevertheless, the Department is doing what it can here.</p>	<p>We hope that the increase in the number of students in the MA in Statistics program will also increase the number of PhD students.</p>
<p>6. In order to improve the education of research MSc and of PhD students in statistics throughout Israel, the committee is proposing the establishment of a country wide series of advanced courses. Treating the small size of Israel as an advantage rather than a problem, the committee believes that such a series will do a lot to overcome the "critical mass" problem that most Israeli statistics departments are facing. More details on this will be given in the general report. (Also see general report - recommendation no. 1)</p>	<p>The heads of the statistics departments in all relevant Israeli institutions of higher education have met several times. It seems that right now, though, each department wants to keep its specialty. The public transportation in Israel is not very efficient and it is difficult for students to travel among the different locations. Thus it seems that in the near future establishing such center is not realistic. However, we might consider such a center in the future.</p>	<p>As the saying goes, the future is now. See the comments in Chapter 6</p>	<p>We believe that such cooperation among statistics departments can begin on a small-scale and increase over time. For example: Since each statistics department has its own specialties, our PhD students take some high level courses in other statistics departments in Israeli universities, usually at the Technion. We believe that another kind of cooperation can be joint supervision of MA or PhD students.</p>

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<p>7. To increase the mathematical level of the Department's students, arrangements should be made to help them take courses in the Mathematics Department when they desire to do so.</p>	<p>The mathematics courses are given by the Mathematics Department. Lately, all these courses are given by mathematics PhD students. We asked the head of the Department of Mathematics to allocate more qualified teachers to these courses. Unfortunately he told us that there are not enough teachers at their department.</p> <p>We suggest 2 solutions to solve this situation:</p> <p>To let us hire our own mathematics qualified teachers or to have a faculty member from the department of mathematics to teach the courses.</p> <p>To unify the mathematics teaching in the Faculty of Social Sciences such that all the students in the quantitative departments have the same mathematics qualified teachers and syllabi.</p> <p>We believe that either one of these actions will raise the mathematical level of our students.</p>	<p>The solutions that the Department is pursuing are sensible. Unfortunately, they depend on the support of other departments and the Faculty, and therefore may be hard to implement. Therefore this was, and remains, a problem.</p>	<p>We have raised the level of the courses in calculus and algebra. We are now working on a new syllabus for the third mathematics course. We are trying to get better teachers and we nominated one of the Department's professors to supervise and mentor the mathematics teachers.</p>

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General Report		
<p>1. Initiate a graduate network for statistics, that provides high-level courses on a national basis. (Also see specific report - recommendation no. 6)</p>	<p>Something must be done to correct this situation. Each Department, in its own report, gave reasons why nothing has come of the idea of a national center. Most reasons were similar: (i) Each department wants to keep its specialty. (ii) The public transportation in Israel is not very efficient and it is difficult for students to travel among the different locations. (iii) Students are able to take courses offered at another university. However, the number of students who are taking advantage of this option is small. (iv) Partially due to lack of agreement among potential contributors and partially due to lack of interest among many, nothing comes out of this (proposal). These excuses (it is hard to call them "arguments") are all unacceptable, and represent either narrow, departmental interests, or lack of foresight on behalf of students in the importance of a first rate education. The latter is excusable, the former is not. It is strongly recommended that the CHE take the lead in attempting to establish a national statistical network that will implement the suggestions of the Committee in regard to statistical teaching and research.</p>	

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2.The number of faculty members in statistics departments in Israel should be expanded to keep up with the growth in the field.	Most departments are doing what they can in this regard, and it seems that university administrations are, overall, responding positively to the need for replacement and additional faculty. On a national level, this will remain a difficult issue for the foreseeable future, given the small supply of candidates.	We have hired a new faculty member whose research interest is in applied and theoretical statistics. We hope to hire an additional faculty member specializing in applied probability and/or actuarial sciences.
3. The statistics departments should develop long-term plans which include positioning within the university, research-orientation and recruitment strategy. (Also see specific report - recommendation no. 1)	The responses to the Committee's recommendations by the individual departments indicate that longer term planning is now happening, even when (as in the case of the Hebrew U Department) a department seems to be against this on principle. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the inability to develop a national program in Statistics, with its clear and important long term objectives, might indicate that medium-term planning, rather than long-term planning, is the norm.	
4. The horizons for hiring need to be expanded to meet the future needs.	Given the nature of this suggestion, and the fact that it depends primarily on new appointments, progress will naturally be slow. So although there is not much progress yet, that is only natural.	
5. Statistics courses that serve other departments should be taught/ overseen by the statistics department. (Also see specific report - recommendation no. 4)	There is some progress here, but since issues of new slots, agreement with other departments, and reallocation of resources by university administrations, are all involved in this issue, real progress will take many years.	
6. The statistical laboratories in statistics departments serve dual roles that are invaluable. They have all been hit by the financial crunch. Seed money should be given to these laboratories so that their potential is realized	The changes noted in the individual Department report indicate a small, but definite, improvement in support of statistical laboratories. Things here are moving in the right direction.	