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המחלקה
לסטטיסטיקה
הפקולטה
למדעי החברה

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To: Ms. Noa Nof Steiner, Coordinator
Committee for the Evaluation of Statistics Study-Programs
Council for Higher Education

Dear Ms. Noa Nof Steiner:

I am writing in response to Follow Up Report of the Committee for the Evaluation of Statistics Study-Programs. The emphasis in my response is an attempt to address the criticizing comments made by the Committee in connection to the response of our department to the original report. Below I lay out each of what I see as the major criticisms, followed by our response.

1: Original Recommendation: *The Department should move to the Faculty of Science.*

Original Response: *at least at present, the cost of such move seems to be too big and the danger to the integrity of the department too serious.*

Criticism: *"It is truly a shame that what seem to be primarily short term considerations prevented the implementation of an important long term project."*

Statistics: The failure of the attempt to change the administrative position of the department of statistics may serve as an indication that the ground is not ripe yet for such a move. Nonetheless, the rationale behind the recommendation of the committee is still valid and it is our intention to move forward in that direction. Indeed, we continued the process of restructuring our teaching efforts in the Safra Campus, focusing on the needs and interests of students and teachers in computer sciences in the determination of the syllabuses of the courses that are offered in

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that campus. Currently, this restructuring effort involves undergraduate teaching. In the future, we plan to offer courses at the graduate level in an attempt to attract to our graduate program students with a strong mathematical and computational background and to enhance the collaboration between our department and the School of Computer Science.

It is my personal belief that strong collaboration between computer scientists and statisticians is natural when facing the scientific challenges that predominates current landscape of data science. Both the School of Computer Science and the Department of Statistics can benefit from such collaboration. A model example for such collaboration is Gal Elidan, who grew up in computer science and is now a member in our department. Next year Or Zuk will join us. He is a rising star in bio-informatics and can make an important contribution for making the banding between the two bodies even stronger. However, this is not enough. A critical mass requires at least 2-3 more people which see both departments as their homes. Here is where the university's leadership may play a role by encouraging joint appointments of new faculty or, alternatively, viewing favorably recruitments to the department of statistics of researchers with previous training in computer science but intentions to do research that involves advanced forms of data analysis. Further justification for this request is the fact that the department of statistics already invests in the Safra Campus a teaching effort that is equivalent to the total teaching quota of 2 full faculty positions. (We include in this count the basic probability course for CS, but not other service courses.) Adding graduate courses will increase this investment even further.

2: Recommendation: the Department should develop a long term development plan.

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Response: *The department does not follow a long term development program since its recruitment is done via the faculty.*

Criticism: *"This is really passing the buck."*

Statistics: In light of the criticism we will initiate a discussion in the department in the second semester of this academic year and formulate a long term development plan.

7: Recommendation: *The University should provide seed money to reinforce the statistical laboratory.*

Response: *The university administration accepted our criteria for an adjunct teacher at half slot who will teach and practice statistical consulting.*

Criticism: *"This is a good start, but it is not enough."*

Statistics: We concur with the expressed criticism and propose increasing the position of the adjunct teacher to a full slot. We think that Laboratory for Statistical Consulting may have a pillar role in our graduate training in Mount Scopus. The enhanced teaching duties of the adjunct teacher that result from such increase may be very significant in that regard.

(Chapter 3) 1: Recommendation: *Initiate a graduate network for statistics, that provides high-level courses on a national basis.*

Response: *Excuses of all forms that are listed in the Follow Up Report.*

Criticism: *"Without doubt, this was the key recommendation of the entire original report... Something must be done to correct this situation... It is strongly recommended that the CHE take the lead in attempting to establish a national*

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statistical network that will implement the suggestions of the Committee in regard to statistical teaching and research. "

Statistics: We will gladly support and collaborate with any initiative of CHE to promote a more coordinated effort in teaching statistics to graduate students and in promoting statistical research.

Moreover, we would humbly like to propose extending this initiative and incorporating related fields such as machine learning, bioinformatics, applied probability, etc. A center such as EURANDOM, but one that focuses on research fields such as the above mentioned in which Israel is in the forefront can give a substantial boost to all parties involved and can serve as the anchor for attracting graduate students to do their research in the science of data.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Yakir