



Oct. 28, 2011

The Council of Higher Education  
Jerusalem

**Response of the Political Science Department at Tel Aviv University  
to the International Committee's Evaluation Report**

We thank the committee for its dedicated work and for its praise for the department's pursuit of excellence, the high satisfaction levels of both students and faculty, the commendable services provided by the administration and the good standard of the infrastructure.

We are in total agreement with the committee that the cadre of regular faculty in the department is the key to many of the points raised in the report. During the crisis period in Israeli academia, which hit Tel Aviv particularly hard, the number of regular faculty dropped to 13. In recent years we have recruited 7 new faculty members, so presently the department comprises 19.5 regular academic staff. The rector of the university has expressed his support for the further strengthening of the department. The Political Science Department is among the largest in the university in terms of student numbers, and, given its faculty-student ratio, a faculty of 22+, as the committee recommends, is clearly a necessary minimum. The department persists in its recruitment efforts, focusing above all on scholarly excellence and the scarcities in Israeli politics and political behavior in particular.

Expanding the regular faculty is the only solution to the requirements of teaching and thesis supervision in the department. Two years ago we recruited two young faculty

members in IR, and a third has been added this year. This has already positively and quite dramatically affected the supervision of theses in the MA programs, a sore problem until recently. After tenure, these new faculty members will also be able to advise the writing of doctoral theses. Similarly, last year we recruited two new faculty members specializing in research methods, and they have immediately assumed the teaching of our compulsory courses in this field at both the BA and MA levels.

As a result, this year, for the first time after many years, the department has been able to conduct its BA and MA programs with only a small number of adjunct faculty. In the special MA programs as well, most courses are given this year by regular faculty. Needless to say, this trend should be consolidated and expanded. In response to the committee's comment, let me point out that all the introductory courses in the BA except one (7 out of 8) are given by senior faculty.

The mixture and character of the BA, MA and doctorate programs raise complex questions. In contrast to other departments in the faculty and university, the department enjoys a strong and growing demand for the BA. In our judgment, at least part of it is due to the interest and demand raised by the department's special programs for the MA. The level of the BA students is very good, and, given the growing demand, we have raised the threshold of acceptance every year over the past years, as we intend to continue doing until we reach an equilibrium point. I would like to take this opportunity to add, following recent publications, that in my humble opinion diverting BA students from the universities to colleges - as a *wholesale* policy - would be a mistake which would only result in a significant lowering of the standard of the BA in Israel.

In the MA we accept the distinction between the specialized and research programs. With respect to the former, it cannot be ignored that they enjoy a very strong demand, which expresses broader trends in higher education and MA studies that this is not the place to discuss. The specialized programs also constitute a prime service to the training of the country's public sector. Obviously, it is necessary to be very strict, as we are, about the academic quality of these programs and distinguish between the research track in them, intended for the few, and the non-research, non-thesis track, taken by most students. In this context, I have already mentioned the incorporation of

our new faculty members in both teaching and thesis supervision in the programs, which has already made a very significant change. In addition, we have expanded in all the programs both the preliminary course requirements and the sharing of courses from our core MA program in political science.

It cannot be denied that the regular MA in the department and the thesis track in it have lesser demand than we would have wished. In this the department is no exception to the general trend in the universities, explained, again, by the changes in both the employment and academic markets. I doubt that there is a clear solution to this trend. We totally agree with the recommendation that the research-track MA and doctorate programs should be tied more closely together. In reality, however, students' enrollment in the direct doctorate track is low, and the actual benefits of this track so far are unclear.

We work to add courses and discussion groups in methodology and thesis writing in the advanced research degrees. We have added an entirely new such course in the doctorate, and reformed the methodological workshop in the MA. Also, as mentioned above, we now have new young faculty teaching research methods.

To the Hebrew MA we added last year an International MA in Security and Diplomacy (English-speaking), including a thesis track. This year we opened in an embryonic form an international MA in the fields of political science proper. The first of these programs enjoys lively demand, and this year it comprises 45 students. The benefits of the international program are clear. It is important that Israeli academia will participate in the fast accelerating trend towards globalization in university education, which now also includes large-scale student mobility, whereas previously it had been mostly limited to faculty members and the United States. Israel has a lot to offer in many fields, including but of course not solely in the field of security and diplomacy. Needless to say, there is also a national added value to bringing students from all over the world to Israel for an extend period of stay.

More and larger doctoral scholarships are necessary and will be most welcome.

The committee notes that the formal structure of the surveyed disciplines in the Social Science Faculty is opaque. But in practice the lines of demarcation are clear enough. As the committee writes, the School of Government exists mainly on paper. Cooperation between the Political Science and Public Policy departments is good, including a joint appointment and double registration of courses. It should be noted, however, that the Public Policy Department was built as an interdisciplinary unit, and a full cooperation between it and the Political Science Department is not entirely natural, nor required.

Our department members have won an impressive number of external research grants during recent years, including 6 ISFs and large grants to our young faculty from both the European funds and the Binational US-Israel Fund.

The department's policy is to allow registration to courses from other departments. It is the first time I hear of problems in this regard, and we shall act to resolve them.

We again wish to thank the committee for its work.

Sincerely,

Prof. Azar Gat

Chair