



Committee for the evaluation of nutritional science program: Response to report by the School of Nutritional Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

We would like to thank the committee for the report and the outstanding effort, and to the council for Higher Education for this self evaluation process.

We agree with the committee that a 5-year strategic plan in all relevant aspects of the School of Nutritional Sciences, its mission and goals needs to be developed. This recommendation is undertaken and will be elaborated during the next two years.

**The BSc program:**

The BSc program was reduced from 165 to 150 credits needs to be re-evaluated. We agree with the committee that the current curriculum is also oriented towards students who want to do graduate level nutrition research and that the clinical part should be strengthened. However, we do not think splitting the program to two tracks, applied nutrition for clinical approach and science-based research nutrition approach, is a good or workable idea.

Reasons against a split program: We foresee that the majority if not all of the students will prefer to enroll in the clinical track and thereby will not be able to be exposed to basic science courses. Additionally, we predict that this split will prevent having a minimal number of students that will enable the sustaining of the research track. We are apprehensive that this measure will result in only one track, the clinical track and negatively impact on the future generations of basic nutritional researchers. Presently, we already have two tracks: the regular program, and the Amirim program, for excellent students, oriented towards basic research in nutrition.

Alternative to two tracks curriculum:

The School of Nutritional Sciences suggests building on the current curriculum, to expand the curriculum to 160 credits with special tracks/study packages for specific expertises. Each additional study package will include 18 credits in a specific clinical or applied nutrition relevant topic.

For example:

Package 1) Nutrition in Sports – will be developed as a unique program of the School of Nutrition.

Package 2) Nutrition in Public Health – will be developed as a joined venture between the school of nutrition and the school of public health affiliated with the school of medicine. We know that this venture will receive support from the University's president, Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson.

**Internship:**

We agree with the committee that students are kept waiting for a long period of time for their practical internship and this causes us great concern. Given that a 4 year BSc program that includes practical internship is something that has to be decided at the national level, we are unable to address this suggestion as raised by the committee. It is obvious that the School of Nutritional Sciences will be in favor of such a program if a sufficient amount of internship positions are available for the 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Unfortunately, we are afraid that this suggestion will not be adopted, for it will lead to the generation of different "classes" of nutritionists, with our graduates.

**MSc program:**

To support additional clinical expertise and practical learning outcomes for our graduate students and in order to aid our students waiting for practical internships, we are now offering a non-thesis M.Sc. track to our new graduates (previously, a 4 year waiting period and practice as clinical dietitian were required prior to applying for the non-thesis program). We consider our new non-thesis track as an opportunity to improve the professional skills of our graduate students helping them to benefit more from the practical internship, which is now mostly observational. The non-thesis track is being gradually upgraded to become the best program in the country for improving the professional skills and knowledge of our graduates in applied nutrition and as therapists.

For the future, we hope to establish a study center in nutritional epidemiology at the school of Nutritional Sciences. Such a center will provide the opportunity and the means to analyze data from different cohorts and nutritional surveys conducted in Israel. The center should be coordinated by new recruits (Nutritional epidemiologist in the regular track or two half time recruits to the teaching track) that will be able to supervise MSc and Ph.D. students in nutritional epidemiology. We strongly believe that such an epi-center will allow us to acquire funding from new sources and to expand our basic research into the human-related issues and for evaluation of clinical intervention outcomes.

**Ph.D program:**

The curriculum for the PhD program will be examined and changed according to the comments of the committee.

**Faculty:**

We agree with the committee determination that at least two additional full time faculty members, a nutritionist and a clinician dietitian, are necessary and should be immediately hired in order to decrease the student/faculty ratio and broaden and enrich the teaching programs of both the BSc and MSc programs. According to the developing program of the School new faculty members are in urgent need in the areas of 1) nutrition and physiology of

exercise (role of muscle tissue) 2) clinical and translational nutrition, 3) nutrition and pharmacology and psychology, 4) nutrition and epidemiology.

**Responding to specific points raised by the committee:**

- Increasing the involvement of the adjunct faculty in the areas of curriculum and course revisions, and student research supervision. An effort should be made to encourage and enable the adjunct teachers to take part in applied research in the school of nutrition and especially with the internship students in the hospitals;

Following approval of the Dean, we allowed two of our adjunct faculty members to supervise MSc thesis students. However, the school plan to hire some of the adjunct faculty in the teaching track was not approved by the Hebrew University in addition to the Faculty's allotted tenure tracks.

- Recruiting at least two additional faculty members with clinical experience, preferably with dietetics credentials to augment the strong basic science faculty. A responsibility of the new faculty members should include developing applied clinical nutrition electives and directing applied-nutrition research projects;

We agree with the committee.

- Employing additional graduate teaching assistants with the intent of enhancing both the learning experience of the students and training of these graduate teaching assistants as future academic professionals.

We agree and think that we should have more graduate teaching assistants. These students should be provided with sufficient scholarships and have much smaller teaching burden compared with current situation.

- Reducing the number of faculty (currently 4) in team-taught courses to facilitate maximal integration of the material.

This has already been implemented. Currently there is only one team-taught course.

**Organizational Structure**

"The higher administration (The Faculty) appears to be focused on the priorities of the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment, whereas the department faculty appears to be focused on the priorities of the School of Nutritional Sciences"

**Recommendation**

The committee recommends:

Intermediate (2-4 years):

- Hiring new faculty on the basis of teaching needs in order to maintain a well-balanced curriculum that supports a comprehensive BSc, MSc and PhD program for the students.

We agree with the committee and think that in the next 4 years the Hebrew University and the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment should have a commitment to the School of Nutrition Science to hire at least 3-4 new faculty members. The School regular staff should be stabilizing on at least 9-10 full faculty members instead of the current 6.

## **Infrastructure**

### ***Recommendations***

The committee recommends:

Immediate (0-2 years):

- Assessing the available research space to determine current distribution relative to research priorities and support, and making modifications, if appropriate, on the basis of this review;
- Condensing individual research groups into single spaces/buildings;
- Separating desk space from research laboratories; and

Intermediate (2-4 years)

- Upgrading and refurbishing the teaching kitchen for effective teaching of food preparation and food service.

We agree with the committee.

The teaching kitchen: Currently the teaching kitchen is being renovated, however it should be re-arranged to a modern unit that will cater the needs of the large number of students and the courses' teaching needs of food preparation and food service.

In summary, in order to be able to make the necessary changes the Hebrew University and the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment should allocate the resources needed for: better administrative support for the School of Nutritional Sciences, to improve the research laboratories infrastructure and most importantly for new and more recruits of academic staff.

Signatures:

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