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Report for: The Israeli Council of Higher Education.
From: Professor Gila Sher

Re: **Bar Ilan University's Implementation of the Recommendations made by the External Evaluation Team of Philosophy Departments in Israel, November 2009**

I. Data

This report is based on an Interim Follow-up Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the CHE Evaluation Committee of the Division of General Philosophy at Bar Ilan University. Written by Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice Rector in charge of Quality Evaluation. January 12, 2012.

II. Implementation of Recommendations to the University

*Levels of Urgency: *** - most urgent, ** - next most urgent, * - pressing need.*

- 1.*** Replacing retirees & increasing the size of the faculty - ***Partially Implemented; Visible Progress.***
- 2.** Hiring priorities - ***Largely Implemented.***
- 3.** Constituting the division as a department - ***Not Implemented.***
- 4.* Tenure - ***Not Implemented by the University; Partially Implemented by the Division.***
5. Administrative & library staffing - ***Not Implemented due to budgetary constraints.***
6. Library support for acquisitions - ***Only Partially Implemented due to budgetary constraints.***

III. Implementation of Recommendations to the Division of (General) Philosophy

*Levels of Urgency: *** - most urgent, ** - next most urgent, * - pressing need.*

- 1.*** Undergraduate curriculum revision - ***Not Implemented due to shortage of staffing, but Some Progress was made.***
- 2.*** Graduate curriculum revision - ***Not Implemented, partly due to shortage of staffing and partly due to disagreement with the recommendation, but Some Progress (on the part agreed on) was made.***
- 3.** Asserting the importance of writing - ***Not Addressed.***
- 4.** Undergraduate advising - ***Partly Implemented (implemented on an informal basis); disagreement with the need for formal implementation.***
- 5.* Introducing structure into the PhD program - ***Partial Implementation (difficulty: shortage of staff).***
- 6.* Mentoring - ***Partly Implemented.***
7. Outside mediator - ***Not Implemented due to disagreement with the recommendation.***
8. Interuniversity - ***Not Addressed.***

IV. Discussion

The division's implementation of the recommendation is only partial. In some cases there is good will by the division but shortage of teaching staff prevents full implementation at the present time. In other cases the division feels that the recommendations do not fully take into account the special situation in the division, and in my judgment they may be right. I do hope, however, that with increase in staffing the recommendations accepted by the department will be fully implemented.

The university's implementation of the recommendations is also partial. Here there are both good and bad developments. The most encouraging development is the university's positive response to the external team's highest ranking recommendation of replacing retirees and increasing the size of the faculty. The university promptly authorized the replacement of a faculty member who retired in the academic year 2010-11 as well as granted the division an additional full-time tenure-track position, and both positions followed the external team's "hiring priorities" recommendation. Concerning further additional positions requested by the external team, the Vice Rector reasonably says that "if the Division succeeds in bringing in excellent new candidates, it will be able to get additional faculty". I commend the university of this attitude and hope additional faculty will be hired in the next year or two. This is crucial in view of the

external team's warning that "the Division of General Philosophy at present is seriously understaffed, indeed, so understaffed that its capacity to remain a viable graduate-degree granting division is in question."

On the negative side, the university has been completely unresponsive to the external team's recommendation that the Division be made into an independent Department, a recommendation that is of the second highest urgency. This recommendation is very important. As the external team indicated in its recommendation: "As a form of inquiry with its own distinctive traditions, general philosophy is unmistakably distinct from Jewish thought and studies. ... [T]his internationally recognized distinction entails distinct norms for such matters as evaluating professional work, constructing curricula, and hiring new faculty members. ... [T]he formal separation of the two divisions of philosophy into separate departments is long overdue". The university did not provide any explanation of its refusal to implement this recommendation.

V. Current State of the General Philosophy Division.

The current state of the general philosophy division is modestly improved compared to its state in 2009. The number of FTE's increased from 6.75 to 7.75 and there seems to be good will on the part of the university to increase this number to 9 FTE's. However, no progress at all has been made in turning the Division of General Philosophy into an independent Philosophy Department. This is very unfortunate, both for the university and for the division. It is unfortunate for the university because virtually any serious research university in the Western world has an independent philosophy department, and for a good reason: Rejecting general philosophy amounts to rejecting one of the most central intellectual scaffoldings of the modern world. And it is unfortunate for the division since it is very difficult, and probably impossible, to pursue general philosophy on a high academic level without having the requisite measure of independence and support.

VI. Conclusions / Recommendations

First, it is imperative that the university take note of the external team's recommendation of separating the general philosophy division from the division of Jewish thought and turn the philosophy division into an independent department. This requires serious deliberation by the administration together with the philosophy faculty, possibly in consultation with various academic bodies in Israel (e.g., CHE), representatives of other Israeli universities, and representatives of distinguished universities abroad.

Second, it is important that the university continue with its current policy of replacing retirees and increasing the number of philosophy faculty.

And third, I strongly urge both the division and the university to implement the other recommendations that have not been addressed or implemented.