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

**Re: The Hebrew University's Implementations of the Recommendations made by the External Evaluation Team of Philosophy Departments in Israel, November 2009**

## **I. Data**

This report is based on

1. Letter to the Evaluation Committee, CHE. January 18, 2010. Professor Avital Wohlman, Head of the Department of Philosophy.
2. Letter to CHE. February 19, 2010. Professor Israel Bartal, Dean, Faculty of Humanities.
3. Letter to Ms. Michal Neumann, Head, the Quality Assessment Unit, CHE. February 25, 2010. Yaacov Schul, Vice Rector.
4. Intermediary Report on the Implementation of the Report by the Committee for the Quality of General Philosophy. November 30, 2011. Dr. Meir Buzaglo, Head of the Philosophy Department.
5. Letter to Michal Neumann, the Quality Assessment Unit, CHE. December 12, 2011. Yaacov Schul, Vice Rector.
6. Letter from the Philosophy Department in Response to Request for Additional Information. May 28, 2012.
7. Letter from Vice Rector Yaacov Schul in Response to Request for Additional Information. June 3, 2012.

## **II. Implementation of Recommendations to the University**

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

- 1.\*\*\* Replacing retirees #1 - ***Partial implementation. Situation very worrisome.***
- 2.\*\*\* Replacing retirees #2 - ***No steps toward implementation. Situation very worrisome.***
- 3.\*\*\* Co-operation between the administration and the department - ***Implemented.***
- 4.\*\* Re-asserting the research status of the department - ***Implemented.***
- 5.\*\* Maintaining departmental autonomy - ***Implemented.***
- 6.\*\* Departmental administration of the PhD program #1 - ***Partial implementation.***
- 7.\*\* Physical infrastructure - ***Partial implementation.***
8. Support for direct-track PhD students - ***Partial implementation.***

## **III. Implementation of Recommendations to the University and the Department of Philosophy**

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

9. Direct-track #1 - ***Partial implementation.***
10. Community and the Mount Scopus campus - ***Partial implementation.***

## **IV. Implementation of Recommendations to the Department of Philosophy**

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

- 11.\*\*\* Hiring priorities ***Being implemented.***
- 12.\*\* Quality and stature of new faculty - ***Implemented.***
- 13.\*\* Revising the MA program ***Implemented.***
- 14.\*\* Departmental administration of the PhD program #2 - ***Partial implementation.***
15. Departmental administration of the PhD program #3 - ***Being implemented.***
- 16.\* Need for additional women among the faculty - ***Attempts at implementation.***

17. Need for full-time members - *Accepted by the department. Depends on university.*
18. Direct-track #2 - *Not implemented. Outside department jurisdiction. Attempts at indirect implementation.*
- 19.\*\* Writing and feedback - *Partial implementation.*
- 20.\*\* Monitoring undergraduate teaching - *Implemented.*
21. Review of undergraduate offerings - *Implemented.*
22. Placement - *Implemented.*
23. Interuniversity #1 - *Not implemented. Depends on university.*
24. Interuniversity #2 - *Attempts at implementation.*
25. Tenure - *Supported by the department.*

## V. Discussion

The department of philosophy has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, most of the external team's recommendations and I commend it for this.

The university has implemented some of the recommendations, either fully or partially. But its implementation of the most crucial recommendations (II. 1-2 above, highest priority) is very problematic. This requires a clear discussion:

Of all the philosophy departments in Israel, with the exception of Bar Ilan, the members of the external team found the situation with the philosophy department at the Hebrew University the most problematic and worrisome. This had been a renowned department, with such international figures like Buber, Bar Hillel, Rothenstreich, Yovel, Zemach, Margalit, Steiner, Pitowski, Kwart, and many others, including some who are still members of the department today. But in the last decade the university neglected to replace the large group of retirees and others who separated from the department, and from a thriving department of 16-18 senior positions (positions min ha-minyan) the department shrank to 13.25 positions in 2008/9 (time of the evaluation report), and to 9.25 in 2011/12 (present), according to the reports I have received. The estimate for 2015 is devastating: the number of positions will go down to a number between 3.75 to 6 positions (according to the various estimates I have received).

It was for that reason that the external team recommended - with the highest degree of emergency possible - that the Hebrew University bring the number of positions min ha-minyan in the

philosophy department to 13.25 by the end of 2012 and to 16-17 by the end of 2015 (recommendations II.1-2 above). Indeed, the external team was so concerned that it asked the university to re-assert its commitment to the research status of the philosophy department, something it did not ask any other Israeli university to do.

Letting a distinguished department lose so many faculty in a decade is hard to justify. This is especially so since the loss concerns not just the philosophy department itself but the university as a whole, the division of humanities, and the new school of philosophy.

I should emphasize that in spite of the losses, the department has an outstanding research faculty, a faculty that can serve as a basis for renewing its strength. But this requires a quick and decisive action on part of the university. In the last three years the department hired one new senior faculty (faculty min ha-minyan), and now the department is authorized to hire one more senior faculty. This is far too little if the university is committed to having an outstanding - even a merely respectable - philosophy department. The severity of the situation calls for an emergency planning meeting of all the administrative and academic bodies involved.

## **V. Current State of the Philosophy Department**

As indicated in the discussion above, the philosophy department is undergoing a crisis. It has shrunk from 16-18 full positions a decade ago to 9 today, and with more upcoming retirements it is in danger of shrinking to fewer than 6 full positions in two to three years. The department has an excellent core, but immediate action is needed to deal with this danger.

## **VI. Conclusions / Recommendations**

The university needs to take substantial steps to reverse the shrinking of the philosophy department and restore it to a viable department - indeed, an outstanding department, a status it used to have and still has the potential of attaining. (See detailed discussion in Parts IV and V above.)