

21 October 2012

## TAU response to the CHE evaluation committee of Occupational Therapy

We are extremely grateful for the in-depth report; the report reflects the committee's comprehensive work both in reviewing the written materials submitted by the university and department and during the committee's two day visit.

We were encouraged by the evaluation committees' positive comments regarding the departments' achievements and success. These achievements were noted in multiple areas including research, teaching, student supervision, and administrative activities, and meet both national and international standards.

Following a thorough review of the report and respective comments, we feel that the report adequately identifies both the departments' strengths as well as areas for consideration and improvement. The report includes both insightful and practical recommendations that will undoubtedly assist us in this complex and challenging improvement process.

Following are specific comments to the report:

1. The evaluation committee identified research as an area in need of careful consideration. We agree that there is an urgent need to expand and strengthen the department's research agenda and activities. This expansion process may include the

following: a. the distinction between research and non-research tenure track faculty, b. recruiting additional research tenure-track faculty, c. identifying diverse research themes and corresponding multidisciplinary research teams that can work cohesively to achieve funding and execution of research, and d. establishing a mentoring process for junior tenure-track faculty members. These items are deliberated between the department and the Rector. The current teaching load is dictated by the Council of Higher Education. Therefore, creative solutions will be explored to alleviate some of the faculty work load, such as receiving teaching assistants as support. Since the submission of the department's report one year ago, one faculty member received tenure (the newly appointed department head), an additional senior research tenure-track faculty member has been recruited, and a mentoring process has been instigated. In order to reduce the work load, the number of department-level committees has been reduced. Recently, the tenure promotion committee for faculty within the School of Health Professions was moved from the Faculty of Medicine into the school. Hopefully this transition will allow the reevaluation of journal impact factor as a prerequisite for promotion.

2. Although the review committee identified teaching as one of the departments' strengths, several aspects of the teaching curriculum and methods require review in order to increase effectiveness. For this purpose, a strategic task force will be created. The taskforce will review the committees specific recommendations (such as alternative teaching methods to promote independent student thinking, incorporation of teaching assistants, and exploring multidisciplinary teaching options – particularly for advanced degrees) in order to examine their feasibility.

The department has already begun a restructuring process of the M.A. program to identify distinct thesis and non-thesis tracks. We will approach the School of Health Professions departments' heads to explore collaborative multidisciplinary advising of Ph.D. students. One such collaboration has recently begun with the admission of a Ph.D. student receiving co-advising with a faculty member from the Department of Physical Therapy.

3. The issue of clinical placements for the increasing number of B.A. students is an important and complex one. There is an ongoing process to continuously increase the number of clinical placements and diversify the clinical teaching methods. In the past year, the School of Health Professions has begun developing guidelines for faculty appointments for clinical preceptors as an incentive to increase the number of preceptors working with the department. In addition, a collaborative effort between the Occupational Therapy Departments at the Tel Aviv, Haifa and Hebrew Universities is promoting the standardization of payment to clinical settings. In our view it is imperative that all occupational therapy departments (including departments within colleges) join this effort along with governmental bodies.
4. We strongly agree with the committee's recommendation to increase the number of tenure and non-tenure faculty, as well as administrative positions to meet the department's growing research and teaching needs. Following a meeting with the university Rector on this topic, the department will receive increased support as needed and within the university's capabilities.
5. We appreciate the committee's highlighting of our alumni as a valuable resource for the department. In the past year we have approached our alumni and administrated a



survey to receive information about this group. We will continue to explore ways to engage our alumni in the department's activities.

6. With regards to the department infrastructure, the university safety officer checked the current state of the classrooms in relation to the number of students and verified that the department is operating within the accepted regulations. In addition, the President of the university is working to extend the campus which is likely to alleviate some of the infrastructure difficulties.
7. Finally, I wish to clarify two inaccuracies that appear in the report. First, PBL has launched in the department 10 years ago and was implemented by Dr. Tal Jarus. Second, driving rehabilitation, although an area addressed in the curriculum, is not a prioritized field within our program.

We wish to thank the evaluation committee's commendable efforts and we hope that this comprehensive assessment will serve as a springboard for creative change in the departmental, university and national level.

Sincerely,

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