



Committee for the Evaluation of Geography
and Environmental Studies Program

Bar-Ilan University
Department of Geography

Evaluation Report

September 2012

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Chapter 1: General Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate the study programs in the field of Geography and Environmental Studies during the academic year 2011-2012.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education who serves ex officio as a Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a committee consisting of:

- Prof. Patricia Gober, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan, Canada, and School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, Arizona State University, USA – Committee Chair.
- Prof. Michael Batty, Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, University College London, United Kingdom.
- Prof. Jeff Dozier, Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA.
- Prof. Baruch Kipnis, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Haifa, Israel.
- Prof. Yochanan Kushnir, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, USA.
- Prof. David Thomas, School of Geography and the Environment, Oxford University, United Kingdom.
- Ms. Daniella Sandler, Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

The scope of work for the committee included:

- Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by institutions that provide study programs in Geography and Environmental Studies.
- Present the CHE with final reports with findings and recommendations for each of the evaluated academic units and study programs.
- Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the status of the examined field within the Israeli system of higher education and relevant recommendations.

The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The first stage of the quality assessment process consisted of self-evaluation, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the institutions under review. This process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's guidelines as specified in the document entitled "The Self-Evaluation Process: Recommendations and Guidelines" (October 2008).

Chapter 2: Committee Procedures

Committee members were given an overview of higher education in Israel and a description of the Israeli CHE at their first meeting on March 11, 2012. They also discussed Israeli Programs of Geography and Environmental Studies and fundamental issues concerning the committee's quality assessment activities. Committee members had received copies of the departmental reports before this date.

During March 2012 committee members conducted two-day site visits to Tel Aviv and Ben-Gurion Universities. They visited Bar-Ilan University, the University of Haifa, and Hebrew University in May 2012.

This report deals with the Department of Geography and the Environment at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Bar-Ilan University. The Department was founded in 1969 as the Department of Geography, with "Environment" formally added to the name in 2005. The Department offers BA, MA, and PhD degrees with specializations in physical geography, social geography, environmental studies, remote sensing, GIS, and geo-archeology. The academic staff is comprised of 9 full time, permanent faculty members and 15 adjunct lecturers.

The Committee's visit to Bar-Ilan University occurred on May 9-10, 2012 and included 2 days of intensive meetings with appropriate administrators, tenured and tenure-track faculty, and BA, MA and PhD students and visits to libraries and laboratory facilities. We thank appropriate individuals for their involvement in our proceedings. Their input allowed us to explore many of the issues raised in the self-evaluation report.

The schedule, including the list of participants representing the institution, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

Chapter 3: Executive Summary

The Department of Geography and the Environment at Bar-Ilan University has several admirable qualities that bode well for the future: productive research, student collegiality, emerging new and unique interdisciplinary initiatives across departments, and eager young faculty who are optimistic and making their mark. They also display desire and eagerness to overcome serious challenges in student recruitment and decisions about research and teaching foci in a small department that is intellectually diverse. The Department has been unable to articulate a coherent vision as a collective of geographers with a mission and plan for the future. Responses to enrollment declines have been ad hoc and reactive rather than strategic and proactive. Ironically, the Department has embraced the notion of “environment” by added it to its title, but has not incorporated geography’s special advantage in sitting at the triple junction of science, social science, and technology for environmental problem-solving and research. Possible programs that might pull together expertise of human and physical geography and marry them with geographic information science include studies of climate adaptation, water management, coastal planning, environmental risk and uncertainty, and rural/agricultural development. The Committee was not convinced that the current proposal to develop an Earth Science Program based on expertise of the Department’s physical geographers alone is consistent with modern geography’s integrative advantage in today’s world of science and technology.

We recommend that the Department urgently produce and implement a strategic plan for the next decade and articulate a process for implementing this plan. We were not convinced that the Department as presently constituted—eight faculty members pursuing eight separate research agendas—can produce such a plan. Some in the current faculty are heavily invested in the status quo and unwilling or unable to think about a future in which they combine their specialized expertise for research. The committee believes that outside help is needed to shape and implement a forward-looking, problem-oriented, synthetic plan for Bar-Ilan Geography. This outside help may take the form of consultants, an outside chair, or support from strategic academic planning professionals at Bar-Ilan.

The number of enrolled students, especially at the BA level, has dropped in recent years, although the number of majors seems to have bounced back in 2010-11. More troubling is the decline in BA graduates from 50 in 2005-06 to 12 in 2010-2011. Graduates also have fallen during the same time frame from 31 to 6 at the MA level and from 3 to 0 at the PhD level. When the number of graduates is compared to the number of students enrolled in the program, it is clear that the Department is producing fewer graduates than would be expected from the number of enrolled students. The Committee is unable to diagnose the causal mechanisms and social dynamics of this process. We recommend that the University and Department implement a comprehensive study of recent enrollment trends and develop a plan for future enrollment management to achieve a stable output of geography graduates at the BA, MA, and PhD levels.

The curriculum does not appear to produce sufficient depth and rigor to live up to programmatic strengths as articulated in the self-evaluation report: “the development of scientific curiosity and critical thinking” and “hands-on experience demonstrating the connections between the study program and real world application.” There are not enough graduate courses for MA and PhD students, forcing graduate students to take too many undergraduate courses. The committee recommends greater differentiation of

course work by undergraduate and graduate status.

The research culture is not consistent with that of a major research university. With some notable exceptions, faculty members lack an entrepreneurial spirit for acquiring outside funding and publishing regularly in internationally recognized outlets. The list of journals with grades assigned by the faculty does not correlate with internationally recognized quantitative impact factors. The goal of a major research university in Israel should be to publish significant new ideas in widely read and recognized journals and contribute the Israeli case study to more general ideas about global societal and environmental change.

In sum, Bar-Ilan Geography displays elements of strength, but deeper analysis reveals that individual behaviors limit the potential to move the Department forward as a coherent unit. This individualist culture has not allowed the unit to respond effectively to a changing University environment, societal expectations, and disciplinary trends. The path forward is to redefine instructional programs, research activities, and contributions to society as the integration of physical and human geography and geographic technologies. There are already vibrant and innovative programs in place that embody this theme. The Department is at a defining moment when it could continue to react to forces outside its control or plot a new course and take advantage of key opportunities to connect the existing staff in such a way that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Department of Geography and Environment

4.1 Mission, Goals and Aims

The self-evaluation document states that the mission of the Bar-Ilan Department of Geography and the Environment is to “train students to analyze spatial and environmental phenomena.” This statement, simply interpreted, puts *education* in the forefront. The document elaborates the means by which such training or education will be achieved at BIU, including developing students’ ability to plan projects, obtain skills in operating advanced geographical information systems, connect with research, cultivate “geographical thinking,” and “a sense of environmental responsibility in general and as applied to the specific human and physical issues of Israel.” While we agree in general with this philosophy, it is not producing adequate student enrollments. In addition, it has not produced high morale and satisfaction (see more details below in “Students and Learning”). Moreover, this mission statement reflects, and may be partially responsible for, relatively weak external funding levels and the poor state of the research facilities and faculty space for offices and teaching (see below “Research” and “Facilities”). Despite these funding and infrastructure problems, publication output has been solid.

There is urgent need for Bar-Ilan to outline a direction to a coherent, attractive, programmatic vision for the Department of Geography and the Environment. We see this as essential to maintaining a thriving combination of education and research that would be attractive to student recruitment and successful performance. Currently, Departmental planning is reactive and ad hoc. Sometimes, it results in successful directions, as for example in the proposed joint MA program on *Regulation and Environmental Policy* with the Law Faculty and *Conservation and Development of Heritage Landscapes* with the Department of Israel Studies and Archeology. It is possible, however, for the Department to move down blind alleys and in directions that are disconnected from one another and from the larger mission of “allowing students to acquire knowledge of the structure and dynamics of the natural and human environments.” The Committee is concerned that the geosciences initiative is largely separated from the human geographic part of the Department. We are also concerned about the ability of senior faculty to achieve consensus about future plans. Possible directions that integrate rather than separate human and physical geography are: climate adaptation, water management, coastal planning, environmental risk and uncertainty, and rural/agricultural development.

4.2 Students and Learning

The Department offers study programs at the BA, MA, and PhD levels with the MA program being divided into two types—degrees with and without a thesis. The number of students in the BA and MA programs declined steadily from 2005-2010, but grew back in the last academic year (2010-11). The decline in the number of geography majors was precipitous, but the recovery is equally remarkable owing mainly to increased enrollment of 1st-year students. Numbers of students in the PhD program remained steady. Reported numbers are given below in the table, a synthesis of Tables 3.1.1, 3.1.2, and 3.1.3 in the documents.

A puzzling picture emerges, however, when we examine the number of graduates, from Table 3.1.4. For the BA degree, that table specifies that the number refers to the graduating majors.

Study Year	BA		MA	PhD
	Major	minor		
2005-06	41	93	59	16
2006-07	40	86	52	15
2007-08	22	82	45	19
2008-09	24	76	35	20
2009-10	27	64	41	21
2010-11	75	62	55	22

Study Year	BA	MA	PhD
2005-06	50	31	3
2006-07	55	22	2
2007-08	36	12	2
2008-09	35	14	3
2009-10	26	10	1
2010-11	12	6	0

From 2005-2009, more students graduated than were in the program. Yet in 2010-2011, less than 1/3 of the 3rd-year BA students graduated. Among the graduate students, both MA and PhD, graduation rates seem to have dropped significantly in the last couple of years. About the PhD students, the document states (page 39) that “very few students who begin their studies fail to complete them,” but the ratio of the right-hand columns in the two tables above would indicate that PhD students are either dropping out or remaining in the program longer than would be expected.

The BA Program

There are 49 courses on offer for undergraduates, which include obligatory courses that form the core curriculum and electives. The proliferation of one- and two-credit courses in the undergraduate degree favors breadth over depth and contributes to a scattered approach to instruction and student learning. With some students taking as many as 10 to 14 courses per semester, we are concerned that they focus on what they need to know to pass the final exam, rather than on learning complex material and its theoretical and practical implications and meanings. Out-of-class work (homework) in some classes is slim, and we are under the impression that students feel they are challenged less than they could be (especially in terms of provocative thinking). Moreover, the large number of courses, the tiny number of hours in each course, and the number of courses that each faculty teaches, together cause overlap among courses. The result is that redundancy persists in the BA curriculum. The lack of cohesion among the faculty contributes to this apparent redundancy; it is not clear that they discuss syllabi and course content, to make sure that the suite of courses is indeed a curriculum.

BA students also benefit from learning experiences outside the classroom, and we note that the Department offers a couple of field courses, one in physical and one in urban geography. We strongly urge the University to continue to support a budget for field activities that have traditionally formed the lifeblood for many subfields of geography.

Currently, the courses on remote sensing and geographic information systems are offered in the first and second terms—and thus are of use in other areas of the student program. Given the vital importance of such tools for research and practice, we recommend that the faculty consider changes in the curriculum that make such courses three credits so that detailed work is possible.

The self-evaluation provides numbers on the drop-out rates, but the data are difficult to interpret. By not tracking its students and alumni, the Department misses a valuable opportunity to monitor students' subsequent achievements and converse with them and their employers about what was most valuable in their education, and what should have been left for them to learn on the job. The faculty should establish a systematic process to track progress of students and graduates. Such data are important metrics of successes and areas for improvement and provide the opportunity to make mid-course corrections when necessary.

Graduate Programs: The MA and the PhD

MA and PhD students are involved in faculty research programs but the synergy between research and graduate education is not strong. Table 1 in Appendix 6.1 lists a suite of MA courses, but 2011 enrollment values are missing from the table. A major problem identified in the site visit is the shortage of courses for MA students. Especially for students who completed the BA at Bar-Ilan, it is not clear that sufficient coursework at the MA level is available in any given specialty. Particularly in the physical geography area, the laboratories need to be strengthened.

Two new programs at the MA level illustrate innovative interdisciplinary study. Both serve as exemplars of how to integrate aspects of physical and human geography.

1. A joint, interdisciplinary program, in Regulation and Environmental Policy, between the Law Faculty and the Department of Geography and Environment is due to open in 2012-2013, subject to internal approval at Bar-Ilan and external approval from the Council of Higher Education.
2. A program in Conservation and Development of Heritage Landscapes emphasizes familiarity with the most current knowledge, and development of skills necessary to cope with the evolving field of planning and conserving cultural heritage assets and cultural landscapes.

The PhD program suffers from an overemphasis on the relationship between student and advisor. There is growing recognition that students often learn as much from their peers as from faculty supervisors. There need to be structures in place to enhance intellectual exchange among PhD students. Options include interdisciplinary seminars, along with dedicated space (like a coffee room with whiteboards) to foster informal interaction among students.

The financial stipends currently provided to students are at levels insufficient to allow them to live in the community with dignity. A few PhD students (16% of the PhD population) have President's fellowships with guaranteed multi-year support, but most of the graduate students need to fund their studies from their own resources and thus

must also hold jobs. Graduate study is most effective when students can commit 100% of their time to their program and research.

4.3 Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes are articulated reasonably well in the self-evaluation document, and they comprise both the transfer of knowledge and development of students' research skills, including observational skills and the ability to analyze and integrate observations and spatial variability and patterns. The "knowledge" to be transferred is defined only implicitly by the list of courses. Geography's core competencies are not explicitly defined. The methods to measure learning outcomes do not distinguish between the program's added value and the knowledge the students had when they entered the program. Finally, the measurements of learning outcomes in the BA program consist entirely of exams in specific courses.

Internationally, the range of subjects and skills covered in geography programs is large, in part because high-quality departments vary in size by a factor of five. A small department, such as Bar-Ilan's, must determine its areas of focus, based both on the student needs and faculty competences.

Essential core competencies in geography include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Understanding how geography, the study of Earth as the home of humanity, integrates physical and biological sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and humanities.
- Knowledge of the basic spatial layout of Earth, the identities of major terrestrial and aquatic surface features, Earth's climates, and physical processes in the atmosphere, oceans, and land.
- Understanding and appreciating the concepts of space, place, and the natural and built environment and the position and relationship of people within these spaces and places,
- Ability to identify and apply the geographic information techniques such as cartography, remote sensing, GIS, and spatial- and geo-statistics.
- Ability to read, understand and critically evaluate literature in geographic research.
- Ability to communicate knowledge about geography, in oral, graphical, and written form.

One critical concern in articulating student learning outcomes is whether or not a BA is intended to prepare students for the labor market or serve as a general education degree. In many universities internationally, the answer to the question depends on the field. In the Humanities the answer would be no, but in Engineering, preparation for the labor market is the norm. We had the impression that this decision was not explicit in the Department and that over time core geographic competencies are being postponed to the MA level. It seems that in Israel most employers of geographers prefer to hire an MA graduate.

Given the paucity of faculty positions for newly minted PhD graduates, the Department should explore ways in which the PhD opens opportunities in corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies, and then consider a few courses that would

prepare PhD graduates for success in such positions. Examples might include a course in finance. Ideally, this structure would be implemented at the University level rather than the Department or Faculty levels because the need for non-academic employment of PhDs extends across many disciplines.

4.4 Faculty

The Department has 9 full time Faculty, 5 in physical geography and 4 in human geography but one member in physical geography has been on full time leave for the last three years, which essentially means that the complement of permanent faculty is 8. Due to sabbatical leave, effectively this reduces the staff available to run courses and supervise research and to engage in the many administrative tasks that enable the Department to function to between 7 or 7.5 per year. Needless to say, the faculty is highly burdened. Budgetary cuts, particularly in administration, have caused many faculty members to engage in tasks that ordinarily would be handled by administrators and technicians. They use research students often as adjunct faculty to help on these tasks.

Recent appointments, which have been excellent, have brought researchers who have more wide-ranging views of the program and who are in the process of building critical mass with other units in the university. In particular, the focus on e-democracy, environmental regulation and the law, landscape and heritage as well as climate change has enormous potential, as has the methods-based focus in remote sensing and GIS. But to realize these to their full potential, there needs to be greater synergy between the existing faculty members, and probably some new key appointments are necessary to enable this synergy to evolve spontaneously.

In terms of faculty structure, there are 3 lecturers, 2 senior lecturers, and 2 associate and 1 full professor (leaving aside the absent professor). The promotion procedures are well mapped out, as they are in all Israeli universities, although the weight of responsibility on the chair in terms of the academic administrative mentoring burden is considerable. Promotions to associate and full professor are made according to productivity and performance and do not follow any time schedule. We were surprised by the fact that some of the faculty had not been promoted to associate and full professor positions faster, although we do recognize that several faculty members had been on part-time appointments in the past.

We would like to have seen a clearer discussion of mentoring and related procedures with respect to both the search for new faculty, the areas in which they might best play a role and the progression of existing faculty, particularly with respect to future initiatives in teaching and research. But we recognize that the budget cuts of the last few years have taken a toll on the Department and that morale is not high.

To an extent, the question of academic leadership is important in this debate. The Department has been well run in the face of budget cuts, but there needs to be a much stronger sense, particularly among senior faculty, of where the Department is going. The challenge is to enable the Department to grasp the new challenges that make geography a particularly important force in modern society in terms of addressing grand challenges such as climate change, cities and urbanization, environmental regulation and policy, energy, aging, health, and governance, all of which have geographical components. Of course the Department cannot address all of these, but a

shift in focus to new research areas would energize the unit, stimulate collaboration, and present a more coherent program to the University and discipline.

4.5 Research

Research in the Bar-Ilan University Geography Department is organized and conducted around the research interests of the individual faculty members more prominently than around thematic areas. To some degree, this reflects the rather 'dispersed' culture of the Department. The self-evaluation report notes "*the uniqueness of the department is in fact that the expertises of the faculty members are very versatile and cover a wide variety of research fields*" (p82). Ultimately this might not prove to be a recipe for the sustainable research reputation for the Department. Nonetheless, there is evidence that it has been possible to make important contributions to areas that are recognized as major themes for geography as a discipline both internationally and within the specific context of Israel. These contributions are reflected in the publication records of faculty and participation of some individuals in national and international initiatives, such as those of the Israeli Geographical Association and the International Geographical Union.

The majority of the Department's research collaborations are outward-facing (within Israel and internationally) rather than among existing faculty members. Internal collaborations are present in the areas of geomorphology, climatology/GIS, and rural geography. It would be desirable, for the sustenance of the Department, to see further internal initiatives, particularly those that might integrate more recent faculty hires. It is often the case that departments, regardless of size, have "lone scholars." In smaller departments, such as Bar-Ilan's, this runs the risk of limiting the development of a research culture, which is all-important for research sustainability.

Research, especially at the physical end of geography, requires suitable facilities. We refer elsewhere in this report to the Departmental infrastructure; suffice to say here that facilities in GIS and geomorphology/soils fall significantly below those that would be deemed satisfactory in major geography departments elsewhere in Israel and abroad. To some extent therefore, research achievements in these areas are to be congratulated, being attained despite the physical facilities available to faculty and graduate students.

Research funding of US\$1.9 million has been secured from external sources during the six year assessment period. We note that not all successful research requires significant funding, especially in human geography. Contrary to the statement in the report regarding funding success, and noting that 50% of faculty members are at the physical geography end of the spectrum, the panel regarded this level of success to be rather average as opposed to 'impressive' (p85). Just under half this sum had been won from non-Israeli sources (a consequence of international collaborations), and approximately two-thirds of funding related to physical geography/science areas. External funding is a critical source for improving laboratory resources and equipment, and we saw some evidence of new equipment (in the geomorphology laboratory) having been obtained in this way. Further external funding success is the most logical way to improve research resourcing and thereby research prominence in the future.

In Israel, the model of depending on research students in laboratories contrasts with that of many other countries where postdoctoral fellows play a more dominant role. Bar-Ilan Geography follows the Israeli model, and we observed evidence of the importance of research students to the success of faculty research initiatives. Nurturing

the environment for postgraduate students (see the section on students) is likely to prove critical for the growth of research success in the Department.

The faculty has a sound track record of research publication, as evidenced by data in the report. The report makes some play on the difficulties and delays in the publication process and suggests that this may limit research outputs (p90). The Committee notes however that this is an international phenomenon and cannot play a special part in publication levels in Bar-Ilan Geography compared to geographers elsewhere, or researchers in many other disciplines in the social and natural sciences. Over time this issue averages out, and only for early-career researchers might it be expected to impact publication profiles.

Refereed publications are one internationally recognized measure of the research quality of individuals, departments and institutions. The average rate of refereed outputs of Bar-Ilan Geography faculty in the period under consideration has been ~2 per year. The Department provides a grading of journals in which faculty have published; some of these ratings were at odds with the understanding held by committee members (for example, *Geographical Journal* is not a grade A journal by any stretch of the imagination). This notwithstanding, it is evident that Bar-Ilan Geography faculty publish both in some of the benchmark journals of the discipline and the multidisciplinary journals from which geographical research gains its wider reputation. The former include *Geomorphology* and the *Journal of Historical Geography*; the latter include journals such as *Earth Science Planetary Letters*, *Journal of Hydrology*, *Journal of Geophysical Research* and *Transportation Research A*. There are also several benchmark geography journals in which publication has not occurred during the past 6 years and which map onto the areas where the faculty conduct research. For human geography these include *Annals, Association of American Geographers* and *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* (recognized globally as the two premier journals for human geography), and for physical geography, *Earth System Processes and Landforms*.

Thus it is our collective view that Bar-Ilan geographical research shows evidence of international standards being attained in several areas, is receiving external recognition (through funding and collaborations) and is generating appropriate outputs. But research is occurring in a context that is potentially unsustainable, or at least is unlikely to lead to an enhancement of standing without change of circumstance and culture. Issues of concern relate to pressures on faculty time, a perceived lack of an integrating research culture, and limitations of equipment and facilities.

4.6 Broader Organization Structure

The Department of Geography is affiliated with the Faculty of Social Science, which is in charge of administration and allocation of funds, and acts as a liaison between the Department and the University authorities—the President, the Rector and the administration at large. Geography is the smallest Department in the Faculty. There are both shortcomings and benefits of being small. The major shortcomings are the meager funds allocated to the Department, the Department's inability to offer the needed diversity and specialties in teaching, and guiding graduate students. The benefits of being small are the potential of creating strong inter-faculty relationships and close intellectual relations with students. In the case of Bar-Ilan, the first benefit has not yet fully materialized.

4.7 Infrastructure

The Department is located at the third floor of Mexico Building, an old structure requiring urgent renovation and maintenance. The third floor does not provide the needed space for the faculty, onsite labs in GIS and Remote Sensing, students' working areas, particularly for graduate students who do not have a permanent working space, and supporting equipment such as computers. Even the Department's seminar room is shared with other facilities in the College.

Classrooms and laboratories are located across campus, and one lab is in Jerusalem. In some cases, classrooms are not well equipped with the required teaching gear. The situation in labs, as revealed at the Geomorphology Lab, is even worse. Beside poor, somewhat dangerous structural conditions, the lab is equipped with a few outmoded pieces of essential research equipment: some are beyond recommended eligibility for services and maintenance.

There is not a consistent allocation of funds for updating and maintaining equipment for the labs. The faculty has not been aggressive enough in applying for competitive funds that would allow the purchase of vital equipment.

Geography makes use of the Social Science Faculty library. The purchasing budget is allocated on the basis of faculty size and thus the budget allocated to geography seems too low to support adequate resource materials.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

5.1 Congratulatory Remarks

Bar-Ilan Geography is a solid center of research and graduate instruction in Israel. Faculty members publish on a regular basis, supervise an adequately sized cohort of graduate students, and serve the country with new knowledge about society and the environment. The Committee was warmly welcomed to the Department and University and provided with frank and substantive answers to its questions.

5.2 Recommendations

University-Level Recommendations:

- In conjunction with other geography programs in Israel, begin a dialogue about how to best use the nation's scarce educational resources. The current system of repeating a broad range of specialties across five major universities is inefficient and impedes any single department from achieving international excellence in research.
- Upgrade physical facilities in the Department. Current facilities in GIS and geomorphology and soils are inadequate for a major geography department in Israel and abroad.

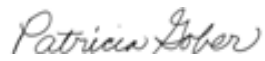
Department-Level Recommendations:

- Establish a strategic mission and plan with goals for the next decade and implementation strategy. This plan should be geared to several problem-oriented areas that link physical and human geographers with geographic technologies. Examples of possible ideas include: climate adaptation, water management, coastal planning, environmental risk and uncertainty, and rural/agricultural development.
- Seek outside help in preparation of this plan. Differences of opinion, although aired in a collegial way, appear to have stifled progress toward an integrated vision of the Department's future. The planning process should be facilitated or mediated by individuals who can offer advice and an outside perspective on future directions.
- Implement a comprehensive study of recent enrollment trends and develop a plan for future enrollment management to achieve a stable output of geography graduates at the BA, MA, and PhD levels. Past enrollment declines seem to have been staunch, but careful attention needs to be paid to the demand for geography courses and to the number of students who will constitute the next generation of geographers.
- Undertake a thorough review of the current curriculum. Pay particular attention to the development of a cumulative and rigorous curriculum, elimination of redundancies in content, and differentiation between graduate and undergraduate coursework. We had the impression that Bar-Ilan students across the board were prepared and indeed eager to handle more difficult material.
- Reduce the proliferation of two-credit courses in favor of a more traditional curriculum consisting of three- and four-credit courses. The current system does

not allow enough depth for students to process what they learn, to relate it to other coursework or personal experiences, and to integrate it into larger knowledge systems.

- Reorganize the PhD program to emphasize more interaction among PhD students. This can occur by providing a gathering space for graduate students, coursework organized around problem solving rather than knowledge acquisition, support for published articles and grant submission, workshops that require a high level of interaction among participants, Department-wide poster sessions, participation in Departmental search committees, facilitation of visits by outside experts and speakers, reverse post-doctoral fellowships bringing excellent scholars and their students to campus for a month, and group participation in international conferences.
- Increase competitive research funding and facilitate a less individualistic and more collaborative research culture, especially between physical and human geographers.
- Implement a credible system for tracking student progress, dropout rates, graduation rates, and alumni. The data derived from such a system augments the Department's capacity to monitor changes in student numbers and needs and enable it to more effectively argue for additional resources.

Signed by:




Prof. Patricia Gober



Prof. Michael Batty



Prof. Yochanan Kushnir



Prof. Baruch Kipnis



Prof. Jeff Dozier



Prof. David Thomas

Appendix 1: Copy of Letter of Appointment



December 20, 2011

שר החינוך
Minister of Education
وزير التربية والتعليم

Prof. Patricia Gober
School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning
Arizona State University
USA
School of Public Policy
University of Saskatchewan
Canada

Dear Professor Gober,

The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) strives to ensure the continuing excellence and quality of Israeli higher education through a systematic evaluation process. By engaging upon this mission, the CHE seeks to: enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies, provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel, and ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

As part of this most important endeavor we reach out to world renowned scientists to help us meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher education by accepting our invitation to participate in our international evaluation committees. This process represents an opportunity to express our common sense of concern and to assess the current and future status of education in the 21st century and beyond. It also establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process among scientists around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial enterprise.

It is with great pleasure that I hereby appoint you to serve as the chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Geography and Environmental Studies. The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Patricia Gober, (Chair), Prof. Michael Batty, Prof. Jeff Dozier, Prof. Baruch Kipnis, Prof. Yochanan Kushnir, Prof. Mark Rosentraub, Prof. David Thomas.

Ms. Marissa Gross will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as the chair of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Gideon Saar
Minister of Education,
Chairperson, The Council for Higher Education

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Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

Geography - schedule of site visit

Wednesday May 9, 2012

Location: Building no. 213, Room no. 320

Time	Subject	Participants
9:30-10:15	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice-Rector
10:15-11:00	Meeting with the Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty	Prof. Zemira Mevarech, Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty
11:00-11:45	Meeting with the chair of the department of Geography and Environment	Prof. Michael Sofer, Chair, Department of Geography and Environment
11:45-12:45	Meeting with senior faculty and representatives of relevant committees (teaching/curriculum committee, admissions committee, appointment committee)*	Prof. Steve Brenner Dr. Itamar Lensky Dr. Nir Cohen Dr. Orit Rotem Prof. Sarah Pariente Prof. Yossi katz Prof. Irit Amit Cohen Prof. Yishai Weinstein
12:45-13:30	Lunch – closed meeting	
13:30-14:15	Tour of campus (classes, library, offices of faculty members, computer labs etc.)	
14:15-15:00	Meeting with Adjunct Faculty*	Dr. Helena Zhevelev Dr. Yoram Benyamini Dr. Tseira Maruani Dr. Judith Lekach

		Prof. Yair Goldreich Dr. David Iluz Dr. Eli Itzhak
15:00-15:45	Closed Door Committee Meeting	

Thursday, May 10, 2012

Location: Building no. 213, Room no. 320

Time	Subject	Participants
10:15-11:00	Meeting with Scholars from Related Fields who collaborate with the Geography Department	Prof. Oren Perez Dr. Oren Ackermann Dr. Rivka Harel
11:00-11:45	Meeting with B.A students*	
11:45-12:30	Meeting with M.A students *	
12:30-13:15	Meeting with PhD students *	
13:15-14:15	Lunch and Closed-door working meeting of the committee (in the same room as the meetings)	
14:15-15:00	Summation meeting with heads of the institution and of the department	Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice-Rector Prof. Zemira Mevarech, Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty Prof. Michael Sofer, Chair, Department of Geography and Environment

* The heads of the institution and academic unit or their representatives will not attend these meetings.