

Dear Professor Gober,

Thank you very much for the deep and comprehensive evaluation report. It will definitely help us to raise the effectiveness of our quality of teaching and research. The department staff and TAU authorities have thoroughly studied the report and now we are working on the implementation of the committee's recommendations. Currently, we are finalizing our **Department Strategic Plan** that will be submitted to the TAU authorities in the nearest future.

Below please find our reply to the committee's recommendations

1. Make an immediate decision about the organizational status of Tel Aviv Geography, preferably moving it as a freestanding faculty into the Porter School of Environment, as a department in the Faculty of Social Sciences, or combined with cognate fields in a new unit. Continued uncertainty about its position in the University's organization impedes planning for the future, undermines faculty morale, and causes confusion for graduate students.

TAU is very aware of the problematic location of the Department of Geography and Human Environment at the Faculty of Humanities and works on finding proper solution. The brainstorming and intensive discussions of possible solution with the participation of the Department Head, senior department staff and TAU authorities is taking place. Several possibilities are being investigated in depth.

2. Develop a Graduate School or another form of managing graduate degree programs that better reflects the evolution of interdisciplinary studies, synthetic research, and the current state of geography.

The development of the Graduate School for our MA and PHD students is one of the major components of the resolution of the aforementioned problem of the faculty belonging and of the department's relations with the Porter School of Environmental Studies. It will be thus a component of the solution of the basic problem.

3. 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.

In conjunction with other Geography Departments, we are considering a balanced education programs that will touch several disciplines, including Environmental Studies in their climate, hydrogeology and anthropogenic aspects, Geoinformatics, Urban, Regional and Transportation Planning.

4. Establish a regular process of strategic planning designed to produce a focused mission statement, goals for the next decade, and implementation strategy

The strategic plan is currently being worked out by the department staff and is discussed with the university authorities

5. Reduce or reconfigure current research and graduate education around three to four targeted areas. Use these areas as the basis for faculty hiring, graduate student recruitment, and research investment

Target areas of research and graduate education are part of the Department Strategic Plan for the next 5 years that is currently in development. We plan to submit the plan to the Dean and the Rector in the nearest future

6. Reconsider the current structure of laboratories with an eye toward reducing the number and taking advantage of strategic overlapping research interests

We believe that the current structure fits best to the TAU view of the staff research activities. We follow the tradition of exact and life sciences, where each professor establishes his or her own research laboratory that is supported by his or her research funds. In the same time, research laboratories are critical for collaboration between the members of the department staff in their research on climate and urban and spatial planning, spatial analysis and remote sensing, environmental problem and GIS.

7. Trim the number of undergraduate courses to fit the size of the current faculty and student needs

In the program for the next teaching year that is now in development, we plan to reduce several courses. In the same time, our teaching program aims at maintaining sufficiently wide selection of courses. Hopefully, the solution of the problem of the new framework of Geography will include an increase in the department staff.

8. Develop a set of student learning outcomes (what students need to know and be able to do) for the undergraduate degree and map these onto the core curriculum

A set of student learning outcomes is a part of Department strategic plan that is currently in development

9. 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

Comprehensive system for tracking student progress, dropout rates, graduation rates, and alumni is necessary for the control of Department strategic plan. For this purpose, we will use the existing TAU systems. We will establish the convenient access to this system and use system's reports as an important input for developing and evaluating teaching programs.

10. Reduce faculty teaching loads to what is more typical of those in internationally recognized Geography departments. In such universities operating on the semester system, teaching loads are often two courses in one semester and one course in the other, but with the courses having greater loads so that students typically take four in a semester.

Formally, current teaching load is decided by TAU senate for the university as a whole. We just comply with this decision. However, the load of the Department staff is above the TAU standards: in addition to teaching, every faculty member supervises several MA and PhD students. Hopefully, the solution of the problem of the framework of Geography will include an increase in the department staff.

11. Develop an oversight system for graduate students and occasional lecturers who teach core courses

The Head of the department pays special attention to the students' evaluation of the courses taught by graduate students and occasional lecturers and, if necessary, meets with the lecturers and discusses the ways to improve their teaching methods. In addition, these courses are regularly inspected by the members of the teaching committee and the results are presented at the department meetings