



Committee for the Evaluation of Geography
and Environmental Studies Program

Tel Aviv University
Department of Geography and Human Environment

Evaluation Report

September 2012

Contents

Chapter 1: General Background	1
Chapter 2: Committee Procedures.....	2
Chapter 3: Executive Summary	3
Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Tel Aviv University.....	5
Chapter 5: Recommendations.....	13
Appendix 1: Copy of Letter of Appointment.....	16
Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule	17

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. Mark Rosentraub, Department of Sports Management, University of Michigan, 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 Geography and Environmental Studies Programs in Israel and fundamental issues concerning the committee's quality assessment activity. 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 Geography Department at the Faculty of Humanities at Tel Aviv University. The Department of Geography at Tel Aviv University was established in 1967 and grew rapidly to become Tel Aviv University's largest Department in the Faculty in the 1970s. By 1971 it had grown to over 300 students; and the expanded curriculum included postgraduate studies. It was later authorized to award Master and Doctoral degrees. Teaching and research staff grew to include 15 internationally known researchers, but has subsequently fallen back to nine. The variety of courses expanded to Applied Geography, Rural Geography, Climatology, Cartography and Regional Studies.

The Committee's visit to Tel Aviv University took place on March 13-14, 2012 and it included two days of intensive meetings with appropriate administrators, tenure 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 Human Environment at Tel Aviv University has a long and distinguished history as a center of teaching and research excellence. In the review period, nine core faculty members averaged between two and three articles per year in high-impact, international journals; the curriculum provided wide coverage of the scientific, social scientific, and humanistic components of the discipline; and many of the faculty were successful in obtaining funding external to the University to support their work. It was clear from the site visit that graduate students are well integrated into ongoing research programs. These programs are organized around nine laboratories that enable shared use of equipment, facilitate interaction between faculty mentors and graduate students, and serve as focal points for responding to external funding requests. This model of multiple laboratories plays to faculty interests and strengths, but given the small size of the Department, means that some of the labs lack critical mass to compete in the international arena and others are entirely depend on a single faculty member.

There is an enviable sense of community and esprit de corps in the Department that has allowed it to survive budget cutbacks of the so-called “lost decade” and maintain an optimistic attitude that budget problems will be resolved and the Department will return to its previous base of 13 faculty members. Operating in survival mode has taken its toll, however. It has been hard to maintain the quality of instruction, especially at the undergraduate level. There are not enough courses offered to support students’ preferred programs of study, material often is not offered in sufficient depth, many courses are taught by occasional faculty, and students are forced to seek supplementary coursework outside the department. Some assignments are never graded or returned, students find it difficult to follow-up lecture material with teaching assistants, and the BA is no longer seen as a terminal degree. The MA has become the transition point between higher education and professional opportunity; and the BA now lacks the substance and in-depth coverage of BA and BS degrees worldwide.

Departmental faculty have found it hard to make strategic choices to cope with its smaller size and changing external environment. It is imperative that the Department reduce the breadth of its current course offerings, research specializations, and laboratories. To this end, faculty should articulate a coherent, focused mission statement with specific goals that can be accomplished in the next five years, and an implementation plan to achieve these goals.

The department’s fraught and uncertain relationship with the Porter School of the Environment undermines morale, impedes the long-term planning process, and creates problems for students. The Porter School now offers degrees for 25 of the department’s 90 MA students and 11 of its 27 PhD students. Students are attracted to the Porter School by its environmental bent, funding opportunities, and as an alternative to the Faculty of History, especially for physical geographers. The split of graduate students between History and Porter reinforces rather than bridges the intellectual and social divide between physical and human geography. Moreover, it puts some students in the awkward position

of choosing between an environmental science and a humanities degree when neither fits well with their research interests or philosophies of a geography degree. The University should identify a new organizational home for TAU Geography in the very near future as a freestanding faculty in the Porter School of Environment, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, or in a grouping of cognate departments that relate to the mission of the department.

In the end, the Committee concluded that TAU Geography's research and instructional programs are not sustainable in the current budget climate and organizational framework. Depending on contingent faculty for essential instruction, heavy teaching loads for internationally recognized researchers, too many courses, and too many laboratories will in the long-term damage the quality and competitiveness of instructional and research programs. The Department needs to focus on a core curriculum and three or four research specialties in which it can achieve and sustain international recognition.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Department of Geography and Human Environment, Tel Aviv University

** This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

4.1 Mission, Goals and Aims

The mission statement provided in the self-evaluation document expresses a general desire to keep up with advancements in the field and “be the best.” It presents geography as an academic discipline that demands “rigor and extensive training.” This generic vision has not been easy to translate into a coherent mission statement with clear aspirations for the near-term future and path forward. The lack of focus, direction, and mission in the face of falling resources was also apparent to the committee during the site visit. We did not get a clear sense of what the Department stands for and what is unique to it beyond the notion of geography as human-driven system science. This inchoate search for “excellence” is shared on all levels of the academic hierarchy of the University where the emphasis is on individual faculty accomplishment rather than integrated group efforts leading to depth in three or four targeted areas. The study program’s emphasis on breadth over depth stems in part from a traditional view of geography as a broad, multi-faced discipline, but it is inconsistent with stated aspirations for international recognition. The Committee believes that a more focused vision, expressing the constraints imposed on the TAU Department of Geography and Human Environment (DGHE) and the unique aspirations of its faculty, would benefit the department’s curriculum, faculty, and students. This vision, along with a clear set of goals, should guide future faculty hiring and reflect the University’s broader mission.

With respect to planning, neither the self-evaluation report nor the on-site interviews reflected a clear planning process for hiring decisions, curriculum development, and responding to budget cuts or enhancements. Decisions seem to be made on an ad hoc basis in response to uncertainties at the University level. For example, the Department seeks to hire in the areas of physical and economic geography, but this strategy is more in response to the departure of faculty decades ago rather than a move in new directions. Long-term planning also is impeded by uncertainties associated with the Department’s relationship with the Porter School and potential move from the Faculty of Humanities.

4.2 Students and Learning

The Department of Geography and Human Environment is committed to insuring that students are well educated in “human and physical Geography through studies of the Environment and Society in a broad historical and cultural context.” Flexible combinations of courses originating in the humanities and the biophysical sciences, covering theoretical and applied aspects of geography, together with essential laboratory and practical work, allow students to develop a wide variety of individual specializations. At the BA level, these combinations are formalized in tracks: Geoinformatics, Physical Environment, Urban Environment and Planning, and Political and Historical Geography. At the MA level, students can choose between graduate studies with and without a thesis or enroll in the Environment and Society Program.

Student enrollment data were provided in the self-evaluation report. The total number of students enrolled in departmental programs has remained relatively stable (312 in 2006 to 336 in 2010). The reported numbers are given in the table below with numbers associated with the Porter School in parentheses (Self-Study Report, p. 27). The latter group are supervised by Departmental faculty but are counted as students in the Porter School.

Study Year	BA	MA	PhD
2006/7	187	89(6)	15(15)
2007/8	194	67(12)	10(19)
2008/9	185	76(12)	9(24)
2009/10	217	95(19)	9(28)
2010/11	214	90(25)	11(27)

The BA Program

The need to attract large numbers of students for accounting purposes, along with traditional faculty expectations that degree programs should be populated by a large number of courses, have led to too many courses being taken by students and too many being taught by faculty and adjunct instructors. Some 50 courses are offered to undergraduate students, many of them electives. Moreover, most courses have a small number of hours (many at 2), students take as many as 12 courses per term, and faculty teach several courses at a time. This portfolio of courses is quite large compared what is offered in Geography departments in Western Europe and North America, and the small number of units assigned to each course is unusual. To handle this load, the Department relies heavily on retirees, occasional lecturers, and graduate teaching assistants. Approximately half the curriculum is taught by non-core faculty. We worry that this

situation cannot be sustained and that the Department should reduce its course offerings and establish a core curriculum at the BA level.

The current dropout rate of ~20% is high, although the figures for tracking graduation and dropout rates are difficult to interpret. It is not clear if those who do not continue with their studies at the undergraduate level decide to pursue degrees in other units, transfer to another university, or leave the program for personal reasons. It would be valuable to understand the factors contributing to the high dropout rate. The University and Department should track students from entry to graduation. Included in that data collection effort would be information on the Department chosen for study in the initial year of enrollment and the Department in which a student completes a degree. The number of years spent pursuing degrees also could be tabulated. Among students who take more than three years to complete their studies, surveys of representative samples could provide insight into personal and institutional factors that contribute to the inability to complete degrees in the expected or desired timeframes. Around one-third of students are not prepared to study at the level expected by the faculty. They must, as a result, take remedial classes if they are to continue their work in geography. This means taking coursework from other departments and competing with students who have very specialized backgrounds tailored to learn this material. This situation leads to lower-than-desired scores and less overall success.

Graduate Programs: The MA and the PhD

Overall, the quality of the graduate program is good, with graduates progressing to productive work in academia and practice. Graduates from Tel-Aviv are evident as faculty members in other geography departments in Israeli universities. There is a very high and extremely laudable involvement of graduate students in the faculty members' research programs and labs. The faculty is committed to providing graduate students with opportunities for research. Despite this generally favorable impression of the graduate programs, two major problems came to light during the site visit.

1. There is inadequate coursework at the MA level for students who pursue both BA and MA degrees at TAU. Students in the third year of the BA are able to take graduate courses. By the time they matriculate to the MA, there are too few graduate courses left to complete the requirements for a master's degree. Even for students who do not take graduate courses as part of their first degree, there are too few graduate courses to fulfill reasonable expectations and stated requirements.
2. There is a degree-management problem stemming from the fact that graduate students must choose whether to pursue degrees in the School of Humanities or the Porter School of Environment. We are concerned that some students are asked to change their research focus to ensure that there is a historical dimension to match the perspective of the Department of History or an environmental dimension consistent with the Porter School's mission. We had the impression that this is an unfair burden for students who are neither focused on environmental or historical issues, and is not in the spirit of what geography as a discipline can offer to critical fields of research

endeavor. The University must change its structure to allow students to pursue their research agendas without the additional burden of meeting a bureaucratic regulation that has not been realigned with the research programs at TAU Geography.

4.3 Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes in the self-evaluation report are articulated only vaguely and in some cases use circular logic. For example, the outcome to “acquire sufficient conceptual and empirical knowledge on geography's main research fields” leaves the definition of geography to the reader. This vagueness propagates to the required and elective curriculum, whereby the discipline'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 students had when they entered it. Finally, the measurements of learning outcomes in the BA program consist entirely of exams in specific courses rather than oral presentations or research portfolios. 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 relationships of people within these spaces and places.
- Ability to identify and apply the geographical information techniques such as cartography, remote sensing, GIS, and spatial- and geo-statistics.
- Ability to read, understand, comprehend, and critically evaluate literature in geographical research.
- Ability to communicate knowledge about geography in oral, graphical, and written form.

An important question that the Department needs to answer is whether a bachelor's degree is intended to prepare students for the labor market. Legitimate differences of opinion pertain within and across disciplines (e.g. no in the humanities but yes in engineering). We got the impression that the undergraduate degree has become a stepping-stone to the MA degree where students obtain the core competencies for geography and acquire skills for the labor market. There is no right or wrong answer to the question of whether the BA is a terminal degree or not, but the Department's perspective on this matter needs to be communicated to prospective students.

The Department does not track its alumni. Therefore, the Department misses a valuable opportunity to track students 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.

4.4 Faculty

Faculty productivity is quite good for a comprehensive Department with large numbers of undergraduate and graduate students. Some faculty members in TAU Geography operate superb research programs, for example in remote sensing, hydrochemistry, social issues, and urban modeling and spatial analysis.

Occasional faculty members play an especially important role in departmental life due in part to an extraordinary commitment of retirees for the welfare of students and the Department. It also results from the lack of entry-level tenure-track faculty positions in Israeli universities. This puts some highly productive young scholars in the position of part-time teachers who often combine duties at more than one university to put together a sufficient paycheck. PhD students also play a quasi-faculty role in teaching important courses and interacting with students. Their teaching performance appears to be variable, however. Teaching a course for the first time often leads to somewhat ragged quality—even by people who in time will become great teachers.

Faculty teaching is evaluated through a comprehensive method that combines formal teaching evaluations with a process to help under-performing faculty improve. The University's Center for the Advancement of Teaching offers lectures and workshops on teaching improvement, individual consultation, and personal assistance. Faculty members with teaching evaluations consistently in the lowest quintile are targeted for special help. At the other end of the scale, faculty and teaching assistants in the highest quintile are eligible for consideration for the honorific Rector's Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

The University's processes for evaluation in promotion cases are well defined. The department's full professors and the Chair examine the case. If they recommend promotion, the Dean and the Faculty Appointments Committee of the School of History consider the case. If their view is favorable, the Dean convenes a promotion committee that includes an internal faculty member and an external member coming from the candidate's domains of scholarly expertise. This committee reviews the candidate's stature and requests letters of evaluation from leading national and international scholars. In these ways, the process is similar to those in other universities internationally. One potential issue is that the Faculty Appointments Committee of the School of History may not have the expertise to evaluate the qualifications of, say, a faculty member in physical geography or geographic information science, and they may not appreciate a candidate whose strength is in the integration of disparate disciplines.

4.5 Research

Research in TAU Geography is organized around nine laboratories (a natural science

model) that reflect the research specialism's of the faculty. These laboratories are: Remote Sensing; Hydrochemistry; Urban Space Analysis; Planning for Environment with Communities; Geosimulation and Spatial Analysis; Contemporary Urban Design; Urban Environment and Climate; Environmental Simulation; and Historical Geography. Each of these laboratories in turn focuses on a number of research topics, as spelled out in the self-evaluation document. In some areas, there is evidence of important research collaboration and cooperation with faculty in other disciplines. Examples include collaborations with engineering, ecology and sociology.

The population of each laboratory is determined by the body of MA and PhD students who conduct research in areas cognate to the relevant laboratory and, in some cases as noted above, by collaborations with faculty in other departments of the University. The model of multiple laboratories plays to faculty interests and strengths, but given the small size of the department, this means: a) some of these labs potentially lack critical mass to compete in the international arena, and b) are susceptible to the activity of individual staff that are already overtaxed by high teaching loads. A review of the titles of some of the laboratories suggests there is much to gain from reconfigurations and mergers of laboratories to strengthen areas of significant expertise. This could create synergies that parallel models that have proven successful in other countries. As things stand, the diversity and number of research directions pursued in the Department is more akin to what would be expected in a Department two or three times the size of TAU Geography. This raises issues of sustainability and the retention of standing and reputation in the relevant fields of research.

The nine core faculty, have a good record of publication in international and national journals. The self-evaluation report did not provide an overview of research outputs, but the material listed by faculty member indicates that all are delivering outputs at variable levels in relevant journals to their specialties, and that these are often in collaboration and co-authorship with research students and sometimes with other faculty. Examples of major international journals that faculty have published in during the last five years include *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *International Journal of GIS, Environment and Planning B*, *International Journal of Climatology*, *Journal of Applied Remote Sensing* and *Science of the Total Environment*. Additionally, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings are common. The average output per year per faculty member is two to three refereed papers per year.

The Committee also noted that research at TAU Geography has garnered other forms of recognition. These include awards to staff for research performance and publication quality, and the conduct of research that has led to applications for patents.

In many, but not all, areas of geography good research requires significant funding, which is commonly won from competitive peer-reviewed sources. In this regard, TAU Geography demonstrates a good capacity to raise such funds to support its research ambition, especially in the areas of physical geography/applied environmental geography where such funding is essential to success. The Hydrochemistry, Remote Sensing, Environmental Climatology and Geosimulation & Spatial Analysis laboratories

are excellent examples of units raising funds to support their research activities. These resources support the purchase of necessary equipment but also contribute to the capacity to support research students who in turn conduct necessary research activity. The model of depending on research students contrasts with that of many other systems where postdoctoral researchers play a more dominant role in research laboratories.

Thus it is our view that TAU geographical research is often of international standard, is receiving external recognition and is generating high quality outputs, but is doing so in a context that is potentially unsustainable. This relates to pressures on faculty time, a need to reconsider the structural arrangement of activities across laboratories to create and maintain critical mass, and the threats and issues associated with the placement of the Department within the organization of the University.

4.6 Broader Organization Structure

The Department of Geography and Human Environment of Tel Aviv University has been anchored since its establishment in the Faculty of Humanities and affiliated with the School of History. Although the Faculty and the Deans of the School have been supportive of the Department over the years, severe budget cuts during last decade eroded the department's research and teaching missions. Coincident with these cuts has been the emergence of the Porter School of the Environment as an academic home for many graduate students. The Porter School, established in 2000, is the first multidisciplinary graduate school geared to research and teaching and dissemination of environmental studies in Israel. The School, rich in research resources, is independent of the various faculties of the University and does not have a faculty of its own. It functions as an 'umbrella' for teaching and research in different fields and by different departments.

Geography's academic home in the Faculty of Humanities and emerging role as feeder to the Porter School has created two organizational problems, both of which have been alluded to elsewhere in this report. First, the Faculty of Humanities and the School of History do not cover the range of specialties of TAU Geography, each with different requirements for research funds, equipment, and laboratories and each with different promotion procedures and expectations. Second, the alliance with the Porter School has led to increased teaching and supervision loads for the Department's faculty members. In some cases the Department absorbed Porter students with no or insufficient background in geography. Unequal stipend/fellowship allowances are available to graduate students working on their theses through the Department.

4.7 Infrastructure

Yad-Avner Building

Since 1973 the Department of Geography and Human Environment has occupied the Yad-Avner Building. Yad-Avner, 300 meters north of the main Campus. It is sufficient for most of the various space needs of the Department. Yet, the building, 40 years old, suffers from poor deteriorating infrastructure, causing numerous problems that directly and indirectly decelerate research and learning productivity. Curing Yad-Avner infrastructure deficiencies demands significant funds but until very recently the support of the University has been minimal [the University does not own Yad-Avner and is not inclined to invest in renovating it]. Some of urgent maintenance is needed in order to carry out daily activities and research, covered through the individual faculty member's research funds.

Laboratories

Nine research laboratories serve the department's faculty in conducting world-class research and teaching and in supervising graduate research. The laboratories also act as the arena for cooperative research with faculty from other departments in Tel Aviv University and from other Universities. The general maintenance and renovations needed in Yad-Avner building also apply to the laboratories. Some of the urgent upkeep is covered by the faculty research funds.

Library

The departmental library located in Yad-Avner occupies a main room and three smaller rooms. The library holds some 10,000 books [200 of which are required reading and are loaned overnight only]; close to 300 journals in paper and electronic modes; atlases (400); historical aerial photographs; some tens thousands maps, rare and contemporary; databases and indexes; and graduate theses, most of them in electronic format. We recognize that current library facilities are inadequate, but in a world of scarce resources, we do not consider this to be a high-priority concern for a modern science department.

Computers

Student access to computational resources is meager, and the Department does not take advantage of the reality that many students possess their own computers because the usual software licensing arrangements do not give them access to the software used in the courses and in research (e.g., ArcGIS, MATLAB). This problem should be solvable through a network licensing arrangement and a Virtual Private Network. All computers seem to run the Windows XP operating system rather than Windows 7; we did not determine the versions of the applications software used.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

5.1 Congratulatory Remarks

TAU Geography is a center of excellence in research and graduate instruction. Faculty members publish on a regular basis, supervise a sizable 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:

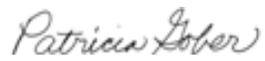
- Make an immediate decision about the organizational status of Tel Aviv Geography, preferably moving it as a freestanding faculty into the Porter School of Environment, as a department in the Faculty of Social Sciences, or combined with cognate fields in a new unit. Continued uncertainty about its position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

Department-Level Recommendations:

- Establish a regular process of strategic planning designed to produce a focused mission statement, goals for the next decade, and implementation strategy.
- 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.
- Reconsider the current structure of laboratories with an eye toward reducing the number and taking advantage of strategic overlapping research interests.
- Trim the number of undergraduate courses to fit the size of the current faculty and student needs.

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

Signed by:



Prof. Patricia Gober



Prof. Michael Batty



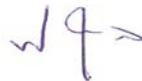
Prof. David Thomas



Prof. Mark Rosentraub



Prof. Yochanan Kushnir



Prof. Baruch Kipnis



Prof. Jeff Dozier

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 Sa'ar
Minister of Education,
Chairperson, The Council for Higher Education

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Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

Schedule of site visit – Department of Geography and Human Environment Tel Aviv University

All Meetings, including lunch, on both days of the visit

Will take place in Gilman Bldg., Room 180

Monday, March 12, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
10:00-10:45	Meeting with the Dean of the Humanities Faculty	Prof. Eyal Zisser
10:45-11:30	Meeting with the chair of the department of Geography and Human Environment	Prof. Itzhak Benenson
11:30-12:15	Meeting with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Aron Shai, Rector Prof. Dina Kovetz-Prialnik, Vice Rector Prof. David Horn, Head, Academic Quality Assessment
12:15-13:15	Meeting with senior faculty and representatives of relevant committees (teaching/curriculum committee, admissions committee, appointment committee)*	Dr. Dror Avisar ,Teaching Committee Dr. Itzhak Omer , Teaching Committee Prof. Arie Bitan , Prof. Emeritus Prof. Moshe Braver , Prof. Emeritus Prof. Eyal Ben-Dor Dr. Tali Hatuka Prof. Hadas Saaroni , Teaching Committee Prof. Yuval Portugali , Prof. Emeritus Prof. Tovi Fenster, M.A. Advisor Prof. Itzhak Schnell
13:15-14:00	Lunch – closed meeting	

14:00-14:45	Meeting with Scholars from Related Fields who collaborate with the Geography Department	Dr. Baruch Ziv ,Open University, Department of Natural Sciences Prof. Israel Finkelstein, Department of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University Dr. Hadas Meiman, Department of Engineering
14:45-15:30	Meeting with Adjunct Faculty*	Dr. Amnon Kartin Dr. Oded Pochter Prof. Micha Hop Dr. Orna Zafrir-Reuven Dr. Zvi Ron
15:30-16:00	Closed Door Committee Meeting	

Tuesday March 13, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
8:30-9:30	Tour of Geography Department (classes, library, offices of faculty members, computer labs etc.) Will take place at Yad Avner	Prof. Itzhak Benenson with the senior department members
9:45-10:30	Meeting with Bachelors students* ***	
10:30-11:15	Meeting with Masters* ***	
11:15-12:00	Meeting with PhD* ***	

12:00-12:45	Meeting with Alumni* ***	
12:45-13:45	Lunch and Closed-door working meeting of the committee (in the same room as the meetings)	
13:45-14:30	Summation meeting with heads of the institution and of the department	Prof. Aron Shai, Rector Prof. Dina Kovetz-Prialnik, Vice Rector Prof. David Horn, Head, Academic Quality Assessment Prof. Itzhak Benenson, Head of Department Prof. Eyal Zisser, Dean

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

*** The visit will be conducted in English with the exception of students who may speak in Hebrew and anyone else who feels unable to converse in English.