

Ruppin Academic Center

The Behavioral Sciences Department at the Ruppin Academic Center (RAC) is to be commended for the direct and thoughtful responses to and clear organization of their report on implementing the 2009 recommendations and suggestions of the committee appointed by the Council for Higher Education to evaluate the department. It is evident that they took the task of implementation with enthusiasm and energy, and in the spirit in which it was offered, as a sincere attempt to support and improve a thriving program. On the whole, it was heartening to see that the majority of the committee's recommendations have been addressed by concrete changes or by serious planning for concrete changes. We also recognize that some of the recommendations made require resources that the department cannot produce on its own.

1. Undergraduate Program

We are pleased that the department added a mandatory course in Introduction to Economics, and that this course has been well-received by students.

A. Too many of the core courses are taught by adjuncts rather than full-time faculty.

The department has hired four promising faculty members, increasing the percentage of courses taught in-house, both excellent trends that should be encouraged. Creating a solid core of faculty should have increasing benefits to both faculty and student life.

B. A state-of-the-art basic course in Cognitive Psychology should be a requirement.

Among the new hires is a cognitive psychologist who has upgraded the course. It is now a requirement for students in the psychology track, a significant majority of the undergraduates.

The committee is impressed that the department has gone beyond the committee's recommendations by significantly enriching the curriculum in cognitive psychology. New state-of-the-art intermediate and advanced courses have been added, with the creative assignments and small class atmosphere that take best advantage of the benefits of the college, in contrast to university, experience.

C. Students should be required to take at least one course that integrates the various disciplinary approaches around a topic.

The department established a committee to respond to the challenge of offering interdisciplinary integrative courses. Four such courses were proposed, each with two fully-participating faculty from different disciplines. The intention is to offer these courses as electives or research seminars. Currently, faculty are only given credit for half a course; the committee hopes that this will change in recognition of the fact that preparing and teaching such a course is as demanding as a single course. Perhaps for these reasons, only one of the proposed courses has been offered. The committee recommends that the department continue their efforts in this direction, and that the college support these developments by giving full credit for teaching.

D. Settings for the experiential learning program should be broadened to include applications of social, developmental, and cognitive psychology.

As recommended, the department formed a committee to design and implement experiential-based courses. Two have been successfully implemented, one in forensic psychology in cooperation with the Israeli police force and another in organizational psychology, and a third in education will be implemented in 2013.

E. Proficiency in analyzing behavioral science material in English is needed for professional work and for graduate school.

The department's response to this request has been exemplary. All course syllabi are required to have at least 10 items in English. Mandatory courses are required to have English textbooks and elective courses to include journal articles in English.

F. The department should carry out biennial internal reviews of syllabi with the intention to upgrade the courses.

The department now carries out biennial reviews of courses and syllabi with the intention of upgrading the courses. The sharing of syllabi also insures coordination of material across courses.

Concurrently, the department should consider raising its entrance requirements.

The department has been steadily raising its admissions standards, on a yearly basis.

G. Related to the previous point, the department should consider instituting an honors program for especially promising students interested in research and graduate school, with special seminars and research experience.

The department has developed a thoughtful and challenging honors program, carefully tailored to its strengths and foci.

2. Infrastructure

A. Library. Efforts should be made to insure that students have access to the journals and other publications they need, both hard copies, and where available, especially e-copies. The College should consider a consortium with other colleges and/or universities to defray costs, as well as arrangements with nearby universities for student access to library materials.

The department belongs to the College Library Consortium which allows free interlibrary loans. The college has wisely chosen on-line rather than paper sources. It has enrolled in six databases that together contain many of the books and journals students need. The committee wonders why PsychInfo is not among the databases to which the college now subscribes. The College has two full-time information specialists to help students find readings. It provides a library orientation to new students.

B. Laboratory Facilities. Efforts should be made to increase laboratory facilities so that

each faculty member can comfortably conduct research. Involvement in research is an important factor in undergraduate training.

Three faculty have laboratories on campus; three others use facilities elsewhere. RAC is planning a building to be complete in 2014 which will increase space for laboratories as well as offices.

3. Faculty

A. Clear decisions and guidelines about promotion and tenure should be made by the RAC administration, along with the administration of the BSD, within a year.

Institutional guidelines on promotion and tenure have been distributed to faculty. This information is provided to new faculty by several levels of administration.

B. The proportion of adjunct teachers should not exceed 40% of the faculty, and ideally, be lower. See previous recommendation (1A) to add a regular faculty member.

RAC has more than complied with this request.

C. The administration should make efforts to provide regular sabbaticals for all regular faculty.

RAC allows faculty to take one-semester leaves (presumably unpaid) depending on budgetary conditions but the agreement with the CHE does not guarantee sabbatical time off nor does it guarantee funding. The BSD faculty would like paid sabbaticals, and the committee supports this. Sabbatical leaves nourish faculty, and thereby add to the college and the students.

D. New Programs. As noted, the department has plans to open MA programs as well as new BA programs. Although the committee is supposed to evaluate only existing programs, it would like to stress that in order to open new programs, the department will need more faculty members who are appropriate to the tasks. The committee hopes that the accreditation committee, appointed by the CHE, will make sure that the Department has a sufficient number of faculty. Relying on adjuncts for permanent programs is not an appropriate solution. In addition, the committee believes that the department should carefully consider the implications of creating BA programs in Psychology and in Social Work on the Behavioral Sciences Program. These new programs are likely to draw many students from the BSD as well as stretching the resources of the faculty.

The RAC has opened two MA programs, in clinical psychology and in nursing. The BSD department outlined many ways that the MA programs have enriched the BA program, including increased faculty and courses. As the MA programs were not in operation as of the committee's visit, however, the committee did not (and cannot now) evaluate them.

4. Alumni Survey. *The committee recommends that the department conduct a survey of alumni on a regular basis. The survey can ask former students about their further education, their employment, how they found their jobs, how their education contributes to their further education and their jobs, and more. The results will be useful for planning*

purposes and for keeping the department up to date with needed improvements and changes.

a. The committee recommends that the department develop a strategic plan for the alumni survey in the second year and implement the plan in the third year.

5. Alumni Association. *The committee also suggests that the department establish ongoing contacts with alumni to build an alumni culture, which can be valuable to the institution and to the department. If the department were to establish a newsletter for alumni and to organize communities of graduates, perhaps by current employment or geographic region, this would keep students involved with the college. Alumni groups often offer financial support to their alma maters as well, and support them in other ways too, making it in the college's best interest to have ongoing alumni contacts that can foster this.*

The alumni survey conducted in 2007 provided useful information to the RAC. They formed a database of 350 alumni (continuously updated) who are willing to guide students and other graduates, a service students and graduates find helpful. In 2010, the BSD faculty launched a bi-yearly online newsletter. They monitor the frequencies of clicking kinds of items and found that interviews with alumni and occupational guidance are especially frequent. Each issue asks for volunteers for the alumni database.

In addition, the RAC offers other services to its alumni: a Facebook page, a unit to provide information about advanced studies, and a unit that provides information about jobs as well as helping students prepare CVs and for interviews.

The committee applauds these creative uses of online and on the spot resources that help its students and alumni and create a supportive community.

Remarks regarding Sociology and Anthropology:

I read the detailed evaluation report and reviewed RAP's response to the recommendations made by the academic committee. My impression is that RAP took the recommendations seriously and provided detailed information as to how they addressed (or will address) each of the recommendations. As neither the committee's report nor the response specifically discussed the Sociology and Anthropology program and courses there is no need for my input in this regard.

Two points were made more generally concerning the program of the Department of Behavioral Sciences that have implications for Sociology and Anthropology. These pertain to readings in English as part of course requirements, and the implementation of interdisciplinary courses.

I reviewed all the Syllabi of the Sociological courses and found that in all courses readings in English (mostly journal articles but also textbooks in some cases) constitute a substantial portion of the required readings. I believe that in this sense the syllabi meet the expectations of the evaluation committee.

The college responded favorably to the idea that a Behavioral Science program should offer courses that are interdisciplinary in nature. Indeed a committee formed in the college to consider the issue proposed 4 such courses all of which seem appropriate. Yet only one has been implemented. While RAP should be commended for this development it should also be noted that the course is given as a seminar which means that very few students will have access to an interdisciplinary course in a given year. I understand that a barrier to the expansion of interdisciplinary courses is the fact that such courses require the participation of two faculty members and each received only half the credit for the course. I believe it is very valuable for such courses to be led by faculty members from different disciplines and their participation throughout the course is important for creating a truly interdisciplinary discourse. I would thus urge RAP to find a way to compensate faculty members who take upon themselves to develop and lead such courses in a way that is commensurate with their efforts.