University of Haifa

The Psychology Department of University of Haifa 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 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. One significant recommendation that has yet to be implemented is to reduce the multitude of MA programs to a more manageable number. Beyond from this, we do recognize that many recommendations made require resources or regulatory clarifications that the department cannot produce on its own.

A. Programs and Faculty.

1. **The committee recommended that the department increase its strength by hiring in three key areas, cognitive neuroscience, traditional social psychology, and cognitive and social development.** The appointments of nine new faculty members address many of those needs. So many young active researchers should also increase the overall vitality of the department.

2. **The committee was concerned that the department had too many overlapping and non-uniform MA programs, and urged more coherence and consolidation, suggesting various specific possibilities.** The department has taken some steps in this direction but not gone far enough. In short, the MA program continues to have the same very large number specializations (i.e., 9 MA programs). The department has integrated the cognitive and neuro areas into a neurocognition track, though a more appropriate name might be chosen given that the new track also includes clinical neuropsychology. The department strongly argued for retaining its organizational/industrial psychology program but is aware that it might not be sustainable in the long term. Planning for a single clinical program leading to a PhD is said to be progressing, but is not complete. As per the committee’s recommendations, the department does seem to be moving toward a more evidence-based approach to clinical assessment and practice. The committee recommends further consolidation of the MA programs. Clarity could come from examining the requirements of each program, the numbers of students in each, and the relationships of the programs to occupations. See also C 1, below.

   These issues should be part of the deliberations of the special committee the department has wisely formed for planning and development for the future. One plan is to become a “school” rather than a department, a move the department believes will bring benefits.

3. The department is aware of the need for more laboratory space and student support, and is working actively to secure them. Presumably some of the new faculty will be involved in field studies and some will use the web to collect data, alleviating some of the needs for in-house laboratories.

4. **The committee recommended more appointments to full Professor as well as more transparent promotion procedures.** Since the committee’s recommendations were
made, four people have been promoted to full professor. The department has also begun implementing recommendations of a committee formed to improve hiring and retention of new faculty.

B. The BA Program
1. Overall, the BA program is solid. However, on the basis of student comments, the committee had recommended making courses more challenging. One way to do this is to increase the number of exercise/discussion sections. The department has attempted to implement this, but has a limited budget for doing so. Given that, perhaps the department can institute other means of increasing challenge, for example, by adding advanced readings and by forming student groups to work on advanced projects.

2. Similarly, the committee recommended increasing opportunities for undergraduates to participate in research and practice. The department has taken positive steps to involve students in research, but less to provide experiences in the field. The planned honors program should also be applauded.

C. The MA Programs
1. Multitude of MA programs. As noted above, the committee recommended reducing the number of MA programs and standardizing their formats. As noted above, there has been some consolidation, but there are too many programs remaining. Because the structure of the MA was not provided for all the programs, it isn’t known if they have been made more uniform and the course content of weaker programs made more comprehensive and rigorous. There are several possible ways to do this. One possibility would be to separate programs aimed at practice from those aimed at research, with common core courses in each strand as well as more specialized courses in specific concentrations. The department noted that this is the plan for the clinical program, and that strategy seems appropriate to the remaining MA programs. As noted in A 1 above, the committee recommends that the planning committee of the department pay special attention to simplifying the MA programs.

2. Clinical Programs. The committee recommended that the department work to consolidate clinically oriented programs and upgrade these programs. In particular, the recommendation was that the clinical programs be brought up to international standards by several means, including reducing the number of courses in each of the main areas (psychopathology, assessment, and intervention), emphasizing clinical science and evidence-based practice in course content, requiring at least one course in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), making an effort to ensure that adjuncts hired reflect the mission of the program, and doing whatever is possible to arrange that students have the option of doing their practicum at a site offering evidence-based practice training (e.g., CBT). As recommended, the department is taking steps to consolidate the clinical programs and to take an evidence-based approach in course work and training, both commendable, as is the increased emphasis on neuroscience. Students also receive training not only in psychodynamic treatment, but in CBT, and family systems as well. The committee encourages the planned post-graduate program in cognitive behavior therapy. The committee also encourages the department to continue to pursue an in-house clinic for both
training and research and to continue to investigate emphasizing the PhD as the appropriate degree for clinicians. It is likely that further improvements can be made in the clinical programs once the new rules are issued by the Ministry of Health (based on its extensive discussions with faculty in the universities and the CHE). In addition, the re-specialization program training post-PhD students to be clinicians will soon offer both psychoanalytic training and training in CBT.

3. Another commendable step has been to fold the former clinical program dedicated to training Arabs into the regular clinical program with special support for three Arab students.

4. The department has taken steps to strengthen the role of the MA thesis in MA training without undue burden to the faculty.

D. The Ph.D. Program

_The committee noted that the PhD program takes too long to complete._ The department did not respond to that issue. The committee also recommended considering moving to primarily PhD admissions. The department noted that an MA is regarded in Israel as a professional degree. Presumably the implication is that unless the situation in Israel changes, the PhD degree should be primarily for researchers and academicians rather than practitioners. Increasingly, the PhD degree is needed for clinical practice in the US, and that might predict similar changes for Israel.

E. Infrastructure and Research

1. _The committee noted that there was insufficient lab space and that the lab space was inequitably distributed._ The department conducted a survey of lab needs that supported the committee’s judgment. The department has been working with the University to increase lab space, but with little success so far. The committee supports the department in this direction. The department has taken advantage of lab space vacated by retirees to redistribute and reorganize the lab space, and in particular, to create shared facilities. It has hired separate administrators for animal and human laboratory facilities to coordinate lab activities. The department is to be commended for creatively reorganizing the minimal facilities that they have.

2. The reallocation of lab space also allowed addressing another concern of the committee, the lack of space to work in or near the labs for graduate students.

3. The reorganization of the lab space has also provided lab space to faculty not involved in collaborative units.

4. _The committee recommended shared laboratory facilities_ and the department has implemented that.

5. _The committee recommended increased and reliable support of PhD students._ The department has been working with the university to that end, with slow progress. Additional funding for graduate students has come from faculty grants. The department knows that graduate funding is insufficient and is continuing to make efforts to increase it. Similarly, the department is trying to convince the University of the importance of shifting from primarily MA training to primarily PhD training.

F. Alumni
Although the department had surveyed their alumni, they have not yet attempted to create an alumni organization. The committee had urged this for many reasons, to track their graduates as a way to evaluate their program, to foster loyalty to the department, to encourage contributions to the intellectual and professional atmosphere in the department, to provide a source for donations. The department has yet to implement this.

G. Additional Note: A General-Report Recommendation

Although the committee’s report for this department did not specify it, it is worth noting that the general report evaluating the discipline of psychology at universities in Israel recommended that psychology at universities be treated as a life science—in terms of teaching loads, undergraduate and graduate support, laboratory space and facilities, and the like. Given that funding and related challenges are noted in the department’s implementation report, this recommendation seems worth highlighting here.