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To: The Committee for the Evaluation of Computer Science Programs

RE: Response to your report from April 2014

Dear committee members,

We acknowledge with thanks your evaluation report of our department. Your report is very comprehensive and raises important issues to many of which we completely agree. Next we would like to comment on the recommendations in your report. We hope that these comments answer your concerns.

In your executive summary you have raised three issues:

- 1) Long-range planning towards the IDF move to the south. We have been discussing this issue with the IDF and with the university administration for over two years. We are in advanced planning stages of a special program for army undergraduates with some exemptions from courses they have studied in the army (after passing exemption exams), thus encouraging them to enroll to our department. We have also discussed the way to encourage army officers to continue to graduate degrees in our department, especially in the recently announced cyber program. We agree with the committee on the importance of this issue and consider it seriously, hoping that our problems of limited resources will be resolved.
- 2) Reorganizing computer science in the university. We agree with the committee that computer science and computer engineering teaching and research is too fragmented at BGU. We think that reorganizing this discipline in BGU makes sense but in a limited and focused way. E.g. we suggest joining only 2-3 departments into an inter-faculty school or faculty where computer science remains the core area of the joint organization and our standards of teaching and research quality are maintained. In the past we cooperated in discussions on this ("school") and will continue doing so.
- 3) Faculty/students ratio. We could not agree more on this issue. We raised it with the university administration many times in the past and will continue doing so. Our current teaching load is obviously unreasonable and many of the points you raise as weaknesses are outcome of this load. We hope the university will follow up the

committee's recommendation of reducing our SFR (students/faculty ratio) as was done in the past, for example, at Bar-Ilan university with dramatic positive impact on their CS department.

Next we would like to comment on each specific recommendation in the order of their appearance in the report.

Steps toward implementation (including time table)	Committee recommendation
Section 2. Blue ribbon committee to formulate strategic plan and address rational reorganization of units involved in computing research and teaching.	The department will participate in deciding upon such a committee as soon as we get green light from the university administration (predicted within 1 year). It is essential that the department will be involved in the composition of this committee.
Section 3. Blue ribbon committee for prioritization of hiring according to field.	The department welcomes the advice of such committee but requests continued autonomy as for hiring prioritization including specialization in fields to increase visibility.
Section 3. Blue ribbon committee for resource allocation and planning for offices for future hiring.	We could not agree more with this recommendation of our need for more infrastructure, especially space, but also many more administrative aids, some whom will have their full attention to students' problems, and others will help with writing grant proposals. Remember that our Alon building was planned for CS and the very small CSE department, and a whole floor was given to another department just before we entered the building. Thus, now we use offices in the way of "warm beds", where new faculty members occupy offices of others on sabbatical, and we do not have any offices for our 2 new hires. Moreover, many of our graduate students and labs were moved to buildings all over the campus. We urgently need additional research labs (at least two in the near future). We would appreciate the committee's explicit comment and support on this.

<p>Section 3. Attracting philanthropic support.</p>	<p>The department will act toward this goal by nominating a donors' committee within 1 year. The committee will work with the vice-president for external affairs.</p>
<p>Section 4. Short term a) Provide more advanced courses, exclusive for graduate students.</p>	<p>The main reason for the lack of advanced graduate courses is our current SFR and the heavy teaching load of undergraduate courses. When our SFR and teaching load are reduced, we will be able to offer more advanced courses than we offer now. On the other hand, we do allow excellent undergraduate students to take these courses and this policy will continue.</p>
<p>Section 4. Short term b) Offer a choice between databases and compilers</p>	<p>The issue of Compilers vs. Databases was raised in the past and we will reconsider it in the next academic year, but for now we view OUR compilers course as a tremendously important educational experience and its importance is confirmed by students' feedback.</p>
<p>Section 4, Intermediate term a) The department must take a decisive action to bring the SFR down to 25.</p>	<p>We strongly support your target of 25 student/faculty ratio (SFR). We plan to hire more faculty and in the meantime reduce the number of admissions by raising acceptance standards. We would like the committee to recommend the university administration to allow the department to make more offers than the number of slots we have (knowing that not all offers are accepted), thus enabling us to approach excellent candidates early on in the hiring season. Given the policy of making at most one offer at a time, we lose some excellent candidates. This issue was not raised in the current report, and is crucial to us.</p>
<p>Section 4, Intermediate term b) Comprehensive effort to improve attractiveness of MSc and PhD programs.</p>	<p>We agree that we need to think carefully how to make both our Master and our PhD programs more attractive. We need the university's help in raising stipends for grad students so we can compete with other universities, which have geographical advantage on us. We also acknowledge that our offering of advanced courses is somewhat limited due to our investment in teaching very large undergrad courses in manageable class sizes, and we hope that fixing the SFR will improve this as well. In the next 2-4 years we plan to recruit excellent candidates for graduate studies also from the army by approaching them ahead of time.</p>

Section 5. Short term: Institute an honors committee, to nominate faculty.	We are in stages of instituting such a committee, and a plan to recommend three excellent faculty for various honors.
Section 5. Intermediate term. a) EU funding.	We agree with the committee's recommendation regarding European and industrial funding. While we are proud to have the highest number of ISF grants in the university and some European grants, we need to increase our international grant support and especially European funding. We plan to promote this issue with the faculty hoping that we have sufficient administrative support (as was accomplished in CS in Bar Ilan, where improving SFR and resources had a positive effect also on getting EU grants).
Section 5. Intermediate term. b) Sufficient infrastructure for support a push for EU funding.	We completely agree with this recommendation.
Section 6 short term a) Raise admission standards.	Admission standards were just raised this year and we plan to keep increasing the standards in the coming years. There might be pressure from higher administration to lower it. The committee strong support on this is essential.
Section 6 b) maintain and expand alumni relations program.	We will assign a faculty committee for this topic within one year.
Section 7. short term) A process to reflect on attainment of outcomes in a periodic manner.	We will assign a faculty committee for this topic within one year.
Section 8, intermediate term a) persistent effort to compete for Israeli European and industrial funds.	Please see our response to Section 5 above.
Section 8, intermediate term b) The university must ensure infrastructure to support a push for funding.	We completely agree with this recommendation.
Section 9, Infrastructure, short term) comprehensive planning must address planned growth of the department.	See our answer to Section 3 line 2.

Sincerely,

Prof. Amos Beimel _____
Chair, Dept. of Computer Science



Prof. Shlomi Dolev _____
Dean, Faculty of Natural Sciences



Prof. Steve Rosen _____
Deputy Rector



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משנה לרקטור