



**Committee for the Evaluation of Social Work and Human Services Study  
Programs**

**Ashkelon College  
School of Social Work  
Evaluation Report**

**July 2015**

## Contents

<b>Chapter 1:</b>	Background.....	3
<b>Chapter 2:</b>	Committee Procedures.....	4
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	Evaluation of the Social Work Study Program at Ashkelon Academic College .....	5
<b>Chapter 4:</b>	General Recommendations and Timetable.....	

**Appendices:** Appendix 1 – Letter of Appointment

Appendix 2 - Schedule of the visit

## **Chapter 1- Background**

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Social Work and Human Services during the academic year of 2015.

Following the decision of the CHE, Vice Chair of the Council of Higher Education on behalf of the Minister of Education, appointed a Committee consisting of:

- **Prof. Allan Borowski**- School of Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia (Ageing; Retirement; Migration; Cohesion; Delinquency) Committee Chair
- **Prof. Michàlle Mor Barak** - School of Social Work & Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, USA (social work and management)
- **Prof. Ram Cnaan** - School of Policy and Practice, University of Pennsylvania, USA (faith based social services, social policy)
- **Prof. David Biegel** - Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, USA (family as a unit, family welfare)
- **Prof. Zahava Solomon** - School of Social Work, Tel-Aviv University, Israel (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and secondary PTSD)
- **Prof. Sven Hesse**-School of Social work, Stockholm University, Sweden (poverty and children and their families in an international perspective as well as International social work)

***Ms. Alex Buslovich Bilik*** was the coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:<sup>1</sup>

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Social Work and Human Services and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2013).

## **Chapter 2-Committee Procedures**

The Committee held its first meetings on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2015, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Social Work and Human Services Study programs in Israel.

In March 2015, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tel Hai Academic College, Haifa University, Ariel University, Emek Yizrael Academic College, Ashqelon Academic college, Tel Aviv University, Ben Gurion Univeristy, Sapir Academic Collge and Bar Ilan University. During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

This report deals with the School of Social Work at Ashkelon College. The Committee's visit to Ashkelon College took place on Wednesday March 18<sup>th</sup> 2015.

The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the management of Ashkelon College and the School of Social Work for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit at the institution.

## **Chapter 3: Evaluation of the Social Work Study Program**

### **at Ashkelon College**

*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.*

#### **1. Executive Summary.**

The School of Social Work aims to provide accessible education in the field of social work in Israel's Southern periphery. Its mission is strongly rooted in the values and ethics of Jewish tradition. The school offers BSW, retraining and Haredi programs. The student population is diverse and includes many individuals from minority and underprivileged populations including, new immigrants, Bedouins, and students with special needs. The faculty is committed to empowering the students by investing in their higher education. The School's faculty consists of a very small number of tenured faculty members. The School relies heavily on adjunct teachers whose primary place of employment is elsewhere. Most of these are on temporary annually renewable contracts. Just under two-thirds of all faculty members are qualified social workers. Most of the adjunct teachers are concurrently employed in public agencies. Given the composition of the faculty, the heavy teaching load and limited funding /incentive for research, the School's research expertise and productivity are modest. Admission criteria are less demanding than those of other undergraduate social work programs in Israel and comparable institutions and the dropout rate is, in consequence, high.

#### **2. Organizational Structure**

The School of Social Work was established in 1999 under the auspices of Bar Ilan University. As of 2007, the school holds independent authorization to grant a BSW. The School of Social Work is one of the largest and most established departments of the college, and is held in high regard by the management of the college. With approximately 3500 students enrolled in the college, about 550 students are enrolled in the department of social work.

The college is financially stable and the Committee was informed by the management that the School's functioning and future developments are not affected by financial constraints. Given the hierarchical structure and size of the College, lines of communication between the School and the College are clear and open.

### **3. Mission and Goals**

Ashkelon College's stated goals are: (1) To enhance accessibility to higher education in the southern part of Israel, particularly in applied disciplines; (2) To strive for academic excellence by providing scholarships for outstanding students and fostering research. Concomitantly, the School of Social Work's stated aim is to make social work studies accessible to Israel's geographic and social periphery by training social workers who may in the future contribute to the welfare of individuals, families, groups and communities. An aspiration of the School is that its students, in the future, will contribute to the advancement of social policy.

#### **Recommendations**

Considering faculty members comprise mostly teachers, rather than researchers, the Committee believes that the School needs to either revise its mission statement with regard to research or change the stated mission. Given the nature of the College and its stated aims, it seems to us that the former is more relevant than the latter.

### **4. Study Programs**

Since 2007 the School of Social Work has offered a BSW program, a retraining program and a program for Haredi men and women

The BSW program, initially founded and operated under the auspices of Bar Ilan University, was and remains inspired by the Bar Ilan model. It maintains a broad approach that aims to address individuals, families and communities. Adopting a systems perspective, special emphasis is placed on the family as a central unit of intervention. The BSW study program consists of social work practice methods courses – taught in small groups – along with supervised field work, basic social sciences courses, a limited number of courses devoted to research, and several additional elective courses.

As the School stated aim is to address the social needs of Israel's southern periphery, special emphasis is placed on community-level interventions and community evaluation. Faculty members and students initiate and undertake innovative community projects to enhance the welfare of individuals and groups in the communities in the College's vicinity.

The College's self-report states that special emphasis is placed on multiculturalism and the special needs of the southern part of Israel due to its precarious security situation. While the student body is ethnically and

socially diverse, and this diversity is addressed in some courses, there is no dedicated course on multiculturalism and social work practice in diverse societies. In a similar vein, there is insufficient content on trauma, a topic which is particularly pertinent to the special needs of the southern part of Israel.

At the same time, the Committee was impressed by the School's attentiveness to issues that feature in contemporary public discourse in Israel.

The Committee regards the unavailability of a community-centered track in the Haredi program as a significant lacuna. Further, it finds the requirement for retraining/hasava students to decide upon a specialization/track before they begin their studies as curious and inappropriate.

The School of Social Work plans to establish an MSW program in aging as well as a child-focused MSW degree. The Committee regards this as a premature initiative for a number of reasons. First, as outlined in the section below on Human Resources, the Committee regards the staffing arrangements at the School of Social Work (the lack of a critical mass of faculty members who hold ongoing academic appointments and the absence of mentoring arrangements) as highly problematic. Satisfactorily addressing this problem is a necessary prerequisite to any consideration of new programs. Second, higher degrees are most commonly offered by academic units that have a demonstrable record of research and scholarship. The faculty of the School of Social Work is yet to establish such a record. (See the section below on Research.) Third, the School intends any new MSW program to be offered to outstanding graduates. (see p. 60 of the self-study report). Given the grade inflation that appears to be at play at Ashkelon College, it is quite unclear how these potential students would be identified. And finally, in the self-study report, neither the rationale for an MSW (especially given the many other MSW programs available at tertiary institutions in Israel) and how it would be distinguished from the current BSW (how its intended learning outcomes would differ from the BSW's learning outcomes) is not addressed and, so, at the very least, this would have to be done before any consideration could be given to an MSW program.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that a dedicated core course on multiculturalism and social work practice in diverse societies be introduced as soon as practicable.

It is strongly recommended that an MSW program not be introduced at Ashkelon College at least until the next CHE/MALAG international committee for the Evaluation of Social Work Study Programs in Israel has had the



opportunity to visit and consider whether or not it is able to recommend that the School is ready to introduce a MSW program.

## **5. Human Resources / Faculty**

The faculty comprises of 22 full-time and 27 part-time lecturers. Fifteen faculty members are associate professors, 6 are senior lectures and 6 are lecturers. The majority hold a PhD. As far as the Committee has been able to gather, only two faculty members hold a permanent position – the head of the School and his deputy.

Faculty members comprise of two groups which differ in their employment status. In one group, employment contracts are renewed annually and faculty members are paid for 12 months of work. Members of this group are fired at the end of every academic year only to be re-hired at the beginning of the next academic year. Although most are rehired this is not guaranteed and management can decide every year not to rehire. Faculty members in the second group are paid for 8 months of work and are terminated at the end of every academic year only and re-hired at the beginning of the following academic year. While this appears to be done for financial reasons, this type of employment clearly jeopardizes not only the future academic development of the School but also may undermine its current academic functioning. Thus, during the site visit faculty members disclosed to the Committee that they believe that these employment conditions detrimentally affects their academic functioning. They also disclosed that they are discouraged from (some said warned against) voicing criticism or challenging the School's administration. The Committee finds this employment strategy disturbing as we were informed by the College management that the College is financially stable.

This situation notwithstanding, the Committee was impressed by many faculty members' high commitment and dedication to their students. Faculty members reported that their primary mission was to engage in professional training as a means to empower their students, many of whom come from underprivileged backgrounds.

The self-study report was silent on the matter of mentoring arrangements for new faculty members. As the faculty members are overwhelmingly young/early career, mentoring arrangements (preferably formalized) are of vital importance to their career development and progression and, indeed, the future of the School.

Just over a third of faculty members are not social work-trained. The School needs to be sensitive to the potential for the erosion of the professional base in a program of professional education.

### Recommendations

#### **Highly Desirable changes recommended:**

The Committee recommends that College review its employment practices as far as social work faculty members are concerned in order to ensure optimal academic functioning of the School and provide viable career pathways for its faculty members. The Committee recommends that employment conditions be revised and at least some core permanent faculty be hired on a 5-year contract basis.

The Committee further recommends that formalized mentoring arrangements be introduced, especially for early career faculty members.

## **6. Students**

There are many applicants to the School of Social Work, both to the BSW (ranging from 185 in 2009 to 194 in 2014) and to the retraining program. In recent years, the number of BSW students ranged from 100-140 students per year, and 100 students in the retraining program.

The School's stated goal is to make higher education accessible. In consequence, the admission criteria for the BSW program are less rigorous than those in other undergraduate social work programs in Israel. In fact, approximately 20% do not meet criteria but are nevertheless admitted as "special cases". This relates to all applicants and particularly to those with special needs, minorities, new immigrants and applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Committee regards the dropout rate of between 10% and 20% as high but not unexpected given the profile of the student population.

While the committee appreciates, understands and supports the College's policy of seeking to facilitate access to higher education, it is nevertheless concerned that it might compromise academic standards. The Committee is concerned that there is a risk of relaxing academic demands and producing social workers who are not adequately trained to provide the level of services that their clients expect and deserve.

The students that the Committee met during the site visit come from diverse backgrounds. They were unanimous in describing faculty members as caring

and supportive mentors. They explicitly expressed satisfaction with both their academic courses and their practicum experiences.

## **7. Teaching and Learning Outcomes**

Evaluation of academic instruction is exercised on an on-going basis. Students are requested to provide feedback regarding the content and quality of courses and lecturers. Outstanding lecturers receive financial rewards. Evidently, the College lacks a teaching enhancement/mentoring program. The self-evaluation report did not indicate use of other measures of assessing instruction quality, such as periodic reviews of syllabi by faculty members from within and outside the School, observation in the classroom, etc.

Learning outcomes are assessed via written and oral assignments and tests. Student grades are high overall, a surprising result given the educationally disadvantaged background of many of the students. This suggests that grade inflation is at play and that, as the self-evaluation report acknowledges on p. 28, the grading system requires considerable refinement.

During the site visit faculty members noted that academic writing courses should be added to the curriculum as many students are in dire need of such skills and face great difficulties in writing papers and reports and in reading texts in English. Further, the disadvantaged background of many of the students and the relatively high representation of students with a disability among the student body also suggest that faculty members need both additional training and greater resources to serve this “client” group.

## **8. Research**

The College is primarily a teaching institution, yet it views research as an integral part of its mission. While some faculty members are involved in research projects, they are mainly invested in teaching given high teaching loads. This is evident in the relatively modest rate of publication. Furthermore, the number of published articles in academic journals, the number of research grants and the size of research grants are modest.

A factor contributing to the low level of research productivity is the School’s (overly) heavy reliance on part-time/adjunct faculty members whose primary employment is outside of the academy.

The College's president and rector see research as an important part of the College's mission and support research by allocating seed money and by lowering the teaching load of faculty members who engage in research. The College also supports research by providing funding for statistical and editing assistance when necessary. However, overall the allocated funds are relatively modest considering their aspirations.

## **9. Infrastructure**

The School of Social Work lacks a building of its own; it is located in the College's main building with adequate classrooms in other buildings. Infrastructure for computers, televisions, and video are in place. Online databases for use on campus and for remote access via internet are in place.

## **10. Self-Evaluation Process**

A comprehensive self-evaluation process culminated in a detailed and systematic self-evaluation report. The process was led by a steering committee and assisted by academic and administrative staff. In addition to the written report, during the well-organized site visit eloquent and informative presentations by four faculty members were delivered. The site visit was attended by most faculty members some of whom took an unpaid day off their other jobs.

## **Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable**

### **Desirable Changes:**

To ensure a satisfactory academic level over time the Committee strongly recommends that the School change its employment strategy with a view to achieving a better balance between permanent and non-permanent positions. Secure employment for instance, via 5 year contracts, will contribute to creating a more cohesive and committed academic faculty that would be able to invest in the development of their academic careers and teaching abilities more readily and consistently. In addition, this will also benefit the curriculum, and may eventually enable the recruitment of highly trained and experienced faculty members and increased academic standards.

Given the career developmental stage of the majority of faculty members, a *formal* academic mentoring system is recommended to enhance career development and eventually increase the academic achievements of faculty members and the academic standing of the College. As the faculty is relatively young and at the early career stage, it is recommended that such mentoring should be sought from more established universities.

The students need and will benefit from courses designed to enhance critical reading and academic writing. We recommend that the curriculum also be enriched with courses particularly addressing social work practice in multicultural societies and coping with trauma –in line with the stated aims of the School.

With regard to the proposed MSW program, it is strongly recommended that such a program not be introduced at Ashkelon College at least until the next CHE/MALAG international committee for the Evaluation of Social Work Study Programs in Israel has had the opportunity to both visit and consider whether or not it is able to recommend that the School is ready to introduce such a program.

**Signed by:**

---

Prof. Allan Borowski

---

Prof. Ram Can'an



---

Prof. Michàlle Mor Barak

---

Prof. David Biegel



---

Prof. Zahava Solomon

---

Prof. Sven Hesse

**Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment**

February 2015

Prof. Allan Borowski  
School of Social Work  
RMIT University  
Australia

Dear Professor,

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, to provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel, and to ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

As part of this important endeavor we reach out to world renowned academicians to help us meet the challenges that confront the Israeli higher education by accepting our invitation to participate in our international evaluation committees. This process establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process 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 the study programs in **Social Work and Human services**. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Michàlle Mor Barak, Prof. Ram Cnaan, Prof. David Biegel, Prof. Zahava Solomon and Prof. Sven Hessele

Ms. Alex Buslovich-Bilik will be the coordinator of the Committee.

Details regarding the operation of the committee and its mandate are provided in the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as a member of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Prof. Hagit Messer-Yaron  
Vice Chair,  
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

*Enclosures:* Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Dr. Varda Ben-Shaul, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE  
Ms. Alex Buslovich-Bilik, committee coordinator

## Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

### Social Work –Schedule of site visit Ashqelon College

Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Time	Subject	Participants
9:30-10:00	Opening session with the heads of the institution	Prof. Shlomo Grossman- College President Prof. Shimon Sharvit - Rector Dr. Adv. Pinhas Haliwa - C.E.O – Founder Prof. Ruben Schindler
10:00-10:45	Meeting with the head of the School of Social Work	Prof. Ruben Schindler, Dr. Chen Lifshitz (deputy director)
10:45-11:30	Meeting with senior academic staff <b><u>with tenure</u></b> (representatives of relevant committees)*	Dr. Liora Baor, Dr. Miriam Chopra, Dr. Merav Rabinovitz, Prof. Gabi Kabalion, Dr. Vardit Zerem-Ulman, Dr. Yair Amram, Dr. Adena Assulin, Dr. Eyal Klonover, Dr. Luda Rubinstein, Dr. Nadav Peretz-Visovodovsky, Dr. Yifat Faran, Dr. Moran Twik, Mrs. Sonia Bechor, Mrs. Tamar Sekely-Witenberg, Dr. Shir Dafna Tekoa. Dr. Efrat Nave, Mrs. Yafit Chaykin.
11:30-12:15	Meeting with senior academic staff <b><u>without tenure</u></b> (representatives of relevant committees)*	Shira Sobol-Goldberg, Racheli Shenhav Goldberg, Hali Buzchish Sason, Dr. Merav Shamir Dardikman, Mrs. Ora Aharon Shitrit, Mrs. Bat-Seva Pick, Dr. Shmuel Rosenman.
12:15-13:00	Lunch (in the same room)	<b>Closed-door meeting of the committee</b>
13:00-13:45	Meeting with BA students** (up to 10 students)	10 students, Years 2-3
13:45-14:30	Open slot	
14:30-14:45	Closed-door meeting of the committee	
14:45-15:15	Summation meeting with heads of institution and head of the department	Prof. Shlomo Grossman- College President Prof. Shimon Sharvit - Rector Dr. Adv. Pinhas Haliwa - C.E.O - Founder Prof. Ruben Schindler Dr. Chen Lifshitz (deputy director)



