



DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS HOLON INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

EVALUATION REPORT

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS STUDY
PROGRAMS IN ISRAEL

JANUARY 15, 2019

Section 1: Background and Procedures

- 1.1 In the academic year 2017-18 the Council for Higher Education [CHE] put in place arrangements for the evaluation of study programs in the field of Visual Communications [VC] in Israel.
- 1.2 The Colleges participating in the evaluation process were:
 - Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem
 - Holon Institute of Technology, Holon
 - Neri Bloomfield School of Design/WIZO, Haifa
 - Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art, Tel Aviv
- 1.3 To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed a Committee consisting of:
 - Prof. Nancy Skolos: Committee Chair Rhode Island School of Design, USA
 - Prof. Bruce Brown Royal College of Art, UK
 - Prof. Leland Burke Massachusetts College of Art and Design, USA
 - Prof. Anat Katsir Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Israel
 - Assoc. Prof. Gerry Leonidas Reading University, UK

Ms. Molly Abramson served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.
- 1.4 The evaluation process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (June 2017). Within this framework the evaluation committee was required to:
 - examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study **programs in VC**
 - conduct on-site visits at those institutions participating in the evaluation process
 - submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the academic units and study programs participating in the evaluation
 - set out the committee's findings and recommendations for each study program
 - submit to the CHE a general report regarding the evaluated field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study
- 1.5 The evaluation committee examined only the evidence provided by each participating institution — considering this alongside the distinctive mission set out by each institution in terms of its own aims and objectives. This material was further elaborated and explained in discussions with senior management,

lecturers, students and alumnae during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.¹

- 1.6 This report deals with the Department of Visual Communications at **Holon Institute of Technology**. The Committee's visit to the college took place on June 3rd, 2018. The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.
- 1.7 The Committee thanks the management of **Holon Institute of Technology** and the Department of Visual Communications for their self-evaluation report and their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit to the college.
- 1.8 N.B. this report will use Committee, with a capitalized first letter to refer to the international evaluation committee conducting this review.

¹Prof. Katsir did not participate in the visit to the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design or in the committee's discussions concerning the evaluation of this institution.

1. Executive Summary

Holon Institution of Technology (HIT) is the largest college of the four institutions that were evaluated. Its unique academic composition creates a large scope of opportunities and a distinctive role for HIT among its peer institutes.

HIT's Self-Evaluation (SE) Report was honest, rigorous and exceeded the expected threshold level of performance. Although the SE process was heavily introspective, all aspects of Visual Communication (VC) Design—curriculum, program learning outcomes, faculty development, research, and national/international collaborations—were documented and reflected upon. Most were operating at a satisfactory level; and in cases where improvements were necessary, the report identified them and indicated plans for improvement.

Leadership at both the Design Faculty and Departmental level was fully engaged, collaborative, and perceptive.

The Committee finds that the VC study program fulfills students' expectations and prepares them for careers in VC. The Department is thoughtfully addressing the challenge of constantly expanding platforms and shifting dynamics in this field.

Amongst the positive aspects encountered during the QA process there were some areas in which further development is either essential, important, or desirable. This will lead to a number of recommendations that will require the institution to create appropriate courses of action.

2. Introduction

The committee members were grateful for the frank and open conversations they experienced during the site visit which reflected a creative community with a strong desire and commitment to the development of the Department and the wellbeing of the students. The uniqueness of HIT's academic composition of engineering, science, art, and design has the potential to generate exceptional interdisciplinary collaborations; those will ensure the fulfillment of the mission, both institutional and departmental, "to shape the

future of the technological leadership in the state of Israel” (p.11 of the SE Report).

The Committee is enthusiastic to see how HIT and the VC Department progress towards fulfilling their full academic and creative potential in the next few years.

3. Quality Assurance (QA) and Self-Evaluation Process

From the various meetings the Committee held during the visit to HIT, it was clear that the SE process was conducted in an honest and structured manner that allowed for efficient communication between all relevant parties. The Committee was impressed with the collaborative effort involving all senior faculty members during the SE process.

The document itself was well organized and written, and illuminated an evolving VC program. The SE Report presented weaknesses as clearly as strengths, and where shortcomings were identified, steps for improvement were outlined. However, methods of ongoing evaluation and follow-up beyond the framework of the Department were not yet found. The Department is clearly responsible for the implementation of the evaluation framework internally, for analyzing performance, identifying key issues, making recommendations and taking follow up actions. There is a need to ensure that the QA process does not become increasingly inward looking. Here, the role of the institution in taking ownership of its own internal departmental quality evaluation process is critical.

4. Character and Mission

4.1 Institution

The mission statement of the institution—to shape the future of the technological leadership in Israel by endorsing the values of sustainability and social responsibility, and creating a synergy of engineering, science, art and culture (p.11 of the SE Report)—is clearly defined and aligns with the institution’s unique academic composition. That being said, it seems that the promising and particular potential of interdisciplinary collaboration between

faculties has not been fully met. The institution would benefit greatly by creating a built-in structure to facilitate ongoing collaborations.

4.2 Department

The Committee found that the VC Department has a distinctive mission that is integrated with the institution's aims and objectives. The program's evolving curriculum, which focuses on studies of the digital medium, including studies of the screen medium and interactive design, clearly supports its stated mission. All indications were that the Department properly prepares its graduates for professional practice.

In order to better integrate with the institutional mission and to create a better understanding of the VC program's needs, it is extremely important that the Department has representatives in decision-making committees of the institution, and senior management. Greater representation of the design disciplines in the higher-level administration would also help facilitate growth and interdisciplinary collaborations.

5. VC Curriculum Design and Delivery

5.1 Curriculum

By looking at the scope of the curriculum and syllabuses, the Committee's impression was that the Department delivers a well-founded design education to its students in accordance with its distinct technology-focused mission. In an effort to give students flexibility the department has evolved a series of tracks for third and fourth year students with three major areas: Interactive, Media and Classic. The Committee was impressed with the vibrant Interactive Design track, supported by the internship program, and developed UI/UX courses for the second year. It is advised that the Interaction Laboratory be further integrated into the curriculum in order to offer the majority of students hands-on experience with physical computing.

Almost 50% of the students in the third and fourth years choose the Digital and Interactive Design track. This occurrence undermines the track system now in place, which limits the ability of other students to learn the core subjects of the department and to become diverse and interdisciplinary designers. The Committee encourages the Department "to create a more

'modular' curriculum that enables each student to evolve in a more personal and accurate manner as a designer" (p. 32 of the SE Report).

Although the Department demonstrated its commitment to civic and social engagement, there is no structure for integrating this subject into the curriculum and it relies mostly on the teachers' personal initiatives. The Department should find ways of building this into the curriculum and the student experience.

5.2 Embedding of Learning Outcomes (LO's)

Pages 70-72 of the SE Report outlined a comprehensive list of LO's—skills and values—for the VC Program. However, the Committee observed that extensive work is needed in mapping the program's overarching LO's to the individual courses and syllabuses. The students should be fully informed of the learning expectations that are placed upon them. All syllabuses must include a clear description of LO's and assessment criteria. The Committee suggests that a more school-wide understanding of LO's is needed against which assessment criteria can be calibrated.

5.3 Assessment Documentation and Clarity

As most syllabuses do not have a clear description of LO's against which assessment criteria can be calibrated, the confusion with regard to the assessment process and the grade system is self-evident.

The VC program requires a pass mark of 60 but from the data provided the final grades appeared to fall primarily between 85 and 94 (65% of the final grades, 35% of which fall between 75 and 84, and none below 75 as shown on p.77 of the SE Report). This indicated to the Committee that a more concentrated effort is needed to ensure that assessment criteria are applied equally to a grading range that has significance. It is further recommended by the Committee that the numerical grades be accompanied by written evaluations. Currently the most significant student feedback is given during course critiques. A more structured advising system is essential to guide the students through the evolving curriculum, and to give them holistic feedback on their progress.

5.4 Syllabi

Syllabi evidenced a collective understanding of the essential structure and content required of such a document. However, the quality was varied, with some syllabi having a more comprehensive goal description, course structure, and bibliographies and others lacking detail. All syllabi should be modified to include a clear description of LOs and assessment criteria in order to inform the students of the learning expectations that are placed upon them. The Department should establish a standard template for syllabi and then ensure that each one is quality controlled.

5.5 Facilities

The Committee was impressed with the Green Space that contributes to the friendly atmosphere for learning and interacting. The Vitrine Gallery with its activities definitely adds to the professional standing of the faculty and to the visibility of students' work.

The Committee identified an intense pressure on space and facilities borne of the growing number of students, the focus on technology-based subjects, and budgetary constraints.

Although there is a broad range of workshops and laboratories in the Design Faculty (both analog and digital), the VC Department needs to expand the Interaction Laboratory and to upgrade some of its digital equipment in order to further support its mission statement.

6. Faculty Members and Professional Development

6.1 Faculty Composition

The Committee recognized that the senior faculty consists of top Israeli designers and illustrators, who are fully engaged in the development of the Department and the wellbeing of the students. There are clearly strong relations between senior staff members.

With regard to the mission statement a few concerns have been raised:

Although almost 50% of the students choose the digital medium track, only a third of the tenured faculty members come from digital media and interactive design. Moreover, only one of the three tenure-track faculty that have been recruited in 2016/17 is a digital media/interactive designer.

There are only three women among the twelve tenured faculty members.

Having only twelve tenured faculty members among the 67 members of the teaching staff puts undue pressure on FTE's and prevents collaboration and further engagement of the rest of the lecturers.

The Committee agrees with the SE Report's acknowledgement that further effort is needed to promote these issues and encourage the Department to address them in the near future.

6.2 Faculty Engagement

Faculty members are passionate and fully engaged with the development of the Department and its curriculum. Furthermore, they are clearly at the heart of the student's positive experience.

However, having only twelve tenure-track positions among the 67 members of the teaching staff inhibits full involvement and coordinated faculty-to-faculty collaboration. The limited schedule of the majority of the teaching staff does not facilitate an ongoing dialog from faculty to students over the course of the program. One consequence of this is that the student experience is often fragmented and sometimes unnecessarily pressured.

6.3 Faculty Collaboration

Course teams seem to be well-coordinated and fully engaged in the development of the evolving curriculum, but overall collaboration among all teaching staff is limited due to their schedules.

The potential of collaborations among the different faculties of HIT (design, sciences and technologies) has not yet been met, even though it was stated that "The Institute believes that the advancement of knowledge necessitates inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary collaboration, both within the Institute and outside it" (p. 12 of the SE Report). The VC Department has impressive ongoing collaborations with high-tech industries; the Committee suggests that it will thoroughly explore the possibilities of inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary collaborations.

6.4 Professional Development

6.4.1 Promotion Transparency

The institution does not provide clear and transparent routes and timetables for academic staff promotion. There is no information regarding promotion routes in either the yearbook or the website. Faculty members that we have met were not informed in this issue.

6.4.2 Teaching and Learning Skills

There is a growing awareness of the need to provide more systematic support for teaching and learning skills in VC design. HIT Center for Promotion of Instruction offers professional workshops on diverse issues each semester, but it seems to be voluntary and not part of a systematic training for the teaching staff. The establishment of a structured training scheme for new and adjunct staff would be effective in ensuring that lecturers based in professional studio practice are also conversant with best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment.

The professional development of each faculty member has an enormous effect on their ability to develop their syllabuses and to deepen their dialogue with their students and with other faculty members. At the moment, the ERASMUS+ program is the only route offered to faculty members as a means to develop their international relations. The Department would benefit from creating other opportunities for professional development.

7. Student Experience

The Committee found that the students experience the program as a friendly, intimate and supportive environment, mostly due to the highly engaged Department head and faculty members. Student representation in different departmental forums would make them better heard and better informed. Recognizing that the vast majority of classes are solely based on critiques, the Committee suggests that integrating lectures and in-class work time into studio courses would improve the student experience and ease their heavy workload. There was also a wish for more extracurricular activities to further support the wellbeing of the students.

7.1 Supporting Student Progression

Student progression support comes primarily from the Department head and faculty members. The teacher sees the student from the limited perspective of one course. While there is an assigned faculty member to help guide each

individual year, it is concerning that there is no person to guide each student through the evolving curriculum, and to give him/her an informed overview feedback on his/her progression. A more structured advisement system is essential moving forward. Furthermore, students should receive clear and consistent assessment criteria and documented feedback. The Committee noticed (p.85 of the SE Report) that the dropout rate in 2012/2013 was extensive (23%-28% of the number of students started studying in the program). Although the dropout rate has decreased in the last few years, the Committee believes that better support of student progression could reduce these numbers even more.

7.2 Alumni

It seems that the program's focus on the digital medium, including studies of screen-based and interactive design, produces graduates who are properly prepared for the labor market in this field. The Department initiates meetings every year between alumni and fourth year students and informs the alumni about departmental events. Besides that there is no formal structure for cultivating a strong creative alumni-institution network. The Committee agrees with the SE Report's acknowledgement that further effort is needed to develop and reinforce the Department's ties with its graduates.

8. Diversity

The Committee appreciates HIT's intentions and actions to promote diversity and gender equality in accordance with the guidelines of the CHE (p.110-114 of the SE Report). However, although it was stated that it is one of HIT's main goals to attract minorities, there is a lack of sufficient representation of underserved communities (only 20 Druze, 20-25 Arabs, 80 Ethiopian Jews—as mentioned by HIT president during the visit) and almost none within the VC Department.

There is a disproportionate gender representation among senior faculty members. Only three women are among the twelve senior faculty members of the VC Department, and there are no minorities among the teaching faculty.

9. National and International Collaboration

In addition to the Department's growing number of students participating in the student exchange program, there is clearly an honest intention to explore the potential of other international collaborations, on institutional and departmental level; yet much more could be put in place. It is to the program's benefit to reach out more robustly to the outer world on the national level (similar institutions) and the international one, in order to create a strong creative network.

10. Research

The Committee applauds the Department's allocation of teaching hours in order to encourage research among its senior faculty, and the foundation of the Vitrine Gallery as a platform for an in-depth discussion in of emerging issues in the design world. Furthermore, it was clearly stated in HIT strategic plan that it will support and encourage its faculty members' research through its Office of Research, Development and External Relations (p. 104 of the SE Report). That being said, looking at the research projects mentioned on p. 116, it seems that the definition between practice, self-initiated professional projects and project-based research is not at all clear. The Committee suggests looking into other opportunities for research alongside other art academies both in Israel and abroad.

Recommendations

1. Essential

1.1 QA Process

Take ownership of embedding the CHE QA framework within the institution on a regular basis and lead the implementation of the CHE QA process into the Department. (See 3)

1.2 Learning Outcomes

Map the LO's of the entire curriculum at each key stage of the student's progression. (See 5.2)

1.3 Assessment Criteria

Define and document consistent assessment criteria and an assessment framework for the program as a whole at each key stage of the student's progression and accompany the numerical grades by written evaluations. (See 5.3)

1.4 Syllabuses

Audit and vet syllabuses to ensure that a consistent and format is implemented. (See 5.4)

1.5 Supporting Student Progression

Implement an advising framework that will better guide each student through the evolving curriculum, and will give him/her an informed overview feedback on his/her progression. (See 7.1)

1.6 Diversity

Develop a mechanism to proactively reach out to underserved communities, and tailor support for the student experience to the specific needs of all ethnic groups in order to ensure successful completion of the academic program. (See 8)

2. Important

2.1 Faculty Composition

Adjust the senior faculty composition to match the program's mission and gender equality values. (See 6.1)

2.2 Institutional Collaboration

Create an institutional mechanism to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration between different faculties within the institution. (See 4.1)

2.3 National and International Collaboration

Expand the range of possibilities for national and international collaboration. (See 9)

2.4 Faculty Professional Development

Establish clear guidelines on criteria for faculty development, promotion and training; and provide more structured opportunities for professional development. (See 6.4.2)

3. Desirable

3.2 Alumni Relations

Create institutional channels and actions for developing alumni relations. (See 7.2)

Signed by:



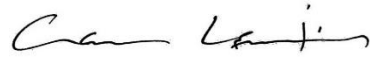
Prof. Nancy Skolos - Chair




Prof. Bruce Brown



Prof. Leland Burke



Associate Prof. Gerry Leonidas



Prof. Anat Katsir

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



May 2018

Prof. Nancy Skolos,
Professor of Graphic Design, former Dean of Architecture and Design
Rhode Island School of Design
USA

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 Chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of the study programs in **Visual Communication and Graphic Design**. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Bruce Brown, Associate Prof. Gerry Leonidas, Prof. Leland Burke, and Prof. Anat Katsir.

Ms. Molly Abramson 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. Ido Perlman
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. Molly Abramson, committee coordinator

Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

Visual Communication & Graphic Design – Schedule of Site Visit

HIT - Sunday 3/6/18

Time	Subject	Participants
9:00-9:30	Opening session with the heads of the institution	
9:30-10:00	Meeting with the Dean of Faculty of Design	Prof. Dana Arieli - Dean
10:00-10:45	Meeting with the academic and administrative heads of the Visual communication Program	Mr. Tamir Shefer – Head of the dep. Mrs. Hemda Cohen – Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
10:45-11:00	Break	Closed-door working meeting of the committee
11:00-11:45	Meeting with senior Academic Staff*	Bachar Erez; Eitan Bartal; Gafni Golan; Judith Asher; Oded Ezer; Talia Fried; Yehuda Hofshi; Peddy Mergui
11:45-12:30	Meeting with Junior Academic Staff * + Adjunct Lecturers	Zachi Diner; Dana Ben-David; Yael Paz; Maria Masha Yozefpolsky; Nir Sapir Nevot; Crispey Mali; Sivan Nuriel; Xenia Sova
12:30-13:15	Lunch (in the same room)	Closed-door working meeting of the committee
13:15-14:00	Meeting with Students	
14:00-14:45	Meeting with Alumni**	Shmuel Yahbez; Roni Gabai; Anna Kuntzman; Hila Halperin; Yael Hasson; Nitzan Lir; Idan Elkabetz; Zvi Meler; Kobi Hasson; Renna Elbag
14:45-15:30	Open slot	A tour of the laboratories: Interactive Lab; Screen Printing lab;(building 4 & 6)
15:30-16:15	Tour of Campus (Studios etc.)	Vitrine Gallery (building 6)
16:15-16:30	Closed Door Meeting	Closed-door working meeting of the committee
16:30-16:50	Summation meeting with heads of institution, Dean and Chair of the Department	

* 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.