



EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURE STUDIES

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURE STUDIES IN ISRAEL

April 2022

Section 1: Background and Procedures

1.1 In the academic year 2021-2022 the Council for Higher Education [CHE] put in place arrangements for the evaluation of study programs in the field of Architecture in Israel.

1.2 The Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] participating in the evaluation process were:

- Ariel University - School of Architecture
- Bezalel Academy of Art and Design - Department of Architecture
- Neri Bloomfield School of Design (WIZO) - Department of Architecture and Education
- Technion - Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning
- Tel Aviv University - Azrieli School of Architecture

1.3 To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed an International Quality Assurance Review Committee [EC; 'the evaluation committee'], under the auspices of the CHE's Committee for the Evaluation of Architecture studies in Israel¹, consisting of:

- Prof. Michael U. Hensel, Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Vienna University of Technology, Austria, *Committee Chair*
- Prof. Tal Alon-Mozes, Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion, Israel
- Prof. Alessandra Battisti, Department of Planning, Design and Technology of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy
- Prof. Per Olaf Fjeld, AHO Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway
- Prof. David Leatherbarrow, Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, USA
- Prof. Rafi Segal, Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA

Ms. Anat Haina, 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 (January 2020). Within this framework the evaluation committee was required to:

- examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the HEIs that provide study programs in Architecture
- conduct on-site visits at those institutions participating in the evaluation process. The visit to Tel Aviv University took place on 22.03.2022.
- 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

¹ The committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

- 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 alumni during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.

1.6 This report deals with the Azrieli School of Architecture in Tel Aviv University. Prof. Rafi Segal did not participate in the evaluation of this institution.

The EC would like to thank the management of the Azrieli School of Architecture for their self-evaluation report, supportive interactions with the evaluation committee in the course of the evaluation process, and hospitality towards the committee members who visited the institution.

Section 2: Assessment and Observations

1 The Institution

The university is located on the periphery of the city of Tel Aviv. The School of Architecture is part of the Faculty of Art, which comprises 3 schools and 2 departments. Tel Aviv University can be defined as the most diverse university in the country. The rector emphasized that the university is striving for academic excellence.

The School's affiliation with a faculty of the arts affects its approach to architecture and accents its humanities focus. Regardless, the school is budgeted like the engineering school.

The number of faculty slots is determined by the rector and they are divided per school by the Dean of the Faculty. University administration indicated criteria for faculty appointment, as well as the way research in the discipline is evaluated.

A new building for the Architecture School will be constructed and is expected to fulfill the needs of the School that currently constitutes major shortcomings. Furthermore, the new building offers an opportunity to affirm or redefine the objectives of the educational program.

The proposed future location of the new building near the neighborhood center, the archive, and its public space is an opportunity to connect to the local community.

Observations

The head of the faculty is currently the only person involved in the central leadership.

Recommendations

n/a

2 Infrastructure

Currently the School is scattered across the campus, including the faculty of arts building, the former campus cafeteria, and more remote locations for the 5th year students. There exist no offices for faculty. There exists no adequate infrastructure for 5th year students who are learning in remote locations.

Generally, contact and communication between faculty and students is weakened by the spread or lack of appropriate spaces.

The Head of School indicated that there has been a long period characterized by a lack of investment. In the conversation with the Head of School, a period of 10 years was mentioned. This lack of investment is particularly evident in terms of sub-standard studio spaces and workshops.

Library leadership is impressive, particularly in their willingness to involve school faculty in acquisition and students in learning programs.

In the near future, the School will occupy a new building that will include most spaces it requires, including offices, teaching spaces, etc. The new building promises to unify the faculty and students in one location, give visible prominence to the school, and enable direct connection to the surrounding vicinity.

Observations

There seems to exist no plan for maintaining and upgrading current facilities for the period between the EC's report and the occupation of the new building.

Recommendations

The EC strongly recommends rapidly initiating and seeing through adequate upgrading of the current infrastructure.

Plans for managing the transition from the existing to the new premises should be developed.

3 Human Resources

The Faculty of the Arts has 65 positions and 500 adjuncts. The School of Architecture has 18 faculty members, 6 of which are on 100% contracts. By international standards, the School is poorly composed, as there are no full professors, and only 2 associate professors (one of them is the head of faculty). Everyone else is a lecturer. Most of the adjuncts are appointed annually and assume re-appointment. There is a low percentage of researchers in the faculty. The School's chair provided calculations that show that recruiting full-time researchers by combining existing 50% positions reduces the funds for teaching.

Faculty feel underpaid with respect to their teaching load and expressed the need for more administrative staff. Part-time faculty sometimes teach courses, studio, and take on administration. There is no assistance for teaching.

Among senior faculty, there seem to exist different understandings of the basis for decision-making on promotion. Part-time faculty are not clear on the criteria for promotion.

Adjunct faculty fulfill a critical role in the delivery of teaching, as well as additional administrative responsibilities leading to a considerable workload. However, adjunct faculty feel that this position contributes to their self-development in personal and practical terms. Contracts are short, that is per semester or yearly. Adjunct faculty accept this and feel confident in being reappointed. Adjuncts expressed unclear or diverging understandings regarding criteria for promotion than senior faculty.

The faculty feels involved in curriculum shaping. More interaction between senior faculty members and adjunct is desired to facilitate more horizontal and vertical teaching collaborations.

Observations

Better communication between faculty and central leadership is required.

Student-teacher ratio, and therefore teaching load is too high. The heavy teaching load will be lightened with teaching assistants.

The EC observed that better access to faculty and laboratories in other faculties is desirable, especially considering the view that PhD students aspire to interdisciplinary research.

The transition from predominantly teaching faculty to the integration of research faculty, will require a budgeting plan that will cover expenditures in the interim until sufficient funding can be secured.

The substantial commitment of the faculty members regarding teaching time creates an imbalance in relation to the time allotted to research, which in turn impacts scientific productivity.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the School immediately prepares a plan for apportioning and balancing different activities including teaching, research, and administrative work.

The EC recommended that the School draft a budgeting plan for the transition from predominantly teaching faculty to the integration of research faculty.

The EC recommends clarification and communication of promotion criteria, especially for adjunct faculty, and the way promotion to senior faculty can be achieved.

The EC recommends a serious reflection in the direction of a more viable distribution of the teaching load, greater consistency, and a rebalancing between the teaching, research, and management purposes of the school.

4 Diversity

Diversity concerns are well addressed within the University, Faculty, and School. There exists a commission of equity and diversity on the University level.

The EC received a strong impression that the School has a very open attitude for ethnic diversity. This is specifically evident during times of crises and is expressed through School-wide initiatives.

Staff is gender balanced. And there is a good balance of diversity in the student body in terms of ethnic diversity: in the School of Architecture, circa 20% are Arab students (as shown by the graph in

the report). There are plans to support Arab students by a mentorship program supported by the University.

There is a diversity in teaching approach, and there exists a plan for a course on Palestinian-Israeli architecture and urbanism, intending to introduce diverse perspectives into the curriculum.

Observations

While Staff is gender-balanced, there is, however, a lack of diversity in terms of age and ethnic diversity among faculty. Stagnation is evident in the lack of young faculty (mentioned in the student meeting and under point 5.5 in the self-evaluation), as well as a plan to recruit young lecturers from different ethnic backgrounds.

There is an unbalanced gender diversity of students: 75% of the students are females.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the School prepare a faculty development plan to address the lack of diversity in terms of age among faculty, and prepare recruitment of young faculty, especially from different ethnic backgrounds.

5 Study program

The School offers BArch (bachelor of architecture), 2 MAs (master of arts), one with thesis and another with a final written exam, and PhD.

The BArch program has three-year foundational studies followed by two years of required and elective courses. In the BArch program, a broad scope of courses facilitates different career paths with practice or academic emphasis. Students appreciated group work in all parts of the study as useful preparation for practice.

Many teachers offer courses in different subjects, one person teaching both studio and technology courses. This form of instruction demonstrated to students the integration of different subjects. Due to the presence and interaction of the different faculties on campus, there is a wide variety of topics/electives on offer. However, this resource was felt to be underutilized due to the workload within the architectural program.

4th and 5th year students indicated strong interest in environmental and sustainability aspects but found related preparation and provision of foundational knowledge in these topics in 1st to 3rd year insufficient. Students indicated some unproductive repetition of specific course topics.

Observations

Uneven submission requirements for courses with the same credit value posed difficulties for the students, suggesting the need for better coordination among the teachers about their outcome expectations.

The recent reduction of course units has partially, but not fully, alleviated the heavy workload problem students face. The EC observed a lack of coordination and intellectual interaction between programs, for example, PhD students are not used as teaching assistants but should be.

The ambition of the program is not supported by the present infrastructure. There is a clear lack of adequate workshops and laboratories.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the faculty should revisit the problem of workload and consider further measures towards reducing workload.

The EC recommends better coordination among the teachers about their outcome expectations with the aim to resolve uneven submission requirements for courses with the same credit value.

The feedback on course grades needs to be improved. The EC recommends establishing a written feedback routine.

The EC recommends immediate drafting and implementation of a plan for providing adequate spaces and infrastructure in the interim period before moving to the new building.

6 Teaching and Learning Outcomes

The study program introduces a great variety of themes in different scales, and degrees of abstraction. There exists a variety of topics, and different approaches and techniques that result in projects with an architectural identity and with a conceptual attitude.

Outcomes indicate that elective choice in the upper years, especially the final project, enables learning that will prepare students for different careers, not limited to but including the practice of architecture.

The provided works display a wide range of quality.

The works show expected competence in representational skills, however, experimentation with representation is frequently not present.

Observations

The outcomes show that almost all works are elaborated on local themes.

There exist no obvious themes of technological innovation and sustainability. The constructional and structural understanding and awareness of studio work require more attention.

The landscape courses included in the curriculum are valuable and instill sensibility in the students for working across and integrating scales, as well as regarding the quality of open spaces.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that themes of technological innovation and sustainability are developed, and that constructional and structural understanding and awareness of studio work is given explicit attention.

7 Students

Students are generally positive but were also frank in their criticism. They appear to be mature and display an acute understanding of School challenges in terms of the study program and the infrastructural limits.

Students stated that there exist several repetitive courses that are perceived to be redundant and that impact negatively on workload and learning outcomes (theory and technical courses). Students perceive that workload is too high. Some students find that the study program does not prepare them enough for diverse tasks in professional practice. The current program leaves little time to work in offices, nor time to take classes in different schools or faculties. Students expressed the desire for more collaboration within the School and within the Faculty. They also wish for the option to work in groups on final projects. Students desire to receive written feedback on grading in order to better understand how to improve their performance.

Master students enjoyed courses on theory and research methods, as well as having the option of taking courses in other faculties to support interdisciplinary perspectives. There is no culture of publication among graduate students. There exists no funding for MA students (Fellowships), although some Master's students work as teaching assistants for little money. It was further mentioned that there is no connection between graduate and undergraduate study programs.

Students report shortcomings in essential resources and infrastructure, such as no place to sit (international studio). 5th year students are isolated and have no direct access to infrastructure. Workshops require urgent upgrading, and the opening hours are not adequate.

The School administration is perceived as not responsive enough.

Some students find that the study program does not prepare them enough for diverse tasks in professional practice. Alumni, too, perceive the practical side of their education as insufficient.

Observations

The School could benefit from better interaction between its BArch and the Master programs.

Students perceive that overscheduling prohibits interdisciplinary study, and that the study program is not adequately updated to address current broader issues such as climate change.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the School considers and improves the interaction between its BArch and the Master programs.

The EC recommends that the School immediately addresses the problem of overscheduling which prohibits interdisciplinary study.

8 Research

Several faculty members are engaged in research and view research as one of their key academic activities.

In the Schools view, a significant part of the curriculum is fostering individual research.

A formal research program and coordination of research topics is lacking. There exists no research dean or research coordinator.

The range of research outcomes in architecture has not been clarified within the university administration. Although outcomes at this School are generally based on the models established in the humanities, internationally outcomes in the discipline of architecture typically include not only scholarly papers and scientific monographs, but also research reports, monographs of architectural works, exhibitions, design competitions, built works (not all of which are research), etc. The consequence is often inaccessibility to funding sources and fulfilling promotion criteria. It also seems that the School is not formally prepared for the international rating of research in terms of faculty and PhD student work.

Start-up funds for junior researchers are lacking.

Currently, little advantage is taken in interdisciplinary research that could benefit from the close proximity to other faculties on the campus and schools within the Faculty.

Observations

Heavy teaching loads impede research activities.

Because the School is part of the Faculty of the Arts, related research modes, tools and outcomes need to be recognized by the university.

The advantage of collaborating in research within the faculty or within the whole university is unique for Tel Aviv University.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the school clearly defines its scope of research, what it perceives as research, and which are the needs of such research in terms of human and physical infrastructures. Furthermore, there is a clear need for a Research Coordinator or Dean.

The EC recommends that the School organizes a course for Master and PhD students on how to produce research outcomes, within the international rating system and research outcomes that are particular to the discipline, and prepares and mentors them to submit applications to obtain research funding.

9 Internal Quality Assurance

There exists an extensive self-review of the school's curriculum along the current model of a bottom-up process in quality assurance. There exists a system of student representatives through which criticism inside of this bottom-up process is expressed, but sometimes their criticism is not heard.

A studio coordinator and internal QA committee are reviewing and harmonizing aims and methods between different studio teaching and non-studio courses.

Observations

Quality assurance in the school is generally handled very well.

The EC observes that Quality assurance for research outcomes, however, has not yet been established.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that Quality Assurance for research outcomes is established together with criteria that are particular to the School of Architecture as part of the Faculty of the Arts.

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The general support expressed by central leadership is not evident in the state of the School, especially in relation to its infrastructure. While waiting for the new building, plans must be put into place that secure upgrading and general maintenance of existing facilities in the interim period.

The School is currently in the process of revising its curriculum. There are underexplored possibilities for connections and collaboration in teaching and research between the school, the Faculty, and the university as a whole.

The composition of the faculty is ill-suited to play an important role in the university due to a lack of full professors and cultivation of junior ranks.

Alumni are prepared for different directions in the development of their professional work, including different directions in architecture and planning and other professional fields.

Recommendations

Essential Recommendations:

The EC recommends the drafting and approval of a 5-year faculty development plan that will be based on and support the School's teaching and research mission.

The committee recommends drawing up a plan of the works needed in the old building and a timetable for their implementation, especially the spaces used by the students. In addition, the EC recommends that spaces are allocated for faculty offices.

The EC proposes to revise the syllabi for the students' workload and to allow them to work in groups also for the final projects.

Important Recommendations:

The EC recommends the School develops a curriculum for a new program in Landscape Architecture, and determines the means by which it can be developed within the school over the next 5 years.

Desirable Recommendations:

The EC recommends that the study programs in architecture in Israel collaborate on organizing an annual joint research day during which current research of each study program is presented and

exhibited. Additionally, and perhaps in conjunction with the research day, it would be desirable for the study programs to jointly organize an annual PhD colloquium in which researchers can gain knowledge of research undertaken in architecture in Israel, exchange peer-review and build research networks.

(Future Assessments)

The EC recommends drafting and approval of a faculty development plan for the next 5-years that will be based on and support the schools teaching and research mission. This plan should be developed and reviewed within the next two years.

The EC recommends that at the close of this current academic year an interim plan is developed to guide the use, maintenance, and development of the spaces in the old building(s), especially the spaces used by the students and the currently not existing faculty offices. This plan should be approved by the beginning of the next academic year.

The EC recommends that a committee is formed to discuss and plan responsibilities and ambitions in relation to research. This committee would benefit from including external advisors. This plan should be assessed within the next year.

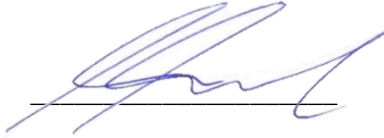
The EC recommends that the problem of student workload is solved as soon as possible and at the latest by the end of the next academic year.

The EC recommends the development of a curricular faculty for a new program in landscape architecture within the next two years, in order to establish the program within the next five years.

Signed by:

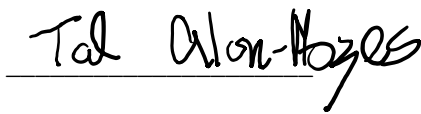
Prof. Michael U. Hensel

Committee Chair



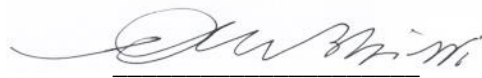
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Prof. Tal Alon-Mozes



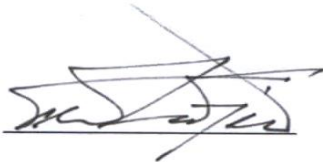
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Prof. Alessandra Battisti



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Prof. Per Olaf Fjeld



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Prof. David Leatherbarrow



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Appendix I: Letter of Appointment



January 2022

Prof. Michael U. Hensel
Department of Digital Architecture and Planning
Vienna University of Technology
Austria

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 **Architecture** departments. Other members of the Committee will include: Prof. Tal Alon-Mozes, Prof. Alessandra Battisti, Prof. Per Olaf Fjeld, Prof. David Leatherbarrow, and Prof. Rafi Segal.

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. Maria Levinson-Or, Senior Advisor for Evaluation and Quality Enhancement, CHE