



EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURE STUDIES THE NERI BLOOMFIELD SCHOOL OF DESIGN (WIZO)

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 WIZO was conducted on 13.03.2022;
- 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 each one-day visit to each of the institutions.

1.6 This report deals with the Department of Architecture & Education in the Neri Bloomfield School of Design (WIZO). The EC would like to thank the management of the Department of Architecture & Education for their self-evaluation report, supportive interactions with the evaluation committee during the evaluation process, and hospitality towards the committee members who visited the institution.

Section 2: Assessment and Observations

1 The Institution

The Head of the institution perceives the Department of Architecture to be the strongest department. This view is shared by faculty members.

Among schools of architecture in Israel, this Department of Architecture is unique in combining teacher training with architectural education, and its graduates obtain a B.Arch. Ed. degree.

A professed aim is the education of a “cultural architect.” Throughout the Department, there is an emphasis on learning, especially self-learning.

Faculty and administration understand the School to be a small institution, which is reflected in familial relationships between all of those involved. The EC heard individuals describe themselves as members of a “family,” allowing easy interaction and understanding of one another. On their account, this type of relationship allows them to promote interdisciplinarity and linkage across all disciplines in the School.

Observations

The merger with the University of Haifa is widely viewed as a benefit and a challenge. The difficulties that will arise generally relate to the Department’s identity. The university will require of the Department significant changes, including: its manner of appointing faculty, the way of developing and implementing academic programs, and the School’s ways of maintaining and developing the particular character of WIZO’s program in architecture.

For the Department to maintain its character and familial-like study environment, it must be well prepared to address the foreseen institutional changes that the merger can impose. The emphasis here is on the ability of the Department to define and communicate to the university why, how, and in which ways this Department is unique and differs from the other faculties of the university.

Bringing research into the Department will be another significant challenge. Time and effort will be required for the provision of funding, infrastructure, and faculty for research.

Recommendations

The EC views the merger with University of Haifa as a moment of decision: the Architecture Department must either fully commit to maintaining and developing its own approach to an architectural program or be fully integrated as another department in the University. Either way, the result of this decision would involve reimagining parts of the Department of Architecture itself.

To bring research into the Department, time and effort will be required for the provision of funding, infrastructure, and faculty for research. The Department should plan accordingly.

2 Infrastructure

In its teaching program, the Department takes advantage of its location in the city. This is perceived as a positive influence. The location and community serve as focal points for several of the Department's research and design projects.

Given its investment in the community, the Department wishes to stay in its current location after the proposed merger with the University of Haifa. One example of the relationship between the location and the approach to architecture education, is the public space in front of the school, which is used by the neighborhood. It is seen as a positive space of meeting and exchange with the community. The Gallery also plays an important role in the Department's interface with the city; teachers, students, and members of the community meet there, and it is a place for exposing teaching, study, and the life of the Department at large to the life of the city. The interaction is not only academic and civic, but also between members of different ethnic communities, characteristic of Haifa itself.

Students in architecture programs throughout the world tend to work day and night and on all days of the week. This department recognizes that practice and is open 24/7.

Observations

The existing facilities have several shortcomings. More space is needed for studios and individual workspaces for students, as students do not currently have individual desks. The current state of the workshop does not serve the teaching objectives, although it was stated in the Self-Evaluation report that it is sufficient. More generally, the building could benefit from an upgrade of its studio spaces and workshops. Several other problems impede architectural education at WIZO: several rooms do not have windows. There are very basic facilities that require considerable upgrading: workshop, computer lab, and maker space. There is also a need for a digital archive for student and staff work.

With all these challenges in mind, it is clear why the Department argues for having its own building. The Department has plans to construct an additional building and connect it to the existing one, which has the capacity to be adapted to changing needs. The challenge is that there is no assured funding for such upgrades.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the Department draft a plan to address shortcomings of the facilities. This includes considerable upgrading of its studio spaces, computer lab, and workshops, provision of more space for studios and individual workspaces for students, and a digital archive for student and staff work.

3 Human Resources

The Department faculty is an experienced and committed group that takes pride in close and productive relationships with the students. This closeness seems to arise partly out of the fact that teachers often work with the same student or group on more than one occasion, including classes and studios, contributing to a continuity of the student's development.

Observations

The EC observed less connection in relationships between individual faculty members and the central administration, especially as regards appointment and promotion. Decisions on faculty appointments are made by the boards of the institutes. The Department Head is invited to be present but does not participate in the decision-making. This could be solved by the promotion of the Department Head to the rank of full professor.

There are several challenges ahead regarding human resources. Chief among them is the absence of an articulated and shared plan for faculty development concerning hiring, promotion, etc. Teaching staff numbers do not correspond to the growth of student numbers – the student-teacher ratio is making the teaching load increasingly difficult. A faculty development plan would address this issue. A related challenge is the fact that the adjunct faculty have no knowledge about the criteria for appointment and promotion. There is also the matter of compensation – the faculty feels underpaid.

Recommendations

The EC recommends the promotion of the Department Head to the rank of full professor to improve cooperation with central administration in important committees and boards of the institution.

The EC recommends drafting a detailed plan for faculty development concerning hiring, promotion, etc.

4 Diversity

Diversity conditions and targets can be observed in three areas: faculty, students, and the curriculum.

In the Department, there is a good gender and age balance in the faculty. An equal opportunity approach and policy to recruiting and promoting faculty has resulted in positive results.

The student body at WIZO is diverse. But preparation for architectural study presents specific challenges for some. Students from some groups have learning difficulties and economic hardships. There are also challenges for students with families. The program successfully closes gaps that result from differences among entering students, especially in terms of language (Hebrew) and skills.

Teachers and students have different perceptions regarding the inclusion of different traditions in the curriculum.

Observations

The EC found the Gallery exhibition that presented the work of an Arab artist at the time of the visit to be an indication of a desire for inclusion of diverse viewpoints. There is important work to

be done regarding the inclusion of under-represented ethnic minorities in this Department's teaching ranks. Recruitment of full- and part-time faculty from under-represented ethnic groups should be regarded as an important part of building the faculty.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that a plan is drafted and implemented regarding the inclusion of under-represented ethnic minorities in this Department's teaching ranks.

5 Study program

The Department seeks to embed its architectural program in its urban and socio-cultural location and community, and to provide students with a humanist orientation towards architecture. The faculty see their teaching as a "contextual approach to design." The faculty aspire to prepare engaged and involved architects who also possess strong conceptual abilities. A holistic approach in experimental work is fostered.

The study program has very ambitious aims and goals and seeks synergies through the combination of the education and architectural programs. The combination of architecture and education is also reflected in the fact that students must contribute 13 hours a year of teaching architecture in high schools. In more general terms, the educational studies are seen to contribute to an awareness of the social aspects of architecture.

Instructors meet to discuss and coordinate the themes to be taught. In these meetings, decisions on the study program are taken democratically. Democratic decision-making also occurs at higher levels of the institution. Weekly meetings of all department heads, chaired by the president, seem to sustain inter-departmental teaching and learning.

Classes, where students from different departments meet, are seen as positive, particularly in the mutual learning of design skills. Examples include: 1) vertical studios that combine students from the 4 departments (architecture, photography, visual communication, and fashion design), and 2) history of art is a shared subject.

Classes that were presented as chiefly indicative of the Department's values and approach include the 4th year research studio, which deals with a contemporary social issue in Israeli society, and the "Emtza haderech" course – students taking a 2nd year project and re-visiting it to further develop it in detail.

The faculty proudly observed that the study program prepares students for success in design competitions.

Observations

Faculty asserted that the aim of the program is to address local and global social and environmental needs with responsive integrative design, while taking advantage of new technological developments. The Self Evaluation Report and onsite visit observed some of this but questioned if the needs of the natural environment are being addressed in the design projects and taught courses. One step toward increasing global awareness would be offering classes in English, as the students themselves suggested.

In the future, the possible merger with Haifa University may have a significant impact on the educational training and the program in architecture. The merger might result in more choice of subjects (electives).

Additionally, inter-departmental collaboration must be reconceived and renewed, and should be anchored into the curriculum.

Recommendations

The EC anticipates that in the future the possible merger with Haifa University will require a plan for inter-departmental collaboration that must be reconceived and renewed, and should be anchored into the curriculum.

The EC recommends that classes in the English language should be offered to increase global awareness.

6 Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Among the ambitious goals set out in their mission statement, several have been achieved in the teaching and learning outcomes: contextuality, orientation to human values, and environmental aspects. The EC did not have sufficient documentation of learning outcomes in the preparation of teachers to make an evaluation.

There was a consensus that the graduates in architecture are well-prepared for professional practice. They have capacities in design, technology, and cultural understanding – “down-to-earth humanism”. Strong evidence of preparation for careers in a range of occupations related to architecture was seen in the careers of the alumni, some of whom are successful architects, others at work in government and municipal agencies. Another clear evidence of positive outcomes is the record of awards given to these students – national and international.

Teaching is evaluated by students anonymously and they feel they have a role in assessing the outcome.

Observations

Diverse types of projects reflect the diverse capacities and interests of faculty and students. However, there could be stronger integration of design and theory courses. Such integration exists to different degrees at the different levels of the program and was not always evident in the design work. A precise spatial investigation is variously apparent in the teaching outcomes, in many cases going beyond the typical conceptual level of development. The technical aspects of design (building details, environmental analysis) show a high level of development, particularly in third year works. Interestingly, this degree of resolution is less apparent in the final year projects.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that a plan is drafted that aims for stronger integration of design and theory courses.

The EC recommends greater attention be given to final year projects, particularly with respect to full resolution of the design in all its aspects.

7 Students

Students are dedicated, optimistic, enthusiastic, and satisfied with the study program. Students are also content with the workload. They have a shared sense of benefit from their teacher training but do not necessarily desire to become educators. When asked about their expectations concerning the merger with Haifa University, the students replied that the degree they would receive would have a higher standing.

Students have various desires with respect to the study program: they would like a broader range of elective courses; they would like to receive written feedback on their work. They also regret that there is no program for international experience. They desire such experiences.

There exists an open-door policy, and students are encouraged to approach the Head of Department on any issues. Students feel they have access to the administration even though they may not understand its operations.

Observations

The students are very satisfied with their studies and their relationships with their faculty, and they are proud to be enrolled in this school. They feel the study program is strenuous, but because of their commitment and belief in the objectives of the program, they are willing to do the hard work that is necessary for success in the program. This sense of the Department should be safeguarded.

The Department stated in the Self-Evaluation Report that the graduation rate is low compared to architecture programs internationally. This is not positive and the reasons for this should be determined, and corrective steps should be taken. Related to this, it is important to note that the acceptance rate has nearly doubled. Care should be taken to ensure quality, and the likely effects this increase will have on the sense of familiarity that now exists should be acknowledged.

There is an effective student union in this Department.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that policy concerning elective choice after the merger with Haifa University is established, to increase interdisciplinary elective opportunities.

The EC recommends continual reinforcement of the student union's activities and involvement in support of student interests. Students in the upper levels of the program helping those in lower levels can contribute to the unity of the student body. The EC feels that TA engagements could serve this purpose, as a form of practical education. At present, such work is not compensated but should be. Furthermore, more comfortable rooms for all students would be preferable to what they have at present.

8 Research

Research in WIZO is broadly understood, so broad that many activities and outcomes are described with this term – not only articles and books, but also engagement with community groups, and all manner of architectural projects. Faculty members seem to agree on broad thematic interest areas, which could provide orientation to research projects. Most commonly they argue for an orientation toward cultural expression, creativity, and architecture as a multidisciplinary field. But

mainly research is seen to be conducted within student work through theoretical seminars and studios, of which the outcomes, if evident, only appear in student work. A positive development of the research culture at WIZO is the establishment of the NBSDE Research Committee in 2019.

There exists no funding for research.

Observations

Given the inclusive definition of research in this Department, specific and planned steps to build a scientific research culture should be taken in anticipation of the merger with Haifa University, where typical university research outcomes will be part of the documents considered for faculty appointment and promotion. But throughout such a process, care should be taken not to diminish the energy, intensity, and strength of the existing BA program.

There is some evidence of non-curricular or independent faculty research that would benefit from institutional support and wider dissemination. Extracurricular activities, such as the design and development of exhibitions could serve as the basis for the development of research programs, leading toward research outcomes.

Community engagement as a type of field research could become a more established research effort involving a range of established research outcomes. At present, research in this Department is entirely local and could benefit from broader and international collaboration and activities.

Recommendations

The EC recommends that the Department drafts a plan that outlines specific steps to build a scientific research culture in anticipation of the merger with Haifa University.

The EC recommends that the Department prepares a plan for broader and international research collaboration and activities.

9 Internal Quality Assurance

The Self-Evaluation Report describes the Department's aim to develop a dynamic quality control and evaluation structure. Institutional structures have been established toward this end: the Supreme Academic Council, QA Reviews, and a Board of Governors.

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The merger with Haifa University is likely to have positive and negative consequences for each of the points above. The Department perceives the following outcomes as positive: 1) having an academic process of promotion, 2) increase of budget by 70%, 3) access to and expansion of research possibilities, expectations, and funding, 4) potential collaboration with other disciplines within the University, 5) a longer-term outlook for becoming part of the art school, 6) a more prestigious degree, 7) the possibility to formally apply for international collaborations, and 8) possibilities for developing the teacher training part of the program. Of course, together with positive outcomes, there will be

challenges. The Department has the following fundamental concerns: 1) a loss of identity, 2) the potential loss of experimental qualities (a fear of over-academization), 3) a loss of possibilities for research by design, according to their approach, and 4) losing the education part of the program and the related faculty.

The EC, however, has additional observations. The merger will have a significant impact on the Department's self-understanding. WIZO's role in architectural education in Israel will change because of the merger, to the extent that the institution will fundamentally change. Faculty might not be able to continue in the same way they presently teach. Expectations for faculty productivity and promotion will change (there will be a need to conceptualize what they do, especially concerning their idea of research). Strict promotion procedures might not accord with the self-understanding of the faculty. There will be, the EC believes, potential for the program to grow and flourish, a consequence of which will be the wider impact of the program. Another positive outcome will be more visibility. The merger also holds potential for WIZO programs to introduce and offer design teaching to other disciplines, as well as faculty access to a broader range of resources and facilities.

Recommendations

Essential Recommendations:

The Department needs to prepare a strategic development plan for the program to preserve and strengthen its identity, to maintain the character of the study program while adapting to the new institutional framework, and to explain this clearly vis-a-vis the university.

The EC recommends for WIZO and HU to develop a common understanding and definition of what research in the field of design means, and how it is evaluated, measured, and supported.

The Institution and Department need to develop specific criteria for promotion and tenure for faculty and adjunct faculty in the discipline of architecture.

The Department needs to remain in its Haifa downtown site to preserve its identity,

Important Recommendations:

The Department needs to prepare a faculty development plan with a focus on increasing ethnic diversity among the faculty.

It is important for WIZO to better clarify its philosophy and mission. Key steps would be the following: significantly strengthening and consolidating its position and recognizability, building an authoritative and cohesive community through the formulation of a cultural project, enhancing the heritage of scientific, disciplinary, and structural competencies as parts of a complex system, and equipping itself with all the useful tools to govern change. These steps could be sequenced as follows: firstly, by bringing together the differences and the multiplicity of knowledge that this community has within the framework of the merger with the University of Haifa, and secondly, by reaffirming a common, plural identity, highlighting, as a useful transversal element for the construction of a truly interdisciplinary approach, the experimental dimension is present in the school and, more generally, has been part of the culture that has historically characterized the school.

Desirable Recommendations:

The Department needs to develop more international engagement including student exchange, visiting professors, joint workshops, etc.

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 the preparation of a strategic plan to preserve and strengthen WIZOs identity while adapting to the new institutional framework, with the aim to maintain the character of the study program. This plan should be drafted and reviewed within the next two years.

The Department needs to develop specific criteria for promotion and tenure in the discipline of architecture. These criteria should be developed and reviewed within the next two years.

Given the importance for WIZO and HU to find a common understanding of what research in design means, and how it is evaluated and measured, the EC recommends for the two institutions to prepare a joint plan once steps towards the merger commence.

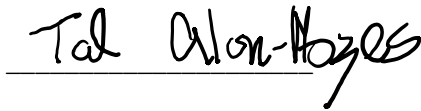
Signed by:

Prof. Michael U. Hensel

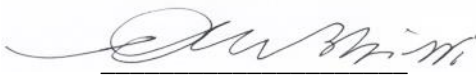
Committee Chair



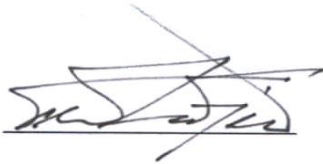
Prof. Tal Alon-Mozes



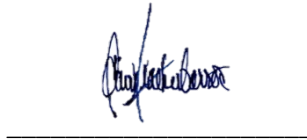
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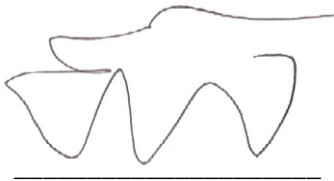
Prof. Per Olaf Fjeld



Prof. David Leatherbarrow



Prof. Rafi Segal



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