



# EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS

## **REICHMAN UNIVERSITY**

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS IN ISRAEL

July 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 Communication in Israel.

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

- Ariel University
- College of Management
- Emek Yezre'el Academic College
- Hadassah Academic College
- The Hebrew University
- Kinneret Academic College
- Netanya Academic College
- Reichman University
- Sapir Academic College
- Tel Aviv University

**1.3** To undertake the evaluation, the Vice-Chair of the CHE appointed an International Quality Assurance Review Committee [‘the evaluation committee’], under the auspices of the CHE’s Committee for the Evaluation of Communication in Israel<sup>1</sup>, consisting of:

- **Prof. Patricia Moy** – Department of Communication, University of Washington, USA; *Committee Chair*
- **Prof. Andrea Hickerson** – College of Information and Communications, University of South Carolina, USA
- **Prof. María Len-Ríos** – Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia, USA
- **Prof. Richard Ling** – School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
- **Prof. Karen Ross** – School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, UK
- **Prof. Gabriel Weimann** – Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy, Reichman University, Israel

Ms. Anat Haina served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

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

**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 institutions that provide study programs in Communication;
- conduct on-site visits at those institutions participating in the evaluation process (the visit to Reichman University was conducted on 27.03.2022);
- 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; and
- 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 and considered it 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, faculty members, students, and alumni during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.

**1.6** In undertaking this work, the evaluation committee considered matters of both quality assurance and quality enhancement. It applied its collective knowledge of developments and good practices in the delivery of higher education in communication (mainly from European countries and from the USA) to the evaluation of such provision in Israel.

**1.7** This report deals with the Sammy Ofer School of Communications at Reichman University. The institution was evaluated by Prof. Andrea Hickerson, Prof. Patricia Moy, and Prof. Karen Ross.

The EC would like to thank the management of the Sammy Ofer School of Communications for its 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: Executive Summary**

This assessment is based on a review of the self-evaluation report prepared by the Sammy Ofer School of Communications, and the site visit conducted 27 March 2022 by the evaluation committee (Prof. Andrea Hickerson and Prof. Patricia Moy on site, and Prof. Karen Ross via Zoom). During that visit, the evaluation committee met with the University leadership, School leadership, senior academic faculty, adjunct faculty, BA and MA students, and alumni. The on-site team members also were given a campus tour.

The School conducts rigorous and impactful research that marries technology and the social sciences. Foregrounding the "problem" and not the discipline, faculty research is funded by competitive grants and published in leading international journals. The School's teaching and research facilities are impressive, and its strong group of adjunct faculty with industry ties helps align the curriculum with the latest industry trends and skills. The School offers two BA programs, one taught in Hebrew and the other in English, as well as two MA programs.

Stakeholders were generally satisfied with the School, but also expressed concerns. Based on those concerns, the evaluation committee recommends: taking action to improve communication between senior faculty, adjunct faculty, and students; increasing resource allocation and transparency where students are concerned; and revisiting some pedagogical and curricular aspects of the program. In addition, the evaluation committee recommends that the School develop and implement a diversity plan to increase the diversity of its students and faculty.

## **Section 3: Observations**

### **3.1 The Institution**

Founded as The Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya in 1994, Reichman University was officially accredited as a private university in 2022. Reichman University offers nine BA programs, one international undergraduate program, and more than a dozen MA and PhD programs; in total, 8,400 students are enrolled across all programs. Reichman University is home to 33 laboratories and research institutes, and brands itself as an international university, focusing on interdisciplinarity. The Sammy Ofer School of Communications exemplifies this orientation, offering parallel programs to international and Israeli students. Interdisciplinarity is evident in the School, particularly through the use of new technologies and innovation. As a private university, Reichman University derives its budget from student tuition, donations, research grants, and other sources.

### 3.2 Internal Quality Assurance

According to its self-evaluation report, Reichman University has a committee for quality assurance, chaired by the Provost, which sets and monitors academic standards at the institutional level. The deans of schools head up parallel committees in their respective schools to provide quality assurance at the school and program level. For the purposes of developing the self-evaluation report, data were collected from a number of stakeholders from the School as well as the university at large. The report itself was written by several stakeholders, including the Vice Dean of the School and a number of senior faculty. The final version was approved by the Provost and Associate Provost.

Regarding the crafting of the self-evaluation report, the document did not provide, as asked, any details of how faculty and staff members contributed to the report. Indeed, in some areas, the report lacked the level of detail requested, and the evaluation committee hopes that this lack is addressed in future self-evaluations. As well, during the site visit, some faculty members expressed a lack of familiarity with the self-evaluation process and the report itself.

### 3.3 Parent Unit

There is no parent unit.

### 3.4 Study program

The School teaches two BA programs (one in Hebrew and one international) and two MA programs (MA in Human-Computer Interaction, and MA in Communication and New Media).

The Hebrew-language BA program includes three sub-disciplinary tracks: 1) Marketing Communications; 2) Digital Influence and Perceptions; and 3) Interactive Communications, each of which has its own set of elective courses. The English-language BA provides a parallel program; however, there seems to be no overlap between the two programs. Opportunities for cross-cultural communication between the two groups of students could be highly beneficial, and the School should consider offering courses that are open to students in both cohorts.

Both MA programs are one year (3 semesters) long and offer a non-thesis and a thesis track. Communication and New Media includes two tracks: Communication Strategies in the Digital World, and Society and Culture in the Digital Age. The MA programs are consciously oriented toward digital technology which should maximize graduates' marketability for entering the media industry. The MA students appreciate the digital orientation of programs in relation to preparing them for work in high-tech industries.

The syllabi provided in the self-evaluation report varied considerably in terms of content, although the same template was mostly used. The committee recommends creating a common template that sets out the same basic information. Some of the syllabi, where they included readings and bibliographies, had quite a few dated references. Faculty should be required to review the texts they want students to read and refresh/update them, not least to take account of new research and best practices.

In the first year of the BA, the program is entirely mandatory and most of the courses are theory-focused, with one or two practice-based courses such as Introduction to Radio Broadcasting. The committee was heartened to see quantitative research methods and statistics offered in the first year. After a mandatory first year, students move to a specialized track, where courses are clearly identified in relation to the mandatory part of the program, with the “visual” and “interactive” tracks oriented toward practice-based courses. Some shared mandatory courses in the second and third years offer a grounding in different aspects of the communication process, including music and visual representation and qualitative research methods. The committee heard the programs are pre-structured with limited elective options, but the elective courses include some highly imaginative offerings (e.g., “Identities, emotions and excitement in popular texts,” “Romantic relationships in the digital age,” and “Living in smartphones’ tyranny”). Students seemed overall content, although some said they would have liked more time in the first year to consider what specialization they want to study in their advanced years. The School should provide more information on the content and focus of each specialization track and delay the decision-making closer to the end of the first year.

The self-evaluation report suggests that the curricular vision is carried out by the current dean, with the senior staff committee (comprising all senior faculty) discussing new ideas for courses and overseeing content. Adjunct faculty can also propose new courses for consideration. The School should, at its own expense, invite adjunct faculty to the principal annual curriculum-planning meeting.

New course and program proposals have several layers of review and approval before coming back to a Faculty committee for practical consideration. Regular discussions are held between course leaders and program directors to ensure up-to-date content and no overlap in content across courses. The evaluation committee also heard that the School is responsive to industry needs and updates the curriculum accordingly.

### 3.4.1 Training

According to the self-evaluation report, a paid internship program exists as a part of the career center. Places of internship as part of the program were listed under “Student Support Services” (p. 77), but nothing else was mentioned under the “training and fieldwork.” Some courses offer internships, and the self-evaluation document states that 20% of the workshops are taught by industry partners.

Regardless, it was unclear whether these courses are mandatory and if so, for whom. Students reported they believe the internships are useful in enhancing employability.

The evaluation committee understood from the faculty that a small (1-3) number of students each year can join faculty-led research projects as research assistants and are given credit waivers from some elective courses, although the process for selection was unclear to students. It is essential to make the criteria for selection transparent to all students. Some students are given the opportunity to co-author academic papers and thus gain publication credit before graduation. This is a great initiative and will enhance employability for any graduates who want to follow an academic career path.

### 3.4.2 Internationalization

The self-evaluation report described internationalization almost exclusively in relation to the BA program, which is taught in English and recruits around 150 students each year. However, the committee heard that there is an exchange program with Erasmus+ with several universities outside Israel, in which around 15 students participate each year.

## 3.5 Teaching and Learning outcomes

### 3.5.1 Teaching

According to the self-evaluation report, Reichman University supports teaching via a host of tools, including pedagogically oriented workshops for both in-person and online education and the efforts of a teaching improvement committee. Notably, the Teaching Innovation Unit (TIU) offers opportunities for instructors to learn how to integrate technology into their courses. The TIU works with faculty to help them succeed in various teaching models (for instance, distance education, hybrid teaching, and flipped classrooms). Designed to promote teaching excellence, the TIU identifies best practices and evaluates instruction via end-of-term student evaluations and focus groups. It then conducts a summary conversation with the instructor. According to the self-evaluation report, 100% of all courses offered at Reichman University are evaluated.

Once the evaluations are completed, the data are analyzed by the faculty administration and the results distributed to the dean of the respective school and the Provost's Office, which drafts a statistical report for the school, after which the two parties review the results jointly. According to the self-evaluation report and confirmed during the site visit, evaluations are discussed between the Head of School and individual faculty, particularly those who have received weaker evaluations. Persistent poor performance can result in dismissal, although the review committee learned that rarely has happened.

## 3.5.2 Learning outcomes

The self-evaluation report highlights a range of learning outcomes (LOs) for the BA program as a whole (Table 8), and individual syllabus outlines reviewed include course-specific LOs. Both the generic and the course-specific LOs are appropriate for a communications program. The LOs for the MA program are differentiated by each of the named MA programs and are appropriate.

Each course syllabus includes a diverse set of mixed assessment tasks (e.g., in-class and team presentations, mid-term assignments, and final projects) that can accommodate and speak to different learning styles. The syllabi included some excellent examples of encouraging active engagement in-class activities, such as awarding “bonus” points for those going the extra mile and deducting points for non-participation.

As examples of more imaginative assessment tasks, student assignments include designing campaigns and creating digital content. However, it was not clear how learning outcomes, which were more usually described as “goals,” were tied to the assessment tasks. The relationship between individual learning outcomes and the assessment tasks in the course materials needs to be made clearer.

During the site visit, the evaluation committee learned students are expected to be on campus for the purposes of teaching and learning. Students who wish to study at home and need to use specific software packages are not provided with remote access to such software. It is essential that students have easy access to key programs such as those in the Adobe Creative Suite and SPSS, or another statistical program. The cost of using this software should not be a barrier to student learning.

## 3.6 Students

### 3.6.1 Admission and graduation

According to the data presented in the self-evaluation report, admission and enrollment rates have remained stable with approximately 760 enrolled students in the BA program, and 45 in the MA program. The admissions criteria are clearly set out in the self-evaluation report, although exceptional circumstances enable promising students from particular backgrounds (special military units, outstanding musicians/athletes, social and economic periphery, and so on) to enroll without attaining the minimum entry requirements. Regardless, in the data provided in the self-evaluation report, average psychometric test admission grades were lower than the required minimum of 620, or the combination of baccalaureate pass at 90% and a psychometric test score of 600. Data about the admission of students with particular backgrounds were requested during the visit, but still have not yet been provided.



Although the two MA programs and their thesis tracks have different admission criteria, the pattern of application, offer, and enrollment has remained relatively stable in the past few years prior to the pandemic. The dropout rate has reduced during this period. It is important to note that according to the data in the self-evaluation report, the proportion of MA students admitted on probation is above 50%, a figure that, significantly exceeds the 10% limit set by the Council for Higher Education.

### 3.6.2 Graduate students

The MA programs have some shared mandatory courses and a range of interesting-sounding electives which reflect their different foci. The courses are balanced between theory and practice, and students appreciated the variety of theory- and practice-based electives available. The practical courses are taught as workshops and facilitated by professional practitioners which the students appreciate. According to the students, being taught by industry practitioners brings additional value to their learning. Faculty recognized the importance of not only producing graduates who have the skills base that media industries require, but also reviewing their curriculum to reflect changes in industry practices.

### 3.6.3 Student support services

Support services available to students include counseling and support for students with special and additional needs. A career center is available for the students, and the evaluation committee was told the faculty members and School itself are also actively engaged in helping students identify job opportunities. There is a designated career advisor available for the MA students taking the HCI track. Financial support is offered in different forms, including scholarships for academically gifted students and some from disadvantaged backgrounds. A significant proportion (between 16% and 20%) of students receive some kind of funding. This level of support is very commendable. It was heartening to see an explicit statement saying that in return, the unit expects students to give something back by way of volunteer activities.

There are mid-semester meetings between student representatives and faculty to discuss any issues or complaints. Students are broadly satisfied with the arrangements for feedback. The evaluation committee heard from students that faculty also have an open-door policy that facilitates ad-hoc, informal discussions with them. The School should consider setting up a regular student-faculty liaison committee which has a wider ambit and membership and deals with more than merely complaints and concerns.

During the tour, the evaluation committee did not visit any of the institution-wide support services, so cannot comment on how these actually work in practice.

### 3.6.4 Alumni

The School's Alumni Association is described as inviting alumni to report back on what they are now doing. The response rate from graduates is less than 100%, so only a partial picture is possible. No data were provided in terms of employment contexts, although data on internal progression from BA to MA show a steady increase in students making this transition. Again, this says something very positive about the BA students' experience. During the site visit, alumni spoke very positively about their experience and believe that the reputation of the School enhanced their employability.

### 3.7 Human Resources

The School's self-evaluation report is thorough in its explication of the tenure and promotion process. On the site visit, senior faculty expressed having clarity about the processes. They added that grants and sponsored research are expected in addition to publications. They feel supported in their efforts in securing and managing external funding.

Adjunct faculty teach most of the School's workshop courses. Students look to adjuncts with professional careers outside the School to bring industry trends and hands-on skills into the classroom. Alumni also mentioned the professional strength of the adjunct faculty.

Despite yearly contracts, adjunct faculty said they felt central to the School's mission. Adjunct faculty understand their contracts are based on the teaching needs of the School. However, they appeared unclear about the process by which contracts are renewed or about processes and procedures within the School in general. It is thus essential to develop a handbook for adjuncts that includes basic information about academic responsibilities and employment regulations as well as details related to contract renewal, curriculum development, and travel and research funding.

Adjuncts do not serve on School committees, but they voiced a potential willingness to do so. The evaluation committee suggests establishing a regular meetings cycle, for adjuncts to interact with each other and with other faculty, and to participate in curriculum development.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the diversity of faculty is a concern of the evaluation committee. During the site visit, the evaluation committee learned that faculty hiring was based primarily on recruitment and did not involve job postings. This mechanism naturally taps into School's existing networks, which may or may not be homogenous and over-representative of certain academic pedigrees. Diversity should be a greater priority in recruiting than currently expressed.

### 3.8 Diversity

In the self-evaluation report, the School expresses a commitment to gender and ethnic diversity. Indeed, their data express great support for gender equity. However, the self-evaluation report lists zero minority students and faculty (not including women). This is at odds with the mission of the University.

During the site visit, the evaluation committee heard about some centralized efforts to increase diversity at the University (e.g., scholarships for low-income students and Ethiopian Jews; mentoring for Arab students.) However, we did not learn about any specific diversity efforts within the School, nor initiatives to support diversity. Data about minority students and faculty members were requested during the visit, but were not provided. It is essential the School develops a formal policy that articulates principles of promoting diversity, as well as the procedures for implementation and outreach, and ultimately evaluation of progress.

Also of note, overall diversity efforts at the University appear to be focused on students. Significant efforts need to be taken to diversify faculty as well. Recruiting from a small pool of potential candidates can be problematic, and the School and University will need to be strategic and creative. For example, they might consider a cluster hire of minorities across disciplines. Having minorities on faculty may encourage more students to come to Reichman because they see others like themselves succeeding. If finding full-time and adjunct faculty is challenging, inviting diverse guest speakers in classes can serve as a small, short-term effort.

### 3.9 Research

The faculty members at the School are prolific scholars in their respective areas of research, which include political communication, information and communication technologies, human-computer interaction, sports and media, as well as virtual reality. Their research appears as books, book chapters, and articles in a broad swath of leading international journals.

Collectively, the research produced by faculty speaks to communication issues and phenomena in Israel; it also engages with larger theoretical concerns, broader societal contexts, and global issues. Indeed, the research reflects what the university president described as Reichman scholarship situating the problem, not the discipline, at the center. This is further borne out by the Israel-based and international professional associations in which the faculty are active and the journals on whose editorial boards they serve.

The School boasts a number of institutes and labs, among them the Advanced Reality Lab, Media Innovation Lab, Research Center for Internet Psychology, and the Sport, Media and Society Research Lab. These labs and centers are used to conduct research, but also are integrated into the undergraduate and graduate curricula. For instance,

the School offers a number of research methods classes that utilize these labs and centers. In addition, students can earn credit for research conducted under these auspices; graduate students can earn authorship on research articles produced from studies conducted here.

In the three-year period prior to the submission of the self-evaluation report, all senior faculty had successfully secured research funds, mostly from external sources, ranging from the Israel National Institute of Health to the Knesset to the European Union.

The faculty are involved in much collaborative research, with colleagues at Reichman and elsewhere, as well as with graduate students within the program. While they felt well supported, faculty expressed a concern that some graduate students were not sufficiently supported in their efforts to conduct empirical research, as in the case of securing licences for statistical software. In addition, students' research efforts currently are funded by faculty grants and not university scholarships. The evaluation committee believes prioritizing funding for graduate students and their research will bolster productivity and the School's reputation. Faculty also communicated the enthusiasm MA students felt in pursuing doctoral work, which speaks well to how graduate students might be engaging with the program. The School is interested in starting a doctoral program, but recognizes this would require the production of more MA students.

Research within the School is conducted as well by adjunct faculty, many of whom eagerly conduct research. However, this research is supported by grants only if they collaborate with a senior faculty member on that grant. Some research efforts involve undergraduates; for example, some students can work in the Media Innovation Lab for course credit and earn authorship on various publications. Such undergraduate experiences can bolster students' interest in research and graduate work.

### 3.10 Infrastructure and Facilities

The centrality of technology and the interdisciplinary nature of the institution are clearly reflected in the School's infrastructure, equipment, and resources. The facilities are already high caliber and additional improvements are underway, including the construction of a new building with increased space for the New Media Lab. The New Media Lab and the Advanced Reality Labs are interdisciplinary spaces for undergraduate and graduate students to work collaboratively with faculty on applied technology research.

Students have regular access to both specialized labs and basic computer labs. The School also has a state-of-the-art television studio, editing suites, and podcasting booths, providing many opportunities for hands-on learning by industry professionals and adjuncts.

Also of note, the proximity of the Museum of Communications to the modern studios is a physical reminder of how the modern age connects to the history and development of new communication technologies, especially in Israel.

The Marc Rich Library has books, e-books, and databases in English and Hebrew. The library also had group and individual work stations for students.

## **Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Housed at a private university, which draws funds from student tuition, donations, sponsored grants, and other sources, the Sammy Ofer School of Communications appears well resourced, with state-of-the-art labs and centers and access to the latest technology. These resources support the faculty in their research and teaching efforts, which align with the University's goal to blend technology with the social sciences. The School offers the only international BA program in Israel, attracting students from a few dozen countries. Through courses, workshops, and internships, its BA and MA curricula allow students to think analytically about communication, to learn best practices in industry, and to increase their marketability post-graduation.

This richness of resources does not guarantee satisfaction on all fronts. The evaluation committee heard concerns from faculty and students with whom it met. These concerns are articulated in this report and drive the list of recommendations below.

### **4.1 Recommendations**

#### **Essential**

The School needs to be more transparent in communicating with its graduate students. It needs to make transparent the criteria by which students are recruited as research assistants on faculty projects. It also needs to make transparent the process by which they can secure funding to undertake empirically based projects.

The School needs to prioritize funding and resources for graduate students and their research, which will work to bolster productivity and the School's reputation. These resources can be used, for instance, to increase access to key software programs.

Given the large number of adjunct faculty, the School should ensure that all have access to critical information. The School should develop a handbook for adjuncts that includes basic information such as where and how to achieve travel and research funds, how to propose new courses, and how to navigate the renewal of contracts.

Given the relative lack of diversity within the School, the unit should set up a formal policy that articulates the principles of promoting diversity among students and

faculty. This plan should include the procedures for implementation and outreach, and ultimately evaluation of progress.

### **Important**

Important recommendations relate to issues raised related to curriculum planning. First, the School should provide students with more information on the content and focus of each track and delay decision-making closer to the end of the first year.

The School should initiate regular meetings (maybe once or twice a semester) for adjuncts to interact with each other and other faculty and participate in curriculum development.

The School also should provide to all course leaders a common syllabus template that sets out the same basic information for students.

Finally, faculty should be required to review the texts they want students to read and refresh/update them. Doing so would expose students to the latest research and best practices.

### **Desirable**

To the extent possible, the School should design some course offerings that can be taken by both BA student cohorts.

Instructors should make clear the relationship between individual learning outcomes and the assessment tasks undertaken in a given course.

The School should consider setting up a regular student/faculty liaison committee that can deal with a wider array of issues, not only student complaints.

Given diversity concerns, if finding full-time and adjunct faculty is challenging, the School should invite diverse guest speakers in classes as a short-term strategy.

Signed by:

Prof. Patricia Moy

*Committee Chair*

Patricia Moy

Prof. Andrea Hickerson

Andrea E Hickerson

Prof. Karen Ross

Karen Ross

## Appendix I: Letter of Appointment



November 2021

Prof. Patricia Moy  
Department of Communication  
University of Washington  
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 **Communications** departments. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Mark Deuze, prof. Richard Ling, prof. Karen Ross, prof. Dhavan V. Shah, and prof. Gabriel Weimann.

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