



י"ט בשבט תשפ"ד
29 בינואר 2024

לכבוד
סיגל מורדוך, מ"מ סמנכ"ל
האגף להערכת איכות והבטחתה
המועצה להשכלה גבוהה

שלום רב,

מצורפת תגובת המכון למדעי החיים לדוח הערכת האיכות בתחום מדעי החיים וביולוגיה.

בברכה,

אבי-חי חובב

העתק:

גב' ענת חיינה, האגף להערכת איכות והבטחתה



The AS-ILS response to CHE recommendations

Committee Recommendation	Steps toward implementation (including timetable)
Essential	
<p>The University has to recognize the value of life sciences and allocate funds more generously to the Institute given its research contributions and the disproportionately large grant revenue it brings to the University.</p>	<p>In the examination led by the university's management, it was found that this assertion lacks justification. The university's internal budgeting model indicates an overall fair resource allocation across all institutes within the Faculty of Natural Sciences. Nevertheless, the management believes that both the internal budgeting model and its implementation can be improved. Therefore, the Rector's office conducts an annual self-examination process based on data rather than assumptions to facilitate improvements in the budgeting of the various academic units within the university.</p>
<p>The organizational structure of the Institute as a collection of departments spanning life sciences, provides a useful framework for collegial governance and a coherent approach to supporting high-caliber teaching and research in different fields with shared needs in terms of research resources and pedagogical approaches. However, it appears that the current model of budget allocation to the AS-ILS and the centralized bureaucracy that requires tiers of approval is stifling the Institute's ability to realize its full potential. AS-ILS leadership and senior faculty aspire to become independent Faculty at the University, as a means to rectify these</p>	<p>The university's management acknowledges the comments regarding the necessity to improve bureaucratic processes complicating AS-ILS management. While efforts will be made to address this issue and explore improvement options, we contend that, given the unit's size, categorizing AS-ILS as an independent faculty lacks justification. This is especially pertinent during a period of financial challenges for the university. Consequently, we advocate for organizational measures aimed at improving the interface between the faculty and AS-ILS.</p>



<p>problems. Having said that, many of the functional and organizational issues within the Institute could be addressed with greater independence of the Chair to make decisions on financial and academic matters, and a refined allocation of budget to the AS-ILS that puts more weight on research achievements.</p>	
<p>The University, alongside the Institute, has to develop and implement a strategic plan to reorganize the life sciences research across the University to allow integration of the various life science research branches.</p>	<p>Over the past two years, the Vice President for Strategy and Diversity has led a comprehensive university-wide initiative aimed at formulating the Hebrew University's strategic plan for the coming decade. This initiative prioritized in-depth exploration of research themes and the establishment of decision-making protocols, with a focus on their integration into the academic frameworks of the university. Currently, several of these identified themes are already in the process of implementation, promising to bring innovation and advancement to existing research fields, particularly within the field of life sciences.</p> <p>Moreover, the university is committed to fostering a culture that encourages novel research directions proposed by academic units. In this context, we anticipate active participation from AS-ILS in contributing to and shaping this rejuvenation process.</p>
<p>The University and Faculty need to create a centralized graduate school, whose purpose is to assist with navigating every aspect of graduate student life.</p> <p>The Institute should implement annual meetings of graduate students with their thesis mentoring committee, including, at the end of a meeting, discussion in the absence of the student</p>	<p>The committee suggests creating a centralized graduate school and we strongly support this recommendation. The concept has been discussed multiple times in recent years, and the university is still actively considering its implementation. Therefore, AS-ILS suggests implementing an Institute-level graduate school that will deal with the complexity of navigating the graduate system. Currently, the Head of the Teaching Program is responsible for both undergraduate and graduate students and is assisted by the heads of our five graduate teaching programs. We suggest appointing a separate head of graduate teaching and a designated secretary, who will be responsible for streamlining and unifying the application process and monitoring the students' progress throughout their studies. The</p>



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<p>research mentor. This allows early discovery of issues related to scientific progress, and a setting to bring up non-scientific issues of concern.</p>	<p>head of graduate teaching, along with the relevant graduate program head, will be responsible for reviewing and approving all new graduate students. The secretary will be responsible for the admission process and for submission of the relevant material to the Faculty or the Authority for Research Students for approval.</p> <p>In addition, The AS-ILS will prepare a “primer” for graduate school, which will include all of the relevant information regarding registration, stipends, travel fellowships, submission, etc., in one place in a condensed form, with links to the detailed information online. All this information already exists and is available online, but it is spread out across several different sites and is therefore not read by all students. The ILS will also set a schedule for M.Sc. and Ph.D. students for the different reporting steps including additional steps for Ph.D. students to meet with their committee members, in the presence and absence of their mentor. The idea has been deliberated with the Rector.</p>
<p>University and Faculty: Establish a uniform and transparent graduate student stipend scale to prevent the appearance of favoritism or discrimination.</p>	<p>The AS-ILS acknowledges that there is a problem with the lack of uniformity in stipend levels, and has been working to remedy this problem. The University has a uniform and transparent stipend grade. However, the AS-ILS has always felt that this grade is low and non-competitive in comparison to other universities, and has therefore implemented its own higher stipend grade. During the last few years, the ILS has set a minimum and maximum stipend level (with a narrow margin between them), with even higher stipends available for a small number of outstanding students. These guidelines have been advertised within AS-ILS, but as they are new, some supervisors still do not follow them closely.</p> <p>As an alternative approach, we suggest that once a graduate school is established, the appointed AS-ILS secretary will take care of stipend levels. Each researcher will transfer equal funds for M.Sc. and Ph.D. students, and the school will distribute them to the students. Our goal is to have a unified stipend for the majority of our students, whereas outstanding students and students with special needs will benefit from additional, competitive funding from intra and extramural resources that will be advertised in advance.</p>



<p>The financial penalty for switching laboratories, particularly early on, in the PhD studies, has to be eliminated.</p>	<p>We are not aware of such instances. Regularly, students can gain scholarships for five years regardless of their hosting lab(s). If a student needs to extend his/her thesis period, for example, due to inherent difficulties in the research project, switching labs, or maternity leave, they can apply to the Authority of Research Students for an extension of the research period and therefore for the extension of the funding period by a year.</p>
<p>The Institute has to address issues of gender disparity among faculty members. This can be done by broadening the job advertisement in different global venues, and by instituting policies that provide a more supportive work environment for women with families.</p>	<p>Addressing gender disparity among faculty members is a significant challenge that we acknowledge. Our issue does not stem from a shortage of applicants. Over the past decade, the representation of women in the candidate short-list has consistently exceeded their representation among the applicants, often surpassing 50% in most cases. While the percentage of women among hires is slightly below 50%, it's noteworthy that we have extended offers to more women than men. The percentage of women declining our offers, either to accept offers at other institutions in Israel or to stay abroad, is relatively high. We need to actively tackle the issue of high decline rates, identify the root causes, and work towards finding effective solutions to address this problem. In instances where we are aware of the reasons for candidates declining, it has been due to academic or personal reasons unrelated to gender issues. Nevertheless, despite this, the numerical disparity is evident, prompting us to conduct a more thorough investigation into the matter.</p> <p>Existing policies aimed at creating a supportive work environment for women with families are in place and are diligently adhered to. Both male and female faculty members are entitled to an extension of the tenure decision period if they give birth, adopt, or become foster parents during that timeframe. Research students who experience childbirth during their studies can extend their maternity leave for up to six months while still receiving their monthly stipend. In these instances, it is the responsibility of their mentor to extend the funding period.</p>
<p>Dealing with the outcomes of the COVID Pandemic, the Institute must ensure the tenure clock and/or tenure expectations are adjusted</p>	<p>To the best of our knowledge, the tenure clock and tenure expectations have already been adjusted to compensate for reduced productivity. Generally, if necessary, time extensions for tenure are nearly automatic.</p>



<p>for all faculty members, to make up for the diminished productivity pandemic.</p>	
<p>The Institute has to put in place a tracking system to understand the reasons Arab BSc students leave the program, to reduce attrition without lowering the standard of admissions.</p>	<p>The University has a comprehensive infrastructure in place for monitoring and supporting Arab students. The Office of the Vice-President for Strategy and Diversity actively oversees the academic progress of Arab students across various programs. Additionally, under the Dean of Students, there is a specialized unit with representatives in all faculties and institutes of the Faculty of Natural Science. The representative within AS-ILS (specific department or unit) closely monitors the advancement of all Arab students, engages in regular discussions with them, and serves as their primary point of contact for addressing any issues. The teaching office convenes with the Arab student representative on a semesterly basis to gain insights into students facing difficulties. The teaching office often engages individually with each of these students, endeavoring to construct a personalized study program aimed at enhancing their likelihood of success. The unit for support of Arab students also offers support courses in Arabic coordinated with the relevant lecturers and monitors students who are at risk of failing and reaches out to offer support. Despite this elaborate support structure, dropout rates are still high (although they have improved significantly since this support infrastructure has been implemented).</p> <p>The reasons for the high dropout are well-known. It is a combination of a language barrier, a cultural barrier, poor preparation for university studies by most Arab schools (with a few notable exceptions), and the fact that a higher percentage of our Arab students are the first generation of high education, and so have fewer points of reference and support. The Institute and the University are fully aware of these challenges and exert their utmost efforts to mitigate them through the support infrastructure detailed earlier. During the COVID pandemic, the period which the committee scrutinized, there were elevated attrition rates compared to the normal. This was exacerbated by the heightened prominence of language and cultural barriers in the context of online learning. Additionally, the various support measures were not originally designed for remote assistance, rendering them ineffective for students who were</p>



	<p>disengaged or out of touch. We plan to improve the situation by extending the regular meetings of the Arab student representatives to involve not only the teaching office but also the Head of Teaching. This initiative is scheduled to commence once the semester begins, with the current target set for December 31, 2023.</p>
Important	
<p>The university should report on the different programs when Life Science is evaluated to allow the CHE committee to have a better view of the research done in Life Science at HUJI and assess the efforts to integrate these different programs.</p>	<p>The self-evaluation report was assembled by the evaluated institute under the supervision of the Office of Academic Evaluation. We appreciate the feedback from the reviewers, and going forward, we will ensure that the report thoroughly covers the programs in which AS-ILS actively participates.</p>
<p>The de facto requirement for teaching while on maternity leave must be eliminated at once. The University must ensure employee and student rights are kept and enforced, and the proper accommodations are provided.</p>	<p>The AS-ILS management was surprised by this recommendation as the guidelines for maternity leave are very clear and meticulously adhered to by us. There is absolutely no mandate for Teaching Assistants on maternity leave to engage in any form of teaching activity. Consequently, we presume that the committee's recommendation is rooted in an isolated incident that may not have come to the attention of the Head of the Institute Teaching Program. This is unequivocally an exceptional situation and not a standard requirement.</p>
<p>When providing course syllabi in the SER, the Faculty should make them easier to assess, by, for example, dividing courses into core requirements and electives.</p>	<p>We debated about the appropriate approach to this matter, considering the multitude of programs, each with its distinct set of requirements. We thought we had provided all the necessary information in an accessible format with links for each course in Table 3, which was submitted as an Excel document and allowed sorting. We regret to learn that the committee did not find it as helpful and intuitive as we intended. The Syllabi will be examined again by our media specialist before the beginning of the Semester and we will follow her recommendations.</p>
<p>The Faculty and Institute should update their websites, so that it has information about every</p>	<p>Comprehensive information regarding various facets of Life Science student life at the university, encompassing mentorship, fellowships, required timelines, travel opportunities, etc., can be found on</p>



<p>aspect of Life Science student life at the university, including mentorship, fellowships, required timelines, travel opportunities, etc.</p>	<p>the institute's website in both Hebrew and English. Pertinent details are delineated within three dedicated sections:</p> <p>Prospective students (https://www.bio.huji.ac.il/en/students_applicants_en)</p> <p>Undergraduate students (https://www.bio.huji.ac.il/en/students_bsc_en)</p> <p>Graduate students (https://www.bio.huji.ac.il/en/students_research_en)</p> <p>It comprises information compiled from various HUJI websites, encompassing details about all study programs, HUJI's rules and regulations for each academic degree, financial support provided by HUJI, as well as additional resources for each academic degree. Additionally, it includes a comprehensive list of dissertation topics offered by all faculty members for graduate students.</p> <p>In response to the committee's recommendation, the Head of the Teaching Program and the Institute's Secretary for Teaching Affairs have reviewed all this information, made necessary updates, and expanded relevant sections in the Hebrew version of the website. We anticipate completing the updates for the English version shortly, with the target date set for December 31, 2023.</p>
<p>The faculty must ensure the proper accommodations are given to students with demonstrated needs (such as learning disabilities) in courses and exams.</p>	<p>The services for student with special learning needs are administered at the University level. For certain requirements, such as ADD and learning disorders, the university mandates that students undergo diagnosis by HUJI experts to determine the most appropriate accommodations. To the best of our knowledge, all students with documented needs are receiving appropriate support.</p>
<p>The Institute should establish regular career counseling events for students, to expose them to non-academic tracks (biotech, policy, patents, law, etc.).</p>	<p>Beginning this academic year, we are implementing a program to introduce our students to various career paths accessible to life sciences graduates. A dedicated committee has been formed to coordinate meetings between our students and alumni, including biologists who graduated from other institutes and have pursued diverse career trajectories. This initiative is complemented by our efforts to establish an alumni club. We have compiled a list of AS-ILS alumni and identified those who can offer valuable insights to our students.</p> <p>We intend to launch a series of career counseling and networking events for both our undergraduate and graduate students in the upcoming academic year. The goal is to familiarize them with non-academic career paths, including but not limited to biotech, policy-making in governmental and non-governmental bodies, patents, and law. To facilitate</p>



	<p>this, we have reached out to several alumni holding diverse positions and have secured their consent to participate in these events. We aim to organize at least three such events throughout the academic year.</p>
<p>The Institute should increase efforts in recruiting minority administrative and technical staff.</p>	<p>Recruiting minority administrative and technical staff is not in the AS-ILS hands. All recruitment processes are conducted by HUJI's human resources division, and they are fully aware of the significance of employing minorities in the university's diverse employment frameworks. Currently, the technical staff at AS-ILS includes five Arab members</p>
<p>The Institute should establish regular contact with alumni. Tracking alumni's career progression can contribute to educating students about career opportunities outside the academy. Alumni are beneficial also for fund-raising, and for advertising the Institute.</p>	<p>Following the committee's recommendation, we approached HUJI's Alumni Association to establish an AS-ILS cell within the association. Discussions were held on expanding the list of known alumni, mapping influential alumni, and considering potential activities for HUJI's 100th anniversary in 2025. However, these efforts were temporarily halted following the tragic events on October 7th.</p>
<p>Desirable</p>	
<p>The University and Institute should engage in thoughtful space planning that covers: update of bioimaging core facility with modern instrumentation and other large shared equipment needs; renovation and update infrastructure of mid-career PI labs; renovation of small lecture rooms in the Silberman building; and provision of private spaces for lactation rooms for new mothers.</p> <p>The Faculty should provide a dedicated annual budget for sourcing large, shared equipment needs for the Life Sciences Institute.</p>	<p>To ensure a precise and effective response to the needs of all university research units, the university management has instituted a new office led by Mr. Dvir Reches. This office operates under the supervision of the Vice President for Research and Development, conducting internal surveys in collaboration with researchers to assess their equipment requirements. Through these surveys and meetings with all institutes at the university, the management gains a comprehensive overview of the state of research equipment across the various research institutes. This information enables the management to develop a multi-year plan for purchasing equipment and managing facilities, taking into consideration the needs of the entire research community.</p>



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There is an attrition of women from BSc to MSc to PhD programs. The institute should examine these phenomena, and where possible, address the reasons.

We are aware of the situation. In discussions with female students about their decision not to continue their studies or pursue an academic career, it became apparent that their primary concern is the perceived challenge of balancing a demanding career with family responsibilities. Many of our female students initiate their academic journey later, influenced by military service and extended adjustment periods before university application. At this stage, they encounter difficulties in harmonizing rigorous advanced studies with parenthood.

To address the concerns of female students, we have implemented a strategy involving the publication of stories on electronic media platforms (AS-ILS Facebook and Instagram). These stories feature female students and Principal Investigators (PIs) who have successfully balanced parenthood and research careers, emphasizing the considerations and choices they made. In the career events planned for this year, we have invited several women to participate. Additionally, each PI engages in personal conversations with their graduate students, encouraging them to dream big and offering guidance on how to realize those aspirations.

We do have a nursing room in the AS-ILS; however, female students rarely use it.