



FLS response to the Evaluation committee's recommendations	
Committee Recommendation	Steps toward implementation (including time tabel
Essential	
<p>1. The Faculty of Life Sciences must articulate its vision, including the research areas to focus or expand to, the size of the faculty and student body, and so on. Strategy and milestones for planning, budgeting, recruitment and infrastructure should be developed and set.</p>	<p>The Faculty of Life Sciences (FLS) aims to promote the highest level of multidisciplinary research and interdisciplinary education in Biological Sciences and raise the next generation of Bioscience researchers and educators, representing all disciplines of Life Sciences. The four different Faculty schools cover most biological fields ranging from the organism level to the molecular level, from ecology and food security to bioinformatics and nanotechnology, from marine biology and taxonomy to cancer research and neurodegenerative, etc. The aim of the faculty is to maintain the strength of all these fields and at the same time to identify hot, underrepresented research areas as well as new developments in the front line of modern biology and to recruit leading young researchers in these fields. For example, we recruited recently Dr. Haim Treves as an expert in plant metabolomics. During the last year, Dr. Treves has been awarded the ERC, ISF, DFG, BSF, NSF and BSF grants. Currently, we are trying to recruit a top-notch scientist, an expert in brain-body interaction. To achieve all these goals, we will continue to recruit the best young scientists, and provide them the physical and scientific infrastructure they need and access to excellent students. Moreover, we aim to further improve the faculty infrastructure and increase the number of fellowships allocated to graduate students, and more. As a teaching university, we will continue to put education and teaching our top priority and strive to improve it. Lastly, the faculty is committed to equality and diversity at all levels (see point #4).</p> <p>Regarding strategy and milestones for planning, budgeting, recruitment, and infrastructure, the five-year strategic plan, prepared jointly with the university, refers to all these points. This includes the number of PIs to be recruited to each School and their budget; Budget for renovating buildings and teaching labs; Increasing the number and value of student fellowships and so on. An outline of the strategic plan is attached to this document (appendix 1). Space limitation is acknowledged by both faculty and university leaders and the attempt to resolve this problem is of high priority for the university.</p>
<p>2. The Faculty must analyze and determine the reasons for the high attrition of the BSc students, using data-driven metrics, and early</p>	<p>The faculty fully accepts this recommendation. The faculty has recently recruited a student advisor who is currently working on</p>

<p>interventions should be introduced to retain the students through graduation.</p>	<p>obtaining data-driven metrics and early intervention measures to be implemented in the coming school year.</p>
<p>3. PhD thesis committees must include external scientist members (virtually or in person) for a Defense, as is the international standard.</p>	<p>As mentioned in the SER, and in the point-by-point response, the faculty is shifting toward a Ph.D. defense process, according to international academic standards.</p>
<p>4. The Faculty must develop a diversity policy, and address the low diversity (ethnicity and gender) especially at the faculty level. An action plan must be proactive and have pre-defined metrics for success.</p>	<p>The faculty has a clear diversity policy and can ensure the evaluation committee that diversifying is a priority of the FLS. To improve the representation of minorities, the faculty has adopted designated admittance tracks aligned with the university's non-discrimination policy and based on objective academic criteria. These tracks include the Periphery Excellence Program for students from the periphery, admission for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students of Ethiopian descent, graduates of the Orthodox Jewish educational system, and students with disabilities. These proactive measures aim to increase the number of students from these minority groups within our student body. For example, we have initiated an ongoing fellowship to support Arab MSc students at our faculty. The FLS is actively collaborating with the Equity, Diversity and Community Commission to promote diversity within the faculty. Furthermore, the Office of the Dean of Students provides academic and social support, as well as mentoring for students from minority groups such as Arab students, students of Ethiopian descent, students with disabilities, and students from Orthodox Jewish backgrounds. To further improve the representation of minorities among the FLS student body and to decrease the disproportionate attrition of Arab students we aim to identify (via the Cohen Research Institute) the potential barriers faced by these students and ways to overcome these barriers. Furthermore, additional resources should be allocated to cultivating and supporting these minority groups, addressing not only financial needs but also social and health needs, as well as providing necessary academic support such as tutoring in language fluency for academic success. These active steps will create an inclusive environment for students from diverse backgrounds and enhance faculty diversity.</p> <p>We will prioritize raising awareness and implementing appropriate accommodations to support students and faculty members with various disabilities. While we have made efforts to accommodate wheelchair seating in many classrooms, we recognize that more needs to be done to address the specific needs of students with visual or hearing impairments. We will implement measures to ensure that these students have equal access to educational resources and a supportive learning environment. This may include providing assistive technologies, captioning or sign language interpretation services, and</p>

	<p>adapting teaching materials to accommodate diverse learning needs.</p> <p>We have already initiated a comprehensive shift to make our infrastructure accessible to students with disabilities. We will establish a committee that will be responsible for monitoring and improving the process and to ensure that our facilities, services, and support systems are inclusive, accessible, and cater to the diverse needs of all our community.</p> <p>Regarding the underrepresentation of women faculty members, we are actively working towards increasing the representation of women in faculty positions. We are in the process of implementing a range of measures and initiatives such as targeted recruitment efforts, proactive outreach to women scientists and researchers, and the establishment of mentorship and support programs to assist women in advancing their careers within the FLS. We are also committed to providing a supportive and inclusive work environment that promotes equal opportunities for career development and advancement. In addition, we will undertake comprehensive studies and assessments to gather objective data and identify any barriers or challenges that women faculty members may face. This will allow us to develop evidence-based policies and strategies aimed at creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women faculty members.</p>
<p>5. The Faculty must develop a policy/standard regarding lab size (personnel and physical space) distribution.</p>	<p>The faculty has a clear policy regarding standard lab size (personnel and physical space) distribution. Accordingly, the current policy is that a typical research lab of a newly recruited group leader should be about 80-100 sqm, which reflects typical space requirements to host about 8-10 personnel (students, postdocs, and technicians) and equipment. However, the faculty policy also enables allocating bigger labs to newly recruited faculty members or increasing the space of present faculty members to accommodate specific needs.</p> <p>Regarding the number of personnel in each lab, the faculty policy is not to interfere with the PI's decision of how many students or technical supporters she/he recruits provided that the PI can secure their support.</p>
<p>Important</p>	
<p>1. Teaching evaluation should not rely on student surveys alone, and other mechanisms, such as peer observation, should be incorporated.</p>	<p>The Teaching evaluation does not solely rely on the student surveys. The vice dean for teaching often discusses teaching issues in many of the classes with both student representatives and teachers as well as reviews recordings from selected classes. Nevertheless, the faculty will work on mechanisms whereby additional assessment of teaching will be performed by the vice dean and/or additional faculty members.</p>

<p>2. The process of mentoring and evaluation of junior faculty members should be revised so that research, teaching and outreach, and engagement should all be included in the 'package' reviewed. On annual reviews, the group of reviewers should be consistent throughout the years.</p> <p>The Faculty must specify explicitly and transparently to the junior faculty the requirements for promotion. This document must be kept up to date.</p>	<p>The faculty policy is that a fair, unified, and transparent mentoring and promotion processes of junior faculty members are essential for the success of the faculty. In fact, all the suggestions of the evaluation committee have already been implemented in the past. All this information was provided in the SER, (see Supporting documents 3.4.1 III and V and 3.4.4 II, for promotion and mentoring respectively).</p> <p>Regarding the criteria for awarding tenure with or without promotion to Associate Professor, this part indeed needs to be better defined. The faculty will appoint a committee comprised of members of the four schools to define clear criteria for awarding tenure with or without promotion to associate Professor (Appendices 2A, 2B, 3).</p>
<p>3. TAU should provide 100% salary coverage of the Lab Manager position, and ensure the compensation commensurate with the professional nature of this essential position.</p>	<p>This is a complicated issue which is also linked to the format of the collective agreements that the university has with the workers' organizations, and therefore not every change is under the control of university.</p>
<p>4. Core Facilities should be staffed by Staff Scientists, paid centrally by the Faculty (not by user fees) at a level commensurate with their skill set and essential role. Further, the Cores should not close during times when no classes are offered, as this is the ideal time for research activities.</p>	<p>The salary of all staff scientists at the faculty core facility is paid by the Faculty and not by user fee.</p> <p>The fee collected from the users is aiming at covering some of the regular daily maintenance costs, and its level is similar to fees collected by other universities core facilities using similar equipment. Core service is included in the budget of most competitive grants, including ISF.</p> <p>We open a tender for each new recruitment in the core facility. The requirements are determined by the faculty. It should be noted that all staff of the core facility are trained personnel, holding MSc and Ph.D. degrees (the latter are the majority).</p> <p>Regarding the operating hours of the Core facilities - The core facility is available for users throughout the year (twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with a special access card). The technical support staff is available throughout the year during the university's official working hours, which do not include weekends and official holidays, as determined by Israeli law and the university agreement with the labor unions, unless in urgent cases. Thus, we cannot force our staff to work during weekends and holidays. Finally, the salary of Core Facilities Staff Scientists is determined according to the regulations of CHE for public universities and agreements with the union.</p>
<p>5. Using placement exams, students whose background is in need of enrichments must be identified. Implement 'bootcamp' courses at the beginning of the semester [or prior to matriculation] to bring undergraduates to the level required for first year courses. Incorporate this into the curriculum - do not require students to pay for expensive external courses to achieve this.</p>	<p>Regarding bringing undergraduates to the level required for first-year courses and the suggestion to implement 'boot camp' courses-</p> <p>We emphasize to the students the importance of preparation for the first semester, in particular to students who did not study sciences in high school. We have offered in the past optional boot camp courses prior to the start of the first semester but attendance declined to almost zero. This may be due to the unique situation in Israel, in which almost all students enter</p>

	<p>university following a compulsory army service, typically lasting 2-4 years, and they do not have time for pre-semester courses. Therefore, we recommend that the students take some particular, free, massive, open online courses (MOOCs) in chemistry, python, and physics. The MOOC in chemistry is also integrated into the syllabus of the general chemistry course in the first semester. Furthermore, before the beginning of the 1st year, we actively give students access (via Moodle) to an online biology course taught by two faculty members, preparing them for the Introduction to Biology I course that all students study in the first semester.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the faculty will reconsider the committee's suggestion for boot camp courses, possibly including placement exams.</p>
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<p>6. The FLS should develop a strong advising program for all BSc students. Career counseling must be developed and implemented for all students.</p>	<p>As mentioned earlier, the faculty has recently recruited a student adviser that will also deal with career counseling. The faculty will also work with the university career counseling center to develop programs focused on providing our students with information on career options, including career fairs, courses offering practical experience, and more.</p> <p>Accordingly, three main directions will be pursued: - the career club, including lectures, workshops, and job-fairs; - the immersion course, as part of the undergraduate curriculum, and online resources including advice on writing CVs and job opportunities. All these initiatives are already underway.</p>
<p>7. Course syllabi should be clear, and the prerequisites should be explicit. The add/drop dates for laboratory course sections should not be before the start of those courses.</p>	<p>The Curriculum Committee and the Teaching and Student Affairs administration will ensure that the syllabi of all courses will be clear and their prerequisites defined.</p> <p>Regarding add/drop of laboratory courses; The laboratory courses start either at the beginning of the semester or in the middle of the semester and last a total of 6 weeks. Admission to these courses is done by bidding before the beginning of the academic year. After the bidding, the students are allowed to change or cancel their choice, whether the courses start at the beginning or in the middle of the semester. However, once the course starts the students cannot change or drop the course anymore. This is because, on the one hand, the number of students that can attend a given course is limited and barely meets the demand, and on the other hand the course lasts only 6 weeks. So, if a student change or drop a course, for example after two weeks (as is allowed for the faculty regular courses) his/her space cannot be fulfilled by other students, because new students cannot enroll in a practical course after a third of the course has passed.</p>
<p>8. The language of instruction must be consistent in the taught courses in the Faculty. Additional academic support should be provided for students whose first language is not Hebrew.</p>	<p>According to the CHE instructions, the undergraduate courses are taught in Hebrew.</p> <p>As pointed out in the point-by-point response, since English is the language of Science, and since all textbooks, publications, and online materials at the university level are in English, the faculty consider the practice of English as an important skill for our students that needs to be integrated at all levels of study, and not be restricted to specific English courses. While we understand that having reading material in English may provide an additional challenge for our students, we believe that in the long run, this prepares them better for a career in life science.</p> <p>Saying that, we will aim at providing our students with specific material that helps them deal with English terminology (such as a list of relevant terms in Hebrew and in English). We also agree that class presentations, whenever possible, should be in Hebrew (though in some cases slides are taken from English textbooks). The BSc students are required to have a certain level of proficiency in English, and therefore are generally required to</p>

	<p>either pass benchmark exams in English, or take English classes offered by the university.</p> <p>Regarding support to students whose first language is not Hebrew, the faculty is making an effort to help these students, for example, translating exams to English upon request.</p>
<p>9. The Faculty of Life Sciences must improve the learning and working experience for students and faculty with special needs or disabilities, by making appropriate accommodation of the facilities and support given.</p>	<p>We agree with this comment. Indeed we have already initiated a comprehensive shift to make our infrastructure accessible to students with disabilities. The process has not yet been completed and will continue. We will establish a committee (before the beginning of the next academic year) that will be responsible for monitoring and improving the process.</p>
<p>10. Laboratory repairs and maintenance should be coordinated and paid for at the Faculty level, not by the PI's.</p>	<p>We agree that researchers should not be responsible for laboratory repairs and maintenance. Although this aspect needs to be improved, it should be noted that the faculty has a dedicated superintendent unit that is responsible for basic daily maintenance. If more expertise is needed the faculty outsource the service. In addition, in recent years we increased the faculty investment in the maintenance of individual labs, including in electricity and A/C as well as investment in the renovation of midterm labs. We will continue our effort to improve the involvement of the faculty in maintaining the research lab and this issue is included as a part of the five-year strategic plan which aims to cover the costs of repair of the research laboratories.</p>
<p>11. Graduate student stipends should be increased centrally.</p>	<p>We are glad that the Evaluation Committee acknowledged this important issue that was also raised in the SER. The faculty is making an effort to increase the stipend of the students, at least, those who belong to the excellence track, which receive 175% stipend. In addition, the five-year strategic plan aims to further increase the number and level of stipends for excellent students.</p>
Desirable	
<p>1. The self-evaluation process should be more reflective, and students and faculty members should be better involved in identifying critical issues, discussion, conclusion deduction, and suggesting solutions.</p>	<p>We believed that the self-evaluation process was reflective. Indeed, many of the weaknesses pointed out by the evaluation committee were also mentioned in the SER.</p> <p>Nonetheless, the FLS takes this comment very seriously and will make additional efforts to improve the reflectivity of future SER by increasing the involvement of additional students and faculty members in identifying critical issues and suggestions for solutions.</p>
<p>2. For better involvement, students should be included in the Facultative Teaching/ Curriculum committee membership.</p>	<p>We will strive for better involvement of students in teaching/curriculum issues. One option we will consider is to have students invited for committee meetings to get direct feedback from the students.</p>
<p>3. Graduate students should be encouraged and supported by the Faculty to present their work at international conferences.</p>	<p>The FLS graduate students are strongly encouraged to participate in international conferences. However, the committee is right, as was mentioned in the SER (3.1.3), that there is only very limited financial support available for this</p>

	<p>purpose. Although some faculty-associated institutes provide such support, this is also very limited.</p> <p>We will try to identify additional budget sources that could increase the university's support for students to attend conferences.</p>
<p>4. The University should expand the staffing and responsibilities of the International Office, so it serves the needs of all international students, staff and faculty.</p>	<p>The Lowy International School has recently substantially upgraded its activities on a number of levels. This includes appointing dedicated personnel who support and guide the students from their first contact with the university to overcome challenges such as obtaining visas, housing, and health insurance issues. In addition, prior to arrival, the students are provided a handbook with information about all aspects of life in Israel and TAU. Extensively updated content is also added to the website, providing clear guidance for visas, housing, student life, health insurance, bank accounts, etc. In addition, effort has been put into translating a wide range of documents and forms from Hebrew to English in order to enable the students to function without knowing Hebrew while in Israel.</p> <p>Furthermore, the FLS has appointed a new Vice Dean for international affairs to coordinate all aspects of International student affairs with the Lowy International School as well as to directly care for the FLS international students.</p>
<p>5. The Teaching Assistant positions should be uniform in the number of terms/contact hours as well as compensation from one Faculty to another. Employment and work conditions should be transparent, as well as the process for hiring of students for these positions.</p>	<p>Regarding the "uniformity of terms/contact hours" of Teaching Assistant (TA) positions: The salary of TAs at the university (per hr) is uniform for all university TAs and is determined by an agreement between the university and the TA's labor union. The salary is linked to the hours taught and we are strict in implementing it. Notably, considering the actual investments of the faculty's TAs in the courses they teach, <i>de facto</i>, in some justified cases, they received even higher salaries than they should get according to the agreement.</p> <p>Serving as a TA is not obligatory, since we cannot legally force students to teach, and many of them actually refuse to serve as TAs. Due to our teaching reform, the teaching load per TA has increased and thus fewer students volunteer to be TAs and the faculty has in fact free TA positions that cannot be filled. We are not aware of different employment conditions between different schools in TA positions.</p>