



EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

BEN GURION UNIVERSITY

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL
SCIENCES DEPARTMENTS IN ISRAEL

August 2020

Section 1: Background and Procedures

1. In the academic year 2018-19 the Council for Higher Education [CHE] put in place arrangements for the evaluation of study programs in the field of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences in Israel.
2. The Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] participating in the evaluation process were:
 - Ariel University
 - Bar-Ilan University
 - Ben-Gurion University
 - The Hebrew University
 - The Open University
 - Technion – Israel Institute of Technology
 - Tel Aviv University
 - Ruppin Academic Center
 - Peres Academic Center
 - Natanya Academic Center
 - Tel Hai Academic Center
 - Interdisciplinary center of Herzelia
 - Haifa University
 - Institution of Management
 - The Academic Institution of Tel Aviv Yafo
3. To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed a Committee consisting of¹:
 - [**Prof. Elena Grigorenko**](#), Department of Psychology, University of Houston & Child Study Center, Yale Medical School, USA. (child development, chronic disease, epidemiology, learning disorders, public and global health) – *Committee chair*.
 - [**Em. Prof. Miles Hewstone**](#), University of Oxford, UK. (social psychology)
 - [**Prof. Deborah Stipek**](#), Graduate School of Education, Stanford University, USA. (developmental and educational psychology)
 - [**Em. Prof. Moshe Zeidner**](#), Department of Counselling and Human Development, Haifa University, Israel. (educational psychology and human development)
 - [**Prof. Sigal Alon**](#), Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Israel. (social stratification and mobility)
 - [**Prof. Eva Gilboa-Schechtman**](#), Department of Psychology, Bar Ilan University, Israel. (clinical psychology)

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

Ms. Alex Buslovich Bilik served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

The evaluation process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (February 2018). Within this framework the evaluation committee was required to:

- examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Psychology and Behavioral Sciences
 - conduct on-site visits at 8 out of 15 institutions participating in the evaluation process, based on predefined criteria.
 - 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
 - submit to the CHE a general report regarding the evaluated field of study within the Israeli system of higher education
1. The evaluation committee examined 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.
 2. This report highlights the **Department of Psychology at Ben Gurion University**

Section 2: Executive Summary

Ben Gurion University is a strong higher-education institution in Israel. Its Department of Psychology is well-developed; it enjoys an excellent national and international reputation and attracts strong students at all levels of education. Yet, it experiences tensions that are common to other prestigious universities such as a relative lack of resources (fiduciary, physical plant, and administrative). These limitations appear to impede the growth of the Department and its ability to reach its potential through a fuller realization of the capacity of its students and faculty. We offered specific recommendations that should improve the situation. Overall, the Committee deemed that the performance of the Department clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

Section 3: Observations

3.1 Mission and goals

The mission of all levels of the program (BA, MA, Ph.D.) is to equip the students with the best up-to-date scientific background that will prepare them to work toward excellence in their subsequent graduate training. The program at Ben Gurion University achieves these goals. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the University clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.2 Management and Administration

The Department of Psychology is the smallest in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Over the three years before 2018-19, there were 40 Bedouin/Arab undergraduate students out of a total of 854. The Department reports having students with an Ethiopian background and ultra-orthodox Jews, but it does not have data on how many. There are no minority faculty but a fairly equal number of males and females at every faculty level. Decisions regarding the allotment of positions among the four tracks are made in the Departmental meetings; they expect to maintain the current allocation of 5 faculty members each in the Social Psychology and Experimental Psychology and Brain and Cognition tracks and 5-7 each in the Clinical Psychology and Developmental Psychology tracks. No mention is made of current faculty recruitment plans. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that Ben Gurion University clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.3 QA & Self-Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation report presented three dimensions of the internal quality assurance (QA) process: (1) in research; (2) in teaching; and (3) in administration. With regard to (1), there appears to be (a) a formal mentorship system where a junior is supported by an appointed senior faculty member; and (b) an overseer from the Department Chair's office, whose responsibility is to monitor faculty's progress with regard to recruiting and supporting graduate students, receiving grants, and publishing results. With regard to (2), there are formal teaching surveys administered through the Rector's Office (Academic Development and Teaching Promotion Unit, ADTP) and the Student Organization. It is the responsibility of the Department Chair to follow up on the survey results to improve instructional activities. With regard to (3), administrative and support staff are overseen by their immediate unit heads. Reports to the CHE are generally overseen by the Rector's Office, specifically, by the Vice Rector and QA Coordinator. For the preparation of this evaluation, these administrators worked directly with the Chair and the related University units (Dean of Students, Registrar, Research & Development Authority,

and BGU's Technology Transfer). The Chair formed a support group that included members of faculty and students. The Department has critically appraised its progress since the 2009 evaluation and reflected on how to fulfil the previous round of recommendations. Of these, the majority have been implemented, especially those recommendations that pertained to specific areas of psychology (Social, Clinical, Developmental, and Cross-cultural). Yet, there are some aspects of the Department's activities that still need to be realized (support for Ph.D. students, the development of library resources, and relationships with alumni). In summary, in this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that Ben Gurion University meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.4 Study program

Overall, both the BA and MA (Clinical, Developmental, Social, and Experimental psychology: cognition and brain) programs are well-structured and the curricula appropriately designed. Students are exposed to a demanding curriculum, much of it in English, and generally up-to-date. Exceptions are the courses on Abnormal Psychology and Advanced fMRI Methods. The texts for these two courses date from 2010 and 2008, respectively; given that the two books in question are in English, there are many more recent volumes available. The course on Close Relationships in Early Childhood also has rather dated material. The course on Psychotherapy focuses solely on interventions in early childhood, and should be appropriately renamed (or modified). In addition, the readings in this course are dated, with no representation of research appearing in the past decade. The evaluation by the previous committee included a recommendation to increase the focus on Social Psychology, in part because of the fascinating location of Ben-Gurion University, "where Bedouin and Jewish populations are more likely to live side-by-side than anywhere else in Israel." In this respect, it is encouraging to note the arrival of some new faculty (offset by the departure of other faculty in this area) and courses on Social Psychobiology and The Jewish-Arab Conflict in the Mirror of Theory & Practice. However, the provision of Social Psychology appears slanted to lab-based social neuroscience and misses an opportunity to address the location's unique value for lab and field studies of intergroup relations. The department appears to be very committed to actively involving students in research (with a course for Active Participation in Research, which is chosen by a significant number of students). Both the BA and MA Courses, and exams, appear to meet the criterion of rigor. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BGU meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.5 Teaching and Learning

Overall, the Department appears to provide a satisfactory teaching environment. Teaching is evaluated by means of biannual standard surveys (comprising conventional evaluative ratings) at the end of each course (a process overseen by the ADTP). These surveys are completed by students and staff, but the rate of

student response is low (40%), and the University should develop some proposals to increase participation (since, if skewed, these evaluations will provide no reliable basis for decisions such as how well material is being taught and which instructors require remedial courses). Currently, instructors in need are provided with additional support to address course ratings that fall below the threshold. Most syllabi are sufficiently detailed and helpful. All course materials include clear Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) – e.g., what a student should be able to *do* after the course. It is not clear whether ILOs are directly assessed in course evaluations – if not, the Committee deems it necessary that they be added. It was not clear to the Committee whether faculty are exploiting the potential of hybrid learning (albeit as a complement to, not replacement for, face-to-face instruction). The ADTP unit does provide up-to-date information on e-learning, but it was not evident that this is being used in the courses under review. The provision of some opportunity for distance learning and more extensive teaching materials on the website may support learning, especially for (a) students with disabilities or other students who might not be able to translate taught material into notes as effectively as typical students; and (b) students actively serving in the military or security forces who have to miss classes for service-related duties. From the material provided, faculty currently provide an effective learning environment. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BGU meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.7 Faculty

In the Psychology Department in 2017-18 there were 854 BA, 71 MA, and 69 Ph.D. students, with 21 faculty members (10 full and 1 associate professor, 8 senior and 2 lecturers); these data provide a sense of the ratio of graduate students to faculty, and it appears to be somewhat high. In addition, the Department utilizes the services of adjunct faculty. By 2021 the Department expects to lose two faculty members: a professor (Social Psychology) and senior lecturer (Social Psychology, specifically social cognition). One new faculty member (social cognition) was hired last year (2018-19). The Department has sought to hire a faculty member in Cultural Psychology who is interested in using the Negev as a laboratory for research, but they have been unable to recruit someone. Once hired, one of the senior faculty is appointed as Faculty Advisor to provide guidance for the new recruit until their tenure. In addition, the Chair holds an annual meeting to present all interested faculty with a detailed description of the standards for promotion among the ranks. The Department has three administrative staff members, a computer technician, and a lab technician. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that Ben Gurion University clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.8 Research

The Psychology Department evidences strong research programs in Cognitive Neuroscience, Clinical Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Social

Psychology. The evaluation report highlights the national and international impact of its faculty research in the areas of neurocognitive processes, social cognition and social-affective neuroscience, face perception, child and adolescent development, stress and health, psychopathology, and psychotherapy research. The Department offers two applied tracks: Clinical and Developmental Psychology and attempts to bridge the science and practice in these applied areas. Interdisciplinary research (e.g., psychological processes in dietary interventions, interdisciplinary research on autistic syndrome disorder, and geo-psychology) is also supported. As a rule, the Department's faculty members are highly active in cutting-edge empirical research, as evidenced by their publications in high-impact and visible journals (e.g., *Cortex*, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *Emotion*) and participating in international conferences. In addition, the faculty have been highly successful in receiving competitive research grants (ISF, BSF, GIF, NIH, ERC). Students are encouraged to participate in innovative research projects, present at conferences, and publish in leading venues. Also, faculty members are encouraged to join and partake in intensive cutting-edge methodological courses and training workshops. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BGU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.9 Students

The student body of the BA program is selective and has reasonably high entry requirements, admitting about 57% of applicants to the program. The admission threshold is a Psychometric score above 650 (no reference to the minimum Matriculation score); 83% of the students attain a degree. The MA program accepts 12% of applicants (w/thesis). Entry requirements to the clinical track are: BA Psychology, average score 87, Mitam 100; all other tracks: BA Psychology, average score 85. The BGU Ph.D. program is also competitive. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that Ben Gurion University exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.10 Research Infrastructure

The Department of Psychology houses 22 active and adequately equipped research labs, including labs in cognitive and cognitive-neuroscience research (computational neuroimaging, visual perception, working memory, numeric cognition, psychobiology), social and cognitive-social psychology (social cognitive and affective neuroscience, social decision making, bio empathy), and developmental research (child development and sleep, autism, developmental ERP). In addition, a number of research centers are sponsored by the Department (e. g., Center for Neuroscience, Decision Making and Economic Psychology, Executive Function). Each faculty member has their own private office; Ph.D. students and postdocs share rooms or lab space. There is a newly established in-house clinic that began

operations in November of 2019 designed to provide state-of-the-science training in all aspects of clinical psychology. The clinic has four state-of-the-art therapy rooms with two video cameras and microphones per room and three offices from which trainees can observe live sessions or conduct videotaped supervision. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BGU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

Section 4: Recommendations

Essential recommendations

- Within the next 12 months the Department must develop a new strategic plan that addresses its goals and objectives for the next five years. This plan should examine issues pertaining to limited financial resources, new hiring of faculty as well as pending faculty retirements, support for Ph.D. students, the development of library resources, relationships with alumni and hybrid learning.
- By the next academic year, develop a mandatory course on scientific writing in English for MA and Ph.D. students.
- By the next academic year, course syllabi to be reviewed to ensure that all are up-to-date.
- By the next academic year, add learning outcomes for each course, and ensure that a uniform template for syllabi is used.
- By the next academic year the texts for the courses on Abnormal Psychology and Advanced fMRI Methods should be updated; the books must be in English from the past 3 years.
- The course material on Close Relationships in Early Childhood must be updated.
- The course on Psychotherapy focuses solely on interventions in early childhood and should be appropriately renamed (or modified). In addition, the readings in this course must be updated and address current research.

Important recommendations

- The Department should continue diversifying teaching methods with the enhancement of a distance learning component in its teaching portfolio.
- Formalize the process of addressing the CHE recommendations (for the Department of Psychology and other departments reviewed by the CHE).
- Develop a set of indicators that allow for the quantitative appraisal of the Department's progress between CHE evaluations (e.g., number of Ph.D., MA/MS, and BA/BS degrees granted, research grant revenues, number of publications and so forth).
- Consideration should be given to increasing the number of faculty or reducing the number of students to achieve a better faculty:student ratio.

Desirable recommendations

- Institute a wider network of contributors to the QA process that samples not only the current but also former faculty and students.

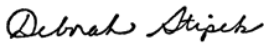
Signed by:



Prof. Elena Grigorenko - Chair



Prof. Miles Hewstone



Prof. Deborah Stipek



Prof. Sigal Alon



Prof. Eva Shehtman Gilboa



Prof. Moshe Zeidner

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



February 2020

Prof. Elena Grigorenko
Department of Psychology
University of Houston & Child Study Center
Yale Medical School
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 **Psychology and Behavioral Sciences** departments. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Em. Prof. Miles Hewstone, Prof. Deborah Stipek, Em. Prof. Moshe Zeidner, Prof. Sigal Alon and Prof. Eva Shectman Gilboa

Ms. Alex Buslovich-Bilik will be the coordinator of the Committee.

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. Alex Buslovich-Bilik, Committee Coordinator