



EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

BAR ILAN UNIVERSITY

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

July 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 of:
 - [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 (Educational Psychology and Human Development), Haifa University, Israel.
 - [Prof. Sigal Alon](#), Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Israel. (sociology)

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

- [Prof. Eva Gilboa-Schechtman²](#), Department of Psychology, Bar Ilan University, Israel.

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
- a. 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.
 - b. This report highlights the **Department of Psychology at Bar Ilan University**

Section 2: **Executive Summary**

Bar Ilan University is an established, high-quality institution of higher education in Israel. Relatedly, the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences is a highly competitive department. It excels in teaching, research, and professional services; it is a highly valued institution by both students and faculty. Yet, the Department experiences the tensions specific to the landscape of higher education in Israel. Specifically, there are unresolved issues related to limited laboratory space and resources, laboratory support personnel, and support for students (especially graduate students). Overall, the Committee deemed the performance of the Department as clearly meeting the expected threshold level of performance.

² Prof. Gilboa did not participate in the evaluation of Bar Ilan University due to a possible conflict of interest

Section 3: Observations

3.1 Mission and goals

The mission of all levels of the program (BA, MA, PhD) is to advance the understanding of psychological processes by cultivating excellent research using state-of-the-art methods and theoretical frameworks. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.2 Management and Administration

The Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences is in the School of Social Sciences. Plans, promotions, curricula, and the routine functioning of the university are discussed and decided in the context of a committee comprised of the 12 heads of the Faculty Departments and Schools. At the Department level, strategic decisions concerning recruitment are discussed by a staff committee comprising all full professors of the Department and the Chair who also serves as a selection committee. Females outnumber males at the lecturer levels, but males dominate at the associate and full professor levels, especially at the associate professor level (20 to 12). There are no Arab, Ultra-Orthodox or Ethiopian faculty, although there are some students from these backgrounds (8%, 5%, and 1%, respectively). In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.3 QA & Self-Evaluation Process

BIU's Quality Assurance (QA) process was developed in response to the CHE's decision to initiate a national QA system. Specifically, the Vice-Rector's office established a QA unit (QAU) that coordinates the annual CHE-triggered processes for various BIU departments to be reviewed. The QAU works closely with the Department Chair, who, in turn, works closely with the Dean and the Department Chair, faculty, and students. The QAU provides the relevant data at the Departmental and/or the University level, and the faculty and students offer their opinions, observations, and local data. These data are collected within the Department by means of: (1) annual reviews of teaching programs; faculty level reviews of new courses; study program evaluations; (2) annual think-tank evaluations reflecting on the past, present, and future of the Department in light of the CHE processes and recommendations; (3) specialized surveys filled out by all lecturers, assistants, and teaching fellows in the Department; and (4) semiannual meetings with student representatives from various degree programs. The 2018 QA process closely followed the generic procedures outlined above. A component of this process reflected the 2007 CHE review

recommendations. It stated that the majority of the curriculum-based recommendations (e.g., re-parameterization of the doctoral program, enhancement and upgrade of clinical programs with evidence-based approaches; strengthening of the in-house clinic) have been met. Yet, there are still outstanding issues related to faculty recruitment and retention, shortage of laboratory space, and support of graduate student; these concerns are present in the 2018 QA as well. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.4 Study program

Overall, both the BA and MA (clinical-adult, clinical-child, clinical-rehabilitation, social-organizational, cognitive and affective neuroscience) programs are well-structured. The curricula are appropriately designed, and students are exposed to a demanding curriculum, much of which is in English. Most curricula are up-to-date, but there are some exceptions (e.g., Face Perception, which includes no publications post-2007). In the last evaluation, the previous Committee recommended an increase in the faculty and a focus on Social Psychology; with the recent recruitment of 3 new faculty, this goal has been met and is reflected in the provision of new courses. The Department appears committed to actively involving students in research. There is an option to take a lab experience course in Year 3 of the BA program which is chosen by quite a large number of students. At the MA level there is an innovative initiative that provides 3 levels of teaching in Research Skills (I & II, and, since 2019-20, III, focused on writing an empirical paper). An impressive 14 graduate student publications occurred in 2017, with the student as first author. Both the BA and MA Courses and exams meet the criterion of rigor. The Department seems to be making every effort to sensitively meet the challenges of educating a small number of students on a necessarily gender segregated campus while maintaining the coverage and quality of the 'mother' program. This includes: a seven-month pre-academic preparatory program for candidates without a matriculation certificate and those who do not meet the admissions criteria for the program; and compression of the degree into 1.5 days/week plus additional summer teaching periods. As far as possible, the Department states that the same courses are taught to, and the same methods used to evaluate the achievements of, students in the "Mahar" study program and the regular program. For understandable reasons, given the small cohort, it has not, however, been possible to offer students in the Mahar program elective courses. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.5 Teaching and Learning

Overall, the Department appears to provide a high-quality teaching environment. Teaching is evaluated by means of biannual standard surveys (comprised of

conventional evaluative ratings with an added qualitative component) at the end of each course. The participation rate for students is, however, not reported and this should be addressed. Instructors who obtain high scores are only considered for awards if the participation rate is at least 50%; the University should develop some proposals to try to ensure this rate since, if skewed, these evaluations will provide no reliable basis for decisions such as how well material is being taught, which instructors require remedial courses, etc. Currently, instructors with ratings that fall below an acceptable threshold are provided with extra support. Most syllabi are sufficiently detailed and helpful, but not all course materials include clear Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) – e.g., what a student should be able to *do* after the course. Specifically, for example, for the Face Perception course, the ILO box is empty; for the Systems Approach to Family Psychotherapy course, the ILO lacks specificity (“the student will gain understanding in different approaches to couples/family therapy”); and for Foundations of Social Psychology, the ILOs are all generic and should apply to *any* course (e.g., students will acquire “study skills”). It is not clear whether ILOs are directly assessed in course evaluations; if not, it is suggested that course-specific, not generic, ILOs be included. Through its Teaching Advancement Centre, BIU uses the Moodle system to make wider lecture-related content available online. Indeed, some courses could be completely online (although it was not clear whether this option has been exploited by the courses under review), while other courses may use a mix of formal lectures plus online teaching. Greater focus is placed on written assignments as students pass from BA (33% in Year 2) to MA, and an appropriate emphasis is placed on feedback, which is provided within 3 weeks on essays. Likewise, there is still a heavy emphasis on ‘Open + MCQ’ exams at the BA level (67%), which is replaced with a greater focus on writing in the MA (only 8% of exam assessment is Open + MCQ). From the material provided, faculty currently provide an effective learning environment. Given the high quality of the current course offerings, consideration could be given to experimenting with more novel instructional designs such as hybrid and distant learning. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.6 Faculty

In 2018, the Department had 403 BA, 177 MA (with thesis), and 115 PhD students. There were 27 tenure-track faculty members, in addition to the Rector (6 full and 8 associate professors, 9 senior and 4 lecturers), and 25 instructors. The previous Committee commented that the Department had an unusually large Ph.D. program. The current self-evaluation reports an acceptable Ph.D. student to faculty ratio of 3.5:1. This year (2020-2021) they expect the retirement of two full professors. The previous 2007 Committee recommended securing funds for new positions. The current report explains, however, that the University does not keep the academic position vacant within the Department

(which would have allowed a replacement for the retired faculty member). Instead, the unfilled position is returned to the Rector to use at his or her discretion. The Department cannot recruit new people unless positions are released by the University to the Department. Of the 8 retirements during a 5-year period (up to 2018), the Department received only 5 new positions. No pending recruitments are mentioned in the report. The 2007 Committee expressed concern over the lack of faculty in core areas of psychology (cognition, cognitive neuroscience, developmental, and social). The current self-evaluation notes that three social psychologists have since been recruited, and that it has strong faculty in developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience. Although newly recruited faculty are assigned a senior faculty member who serves as their mentor, this is only for “the initial steps in the department.” There is no mention of any follow-up mentoring. The Psychology Department has five administrative staff members, a Computer and Electronics Technician, and an electronic technician. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.7 Research

A key mission of the Psychology Department, as expected, is to advance the understanding of psychological processes through the cultivation of outstanding research by faculty and students via state-of-the-art theoretical frameworks, methods, and technologies. Furthermore, the Department strives to successfully integrate clinical and research activities into teaching and training to foster clinicians who practice and develop evidence-based interventions. The faculty in the Department are active in research in the areas of developmental psychology, rehabilitation psychology, abnormal and clinical psychology, psychotherapy research, organizational psychology, and cognitive and affective neuroscience. The specific research projects vary from infant emotional development to the biological correlates of dementia; from emotional disorders to face processing; and from leadership to personal relations and group processes. Overall, the productivity of the faculty members in the Department is impressive. The quality of the publications is consistently high with a median number of publications per year per faculty member in the Department of three articles. Many of which appear in first-tier journals. About a third of the members of the Department have an H-factor index exceeding 25, with an average H-index of Professors at 30. The self-assessment report underscores the point that faculty research output is comparable to the average output of leading departments of psychology in the US, as assessed by the quantity and quality of publications (ranking of journals and citations), competitive grants, and editorial activity. Many faculty members have been successful in obtaining research grants from external sources, having secured close to 13 million dollars in funding from highly competitive granting agencies (e.g., ISF, BSF, GIF) in the past three years.

With respect to international relations, faculty members collaborate with many top scientists in other leading universities across the globe including hosting summer interns from universities abroad and developing an Erasmus student exchange program with King's College London, United Kingdom. Furthermore, the Department is part of a European consortium of five countries (The Netherlands, UK, Italy, Sweden, and Israel) working on the subject of caregiving in the context of illness. The Department supports active student involvement in research and currently has over 100 undergraduate students involved in research. To reward excellent students, the Department allocated 1000 NIS prizes for each research paper published in 2017 in peer-reviewed international journals where the student was the first author. 14 such prizes were offered. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance but believes that the administration will need to provide start-up funds for early career faculty.

3.8 Students

The student body of the BA program is very selective as a result of high entry requirements and a low admission rate (35% of applicants are admitted). The admission threshold is a Matriculation score of 105 and Psychometric score of 640; 85% of the students attain a degree. The MA program accepts 16% of applicants (with thesis). The entry requirements to the MA tracks are as follows—Clinical: B.A Psychology, average score 90, Mitam 110; Rehabilitation: 90, 105; Organizational-Social: 87, 100; Cognitive: 85, na. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.9 Research Infrastructure

According to the self-evaluation report, two major constraints and obstacles serve to impede the development of cutting-edge psychological empirical research. One main limiting factor is reportedly the meager financial support the administration offers for experimental research, research labs, and equipment. The start-up money for new laboratories provided by the university is reported to be modest, thus consequently affecting the Department's ability to attract new faculty and to successfully compete with other leading universities in Israel. Also, there is no tradition at Bar-Ilan University to allocate 'startup' funds for new psychology faculty. A second problem highlighted in the report is the lack of designated lab areas in the Psychology building. This forces faculty members who are based in the Psychology building (about 60% of the Department) to conduct their experimental research either in office rooms or outside the university (clinics, hospitals, worksites, research centers off-campus). The Psychology building was planned and constructed without lab space, and 12 labs and offices were built in the Brain Science building. This is reported to interfere with the Department's autonomy regarding lab space

allocation in the Brain Research Center. The research equipment used by faculty members is purchased via external grant funding, and there is little investment by the University in equipment, including shareable equipment. Finally, many psychology labs with equipment do not enjoy the personnel support that is rather standard in the life sciences. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that BIU is below the expected threshold level of performance. There is room for improvement in lab space and in the administration's financial support for faculty cutting-edge research.

Section 4: Recommendations

Essential recommendations:

- Over the next five years, the University administration needs to find space to house designated labs for psychological research, preferably in the Psychology building or nearby. Also, personnel should be funded for active labs; the Committee recommends a minimum of one funded lab assistant per lab, with additional lab personnel funded conditional to high research productivity, securing of external grants, and available funding.
- By the next academic year, add learning outcomes for each course, making sure that a uniform template for syllabi is used.

Important recommendations

- Develop an official mentoring program for faculty in which a senior faculty member is assigned a new faculty member until the person achieves the rank of associate professor.
- Provide start-up funds for early career core faculty to ensure their continued productivity (at level approaching or comparable to that provided in the life sciences).
- Develop a system for supporting graduate students financially.
- The Department should continue diversifying teaching methods, with the enhancement of a distance learning component in its teaching portfolio.
- Consider experimenting with more novel instructional designs for courses offered such as hybrid and distant learning.


Desirable recommendations

- Institute a broader network of respondents surveyed in the QA processes that samples not only current but also former faculty and students.
- Develop a set of indicators that allows for the quantitative appraisal of the Department's progress in between the CHE evaluations (e.g., number of PhD, MA/MS, and BA/BS degrees granted, research grant revenues, number of publications, and so forth).

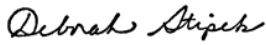
Signed by:



Prof. Elena Grigorenko - Chair



Prof. Miles Hewstone



Prof. Deborah Stipek



Prof. Sigal Alon



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