

9 October 2023

To: THE COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENTS IN ISRAEL

Committee Chair and distinguished members of the committee,

We would like to thank you and the committee members for the in-depth assessment of our department. We were delighted to host you for a whole day of panels and evaluations and were pleased to learn that you found our department functioning well and fulfilling its tasks. We have read the evaluation report carefully and noted the comments that require further action. Following is a point-by-point response to the issues raised in the report.

Sincerely,

Professor Pini Ifergan

Chair of the Department

| | Essential recommendations | Our Comments |
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| 1 | Continue to ensure frank and regular communication between the senior management and the Department and empower the Department to determine the specific ways in which it will implement University-wide recommendations and mandates. | The Department always takes care to maintain a good working relationship with the management to ensure that the Department's needs and interests are met. |
| 2 | Ensure that the Bioethics programme remains adequately staffed so that BIU can continue to offer this valuable training to the Israeli medical community. | We are currently in the process of recruiting a new senior faculty member to replace Prof. Noam Zohar who plans to retire at the end of the year. He or she will join the bio-ethics program in 2024. Moreover, we are planning to allocate resources to increase the number of students in the program. |
| 3 | Keep the department from falling below the current number of FTE. | We are focusing our efforts and resources on recruiting students who have already enrolled in Bar Ilan, and we offer them the chance to take philosophy as second major, or as their minor. By doing that we |

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| | | believe we shall be able to improve the FTE number. |
| 4 | Ensure that retiring and departing faculty (such as Noam Zohar) are replaced without delay. | As mentioned above, we are in the midst of a process of recruiting a new faculty member to replace Noam Zohar. |
| 5 | Continue to conduct all faculty searches using international best practices. | We will continue to conduct open and competitive faculty searches to ensure we recruit the best faculty possible. We will also consider adopting some of the APA's best practices that may help to improve our procedures: https://www.apaonline.org/page/hiring_best_practice |
| 6 | Ensure that the university notes and supports the Department's commitment to gender parity and its importance to this commitment in future hires. | In the new recruiting process, we took very seriously the need to improve gender parity in the department. Moreover, we added a new post-doc position held by a woman, Dr. Aviv Reiter, who will also teach two semestrial courses. |
| 7 | Allow faculty to discharge their teaching mandatory teaching hours in appropriately flexible ways. | We allow it for tutorials to some extent, meeting once a month with a flexible schedule and zoom. The University has just adopted a decision that all ERC grant winners will receive significant reductions of teaching duties, and ERC grant submitters will receive reductions for the semester when they prepare it. Perhaps in the future such reductions or TA help can be offered also for other competitive research grants. |
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| | Important recommendations | |
| 1 | Encourage and support the Department's efforts to reach prospective students in professional sectors, by articulating and publicising the ways in which the skills | We note that on our website. We plan in the future to create a short promotional video. We are |

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| | acquired through philosophical training are useful both within and beyond the academy. | improving our presence in social media together with Bar-Ilan's marketing department. We will emphasize the added value of a philosophy degree to the professions. |
| 2 | Look creatively for opportunities to provide support for a Teaching Assistant programme, which would simultaneously benefit faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. | If our efforts to increase the student number in the faculty will be successful, we believe that we will have more opportunities to offer T.A. positions. But we are already thinking about starting an initiative to offer some of our graduate students the possibility of taking a partial role in the teaching and research activities in the department. |
| 3 | Investigate creative ways to expand coverage, including reciprocal arrangements with other Israeli institutions to allow BIU students to take courses at these other institutions for credit, and perhaps vice versa. | It is already the practice that students can take courses in other universities. We are encouraging our faculty members to initiate joint courses with other universities and so enrich the program for our students. |
| 4 | Continue to explore opportunities for joint BA and/or MA programmes. | We used to have a joint program for B.A. mainly with other Humanities departments. Now we have a joint program with the psychology department, with the law faculty, and with departments from the natural sciences, such as the chemistry department and the faculty of life sciences. We have a successful M.A. program with the law faculty, and we hope to develop a new M.A. program with the brain and cognitive sciences program. |
| 5 | Investigate the possibility of introducing some new cross-disciplinary degree or program that makes sense given the current and projected strengths of the Department and other cognate areas. | We are part of the new Humanities and Sustainability program launched last year and we are |

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| | | continually looking for interdisciplinary programs. |
| 6 | Focus concerted attention on creating a community – both intellectual and co-curricular – among cohorts of students within the Philosophy program, providing the encouragement, infrastructure, and resources to enable students to self-assemble in various formal and informal configurations during their years of study. | We are planning to organize a midterm get-together in addition to the one at the end of the year. We are thinking of creating new informal interactions between faculty and students. Another idea that we are planning to implement is to rethink our tutorials as mentoring programs, where we, the faculty, take time to talk with our students about their studies more generally over refreshment |
| 7 | Extend the completion period for the research-track MA to three years. | We think this is a promising idea and we will implement it. |
| 8 | Do more to prepare students for the (non-academic) job market by establishing mechanisms at the University- or Faculty-level to offer information and assistance to students regarding, e.g., relevant job opportunities and how to compose CVs and cover letters that emphasise the work-relevant skills such as close reading, analytical thought, effective communication that they have acquired through their academic training. | We find the idea a valuable suggestion. There are a couple of university initiatives that are relevant, and we encourage our students to join them. Two such initiatives are: one, “From Academy to Workplace,” and the other is a program of courses in cooperation with high tech companies that are interested in graduates from the humanities, with special skills in analysis and close reading, acquired in philosophy. |
| 9 | Provide resources to employ a student assistant on an hourly basis to assist the Department secretary. | We have already allocated a small budget to hire a student to help the department secretary. The funding came from a combined source that includes the humanities faculty and the research grants held by the department’s faculty members. |
| 10 | Add greater diversity to course syllabi. | We have already implemented this suggestion by recruiting a post-doc that will enrich the departmental syllabus. We also intend to |

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| | | strengthen the cooperation with other humanities departments, such as history, comparative literature, and the music departments to offer our students a more diverse program. |
| 1 1 | Ensure that the University commits to a timetable for changes to the physical infrastructure of the Department. | In our continued dialog with the Humanities Faculty management we hope to convince them of the need to upgrade and improve the classrooms in the department and equip them with updated multimedia equipment. |
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| | Desirable recommendations | |
| 1 | Secure contact information for the department's alumni and invite them to participate in the university in an ongoing way, e.g., public seminars and social gatherings. | We have started creating a database which includes all our alumni from the 2010s and we plan to offer them at least one or two activities each year. The database will also help us to invite the alumni to the program's public activities such as conferences and research seminars. |
| 2 | Recruit a specialist in Medieval Islamic Philosophy. | Prof. Yehuda Halper from Jewish Philosophy covers this field. Hence, we think that when we get another faculty member position it should be used for other subdisciplines in philosophy. We already recommend our students to participate in Prof. Halper's courses, especially those interested in medieval philosophy. |
| 3 | Coordinate with other Departments in Israel to share the cost of international visitors. | We will encourage our faculty members to invite visiting scholars from abroad according to the interests of the Israeli philosophical community as a whole. |