



EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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

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.

This report highlights the **Department of Psychology** at The Open University.

Section 2: Executive Summary

The Open University of Israel (OUI) is unique among other institutions of higher education in Israel due to two distinct features: open admission to all undergraduate students and its distance learning instruction. The self-evaluation report presents information on the undergraduate degree (BA) in psychology and the advanced study program (MA) in social psychology. According to the self-evaluation report, the psychology program mostly achieves its mission and goals. The Committee generally agrees with this appraisal; it deemed the performance of the Department as clearly meeting an acceptable threshold of performance.

Section 3: Observations

3.1 Mission and goals

The mission of OUI is to facilitate access to university level education for all interested individuals. In recent years, there were around 500 freshmen enrolled in

the four BA tracks (Psychology-Single disciplinary; Psychology-Single disciplinary with a division of studies in an additional field; Psychology and an additional field-Dual disciplinary; Social Sciences with an emphasis on Behavioral Sciences) and about 10 students enrolled in the MA track in Social Psychology. There are no admission criteria at the undergraduate level. Yet, there seems to have been a decline in the number of applicants in recent years, likely due to the emergence of the colleges, which also offer “open admission.” In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.2 Management and Administration

OUI offers distance learning programs and offers open admission to all undergraduate students. The psychology program is part of the Department of Education and Psychology.

The Department Chair, together with other senior faculty members, initiates the development of new courses or updates existing ones. Proposals for these courses are reviewed by internal and external reviewers, then they undergo an approval process by the Education and Psychology Senate Subcommittee. The senior faculty constitute the academic leadership, initiating and managing study programs and developing and updating course materials. In the 2017 academic year, 47% of senior faculty members and 54% of course coordinators and tutors at the OUI were women. In the Department of Education and Psychology, 8% of the students were Ultra-orthodox and 4% were Arabic speaking. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that The Open University clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.2 QA & Self-Evaluation Process

OUI has two major types of quality assurance (QA). The first type reflects its ongoing efforts to improve study materials and teaching methods. This type of QA involves both internal and external (other Israeli institutions) evaluators; regular end-of-semester student feedback; and various committee activities. The second type of QA is driven by the CHE. This type of QA is directed by the Coordinator of Self-Evaluation (CSE) and performed by the Department’s team. The role of the CSE is to guarantee access to university-level data and to advise the team on the process. The team contributed to writing the report, interpreted the university-level data, and solicited new data collection within the Department. This process was followed closely for the 2018 evaluation, but there is no regular quality assurance process. With regard to implementing the 2008 CHE review recommendations, OUI has presented the Committee with mixed outcomes; some recommendations were introduced successfully (e.g., the increase in the number of senior faculty; enhancing research capabilities in the program; strengthening the employer-employee connection between faculty and the university, which promotes personnel retention and mutual commitment; strengthening the sense of community and shared goals;

appreciation and promotion of most talented undergraduate students). Yet, there are some continuous concerns that remain from the 2009 report in the current document (e.g., relationships with alumni; career development opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students; research productivity of the faculty). In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI meets the acceptable threshold level of performance, but there is room for improvement.

3.4 Study program

The OUI provides both BA and MA (Social Psychology) programs. The BA curriculum is suitably broad and demanding and appears to be up-to-date. This evaluation should, however, be considered provisional because many of the course syllabi available do *not* include course readings but refer to the course website (not provided, hence the committee could not verify the details). This evaluation must also be qualified by the OUI's focus on Hebrew- vs English-language sources, meaning that more recent material is not covered. There are, however, distinct challenges faced at OUI regarding the provision of materials in English. The self-evaluation document reports that, "OUI is dedicated to the creation of high-level study materials in Hebrew," and this is the language of the study material of most of their introductory and intermediate courses. The report notes too that the transition from Hebrew textbooks to original English sources is "challenging for students;" a challenge made all the more daunting for students with a "relatively weak educational background" (whose acceptance is a key component of the OUI's open admission policy). The MA program in Social Psychology is described as "distinct in its breadth and specialization," which is true. The course materials are current and detailed, with all the required reading in English, and the course on Facilitating Social Change is notably innovative. There is, however, neither a course book nor readings provided for Advanced Statistics 1 & 2 courses. One of the goals of the Department is to teach students "to conduct rigorous and ethical scientific research." This goal is met both through appropriate courses, and by having students participate in research (3 hours) as a requirement before enrolling in advanced courses. Top students (100 in the last 3 years) avail themselves of the opportunity to take an advanced seminar with a senior researcher focused on learning how to conduct empirical research. Both the BA and MA Courses, and exams, meet the criterion of rigor. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.5 Teaching and Learning

Overall, the Department appears to provide a satisfactory teaching environment. Every course is evaluated at the end of the semester in which it was taught by means of a standard online questionnaire. The results are analyzed by OUI's evaluation unit which submits the results to the Dean of Academic Studies and to the academic departments. The Committee could not find any details on the participation rate for these surveys. This is an important point to clarify, 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. Most

syllabi are sufficiently detailed and helpful, and course materials include clear “Objectives” paragraphs. Some of the syllabi are, however, outdated. For example, the course on developmental psychology (10943) uses an outdated textbook and old articles focused on two theories – one which is outdated and another which has been eclipsed by five decades of more recent theory and research. The psychopathology course uses a 1998 textbook with little additional recent material. CHE values instructors stating the “Intended Learning Outcomes” (ILOs) – e.g., what a student should be able to *do*, and not simply *know*, after the course – which goes beyond simply providing a course outline. It is not clear whether ILOs are directly assessed in course evaluations – if not, they need to be added. As one would expect, OUI widely adopts distance learning and states that it invests resources in the provision of materials for independent learning that is augmented by teaching technologies described as “innovative” and “versatile.” This has “led to the development of advanced technological methods of teaching, and an emphasis on student support.” OUI also allocates resources to overcoming the difficulties inherent in distance learning, a resource that itself should be exploited by traditional universities and colleges as they increasingly adopt such methods. However, the Committee could not find further details within the self-evaluation document on these issues. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.6 Faculty

By 2017-18 the number of senior faculty members specializing in psychology had grown from 4 to 9 since the previous evaluation. Altogether, the academic staff includes one full professor, 4 associate professors, 4 senior lecturers, 25 course coordinators, and approximately 100 tutors. Five of the 9 faculty are social psychologists; in addition, 2 faculty members study attention, 1 is a neuropsychologist, and 1 is an organizational psychologist. Overall, this leaves the small faculty quite seriously lopsided. Moreover, there are no developmental or clinical psychologists on the faculty. This is a serious omission that raises questions about whether the core areas of psychology can be adequately covered (see section 3.5) or not. The syllabi for the BA developmental and clinical courses, which are clearly outdated (perhaps reflecting the consequences of a lack of specialist faculty in these areas), provide evidence for the need for specialized and up-to-date faculty. Instructors for many of the core psychology courses (including the honors research seminar) only have MA degrees. During 2016-17, 2570 students were in the BA program which was defined as (1) enrolling in at least one course in the BA program; (2) completing the courses, Introduction to Psychology and Introduction to Statistics for Students of Social Sciences I; and (3) completing at least two additional psychology courses. There were 28 students in the MA program (defined as enrolling in at least one course of the social psychology MA program during the academic year). New faculty members receive specific instructions regarding all OUI policies and procedures during an orientation day and each new faculty member is assigned an experienced faculty member to serve as a mentor who should provide advice concerning departmental

policies. The Department has an Assistant for Academic Affairs, a Coordinator of Student Inquiries, and three administrative assistants. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the Open University does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.7 Research

The psychology program offered by the OUI is part of the university's Department of Education & Psychology. The psychology program grants single-disciplinary and dual-disciplinary undergraduate degrees, as well as an MA in social psychology. The Department's mission, as it appears in the QA self-evaluation report, is to foster students' critical thinking and learning skills as well as to present students with the scientific, historical, social, and philosophical background of the disciplines of education and psychology. Furthermore, a major goal of the program is to help students pursue advanced research degrees by teaching them how to conduct rigorous and ethical scientific research. Moreover, the self-report states that the OUI is dedicated to the creation of high-level study materials in Hebrew and the introduction of versatile learning technologies. The Department does not consider the generation of basic or applied research among its major objectives. Instead, its primary goals are to promote the dissemination of scientific knowledge by developing appropriate learning materials that serve the entire educational and psychological community. The Department has nine senior faculty members, whose research spans a wide spectrum of topics in, especially, social (e.g., underlying political judgment and behavior, inter and intra group conflict) psychology and also in cognitive psychology (e.g., meta-memory judgments, visual attention and memory, word retrieval). A handful of faculty have received competitive grants over the past few years (mainly ISF), but the majority of faculty are supported by intramural grants. Although faculty productivity is modest, a number of faculty have published in visible journals (e.g., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Experimental Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin). Undergraduate psychology students are required to participate in three hours of lab-based research. Outstanding psychology students may take an annual seminar in which they learn to conduct empirical research under the guidance of a senior researcher. The OUI is an active member in many international forums such as the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), and the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN). OUI faculty members are frequently invited to present in the annual conferences of these forums, and they participate in faculty exchanges in the framework of ERASMUS+. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.8 Students

The OUI has an open admission policy at the undergraduate level. Historical data indicate that about half of the BA students graduate within 10 years. At the MA level, the MA steering committee determines admission criteria based on GPA, MITAM scores, recommendation letters, and a structured interview. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.9 Research Infrastructure

The department runs two research labs, one with an internal participant pool of students who receive academic credit and another in which the participant receives pay for participation (in collaboration with the OUI management and economics department). These labs also allow students to run their own research projects. The OUI provides annual funding to cover the ongoing expenses of behavioral labs (i.e., payment to participants and research assistants), to help course coordinators conduct research without external funding, and to help them present this research at overseas conferences. The OUI provided over 350,000 NIS toward the research of 10 course coordinators in the Psychology Department over the past 3 years. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that OUI meets the expected threshold level of performance.

Section 4: Recommendations

Essential recommendations:

- One faculty member in clinical and one in developmental psychology must be hired within two years.
- In the next academic year, all courses must include readings with at least a third of the core texts in English.
- By the next academic year, the syllabi in developmental and clinical psychology need to be updated and revised to provide a more balanced and representative view of the various topics central to those fields.
- Within the next 3-5 years, all instructors delivering psychology courses should have PhD.

Important recommendations

Specific traceable QA indicators should be developed and reported annually so that the progress of the Department can be followed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Desirable recommendations

The groups of stakeholders participating in the different types of QA need to be described and explicitly targeted. For example, the self-evaluation document does not include the alumni; surveying the alumni might add valuable information on the current status and future directions of the development for the Department.

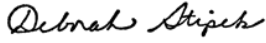
Signed by:



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