EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

RUPPIN ACADEMIC CENTER

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

July 2020

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[1]:

- **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.
- **Prof. Sigal Alon**, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Israel. (sociology)
- **Prof. Eva Gilboa-Schechtman,** Department of Psychology, Bar Ilan University, Israel.

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[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 Behavioral Sciences** at **Ruppin Academic Center**.

Section 2: Executive Summary

Ruppin Academic Center (RAC) holds a special place among higher-education institutions in Israel by offering accessible academic and nonacademic programs to a large contingent of Israeli youth. Yet, although the accessibility of RAC has been noted as an important goal, the Committee recommends that RAC administration and faculty attempt to raise the standards of admission and education while maintaining and promoting diversity and societal engagement. Given the current accomplishments of RAC, it appears that reaching such elevated standards will be both desirable and achievable. Overall, the Committee deemed the performance of the Department as meeting the acceptable threshold level of performance.

Section 3: Observations

3.1 Mission and goals

The key mission of both levels of the program, bachelor's (BA) and master's (MA), is to provide students with a firm understanding of fundamental concepts

and theories in behavioral sciences (Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology). There are also non-academic goals, to: generate social awareness and commitment to the betterment of society; and develop ethical conduct and proficiency in applied practical skills. In terms of its academic goals, the program meets the acceptable threshold level of performance. The achievement of the nonacademic goals cannot be determined by this Committee.

3.2   Management and Administration

RAC is among Israel's largest public colleges. The college offers a bachelor's (BA) degree in the Behavioral Sciences Department (BSD) and a master's degree (MA) in the Clinical Psychology Program (CPP); both are situated in the School of Social and Community Sciences. BSD plans to recruit a faculty member who specializes in quantitative sociology and anthropology. In their report, they do not indicate any planned recruitments in psychology during 2018-21. Regarding diversity, there are more women than men at each level of faculty. Among the BSD teaching staff, there is one Israeli-Arab teacher (adjunct faculty) and one Israeli-Arab teaching assistant. There are none in the CPP. There are no ultra-orthodox Jews applying to the BSD and only one a year in the CPP. About 10% of the 2018 first-year BSD students are Israeli-Arab students, and 11 students are of Ethiopian descent in the BSD; one of the latter students is a member of the honors program. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.2   QA & Self-Evaluation Process

The RAC does not report having a formalized self-evaluation process outside of/in addition to that dictated by the CHE. CHE-triggered evaluations are typically handled by the Academic Secretariat. The Secretariat stimulates and oversees the initiation, crystallization, submission, and response to CHE-based evaluations. With regard to the 2018 evaluation and in response to the CHE's request, the College management established a School of Social & Community Sciences (SSCS) steering committee. The steering committee collected the information and formed work teams that were charged with creating the first draft of the report. This first draft was edited by the members of the steering committee and sent to the faculty members for review. This review culminated in a three-hour faculty feedback meeting, after which the steering committee revised the report to incorporate the faculty comments and finalized it. The Department uses a structured and streamlined method for quality assurance using course evaluations, feedback to lecturers, and assistance to lecturers needing further guidance to improve their courses. No information regarding the evaluation of or mentorship for young faculty was provided. BSD has

systematically attempted to implement the CHE Committee's recommendations formulated after the 2008 review. Some of these recommendations (e.g., the increase in the number of core faculty providing the majority of teaching in the Department) have been met, whereas others (e.g., the creation of cohesive multidisciplinary courses for undergraduate students) have not. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.4   Study program

Overall, the programs for both the Behavioral Science (BA) and Clinical Psychology (MA) degrees are well-structured, and the curricula are appropriately designed. There are, however, some instances in the BA program where the syllabi included outdated material. For example, the Social Psychology uses a 2012 textbook which is a Hebrew translation of a US text. One can understand that instructors are hamstrung by the lack of a more recent text in Hebrew; however, a more recent picture of the field could be provided by adding current reviews to the reading list (e.g., the short pieces available in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*). In addition, most of the readings in sociology are in Hebrew and outdated. The Department appears very committed to actively involving students in research and including a number of innovative arrangements, such as an annual student conference, at which students present results of their own research projects. Both the BA program and exams used in courses meet the criterion of rigor. The Behavioral Science program draws on the 3 disciplines of psychology, sociology and anthropology, each with its distinct theoretical and empirical approaches. There is, however, no evidence of an attempt to provide students with an integration of approaches. **With respect to the BA program, the Committee determined that RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.** In general, the MA program appears to be well-structured. However, the MA curriculum appears to be heavily invested in the teaching and learning of psychodynamic approaches. This includes courses on Dreams and Implicit Memory and Lacanian theory. Unfortunately, these courses come at the expense of the study of empirically supported (dynamic, as well as non-dynamic) treatment approaches and an in-depth study of maintenance mechanisms in psychological disorders. **With respect to the Clinical MA program, the Committee determined that RAC is below 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 standard surveys (comprising conventional evaluative ratings and some qualitative assessment) at the end of each course (a process overseen by the Improving Teaching Quality Unit). Instructors who have

ratings that fall below the threshold are provided with additional support. 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, they need be added. Faculty appear to provide students with extensive feedback on written assignments, but 90% of exams are still assessed by MCQs. It was not clear to the Committee whether faculty are exploiting the potential of interactive learning (albeit as a complement to, not replacement for, face-to-face instruction). Experimenting with novel methods of teaching could simultaneously meet social and pedagogical goals. The provision of some opportunity for distance learning and more extensive teaching materials on the website may support learning especially for: (a) students with disability or other students who might not be able to translate taught material into notes as effectively as non-disabled students; and (b) students actively serving in the Israeli army or security forces who have to miss classes for other duties. Despite high teaching loads, faculty currently provide an effective learning environment. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3. 6   Faculty

The previous (2007) evaluation requested that "clear decisions and guidelines about promotion and tenure" be made. The current report explains that the institutional guidelines about promotion are detailed in a file accessible on the Ruppin portal, but they also state in their "implementation and follow-up" that, "The status of "tenure" is not clear." There is no explanation for this statement. They explain that all faculty members receive explanations about promotion criteria when they are appointed, but they provide no additional information on mentoring or ongoing support. In 2017-18 there were 15 faculty members (6 in sociology and anthropology and 9 in psychology) for 358 BA students and 50 MA students. Given the number of retirements and only one faculty recruitment, it is not clear that the remaining faculty is sufficient to meet the needs of students effectively. Moreover, upon Ada Zohar's retirement, there will be no full professors, and only four associate professors. There is also no social or developmental psychologist on the faculty. They have had or expect three retirements, including one full professor and two senior lecturers. The BSD is currently recruiting a faculty member, but there is no mention of recruitment in psychology to replace their two retirements. The 2007 evaluation advised reducing the proportion of courses taught by adjunct teachers. In response, BSD has increased the percentage of courses taught by full faculty from 52% to 70%. They also recruited a new faculty member in a core area of psychology (a child psychologist), as advised, but the appointment is at the level of lecturer.

Additionally, they have not made notable progress on providing laboratory facilities or sabbaticals for faculty. Four of the faculty received small research grants from 2015-2018. Most of the faculty have a modest record of publishing research. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the RAC is below the acceptable threshold level of performance; there is a lot of room for improvement.

3.7   Research

The self-evaluation report submitted by RAC to the CHE in 2018 states that one of the major aims of the college is to "produce cutting edge international and national research projects." Faculty research focuses on immigration and minorities, political sociology, medical anthropology, cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, decision making, personality and individual differences, abnormal psychology, and health psychology. Researchers in the clinical track are also active in lifespan and psycho-social-cultural research as well as psycho-therapeutic and psycho-diagnostic studies that highlight evidence-based interventions and diagnostic tools. Faculty research is aimed at advancing basic as well as applied research, particularly scientific findings that may serve to inform decision makers in the field. The RAC report notes that faculty research has increased significantly over the past few years, as indicated by the increased number of publications in peer-reviewed journals and external and internal research grants awarded. Inspection of faculty research output suggests, however, that with one or two exceptions, research productivity and quality are still quite modest. Most of the articles published by faculty have been in second or third tier journals, and only a handful of external grants (one ISF) have been received by faculty over the past few years. RAC is in the process of adopting an internationalization strategy including international collaboration in research and conferences. These plans are in the initial stages of implementation. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance with room for improvement in the quality of research output both in terms of published articles and competitive grants.

3.8   Students

The BA program's (Behavioral Sciences Department) admission rate is high (81%), yet, the majority of admitted students do not reach the stated entry requirements of the program (Matriculation score: 100 or Psychometric score: 585). The share of admitted students who are on probation is about 6%, which does not explain why so many other admitted students are below the CHE approved entry thresholds. Given the low academic level of the student body and its heterogeneous prior academic preparation, the Committee finds the relatively high graduation rate (82%) surprising. The MA program (Clinical

Psychology, without thesis) accepts 12% of applicants (entry requirements clinical track: BA Psychology, average score 88; and Mitam 100). The Committee recommends that RAC raise the admission and academic standards of the BA program and uphold the CHE approved entry thresholds. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the RAC's BA program is below the acceptable level of performance and needs much improvement. With regard to RAC's MA program, it meets the acceptable level of performance with room for improvement.

3.9   Research Infrastructure

RAC provides three laboratories (Personality, Health and Psychopathology; Judgement and Decision Making; and Linguistic Cognition) and one research center (mental pain and suicide studies) that support faculty and student research. Specialized equipment includes E-prime software, HRV biofeedback software and equipment, and eye tracking and acoustic analysis software and equipment. Two of the four research units make use of specialized equipment. All full-time faculty members, and some part-time faculty, have their own separate offices. Part-time faculty and adjunct instructors share office space when they are on campus. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that RAC meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

Section 4: Recommendations

Essential recommendations:
- By the next academic year, the Department must update course readings based on current research and add English readings to each course.
- In the next two years, the Department must design cohesive multidisciplinary courses that combine approaches in psychology, sociology and anthropology for undergraduate students
- The Committee recommends that, within two years, at least two new faculty are hired, preferably at least one full professor and one associate professor in developmental and social psychology.
- Given the high faculty to student ratio, searches for all of the current and expected post faculty retirement openings must be conducted within a year of their retirement.
- In the next academic year, learning outcomes should be added for each course using a uniform template for all syllabi.
- The Committee recommends raising the admission and academic standards of the BA program.
- In the next two years, the Department must restructure the MA program in Clinical Psychology to reflect the current empirical understanding of

psychopathology and include a greater emphasis on empirically supported assessments and intervention.

Important recommendations

- The Department should continue diversifying teaching methods with the enhancement of distance and hybrid learning component in its teaching portfolio.
- It is recommended that the College administration systematically survey all Department stakeholders, including adjunct faculty and alumni, for their opinions and contributions to various College policies and practices.
- RAC needs to develop a structured internal QA process that can be administered
- Faculty need to aim to publish their work in high-impact and visible journals and avoid sacrificing quality for quantity.
- RAC needs to increase support for faculty active in research by doing the following: reducing course loads by 4 hours/semester per annum; and providing seed funding of at least $5000 per annum for two faculty members each year, after the faculty member demonstrates the capacity to engage in high-quality research such as by publishing a paper in a Q1 journal or having a competitive external grant (e.g. ISF) rated highly.

Desirable recommendations

- The Department should continue working with their alumni to enhance all aspects of its relationships with former students.
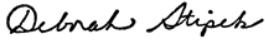
Signed by:

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Prof. Elena Grigorenko - Chair

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Prof. Miles Hewstone

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Prof. Deborah Stipek

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Prof. Sigal Alon

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Prof. Eva Shehtman Gilboa

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Prof. Moshe Zeidner

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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