



EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

TEL AVIV 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](#), Haifa University, Israel (Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Human Development)
 - [Prof. Sigal Alon](#)², Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Israel. (sociology)

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

² Prof. Alon did not participate in the evaluation of the Department at Tel Aviv University due to a possible conflict of interest

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

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 highlights with the **Department of Psychology at Tel Aviv University**

Section 2: **Executive Summary**

Tel Aviv University (TAU) is a large competitive institution and one of the premier universities of Israel. For both faculty and students, the School of Psychological Sciences (SPS) is one of the most attractive places to work and study within TAU. The SPS Self-Evaluation report presented a profile that consists of both strengths and weaknesses and details the achievements and shortcomings of SPS's development within the last decade. Based on this Self-Evaluation and the related discussions, the Committee deemed the performance of the School as clearly meeting the acceptable threshold level of performance.

Section 3: Observations

3.1 Mission and goals

The mission of all levels of the program (BA, MA, PhD) is to provide excellent education in the psychological sciences and to produce excellent research. The program appears to function in accordance with these goals. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.2 Management and Administration

The School of Psychological Sciences is located in the Gershon H. Gordon Faculty of Social Sciences. The self-assessment explains that the funding, size of student body relative to faculty size, and laboratory space are under constant negotiation between the SPS and the University authorities, but a strategic plan on the funding formula in psychology has been devised and hiring recommendations have already been partly met. The gender balance for faculty varies by rank. Senior lecturers and full professors are fairly evenly split between males and females; all five associate professors are male. No faculty are identified as minority. With regard to student diversity, the report explains that, "Data about the ethnic/socio-cultural backgrounds of our students is not available, but our impression is that diversity goal is being achieved." In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.2 QA & Self-Evaluation Process

The present self-evaluation was compiled by the Head of the School who was assisted by an additional member of the core faculty. Faculty members and administrative staff in the School of Psychological Sciences contributed to the process by supplying the requested relevant information. It appears that the Dean of the School was the only person to review and approve the final draft of the report. With respect to the teaching component of QA, TAU appears to function within a structured and streamlined system. Teacher evaluations (for lectures, seminars, and practice sessions) are submitted at the end of each semester. Young faculty members use mid-semester evaluations to track their teaching. Teachers receive a summary of students' feedback in a timely manner. Assistance is provided for teachers who consistently receive low evaluation-scores, and recognition (in the form of prizes and public acknowledgment) is given to outstanding teachers. In addition to quantitative reviews, heads of academic units (presumably, of MA program tracks) have regular meetings with students in their track for feedback and discussion. Following these meetings, the head of the unit seeks to address the issues deemed relevant and submits a detailed report describing the problems and their resolution to the dean. However, no systematic procedure for the evaluation of the appropriateness and

comprehensiveness of the BA and MA curriculum is described, and no procedure of coordination between core and adjunct faculty, especially in the clinical programs, is mentioned. The evaluation process allows for continuity between the recommendation issued during the CHE'08 review and the current review. The Committee deemed the curriculum changes adequately implemented by the SPS at both undergraduate and graduate level programs. Yet, there are lingering concerns related, first and foremost, to the strategic planning regarding the School's development and issues related to faculty recruitment and retention, as well as research infrastructure and office and laboratory space. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the TAU clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.

3.4 Study program

Overall, both the BA and the 5 MA programs are well-structured, and the curricula appropriately designed, thus offering a suitable range of courses at the introductory and upper levels. In the BA program, students are exposed to a standard curriculum, much of it in English, and generally up-to-date (an exception is the course on Cognitive Psychology, which is rather dated, with no assigned readings later than 2005). Courses appear to differ widely, however, in their level of difficulty and engagement. Some courses simply use one textbook and assign chapters for specific classes; for others, the assigned reading consists entirely of journal articles, and some of them quite demanding. 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 large number of students). Both the BA and MA Programs and exams appear to meet the criterion of rigor. In the MA program, there is, again, a wide range in the quality of the courses. At one end, Intergroup Relations and Processes spans a variety of approaches and topics, is up-to-date, does not simply reflect the standard US canon in terms of topics and studies, and appears to be a perfect course on this topic for students in Israel. On the other end, the course on Becoming a Clinical Psychologist provides no information on the weekly assignments while the course on Selected Issues in Social Psychology has an idiosyncratic and, the Committee would argue, unsuitable syllabus ("This course will present selective topics which are currently researched by the lecturer"). It is evident that at TAU students are actively involved in research. They serve (15 hrs) as research participants in their first year and take a compulsory research-based seminar in their 3rd year, which provides instruction on how to plan and carry out a research study, analyze the data, and write a research report. Further opportunities are provided for students to engage in a research workshop and to become involved in research in a faculty member's lab (for 6 course credits). No data are provided, however, on how many students avail themselves of this latter opportunity. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.5 Teaching and Learning

Overall, the Department appears to provide a satisfactory teaching environment. Teaching is assessed by means of standard online surveys, processed by the university's 'Center for the Advancement of Teaching', and address 6 forms of teaching: lectures, tutorials, practice lessons, seminars, labs and studio work/workshops. Although there may be benefits to having these differentiated ratings, rating all forms of teaching sounds like an onerous task for students, and the Committee wondered what impact, if any, that may have on the participation rate, which is not reported in the self-evaluation document. This is important since, if skewed, these evaluations will provide no reliable basis for inferences concerning how well material is being taught (although the report states that results are treated as a measure of student satisfaction, rather than teaching quality) 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. The CHE suggests that course materials include clear Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) – e.g., what a student should be able to *do*, and not simply *know*, after the course. At TAU, course outlines provide 'Course Overviews,' which are not quite the same thing, and it is not clear whether ILOs are directly assessed in course evaluations – if not, they need to be added. There is evidence that TAU is open to innovations in teaching technologies and currently uses a range of more modern methods of teaching, including 'Virtual TAU,' the university's learning website, the Moodle internet learning system, uploaded video recordings of lectures, and online discussion groups. Such technology is also used to offer High School students the opportunity to gain academic credit. From the material provided, faculty currently provide an effective learning environment. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU clearly meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.6 Faculty

In 2017-18 there were 22 faculty members--12 full, 5 associate, and 5 senior lecturers. According to the report, the School was required to increase the number of students to 300-330 a year in the BA level and 64-54 a year in the MA level, thereby worsening the student, faculty ratio. They consider this a burden on faculty because it resulted in an increased teaching load and an increase in the number of students to supervise for the MA thesis, which they claim hinders faculty research productivity. From 2018-19 through 2020-21 three faculty retirements, all in social psychology, and five recruitments (2 in social and 2 in clinical psychology, and one in psychobiology) have occurred or are anticipated. There are currently 4 faculty in clinical psychology. Overall, the faculty is strong in neuroscience (5 faculty) and cognitive neuroscience (7 faculty), and weak in developmental psychology (1 social-developmental). The Committee is concerned about the uneven representation of areas of psychology, which leaves the Department seriously imbalanced with respect to 'neuroscience' (including cognitive neuroscience and

psychobiology: 13 positions) vs other core areas expected in any distinguished university psychology program (e.g., social and developmental psychology: 2-3 positions) and threatens its ability to offer an appropriate breadth of education in the discipline. With respect to mentorship, no formal program for young faculty is described. The School has 10 technical and administrative staff. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that Tel Aviv University meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

3.7 Research

According to the QA self-evaluation report, the mission of TAU is threefold: to generate new knowledge in psychology, to disseminate this knowledge, and to translate this knowledge for practical application in the community. Accordingly, SPS aims to produce cutting-edge research and providing their students with an exceptional scientifically-based education in the psychological sciences. The School offers research-oriented MA programs in social psychology, psychobiology, cognitive psychology, and the brain and cognition. The main aim of the Ph.D. program, it is said, is to conduct scientific research at the highest level and to prepare the finest generation of future researchers. The School administration views supporting state-of-the-art faculty research as a necessary condition for high quality teaching, which, in turn, enhances critical thinking and creativity and exposes students to modern, sophisticated research findings and methods in the quest for excellence. Faculty research is conducted in a wide array of domains including: psychopathology, psychotherapy, trauma, health psychology; basic psychological processes, social cognition, gender and self-psychology, human development, and interpersonal and intergroup processes. Overall, the faculty exhibit an impressive level of productivity. This is evident through the number of publications in highly visible journals and success in winning a large number of competitive grants. The School was ranked by the 2018 Shanghai academic ranking for world universities among the top 100 psychology departments worldwide. The average number of citations per Full Professor at the School stands at 6111 (h-index = 35, i-10 = 63). Furthermore, faculty at the SPS maintain strong international research collaborations with investigators in their fields around the globe, join international forums, and present their work in international conferences. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.8 Students

The student body of the BA program is selective and has high entry requirements as about 37% of applicants are admitted to the program. The admission threshold differs for various programs and ranges from a Psychometric Score of 640 (regular track) to 705 (psychology and computer science); and 83% of the students attain a degree. The MA program accepts 16% of applicants. Entry requirements to the clinical track are: BA Psychology, average score above 88 (and 90 for the clinical program); and Mitam above 100.

The TAU Ph.D. program is also competitive, with a GPA of 85 in the MA program and a grade of above 90 in their theses; and 86% of the students attain a degree. No median time (in years) for the completion of both coursework and thesis is provided. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAU exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

3.9 Research Infrastructure

The School houses over 20 labs, many of which are well-equipped, including labs in a wide array of areas that range from psychoneuroimmunology and the neural basis of emotion to the effects of political violence on children and professional caregivers. New PIs receive suitable startup funds that enable them to begin their research program. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that SPS exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

Section 4: Recommendations

Essential recommendations:

- 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 and reading materials 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.
- In the next year, develop strategic plan regarding the School's development and issues related to faculty recruitment and retention as well as research infrastructure and office and laboratory space.
- The Committee recommends that SPS uses the opportunity of future hires to achieve a better balance between core areas of psychology and neuroscience commensurate with the goal of providing students a high level of instruction across all core areas of the discipline of psychological science.

Important recommendations

- The Committee recommends that the School entertain a less centralized decision making process and discuss self-evaluation materials with core and adjunct faculty as well as with students and alumni.
- Within the next 3 years, balance the student-to-teacher ratio so that the teachers do not feel burden and the students' needs are appropriately met.

Desirable recommendations

- The Committee recommends that the School create an objective measure of evaluation of students' academic achievement by tracking, for example, the percentage of students taking the MITAM as well as the average scores of TAU MITAM takers.
- Continue enhancing the links to all categories of the alumni of TAU.


Signed by:



Prof. Elena Grigorenko - Chair



Prof. Miles Hewstone



Prof. Deborah Stipek



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