



# EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

## TEL AVIV YAFO ACADEMIC COLLEGE

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 of<sup>1</sup>:
  - [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](#), Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, Israel (sociology)
  - [Prof. Eva Gilboa-Shectman](#), Department of Psychology, Bar Ilan University, Israel (clinical psychology)

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<sup>1</sup> 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 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. This material was further elaborated on and explained in discussions with senior management, faculty members, students, and alumni during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.
  2. This report highlights the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Psychology at **Tel Aviv Yafo Academic College**. The Committee's visit to the College took place on **February 27th, 2020**. The schedule of the visit is attached as Appendix 2.

## **Section 2: Executive Summary**

In 2017-18, when their Self-Evaluation was submitted, the School of Behavioral Sciences at the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yafo (TAY) granted BAs in the Behavioral Sciences. Since then, it has received approval from the CHE to grant BAs in Psychology. Because this evaluation drew upon information provided both in the self-evaluation and the current visit (re: BA in Psychology), there may be inconsistencies in this document. Overall, the faculty, students, and alumni left the Committee with an impression of a developing program of higher education that continues to grow and endeavors to improve. However, the Committee noticed numerous concerns regarding the administration of the program, the ratio of faculty

to both students and programs offered, and the quality of admitted students alongside the knowledge of the students. Overall, the Committee deemed that the performance of the School meets the acceptable threshold level of performance but has room for improvement.

## **Section 3: Observations**

### **3.1 Mission and goals**

The School aspires to provide the highest quality academic education and training that will enable students to fully develop to their full potential while maintaining the relevance of their studies of practice and contributing to the community, particularly in the area of Jaffa and south Tel Aviv. Faculty members, however, emphasized another social aspect of the mission: to meet the state of Israel's need for licensed psychologists, especially in peripheral regions. The Committee believes that the academic mission has been only partly achieved because the program's breadth is prioritized over its depth (for example, there are not enough senior faculty to accommodate the largest MA program in Israel: there are currently six MA tracks serving 140 students). In addition, there is no evidence that the social mission is recognized because the School does not collect data about graduates' outcomes and placements. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the College does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.

### **3.2 Management and Administration**

The School of Behavioral Sciences operates directly under the College and hosts seven programs. In 2017-18, the only undergraduate (BA) program available was in the Behavioral Sciences, but it has since changed its name to Psychology. There are six graduate (MA) programs: Clinical, Medical, Vocational, Educational, Developmental, and Neurorehabilitation Psychology. The six MA programs cover all of the accredited areas of specialization in psychology in Israel. All funding is controlled by the College administration and the School has no discretionary funding. At least once a year, the Dean discusses with the President and the Vice President the current needs of the School. Recruitment needs are usually a result of the School's development and faculty plans. However, it is College policy to enable the Dean to recruit new faculty members with exceptional academic profiles even if no new programs are being opened. This year (2019-20) they expect the retirement of one associate professor in occupational psychology; they are currently searching for a faculty member to replace her. The Committee believes that if they continue to offer the same number of programs at their current size, additional faculty are needed. With regard to diversity, the School offers two BA preparatory tracks: a general track and a track for Arabic-speaking students. They are currently developing a program for mentoring Arab high school students from Jaffa in order to prepare them for academic studies. Two of their senior faculty members are Arab.

Each year about 5% of the BA program students and 6-12 students in the MA programs are Arab. They also offer a full year of academic support to Arab students so that they can prepare to enter College. Of 38 senior faculty in the School, 25 (66%) are women. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the College does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.

### **3.3 QA & Self-Evaluation Process**

The present self-evaluation document was compiled by a core faculty member who also serves as the head of the School's largest research unit. The administrative staff and the program heads contributed to the process by supplying the necessary information. The faculty supplied information that is relevant to their responsibilities. The final draft of the report, edited by the Dean of the School for Behavioral Sciences, was approved by the President of the College. From the report, it was not clear whether, and to what degree, core and/or adjunct faculty were involved in the approval of the document. Teaching quality is monitored using student surveys. Teachers and administrative staff receive a summary of students' feedback. Teachers who have difficulty with specific courses are provided help through coaching to achieve higher ratings in their teaching effectiveness. In addition to these quantitative reviews, the Dean has regular meetings with BA and MA students and with the academic staff. With respect to mentorship, no formal program for young faculty has been implemented. The adjunct lecturers seem less integrated into the School, as they have almost no meetings with the core faculty, and communicate mostly with the Dean. In preparation for the 2018 report, the School has appraised its accomplishments with regard to the recommendations from the previous round of the CHE evaluation. Progress has been made in all dimensions noted by the previous Committee—faculty, infrastructure, and students. Specifically, in line with the recommendations and in accordance with the newly formulated Strategic Plan, the School has been working with the CHE on changing the profile of the School so that it offers not just a BA in Behavioral Sciences but a BA in Psychology with a minor in Sociology. There is also a plan to offer double majors with different disciplines in the College. Furthermore, as recommended, the School is trying to integrate research into the texture of academic life in TAY both through research-oriented courses and through hands-on practica. In general, the School has been striving towards enhancing its academic and practical content in order to better prepare its graduates for the demands of the labor market and further studies. The Committee felt that there are certain indicators of success within the BA programs, but there is still much work to do within the MA programs. Additionally, the Committee feels that TAY still does not learn from nor engage enough their alumni. Overall, in this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that TAY meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

### 3.4 Study program

Overall, the BA (Psychology) and MA (Clinical, Educational, Medical, Neurorehabilitation, Medical, Vocational) programs are appropriately structured, and the majority of the curricula is appropriately designed. There are, however, some instances where the Committee felt that revision was required. In some cases, the same concerns were expressed in the previous Committee's report. At the BA level, there is still too much focus on *theory* in personality (Personality Theories 1 & 2). This is at the expense of modern *research on personality science* (there is a further problem in that the syllabus labelled Personality Part 2 in the Dropbox is, in fact, Personality Part 1). The content of this course is also idiosyncratic, including CBT, which should be covered in a Clinical Psychology course. Additionally, there is considerable overlap in the reading materials for some courses at the same level (e.g., electives in social psychology on The Nature of Prejudice and Theories of Intergroup Relations), and some courses are using rather outdated US textbooks (with a market as vibrant as the US textbook market, there is no justification for using textbooks from 2004 in 2020). More positively, the Committee found that for almost all courses, students were provided with a wide range of relevant English-language sources (essential, especially, in psychology, where the field is dominated internationally by the English language but broadly true across the behavioral sciences). Materials in English were not, however, always provided; some courses (e.g., the sociology course on the Politics of Silence and Speech) still rely heavily on material in Hebrew. In the Committee's meeting with BA students and alumni, the students utilize more Hebrew than English when expressing themselves. The College could do more to support and prepare their students for the next academic stage by investing in English-language provision. The program has transitioned from being a BA in Behavioral Science to a BA in Psychology, but students continue to take courses in sociology provided through the Government & Society Department. The Committee found little evidence of any aspects of the curriculum aimed at helping students towards an *integration* of these complementary approaches (e.g., faculty, perhaps co-teaching, exposing students to multiple disciplinary perspectives on the same issue, or developing some cross-disciplinary courses on topics for which there exist substantive literatures in two or more disciplines). Possibilities exist, for example, between the courses on Decision Making and Choice (Psychology) and Decision Making & Policy Setting (Government & Society). **With respect to the BA program, the Committee determined that the School does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.** At the MA level, the Committee found that the previous Committee's lament concerning the excessive focus on psychodynamic approaches to clinical psychology had not yet been resolved; more modern, empirically well-substantiated approaches (both CBT and psychodynamic) are correspondingly underrepresented in courses and MA research projects. The Committee recommends restructuring of the clinical program to reflect the current empirical understanding of psychopathology and

psychotherapy. A major concern for the Committee is the number of both MA programs and students admitted (max. 21 per track, currently 140). This is imposing heavy demands on faculty even though they do not appear to be in a position to complain about it. This situation results in limited student meetings with their research advisers. Some faculty expressed the belief that they had a social responsibility to train sufficient numbers of students to meet the need for trained MAs in their specific field. The Committee feels that the quality of the research done by, and the training provided for, MA students would benefit from a judicious scaling back of student numbers. The Committee was, moreover, surprised that of 140 MA students, only 3 available for interview and had not been prepared to respond to the Committee in English. The Committee carefully evaluated the examination materials and found them to be adequately rigorous; however, more extensive written feedback on the "open" part of the exam would have been beneficial to students. In addition, it appears that the students are not given their exams back unless they appeal their grades. Some doubts about the overall rigor of the School's approach were flagged by our meetings with students, past and present. When asked to give a clear, insightful view of the research they had learned about, participated in, conducted themselves, or recent papers they had read, most of them were not able to present the Committee with more than a very superficial report of *what* had been done in the research and a limited understanding of *why* it had been done (i.e., to test specific theoretical postulates). They likewise revealed limitations in talking about concepts they had encountered in their reading and distinguishing predictors from consequences. In their meetings with students and alumni, the Committee found alumni and MA students relatively at ease with talking about their studies in English. **With respect to MA level programs, the Committee determined that the School does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.**

### **3.5 Teaching and Learning**

Overall, the School provides an enthusiastic and supportive teaching environment. Teaching is evaluated by means of surveys (comprising conventional evaluative ratings) run by the Unit for the Advancement of Teaching Quality. The response rate for these surveys was 45-55%, a sufficient participation rate that allows these survey results to be used, as they are, for decisions such as which instructors should discuss their teaching with the College's Vice President. Those instructors with course ratings that fall below the threshold are provided with additional support. All course materials should include Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) – e.g., what a student should be able to *do* after the course. The courses at TAY, however, have 'Course Descriptions' – which are not the same as ILOs; ILOs should also be directly assessed in course evaluations. Moreover, for several courses, instructors did not provide their Course Descriptions when giving an overview of their course. The self-evaluation report states that the school is keen on exploiting the potential of

modern approaches to hybrid learning (albeit as a complement to, not replacement for, face-to-face instruction) and provides additional financial support to instructors seeking to innovate in this manner. Senior administrators advocated combining online and small-group methods of teaching to avoid, or at least deal with some of the challenges of, huge Intro. courses, but the Committee did not come across any specific examples of this innovation in the programs reviewed. More positively, there are some genuinely innovative courses, such as The Arab-Jewish Dialogue seminar course, with specific requirements for small-group teaching of equal numbers of students from Jewish and Arab communities. The Committee learned that very few courses actually require students to *write* assessed work, thus depriving students of that most essential didactic component, feedback. Overall, however, students reported that staff are highly committed to the program and its students in both the BA and MA programs. Despite the high teaching loads of faculty, students emphasized that they always felt that faculty were “available” to them, responsive, and provided a supportive learning environment. In general, the MA program appears to be well-structured and the examinations rigorous. However, the MA curriculum in the clinical program appears to be heavily invested in the learning of approaches relying mostly on clinical practice while courses and the examination relying on empirically supported (dynamic, as well as non-dynamic) assessment and treatment approaches are lacking. Moreover, some courses (e.g., Psychopathology) appear to be in need of updating, as a large proportion of the cited materials predates 2000. The Committee determined that TAY meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.

### 3. 6 Faculty

The School has 38 faculty members, all psychologists. Of those, 23 faculty are employed in the department  $\geq 75\%$  time. In 2017-18, 971 BA and 244 MA (with thesis) students were enrolled. In 2017-18 they had one retirement (lecturer) and hired four new faculty (one senior lecturer and three lecturers). The Committee determined that the number of faculty is not sufficient to provide adequate teaching to such a large number of students and for so many MA programs. All rules and regulations concerning the procedures for appointment, promotion, and granting tenure are published on the College website. All faculty members in the College meet with the Vice President at least once a year to get feedback on their teaching based on the results of student evaluations. Faculty are also encouraged to apply for external grants and are given advice on publishing. There is no formal mentoring program although the administration reported that it is considering appointing senior faculty as mentors. All core faculty are given a year-long sabbatical, with full pay, after six years. The administration also provides internal funds for seed grants that faculty can apply for. The School’s administrative staff is composed of the head of the School administration, the vice head (who is also the MA coordinator), two academic coordinators, and two maintenance staff. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the College does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.



### 3.7 Research

The School of Behavioral Sciences, housed within the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yafo, incorporates seven academic programs in Psychology: one undergraduate (BA) program in the Behavioral Sciences (includes one BA track with a Psychology major) and six graduate (MA) programs. The School prides itself on being the largest graduate school of Psychology in Israel and the only academic institution to include all recognized professional areas of applied psychology. According to the QA self-assessment report, the vision of the School of Behavioral Sciences is to integrate faculty teaching, research, practice, and contributions to the community. All programs are said to adopt the 'scientific-practitioner' model and focus on the integration between theory, practice, and evidence-based research. The School has a sizable faculty with expertise in neuroscience and health/medical psychology. Most of the publications are in the areas of medical psychology, neuroscience, psychopharmacology, and psychoneuroimmunology. In spite of a relatively heavy teaching load, many of the faculty members are actively engaged in research. However, a glance at the faculty publication productivity over the past five years shows variance among faculty in both quantity and quality of publications. A number of researchers have published over several dozen papers, many in highly visible venues (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, American Journal of Psychiatry, Diabetes, Neuroimaging, Journal of Neuroimmunology, Neurobiology of Aging American Journal of Physiology). In contrast, a number of faculty show a more modest record of research productivity. Regrettably (but, perhaps, understandably, given the CHE-defined university-college demarcation lines) a number of faculty appear to have decided to focus on their teaching and contributions to the college and not devote sufficient time and effort to research. The college offers internal research funds for grants of up to NIS 25,000 for 10 to 15 senior faculty members, and partial funding for students who present research at scientific conferences. Overall, however, the faculty has not been successful in obtaining grants from competitive external agencies. BA students, we were told, have many opportunities to take part in ongoing research and to join experiential courses that combine practice in the community, supervision, and academic learning. Furthermore, the QA report highlights that the college's policy is to support the collaborative projects of faculty members and students with other academic institutions around the world. As part of this policy, the College has a bilateral agreement with Swinburne University in Melbourne, Victoria to establish a joint research and training center, a joint MA program, and an offshore Ph.D program in several fields. The Dean of the School of Behavioral Sciences, with the help of the College research unit and international relations unit, has also signed an agreement with the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland designed to foster mutual visits by faculty members to pursue research, give lectures, and engage in joint academic and scientific activities. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that

the School meets the acceptable threshold level of performance with room for improvement.

### **3.8 Students**

The student body of the BA program is somewhat selective due to moderate entry requirements. The admission threshold is a Psychometric score above 550 and a minimum 98 Matriculation score. Most students have a Psychometric score between 500-700 (peak at 600-650) and matriculation scores from 86-105. There has been a decline over time in the academic quality of the student body, which is a concern, given the popularity of the study of Psychology, as this should be driving an increase in grades of incoming students. About 90% of applicants are admitted, and 78% of the students attain a degree. The students expressed the need for more formal access to faculty and more opportunities for research experience. The MA program accepts 30% of applicants (w/thesis). Entry requirements to the MA track include: a BA in Psychology, average score 88; Mitam 90. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the College does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.

### **3.9 Infrastructure**

In contrast with other colleges in Israel, this College supports and fully funds faculty sabbaticals, which the Committee supports. In addition, the College provides a generous travel budget for attending conferences, undertaking collaborative research with colleagues abroad, competitive research endowments, annual allowances to pay for internet services, access to electronic databases and research books, reduction of teaching hours according to research achievements, and more. The School houses one well-equipped developmental lab open to all tracks for their research needs. The Committee was favorably impressed with the current research projects running in the lab such as the social behavior of children with autism spectrum disorders and parental preparation and education in caring for infants. In addition, a cognitive and stress/hope/coping lab was mentioned in the report. Yet, on the tour, the Committee learned that there is only one operational lab and some others have recently been closed. This is a concern. Students in the School of Behavioral Sciences have access to two computer labs, each with 15-17 computer stations with space for two students to work together. In this area of evaluation, the Committee determined that the College of Tel-Aviv Yafu does not meet the acceptable threshold level of performance, and that establishing additional labs for research and training purposes is needed.

## Section 4: Recommendations

### Essential recommendations:

- Raise admission standards for the BA.
- If the number of MA programs or students are not reduced, the College needs to hire at least two additional faculty members in the next two years.
- The School needs to operate more research labs to achieve its objective of integrating research in both the academic and practical activities of its students. This can be accomplishing within 12-24 months.
- By the next academic year, develop a mandatory course on scientific writing in English for MA students.
- In the next two years the Committee recommends restructuring of the clinical program to reflect the current empirical understanding on psychopathology and psychotherapy.
- By the next academic year, add learning outcomes for each course, making sure that a uniform template for syllabi is used.
- Within the next 6 months, the clinical program needs to be restructured to reflect the current empirical understanding of psychopathology and to emphasize empirical treatment approaches.
- Within the next 6 months all course syllabi need to be reviewed to minimize overlap between courses and ensure that they provide balanced and up-to-date coverage of the relevant topics.

### Important recommendations

- Create an objective measure for the evaluation of students' academic achievement.
- All faculty should endeavor to engage in research and seek external funds.
- The school should implement a more inclusive decision-making process and discuss self-evaluation materials with core and adjunct faculty as well as with students and alumni.
- The school should create an objective measure for the evaluation of students' academic achievement. This evaluation should track, for example, the percentage of students taking the MITAM as well as the average scores of TAY MITAM takers.
- The Department should continue diversifying teaching methods, with the enhancement of a distance learning component in its teaching portfolio

### Desirable recommendations

- Continue attempting to engage alumni and form stronger links with them.

**Signed by:**



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Prof. Elena Grigorenko - Chair



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Prof. Miles Hewstone



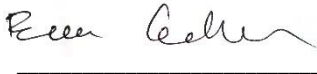
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Prof. Deborah Stipek



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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



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

**Psychology and Behavioral Sciences - Schedule of site visit**  
**Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yafo**

**Thursday, February 27, 2020, Room 315, Fomento Building**

Time	Subject	Participants
09:00-09:30	Opening session with the heads of the institution	Prof. Shlomo Biderman, President Prof. Eilon Vaadia, Vice President for Academic Affairs Benny Alon, Director General
09:30-10:15	Meeting with the Head of School of Behavioral Sciences	Prof. Yonata Levy
10:15-11:15	Meeting with senior academic staff * (including academic heads of programs)	Dr. Ofer Fein Dr. Sharon Ziv-Beiman Dr. Iren Diamant Dr. Eran Shadach Dr. Shulamit Geller
<b>11:15-11:30</b>	<b>Break</b>	
11:30-12:00	Meeting with Adjunct academic staff *	Dr. Anat Lan Mr. Eyal Cohen Mr. Yair Gottlieb Mr. Hgai Rabinovitch Ms. Tzipi Hanalis
12:00-12:45	Open slot	
<b>12:45-13:30</b>	<b>Lunch (in the same room)</b>	<b>Closed-door meeting of the committee</b>
13:30-14:15	Meeting with BA students** (up to 10 students)	to be determined
14:15-15:00	Meeting with MA students** (up to 10 students)	to be determined

15:00-15:45	Meeting with Alumni** (up to 8 Alumni)	to be determined
<b>15:45-16:00</b>	<b>Closed-door meeting of the committee</b>	
16:00-16:30	Closing meeting with heads of institution and the Head of the school of Behavioral Sciences	Prof. Shlomo Biderman, President Prof. Eilon Vaadia, Vice President for Academic Affairs Benny Alon, Director General Prof. Prof. Yonata Levi