Department of Geography, Institute of Urban and Regional Studies
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem - June 8, 2006

Committee Members:
Prof. Susan Fainstein, Columbia University (Chair)
Prof. Yoram Avnimelech, Technion
Prof. Alan Baker, University of Cambridge
Prof. Genevieve Giuliano, University of Southern California
Prof. Chris Hamnett, Kings College London

The Review Committee evaluated the Department of Geography and the Institute of Urban and Regional Studies (IURS). Although the faculty of IURS is currently drawn entirely from the Geography Department, the two provided us with separate reports, and we reviewed them separately. Overall we found that both had excellent faculty as measured by their research productivity, quality, and international reputations. The range of courses offered by the Geography Department is broad and somewhat unfocused; in contrast, the IURS provides a coherent program that prepares graduates for careers in planning and urban management. Despite the IURS’s clear mission to educate planners, the fact that the term “planning” is not included in the title of the degree students receives results in a somewhat blurred identity as perceived in the outside world. Our principal recommendation to the Geography Department is a clarification of and reduction in the areas of specialization that it offers. For IURS we recommend that students who complete the planning curriculum be awarded a degree with planning in the title and that an arrangement be made that would bring in faculty from disciplines other than Geography.

Geography Department

The Department of Geography has created for itself a well-deserved international reputation and continues today to build on that record. Although the Department is relatively small, it has an international standing which is very impressive and a well-received teaching program. In addition, the Department as a whole demonstrates a strong service commitment to the State of Israel.

Notwithstanding its acknowledged status, the Department does need to address some specific issues: (1) Courses offered do not show enough progression from year to year in terms of their level of difficulty and sometimes even in terms of their content. Many students are seeking more intellectual challenges than they find in the courses currently provided. (2) The current curriculum is very broad and could be restructured to provide a better focus. (3) The Department is small, in terms of its number of full-time teachers. As a result, staff may be doing too much teaching and research advising. Moreover, too many are involved in administration, thereby distracting them from research and teaching. (4) The lack of funding for MA and PhD students is a serious problem. (5) There is a large body of PhD students, who often take a very long time to complete their degree.
and lack financial support. (6) The department lacks a routinized method of consulting its students regarding departmental policies.

The committee made the following recommendations regarding the Department of Geography: (1) Retain the physical geographers within the Department and integrate them further into the Environmental Management, Planning and Policy Program (EMPPP). (2) Concentrate teaching and research into three clusters: Environmental Geography; Urban and Regional Geography; Historical Geography. (3) Strengthen the Department’s training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and quantitative methods. (4) Modify the environmental geography curriculum by strengthening its scientific components. (5) Establish a method of student consultation.

IURS

The IURS has a long history, stretching back to 1970. It offers an MA specialization program in planning/urban and regional studies. The number of new MA students enrolled has risen substantially in recent years. The IURS has a number of very positive attributes, as follows: (1) It recruits new students primarily from Geography at HU but also from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and from other institutions. (2) It has a strong sense of mission which focuses on Israeli planning in an international comparative perspective. (3) It is very successful in job placements for graduates. (4) It has a strong identity and a well organized curriculum. (5) It does a great deal on very limited resources. (6) It has international recognition.

We identified the following issues regarding IURS: (1) The specialization program is similar to that of urban and regional planning programs and graduates get planning jobs in ministries and consulting firms. Without the name “planning” in the degree title, the graduates are not getting recognition for the professional training they have received. (2) The permanent faculty and the vast majority of students are in the Geography MA program. Urban planning is an interdisciplinary field that draws from political science, economics, history, sociology, and public policy. Thus the current degree is lacking in some dimensions. The IURS degree would benefit from a more diverse core faculty. (3) Reliance on external faculty is a related problem. Although these instructors add diversity to the program and are mainly very competent and committed, the limited amount of participation by core faculty threatens to curtail the intellectual substance of the specialization program. (4) Soft money is used to pay for the external teachers, with almost nothing left over for fellowships or other discretionary expenditures.

The committee made the following recommendations regarding the IURS: (1) The title of the degree for those who complete the IURS curriculum should be named Master in Geography and Urban Planning or possibly Master in Urban Planning. (2) The Institute should be strengthened with an additional staff member, preferably a non-geographer. (3) Stronger links need to be established with the School of Public Policy. This could be achieved through joint faculty appointments, which need not be in geography. (4) IURS should be placed on a
stronger and more independent financial footing. (5) An interdisciplinary research center based in IURS that focuses on urban and regional issues should be established.

In relation to both Geography and IURS, we think that they could take better advantage of what is available at other universities in Israel. We also suggest that information and communications technology be considered to enhance connections across universities and campuses.