# Department of Geography Institute of Urban and Regional Studies

## THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

**Report of the Review Committee** 

5-8 June 2006

Presented to Prof. Haim D. Rabinowitch, Rector

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### Department of Geography Institute of Urban and Regional Studies The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### Report by Review Committee -Executive Summary June 8, 2006

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.

## **COMMITEE'S REPORT**

### Department of Geography Institute of Urban and Regional Studies The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### **Report by Review Committee**

### **Introduction:**

The Department of Geography at the Hebrew University was established in 1949 and is the first department of geography in Israel. The Institute of Urban and Regional Studies (IURS) was initiated in 1967 by the Departments of Geography and Sociology. It prepares students for the MA degree, and has become one of the two major programs in Israel for students in urban planning and urban studies. Although it offers a specialization open to students in all social science disciplines, its faculty and the great majority of its students at present are drawn from the Department of Geography. Upon the request of the President, Rector, and Standing Committee of the Hebrew University, a Review Committee was established to review the research, teaching program, and structure of the Department and the Institute. The members of the Review Committee were Professor Susan Fainstein (Columbia University and Harvard University, Planning, Chair), Professor Genevieve Giuliano (University of Southern California, Planning and Public Policy), Professor Chris Hamnett (King's College, London, Geography), Professor Alan Baker (University of Cambridge, Geography), and Professor Yoram Avnimelech (Technion, Civil and Environmental Engineering). The Committee met for four days (5-8 June 2006); during this time it discussed the reports of the Department and the Institute; interviewed their directors; and met with almost all the tenure-track faculty, some external (adjunct) faculty, third-year undergraduate, master's and PhD students, two Public Policy faculty, as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

### **Overall Assessment:**

We found both programs to be strong and with the potential for future improvement. The Geography Department has an excellent research record and a broad range of interests; the obverse of that is that it is somewhat diffuse. The IURS likewise has a high level of research achievement; it offers a coherent educational program at the master's level that trains graduates for important positions within the Israeli planning system. The remainder of this report deals with the two entities separately in greater detail.

### The Department of Geography:

The Department of Geography at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the oldest such department in Israel. Led by some intellectually distinguished and personally charismatic individuals, it has created for itself during the almost sixty years of its existence a well-deserved international reputation. It continues today to build on that record. The strengths of the Department run throughout its constituent groups, from BA students to senior staff.

There is a high level of satisfaction among the student body with the courses and facilities offered by the Department. Both courses and teachers are, for the most part, evaluated highly by students. Students at all levels expressed their appreciation of the accessibility and friendliness of the staff. There is considerable interaction between students and staff, to their mutual benefit. Our many discussions with students, both formal and informal, revealed a genuine pride in the Department and a strong loyalty to it.

Although the Department is relatively small, with only 14.5 full-time equivalent teachers, it has an international standing which is very impressive indeed. All of the teachers are active researchers, publishing their work as papers in internationally peer-reviewed journals and as books with publishing houses known to have high standards of reviewing. In consequence, work published by the Department is extremely well-known outside of Israel. The Department is commendably successful in attracting research grants from national and international competitive funding sources. In this regard and calculated on a per capita basis, the Department has a very good track record when compared with others in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The Department is very far from being a parochial institution. Its teaching staff has myriad international connections both with individual scholars and with national and international bodies. In addition, the Department as a whole demonstrates a strong service commitment to the State of Israel, with many of its members serving on the committees of regional and national authorities and also acting as advisors to such bodies.

These different characteristics of the Department combine to give it a general strength and a well-deserved reputation for excellence at all levels. Notwithstanding its acknowledged status, the Department does need to address some specific issues.

### Specific issues

Our discussions brought to light some aspects of the Department's operation which merit closer attention. They are not necessarily related and will be dealt with here separately.

1. We found a general thinking among the students, both BA and MA, that the 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. Some courses appear not to require much written work from students. Possibly this is because staff are required to do too much teaching and grading and/or because they are teaching topics far from their own research interests.

- 2. The current curriculum is very broad and appears lacking in focus. There are many specializations, and the list of courses is quite long in view of the size of the Department. The program gives students wide choice but it also imposes heavy teaching and examining loads on the staff and results in courses with inadequate substance.
- **3.** The Department is small, in terms of its number of full-time teachers, and additional retirements are anticipated. In addition, for such a small Department, too many of its staff are involved in the administration of other institutions within the university; this detracts from the time that they are able to give their departmental duties. Overall the faculty seems to be spread very thin, given teaching, research, administrative and graduate student guidance responsibilities.
- 4. Insufficient funding of MA and PhD students is a serious problem. Most students have to engage in paid employment in order to survive, which means time for their studies is quite limited. As part-time students, many frequently take much more time to complete their degrees than the University intends. Lengthy tenure of graduate students has a negative fiscal effect on the Department, adding to the constraints on student funding and support.
- 5. There is a large body of PhD students. While this is in some ways desirable, it also causes concern. A number of doctoral graduates have obtained teaching and research posts in colleges and universities, while others have moved into a variety of posts in public service and in private enterprises. This is highly commendable. But many doctoral students are taking a very long time in our view, too long to complete their dissertations. In doing so, they make continuing use of the Department's resources and in particular of its limited human resources. In this sense, such students can be viewed as an increasing, and increasingly unreasonable, burden on the Department.
- 6. It was difficult for us to obtain a clear picture of the extent to which students are consulted by the Department about matters directly affecting them. Teaching is, of course, evaluated but we encountered little sign of any other form of consultation.
- 7. The Environmental Management Planning and Policy Program (EMPPP) lacks sufficient scientific and quantitative requirements. While this program should remain integrated with Geography and continue to take account of the human aspects of environmental processes, it needs to provide students with more familiarity with the biological and chemical systems affecting the environment.
- 8. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have become an increasingly central part of geographic training and research. Although the Department has a GIS lab and course offerings in this area, they are inadequate for contemporary expectations of research and training and lack a faculty member to provide leadership.

### **Recommendations**—Geography Department:

- 1. Physical Geography should remain within the Department of Geography for the following reasons: (A) Physical geography is an integral part of the nature of geography with its emphasis on the interactions between people and their physical environments. The Committee also considers that to remove four faculty from the already-small Department would seriously undermine its position and its ability to teach geography adequately. (B) Physical geographers have an important role in developing the future research program and curriculum of the Department, particularly in relation to its environmental program. (C) Both students and the physical geography faculty strongly expressed their wish to see physical geography retained with the Department. None of the affected faculty felt seriously inconvenienced by having to travel to the Givaat Ram campus for some of their work. The committee would, of course, encourage the physical geographers both to integrate their work with other members of the Department and also to continue to develop relations with colleagues in Earth Sciences.
- 2. The Department should consider restructuring its teaching and research activities into three clusters covering (a) Environmental Geography, (b) Historical and Cultural Geography, and (c) Urban and Regional Geography. Such restructuring would enable the Department to build on its existing strengths. These clusters are broad enough to include all current faculty research areas as well as potential new areas. The environmental cluster would include the physical geographers and the EMPPP faculty. Urban would include political geography, transportation, and the IURS faculty. The historical geography faculty already forms a cluster and is very strong. While each faculty member would be associated primarily with one of these three clusters, some members would have secondary interests in and affiliation with another cluster. Such restructuring should encourage further co-operation among staff.
- **3.** The curriculum should be rethought so that it conforms to the three areas. This would provide it with coherence that it currently lacks and could lead to both the elimination of some courses currently offered and the addition of others. For instance, courses on environmental hazards and their perception and management, on the nature and management of river basins or natural resources, on the history of urban planning, and on divided cities would be natural additions. The committee is convinced that concentrating and integrating its efforts within this structure of three clusters would benefit the Department, enabling it to develop a more focused teaching curriculum and research program. The Department should further review its teaching program with a view to reducing the number of courses given with only a few credit points and increasing the work load associated with each course.
- 4. The curriculum for the Environmental Policy, Planning and Management Program should include more teaching in basic science. Students in this program should be provided with an improved and appropriate level of knowledge of the physical and biological sciences as foundations on which to

build an understanding and to assess environmental policies and plans. In addition, the EMPPP should include a course on statistics and quantitative modelling.

- 5. The Committee recommends that the Department should develop much further its teaching and research in GIS by appointing an additional member of staff in this field. GIS is a rapidly expanding component of Geography which can underpin all of its aspects. An additional appointment could therefore be of considerable benefit to the whole of the Department's teaching and research. In addition, strengthening GIS in the Department will provide its students with an extended range of transferable skills which will be of benefit to them in the job market. The Department has its own GIS laboratory and technical officer. That resource needs to be extended by the allocation of a new teaching and research post, by additional terminals, and by extending the hours of the GIS lab. The Department should also explore the possibility of making use of GIS facilities existing elsewhere in the University.
- 6. Requirements for completion of graduate degrees should be tightened so that master's students should, except under exceptional circumstances, finish within three years and PhD students within five years after the master's. Imposing such a rule, however, would require much better funding for students so that they could devote greater attention to their research. Establishment of a research center, as described below, would assist in this aim. Greater selectivity of doctoral students would also be necessary.
- 7. The University needs to consider how best the Department should be led in the coming years. The international reputation of the Department has been built in the past on the ideas, enthusiasms and leadership skills of some distinguished and charismatic individuals. Within the next few years, some of the senior figures in the Department will be retiring and the younger members might not yet be ready to take on the leadership role. The age-structure of the staff needs to be considered when appointments are being made and, if possible, a senior appointment ought to be made.
- 8. The Department should establish a formal method for regularly consulting its students about all aspects of its activities that concern them. At the moment there is no representative departmental body of graduate students that could act as an advisory group.

### **IURS:**

The Institute of Urban and Regional Studies 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 from three or four a year in the early 1980s to around 40 a year more recently. This growth has been fuelled by an expanding job market in urban planning and related professions and by the growth of environmental awareness.

The IURS has a number of very positive attributes. These can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. While graduates of the Department of Geography at HU are the largest group of students in the program, it is not solely dependent for recruitment on students from the HU Geography undergraduate student body. About one third of the program's enrolment comes from other institutions, and an approximately (overlapping) equal number are drawn from other disciplines. It is thus wide ranging in its recruitment.

2. It has a strong sense of mission which focuses on Israeli planning in an international comparative perspective and combines theoretical perspectives with applied skills to provide students with the intellectual tools necessary to occupy professional positions in planning and other areas.

**3.** It is very successful in job placements for graduates, and many of the senior planners and urban professionals in Israel are graduates of the program. In this respect, it can be seen to be very successful in training Israeli practitioners and in establishing itself within the professional community.

**4.** It has a strong identity and coherence and this is reflected in a high degree of student enthusiasm and loyalty to the staff and the program. Students clearly believe that they belong to a distinct entity, even though it is embedded in the Geography Department and the full-time faculty are all geographers.

**5.** It has a well organized curriculum which provides students with the key elements of urban and regional spatial planning, although urban sociology is one area which appears to be missing.

6. The Institute clearly does a great deal on very limited resources. It covers many areas of the curriculum by bringing in outside specialists as adjunct faculty to teach courses, often on relatively low rates of pay. While this makes the program very dependent on adjunct faculty, who are only likely to be on campus only for short periods, it has the advantage of widening student exposure to a range of practitioners and issues and of opening a range of subsequent employment opportunities.

7. It has international recognition. Several current full-time staff publish widely in well-known international journals, participate in international research groups and meetings, and are recognized internationally.

### Specific Issues:

- 1. The IURS offers an MA specialization in urban and regional studies. Our review of the curriculum revealed that the specialization program is very similar to urban and regional planning programs as taught in the US or Great Britain. The name "urban and regional studies" therefore does not accurately describe the content of the specialization. Graduates of the program get planning jobs in ministries and consulting firms, and external teachers within the program describe their job as teaching planning skills. Without the name "planning" in the degree title, the graduates are not getting recognition for the professional training they have received.
- 2. Although the history of development of IURS included participation of faculty in Sociology, at this point all of the permanent faculty affiliated with the program are in the Geography Dept. The specialization can be taken with any MA degree, but in practice the vast majority of students are in the Geography MA program. The result is that the MA-IURS is a de facto geography and urban planning degree.
- **3.** 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. For example, urban planning core courses typically include planning history, urban economics, social planning, and the planning process. Some of this core is provided by adjunct faculty, and the directors of IURS have done what they can to draw on courses from other departments. Our student interviews, however, revealed that few take courses in other departments.
- **4.** The result of having the entire core faculty in Geography causes the specialization to lack some substantive content in non-geography disciplines. IURS has no practical way of attracting faculty from outside Geography under the current organizational structure. Conceivably they could persuade Sociology or Economics to hire someone with an urban planning orientation, but in reality this is unlikely. The best possibility seems to be with public policy, as will be explained below.
- 5. Reliance on external faculty is a related problem. Graduate students were uniformly positive in their assessment of external teachers and viewed them as both providing the skills they would need as professionals and access to future employment. We interviewed two external teachers; they were committed to the program, and were clearly teaching for the joy of what they were doing, rather than the small remuneration they received. There are many advantages to using external teachers, and indeed such instructors are used routinely for the "skills courses" in urban planning programs. However, in this case few courses are taught by permanent faculty not even all the core courses. The lack of core faculty threatens to limit the intellectual substance of the specialization program and may be at the root of student complaints that upper-level courses are insufficiently demanding.

6. IURS is to be congratulated on fielding a program with such meager resources, but this is not a sustainable situation. As we understand the situation, soft money is used to pay for the external teachers, with almost nothing left over for fellowships or other discretionary expenditures. Funds were so scarce in the past two years that additional allocations from the Dean were required to cover expenses. Without an adequate and reliable budgetary commitment, the program will erode and eventually collapse.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. The long history and distinct identity of the IURS needs to be more strongly reflected in Faculty organizational structure and degree status through renaming the degree. The title of the current MA degree awarded to students on the program does not properly reflect the content of the degree and makes the degree less useful in the labor market as it might be. We thus strongly recommend that the title of the degree for those who complete the IURS curriculum be named Master of Geography and Urban Planning or possibly Master of Urban Planning.
- 2. Given the current reliance on teaching by adjunct faculty, we recommend that the Institute be strengthened with an additional staff member. With the retirement of Professor Arie Shachar, the Institute has lost a strong and visionary leader. It would bolster the interdisciplinary character of IURS if a non-geographer was appointed, preferably at the senior level.
- **3.** We recommend stronger links with the School of Public Policy. While it is important that the Public Policy program is not seen as an adjunct to geography, spatial planning is clearly one field of public policy, along with a wide variety of subject areas such as health, public finance, etc. We would thus suggest that urban planning should comprise a specific subject option within public policy formulation and analysis. We further recommend that the connection between IURS and public policy be strengthened by joint faculty appointments, as indicated above. These need not be with geography. A future appointment could be of a planner, an economist, a sociologist, or a political scientist with an urban/regional specialty.
- **4.** We see many opportunities and advantages in closer collaboration between IURS and the new School of Public Policy: Many of the important application areas of public policy are urban, for example, housing, transportation, welfare, public health. Urban planning and public policy are closely related, with both fields working on many common issues. The urban planning curriculum would be enriched with basic courses in public policy, for example policy implementation, public economics, political participation, or public management and budgeting. A joint urban planning/public policy MA degree would provide a professional degree that is both substantive and rich in professional skills. The School of Public Policy has several faculty positions yet to fill, providing a unique

opportunity for joint appointments that would enrich both public policy and urban planning.

- 5. We recommend that IURS be placed on a stronger and more independent financial footing. At present it is highly dependent on soft money and this is a problem for year to year funding for adjunct faculty and for student support, field trips, purchase of computer software etc. It needs greater financial autonomy.
- 6. We recommend the establishment of a research centre in Geography/IURS with links to other disciplines, e.g. economics, public policy, and environmental science. This could support research on high tech and urban growth processes, which are significant areas of interest within Israel. We believe that the area in which IURS works that of urban development is one which could be supported by donations or endowments from property development and high-tech companies. Another possibility is a research center organized around environmental issues. In any case, we recommend a research center that crosses departmental and disciplinary boundaries, offers a location in which graduate students can interact and work on funded projects, and has the potential to add intellectual value to the University.

### **RECOMMENDATION Relevant to Both Geography and IURS:**

### **Relationships with other Entities: Take Advantage of Resources Outside Hebrew University**

Another way of providing courses that are currently lacking in both Geography and IURS is to take better advantage of what is available at other universities in Israel. For example, there is a sociologist at Tel Aviv University who teaches urban courses that could be useful for both geography and IURS students. While in principle it is possible now to take courses at other universities, we were told many times that the bureaucratic hurdles were large, and that in fact none of the students we spoke with had done so. We understand that part of the problem is funding: tuition revenue travels with the course. In a highly constrained funding environment, as is the case in Geography, there is little incentive for faculty to guide their students to other universities (or other departments) for coursework. We suggest that barriers to sharing resources across universities be reduced, and that taking courses outside Hebrew University, as well as outside Geography, be encouraged.

Graduate education could be enriched by both faculty and student exchanges with other universities. For example, while there is no architecture program at Hebrew U, there is at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. Students engaged in questions of urban design would benefit from a semester of coursework in architecture. Similarly, faculty exchanges (for example with environmental specialists at the Givat Ram campus or the Technion) could greatly enrich the EMPPP.

Finally we suggest that information and communications technology be considered to enhance connections across universities and campuses. For example, there is a great deal of interaction on the part of the physical geographers with the Givat Ram campus, and teleconferencing would be a useful tool to assist collaboration among researchers. Similarly, teleconference capability between Tel Aviv U or Technion would enable collaborative seminars and classes.

## **APPENDICES**

### APPENDIX A

### **RESUMES OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- 1. Prof. Susan Fainstein, Columbia University (Chair)
- 2. Prof. Yoram Avnimelech, Technion
- 3. Prof. Alan Baker, University of Cambridge
- 4. Prof. Genevieve Giuliano, University of Southern California
- 5. Prof. Chris Hamnett, Kings College London

### **APPENDIX B**

### List of People who Met with the Committee

The President, Prof. Menachem Magidor The Rector, Prof. Haim Rabinowitch The Vice-Rector, Prof. Sarah Stroumsa

Head of Academic Review for the Sciences, Prof. Eliahu Friedman Head of Academic Review for the Humanities, Prof. Jacob Metzer

Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Prof. Boas Shamir

Head of Department of Geography, Prof. Rehav Rubin Head of Institute of Urban & Regional Studies, Prof. Eran Razin

Members of the Academic Committee – Dept. Of Geography: Prof. Ronnie Ellenblum Prof. Amos Frumkin Dr. Galit Cohen-Blankshtain Prof. Shlomo Hasson

Members of the Academic Committee – Institute of Urban & Regional Studies Prof. Daniel Felsenstein Prof. Arie Shachar Dr. Chaim Fialkoff

#### Senior Faculty:

Prof. Ilan Salomon Prof. Uri Dayan Prof. Ruth Kark Prof. Ran Aaronson

#### Junior Faculty:

Dr. Noam Shoval Dr. Efrat Morin Dr. Itai Fishendler

#### Adjunct Professors:

Dr. Doron Bar Dennis Goldman, Adv. Sofia Eldor, Arch.

#### Other Faculty:

Prof. Eran Feitelson, Head of School of Public Policy Head of EMPPP

Undergraduates of the Program Graduates of the Program Doctoral Students