Survey and Analysis of the Academic Credit System in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

An Exercise in Preparation for the Implementation of the Pilot Project on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) at Ben- Gurion University.

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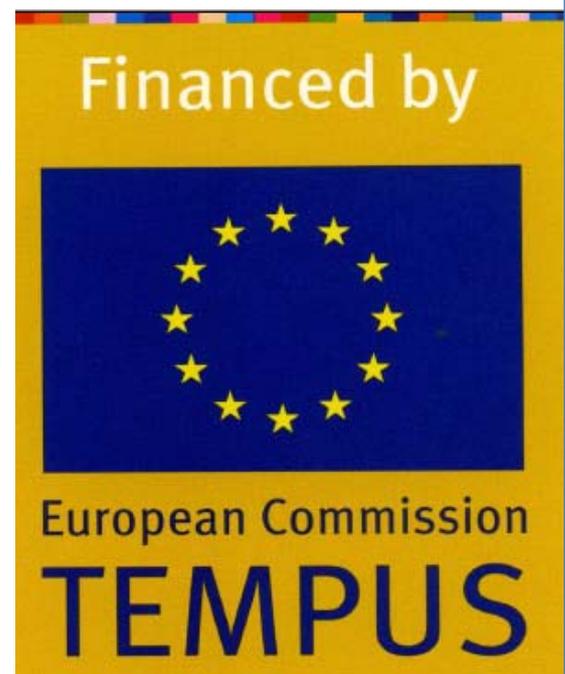
TEMPUS

Report on the Survey and Analysis of the Academic Credit System in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) is a member of an EU funded Tempus project (CORINTHIAM), together with other institutions of higher education in Israel, Palestine and Europe (in Israel - the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya and Ben-Gurion-University of the Negev. At BGU the project is operated by the Office of International Affairs (OIAA) where, in fact, it was conceived. The project aims to examine the implementation of several aspects of the Bologna Process[1] in non European institutions. One of those aspects is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

In order to prepare for the implementation of the ECTS pilot in BGU, it was felt that a reasonable familiarity was needed with the policies pertaining to the existing academic credit system at the university and the ways in which these policies were applied. To reach this understanding, meetings were held with officials relevant to the subject.[3] Meetings took place with the academic secretary, with the heads of faculty administration, or their deputies, and with chairs of academic advisory committees of different departments who were chosen to represent the system as it works today (see list of meetings in Appendix 1).

Most of the meetings focused on the bachelor degrees. The different master degree programs at BGU have different and varied structures (amount of credits, the thesis scope, etc.), but the index of the credits is equivalent to the index of the bachelor degree.

In this Report the Faculty of Health Sciences was not included. This faculty is widely different by almost any criteria. Also, it is not relevant for the implementation of our pilot. For further information on the Faculty of Health Sciences please see Appendix 2.

Source and influence on the existing credit system in Israel:

Mr. Avraham Bar-On, the academic secretary, explained that the existing credit system in Israel was based on the German higher education system (as it existed in the nineteen twenties). Later on, the American system was the dominant inspiration in Israeli higher education. Today we can see the beginning of the European influence (and our Tempus project is one of the examples).

Existing credit index:

Mr. Bar-On described the university's accepted practice, which is presented in the Faculty of Natural Sciences' Year Book (p. 41)[2] :

Method of teaching	Length	Credits
Frontal lecture	One hour in a week per semester	1
Tutorial	One hour in a week per semester	0.5
Laboratory	One hour in a week per semester	0.5
Field trip/study tour	One day	0.25

The same practice is presented in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences' Year Book (with additional information such as: 0.5 Credit point for one weekly hour of sport activity per semester, 0.5 Credit point for participation in official sport teams or in the students' orchestra.),

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[1] See glossary – p 9
[2] Faculty of Natural Sciences year book on the faculty's internet site: http://cmsprod/NR/rdonlyres/3C164B02-F768-4CC7-8DCB-1E14724A5636/81583/takanontoarrishon.pdf
[3] All the meetings and interviews were conducted by Ms Hila Zehavi, author & Tempus Coordinator

but it does not appear in the other faculties' year books. In all faculties this index is flexible subject to decisions of the faculty academic advisory committee.

Mr. Bar-On stated that in all faculties the credit system is based on the index in the above table, even when it is not mentioned in the faculty's year book. This index shows that the existing system is based on the work of students in class and does not take into account the work required of students at home. This is the prevailing situation except in two cases: thesis writing and guided reading (which give credits for the individual work of the students at home, usually at MA degree level). Although in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences this rule is supposed to be applied, an examination of the actual facts reveals that some departments do give credits for the individual work of the student at home in some modules[3] (e.g. Department of Politics and Government and the Department of Psychology).

Flexibility in implementation of the existing credit index:
Considerable flexibility was found in all faculties in several areas:

There is a vast flexibility with regard to the credits given to the study tours / field trips in all faculties. This is because sometimes a professor would like to enrich the class with a field trip, but adding the credits is not an option (especially in departments that calculate the credit points by defined multiple).

Although as a defined rule credits are given for tutorials, in some cases a tutorial lesson will be added to a frontal lesson because of the students' need and their difficulties with the learning material. In those cases the department will help the student by adding the tutorial, but will not give any credits for the additional lessons, since the tutorial does not add learning material but helps the student with the existing learning material. An example for such flexibility can be found in the Faculty of Business and Management where in most cases tutorials will give credits, but in the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management no credits are given for tutorials. In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences although, officially, tutorials do not give credits at all, in actual fact some department tutorials do give credits, even more credits than in other faculties' indexes (e.g. the Department of Politics and Government and the Department of Psychology).

Variability can also be found between departments and faculties regarding credits and the workload in the guided reading and research project. In these cases most of the workload is the particular work of the students at home, not in class (and usually includes more work than in a regular class). Besides these exceptional cases, there is no correlation between the extent of the particular work at home and the credit points (beyond the expected correlation to the amount of learning material in class, a correlation which is not obligatory).

Usually in BGU, practical internship does not give credits, even if it is an essential part of the degree program, but in some departments in the Faculty of Business and Management and in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, credits are given for practical internship. This issue is decided individually in each department and program and can be found in the department's year book (e.g. at the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management, 1000 hours of practical internship, including an academic paper, gives 3 credit points while, till this year, it did not give credit at all but was part of the degree program).

The highest flexibility regarding the credit index was found in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In this faculty it may happen that a frontal lecture will not give any credits at all.

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[3] Module- course in American terminology.

Calculation of the credits:

In most faculties (apart from the Faculty of Health Sciences, which works by a weekly itinerary, and not by semesters) the amount of credit points for the degree and the number of modules is based on the calculation of 40 credit points per academic year (generally 20 credit points per semester, although there are exceptions[4]). This calculation was set by the Meltz Committee for Higher Education in Israel.

Unlike most degree programs in the university, which last 3 years and require 120 credit points, the duration of the engineering degree program is 4 years, and includes 160 credit points (national regulation of the Meltz Committee).

Generally, when a new module is added to the degree program there are several ways of calculating and setting its credits: by the amount of learning material and workload on the student, by a certain multiple, or by addressing the whole degree program and the total sum of the credits in the degree program. In most departments and faculties the calculation will take into consideration all those ways, but not in all cases. For example, in most of the departments in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences there is a large variety of elective modules in the degree program, and therefore the departments have no limitations regarding the elective modules' credits. On the opposite side, in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences there are almost no changes in modules, courses and syllabuses, and the degree program is pretty permanent. Therefore, a new module must bring about the reduction or cancellation of another module, and there is not much flexibility around this issue. These changes are usually affected by the extent of learning material and by the complete degree program. In the Faculty of Business and Management, students from different departments or from different degree programs might get different credits for the same module (even when they study together in the same classroom). This is an outcome of the attempt to maintain the framework of 120 credit points for a bachelor degree program.

In the Faculty of Natural Sciences a punctilious calculation is made, to the level of one quarter of a point, by the extent of learning material. Hence there might be a module of 2.25 credit points (for example in the geology and environment department). In some departments there is an attempt to set all credits in a certain multiple to ease the calculation and the degree program (e.g. a multiple of 4 at the department of Computer Sciences), but in other departments there is no attention given to this issue.

In the Faculty of Business and Management almost all modules give credits in multiples of 3. According to Dr. Poria[5] this is a conscious decision derived from educational theory which claims that a 3-hour lesson brings a maximal utilization of the students' concentration and comprehension abilities.

Different workloads of different modules with the same credits

In the various meetings, a subject that came up repeatedly was the issue of differing workloads for different modules with the same credits. This issue is one of the things that the ECTS aspires to solve. In our meeting[6], Dr. Michael Tsesarsky told about the awareness of the

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[4] e.g. The bachelor degree in the faculty of Natural Sciences can range from 120 to 124 credit points.

[5] Dr. Yaniv Poria is the Chair of academic advisory committee at the department of Hotel and Tourism Management. A meeting with him took place on 24.8.10.

[6] A meeting took place on 13.10.10 with Dr. Michael Tsesarsky, the Chair of the academic advisory committee at the department of Building Engineering and a member of a university committee responsible for the reception and acceptance of new students in the university.

university regarding the different workloads of different modules with the same credits. Dr. Tsesarsky is a member of a university committee responsible for the orientation and acceptance of new students in the university. Among other subjects, this committee discussed the balance of the workload on the students by distributing the heavy burden modules among the different semesters. Thus, the university is aware of the disproportion and the gaps between the workload and the credits. However, the way to overcome this disproportion is not by unifying it, but by building a balanced program with equally loaded semesters rather than setting an equal proportion between workload and credits.

At the departmental level, Dr. Pardo[7] told us of a documented procedure in the department of Politics and Government which set certain assignments and ways of assessment for different kind of modules. Thus, basic first year modules of 4 credits will have different workloads than second year elective module of 2 credits or third year seminar modules. In any case, this procedure and its enforcement were initiated by a particular department and aren't applied in other departments.

Supervision:

Mr. Bar-OnBar-On emphasized the flexibility that the university provides for the different disciplines as part of their academic freedom. This is the explanation for the wide and vast differences that were found between the faculties and between the departments in the way of credit calculation, credit index etc. (apparently, those issues may be considered by the system as part of the academic freedom). In order to maintain unity, there are some mechanisms of supervision at different administrative levels:

Departments and Internal Supervision
The module is prepared by the lecturer, approved by the head of department or by the chairs of departmental academic advisory committees, then by the department academic advisory committee and only then will the faculty academic advisory committee discuss it.

In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, due to the freedom prevailing at the faculty's administration (as we shall explain later), all supervision, on lecturers and on modules, is in the care of the department: the Chair of the department, and the Chair of the department academic advisory committee. According to Dr. Filc[8], the departments do not deal with supervision in cases where academic levels or demands are too high; on the contrary, only in cases where the level and the demands are too low. In his words, the self supervision is usually satisfactory ,but in some exceptions the involvement of the Dean of the faculty is required. However, there is no systematic procedure or mechanism for such cases, only the decision by the head of department that he is incapable of dealing with the problem and therefore requires the dean's involvement.

Faculties
The faculty academic advisory committee is responsible for approving new courses and modules, or the changing of such (even of the lecturer). However, this committee will not interfere while the module is being taught or when the same module is taught for years by the same professor in the same format. The approval is an administrative requirement, but usually has no meaning: in most cases the internal supervision of the professors and the departments is

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[7] Dr. Sharon Pardo is a member of the Department of Politics and Government. A meeting with him took place on 6.12.10.
[8] Dr. Dani Filc- Chair of the Department of Politics and Government and formerly Chair of the academic advisory committee at the department of Politics and Government (1.8.10).

satisfactory. From the point of view of the faculty, the supervisors and controllers are the heads of departments, and the chairs of department academic advisory committees. Another reason why the approval of the faculty academic advisory committee is mainly administrative is the lack of familiarity of the professors who sit in the faculty academic advisory committee with the knowledge being taught in different disciplines in the faculty. Exceptions to this are modules shared by different departments. These cases require an in-depth content-related discussion.

Although, as mentioned, the faculties' supervision is mainly administrative in all the faculties, a significant relief of supervision is evident in the case of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. This faculty allows its departments almost complete freedom to decide the academic programs and their contents, under the banner of "academic freedom". In this faculty the faculty administration deals with administrative services only, and has nothing to do with academic oversight. Also it is not perceived as an authority for the departments. On the opposing side the Faculty of Engineering Sciences is known as the faculty with the strictest procedures, and it does not allow much freedom for the departments to set the courses and the degree programs. This is an outcome of the requirements for authorization for engineering, but also, of a deliberate decision. According to this, almost all decisions or exceptions require approval of the faculty academic advisory committee (such as guided reading module or an irregular module registration). Nonetheless, Dr. Tsesarsky indicated that although there are strict documented procedures, the department academic advisory committee still has the authority to decide, whether the discussed issue has a procedure or not.

Another kind of supervision is an overall tracking of the completion of student's duties for the degree program. This supervision is provided by the computerized system which provides a review of the actual actions and procedures as they take place in reality: the different procedures are characterized in the computerized system of each department's modules. Thus, if a student fulfils all his duties in the courses of the degree program, as they are characterized, he will be entitled to receive the degree.

Council for Higher Education (CHE)

The CHE must give its certificate of approval whenever a new department or a new degree is opened in the university. This approval includes an examination of the academic programs: the courses and the modules. Also, in recent years, The Council of Higher Education performs a national review of different selected disciplines (different in each year) at the academic institutions. This supervision, by an external overall authority, generates relative uniformity of the academic programs and disciplines among the different institutions in Israel.

Written and documented procedures and regulations:

Beyond the faculty year books (some of which are not as detailed and clear as others), in most faculties there is no available documentation of the decisions of the faculty academic advisory committees and the faculty administration. Also, when a new professor takes the duty of chair of department or chair of the academic advisory committee, the predecessor passes on all the knowledge and procedures, usually by heart with no written regulations. Because of this, decisions are made based on "tradition" and past decisions.

Differences exist between the faculties' attitudes towards documentation. An obvious correlation was found between the faculty's attitude to documentation and the faculty's attitude to supervision on the departments. The Faculty of Engineering Sciences is the faculty with the most documented procedures and almost all decisions are made at the faculty level. The Faculty of Natural Sciences also documents and publishes its procedures, available on the faculty's website and yearbook. This while the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences allows its departments

vast freedom towards different decisions, under the name of academic freedom. Correspondingly, there is almost no documentation of the faculty's decisions. In the Faculty of Business and Management all decisions were claimed to be documented, although most decisions are not available on the faculty's year book or website (even the credit index).

Updating and refreshing the content of modules

The Faculty of Business and Management instructed the academic advisory committees of the departments to examine existing standard modules as well as new modules, and to refresh their syllabus (such change should be approved by the faculty's academic advisory committee). In the Faculty of Natural Sciences some departments (such as the Department of Computer Sciences) have established a curriculum committee entrusted with the examination of new and existing modules, and invigorating their curriculum.

In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the professors[9] told about a continuous active discourse among the professors about the learning programs, the modules and the syllabuses. The learning program changes frequently due to the developments in the discipline, the lecturers' expertise and their ambition to improve. Naturally, complaints of students impact this discourse, but in their words, the complaints deal with low level academic demands and not only with high ones.

As mentioned, in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences the modules, courses and syllabuses are pretty permanent. In relatively new departments there are still frequent changes.

Syllabus

The procedure detailed in this section is a university procedure, decided from above and enforced by the faculty's administration. The lecturers must hand in the module's syllabus ahead of time (by the format that the faculties set), to be available to the students, including: name of the module (English and Hebrew), abstract of the module (English and Hebrew), credits, time table, length (semester or year), pre-requirements, method of teaching, module requirements, reading material, reception hours, and the manner of assessment. This procedure is already assimilated in most of the departments. If the lecturer would like to change the syllabus after the registration period is over (first two weeks of the semester), the lecturer must get the approval of all the students registered for the module. If not, the different academic advisory committees will discuss the case (first the department committee, then the faculty committee). Some of the faculties officially do not approve any change in the syllabus at all after the registration period (even if all students approve the change).

Unlike other faculties in the university that publish the syllabus on the internet, available to whom it may concern, the Faculty of Business and Management makes syllabuses available only to the relevant students because some professors claimed that copyright laws should be applied on syllabuses (as on intellectual property).

Conclusion

Although the Israeli Higher Education system was based on the German system, today it is a totally different system influenced and inspired by different attitudes.

The University, formally, has an accepted practice, but there is no official available documentation of it, aside from two faculties' yearbooks. Regarding the implementation of the

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[9] Dr. Dani Filc- Chair of the Department of Politics and Government and formerly Chair of the academic advisory committee at the department of Politics and Government (1.8.10) and with Dr. Galia Avidan- Chair of the academic advisory committee at the Department of Psychology (6.10.10) .

accepted practice, a vast flexibility and essential differences were found between different faculties and even in different departments in the same faculty. As part of that we found differences in the policy of calculating the credits, also between different faculties and even in different departments in the same faculty.

The accepted credit index of the existing system is based on the work of students in class and does not take into calculation the work of students at home. According to this policy, and in view of other findings of this report, there is no importance to the amount of learning material and there is no correlation between the workload and the credits. As seen, the university is aware of the problem of different workloads of different modules with the same credits. This problem was discussed at the overall university level (as Dr. Tsesarsky indicated), but the solution of that forum dealt with balancing the workload of different semesters, not of different modules. One departmental initiative tried to deal with the problem itself by setting regulation for the workloads of different kind of modules, but this approach has not spread beyond that department. This issue is especially relevant to our pilot project of implementing the ECTS system, since these differences are one of the issues that the ECTS intends to solve.

In this report we dedicated a substantial part for supervision, in order to see how the system reviews itself in order to identify differences between decisions and actual practice. At the departmental level, there is supervision of the modules and the way they are being taught. However at the faculty level the supervision works differently in each faculty. Although as a rule all faculties share the same practice of supervision, in realty, in each faculty the practice works in different levels of depth and strictness. In some cases the lack of supervision is justified on the basis of academic freedom. The lack of internal supervision can explain the numerous cases that we found of gaps and differences between the regulations and the actual practice. The external supervision of modules, run by the CHE is satisfied, since it started to have a national review of different disciplines.

An obvious correlation was found between the faculty's attitude to documentation and the faculty's attitude to supervision of the departments. The documentation (as a practice) is lacking in most faculties and almost all departments. Even when there is no lack, usually the documentation is not available for the students or for any external person.

As in other areas, we found that all attitudes toward updating and refreshing the content of modules are different from faculty to faculty and from department to department. Most of the initiatives of examining existing modules were local, usually by certain people in a department. We did not find any regulation regarding this subject on the university level.

The procedure regarding syllabus and publishing it is a university procedure, decided from above and enforced by the faculty's administration. This procedure is widely assimilated at all levels of the system, beside a slight difference regarding the syllabus publishing in the Faculty of Business and Management.

This report attempts to describe and summarize the situation in the university concerning some issues relevant to our project. The report wil be circulated in the university, in the hope that others may benefit from it much as it contributes to our project.

We wish to express our thanks to all those individuals who agreed to meet with us and gave of their time, helping us produce this report.

<u>Glossary</u>

BGU- Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Bologna Process- the Bologna Process is named after the Bologna Declaration, which was signed in the Italian city of Bologna on 19 June 1999 by ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries. Today, the Process unites 47 countries - all party to the European Cultural Convention. The purpose of the Bologna Process is to create the European Higher Education Area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. For further information, see the official website: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/

CHE- Council of Higher Education

ECTS- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Module- "course" in American terminology

OIAA- Office of International Academic Affairs

Appendix 1

List of Meetings

In order to gather information needed for this report, meetings took place with:

- Mr. Avraham Bar-On - the academic secretary (26.8.10).
- Ms. Rivka Kleinberg- Deputy Head of the Faculty of Engineering Sciences Administration (8.8.10).
- Ms. Rivka Sadka- Deputy Head of the Faculty of Natural Sciences Administration (3.8.10).
- Ms. Yaffa Segev- Deputy Head of the Faculty of Health Science Administration (9.8.10).
- Ms. Mira Golomb- Head of the Faculty of Business and Management Administration and Ms. Riki Gershon- Deputy Head of the Faculty of Business and Management Administration (10.8.10).
- Ms. Hava Laider- Deputy Head of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Administration (15.8.10).
- Dr. Michael Tsesarsky- Chair of the academic advisory committee at the department of Building Engineering (13.10.10).
- Dr. Michal Ziv- Chair of academic advisory committee at the Department of Computer Sciences (23.8.20).
- Dr. Yaniv Poria- Chair of academic advisory committee at the department of Hotel and Tourism Management (24.8.10).
- Dr. Dani Filc- Chair of the Department of Politics and Government and formerly Chair of the academic advisory committee at the department of Politics and Government (1.8.10).
- Dr. Sharon Pardo is a member of the Department of Politics and Government (6.12.10)
- Dr. Galia Avidan- Chair of the academic advisory committee at the Department of Psychology (6.10.10).

Appendix 2

Faculty of Health Sciences

In this Report the Faculty of Health Sciences was not included for several reasons. Beside of its being irrelevant for our pilot, there are many exceptions at the Faculty of Health Science for the following reasons:

1. The requirements for professional authorization of the health ministry cause frequent changes.
2. The faculty has regulations in existence from long ago, which still affect the way the faculty works today in some cases.
3. In most departments in the faculty the itinerary is not run by semesters, but as a weekly itinerary. This affects and distorts the calculation of the credit points. Usually the sum of learning hours in class in a certain module is divided by 13 (representing 13 weeks per semester) and the outcome is the credit points of the module. As a result, some modules have complicated credits such as 4.3.
4. Because the itinerary is weekly (and not run by semesters) there is no setting of 20 credits per semester, as in other faculties. Therefore, the credits can range from 17 to 70 points per semester (even in the same program).

Credit Index

In the Faculty of Health Science there is almost no documentation of the decisions and the acts of the faculty. The index of credits is based in a flexible way on the other faculties' indexes, but it is not documented anywhere. According to Ms. Segev we can say that:

Method of teaching	Length	credits
Frontal lecture	13 hours	1
Tutorial or laboratory	13 hours	0-0.5
Clinical internship	13 hours	0.5-1
Internship	13 hours	0-1
Work with community	13 hours	About 0.25
Field trip/study tour	One day	0-0.5

In most cases the credits reflect only the work of the students in class. An exception to this is clinical internship which might reflect in some cases the work of the students out of the classroom..

The faculty's administration, as well as the academic advisory committee, is involved in the details of all new modules (credits, hours, assessments, content), especially if the module is mandatory. Although syllabuses must be submitted and published for the students before the semester, there are still some difficulties with the implementation of this issue. Still, syllabuses can be provided by request.

In conclusion, although there is a vast difference in and within the faculty's regulations, today the faculty is making an effort to unify and write the regulations. All those exceptions led to a decision to remove this faculty from our report.