

Hebrew University Deceptive Administration

Part 1

Vice President for R&D misinforms and Ensuring an academically select Senate

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To Hebrew University Community
HU Governors
Heads of Israeli universities
MALA"G and VATA"T members
The Media
More

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Former Pro-Rector Mara Beller did not trust the Hebrew University top administration. So she told, in effect, the assembly of the Senate in its meeting of December 3, 2003.¹

Indeed, why should HU President Magidor be trusted? One cannot trust a president who falsely blames the Intifada (Palestinian uprising) for his failure to gauge the academic status of the Hebrew University by visiting committees, consequently letting whole HU departments and units fall into disrepair, while concealing that from HU Governors and the public. See "This is a Lie!"²

Similarly, why should HU Rector Rabinowitch be trusted? One cannot trust a rector (faculty elected provost; an Israeli bad invention) whose actions have brought "Shame on the Hebrew University," as described in a recent op-ed bearing this title in *Maariv*, the second largest Israeli newspaper. To read the op-ed, click on one of the following links. (Note: The URLs in the footnotes are clickable too.)

Hebrew: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART/753/909.html>

English: <http://www.maarivintl.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=article&articleID=9768>

I will expand on the aforementioned important issues in the near future. Here, though, I shall discuss briefly yet another recent manifestation of deception by HU top administration.

¹ http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msyberg/YB_files/Beller_to_Senate.pdf

² http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msyberg/Higher_Education/This_is_a_lie.pdf

1 A silly ranking

Recently, Hebrew University Vice President (VP) for Research and Development Herve Bercovier has sent out a message to all of HU faculty gleefully announcing,

In last year's survey, the Hebrew University was ranked 6th of all institutions outside the USA! Let's aim for the top this year!³

Sixth! Not bad! The Hebrew University must be doing very well under the current administration. This is what the high ranking HU administrator Bercovier was trying to tell us. But is his message trustworthy?

A quick check: Guess who beats HU to the top in that ranking. Well, first is Dalhousie University (Dalhousie?!); second is INRA Research Center at Versailles-Grignon; and third is University of Dundee.³ Strange. What kind of a ranking is it, where Dalhousie University outranks Dundee University at the very top, and both beat Oxford and Cambridge Universities which are nowhere in this ranking?

Moreover, in what exactly does Dalhousie University outrank both Oxford and Cambridge? Vice President Bercovier strangely but conveniently forgot to mention that in his message. It turns out that the ranking is not by what one would expect upon reading VP Bercovier's elated message; namely, by how adept the institutions are at fulfilling their mission in research or teaching.⁴ Instead, it is a ranking of "Best places to Work in Academia; Non-US Ranking." The message of that ranking must then be that when presented with the employment choice, one should by far prefer Dalhousie University over Oxford or Cambridge. A silly ranking? Indeed so! Let me explain.

Hebrew University Vice President Bercovier misinforms when he states, "HU was ranked 6th of all institutions outside the USA!" The truth is that the "Best places" survey pertains only to thirty seven (37) non-US academic, private, and government life-sciences labs; a far cry from Bercovier's "all institutions outside the USA," of which there are thousands. Why so few in the survey? Because this is the number of non-US institutions from which the surveyors received four or more usable responses. Four or more! A quick calculation from the data that the surveyors provide shows that each of the 37 institutions that made the ranking was represented by mere six(!) responders on average.⁵

³ http://www.the-scientist.com/yr2003/oct/feature2_031020.html

⁴ The mediocrity of the Hebrew University in too many research areas can be gleaned, inter alia, from the data collected and analyzed by former HU Rector Gidi Czapski. See, eg, pages 2, 3 in http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msyberg/Higher_Education/Senate_Meeting.pdf and Haaretz article at <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtPE.jhtml?itemNo=454925>

⁵ The calculation is this. The surveyors received 2210 responses from 956 separate institutions, but only 168 institutions (131 US and 37 non-US) with four or more responses were included in the survey. Therefore responses from $956 - 168 = 788$ institutions with 3 responses or less were excluded from the survey. A conservative estimate of 1.5 responses on average from those excluded institutions yields about $788 \times 1.5 = 1182$ excluded responses. This leaves about $2210 - 1182 = 1028$ included responses from 168 included institutions, which yields an estimate of $1028/168$ or 6 responses on average from each included institution.

Ergo, HU is the 6th “best place to work in academia” among 37 non-US research institutions, where 6 researchers on average bothered to return the survey forms. To boot, the surveyors also admit to additional major flaws in their survey (“Our sample of scientists was self-selected, we have made no attempt to standardize the results,” etc.⁶). On top of all that, the silly ranking places HU below the top 15% of the 37 ranked institutions. Why is that cause for joy?

Vice President for Research and Development Bercovier, sending a jubilant public message about how well HU does in such a nonsensical ranking demonstrates an unjustifiable disrespect to the intelligence of the Hebrew University faculty.

2 HU Vice President Bercovier beguiles⁷

Is the above, indeed, only a matter of disrespect to our intelligence? Let me demonstrate it runs deeper.

Several months ago, on December 3, 2003, when former Pro-Rector Mara Beller stepped down from her academic office, she gave to the Senate assembly a very stern speech about the desperate situation at the Hebrew University Faculty of Humanities. She said (translated from Hebrew),

Needed is a sense of security, minimal stability, full trust between the faculty and top Hebrew University administration. [But] I am impressed that the opposite atmosphere exists now in many of the [Humanities] departments; uncertainty, panic of collapse, and a sense of disrespect to the whole [Humanities] Faculty.⁸

— Former Pro-Rector Mara Beller
Protocol of the December 3, 2003 Senate meeting

Panic of collapse! Could former Pro-Rector Beller’s alarm have been louder or clearer? Amazingly, not one at the Senate meeting responded to Beller’s harsh reproach; neither HU President Magidor, nor HU Rector Rabinowitch, nor Vice President Bercovier, nor any Senate member. Nobody! As if former Pro-Rector Beller has not spoken at all. What a disgrace!⁹

Now, Vice President Bercovier, when you wrote your message, you definitely knew about the desperate situation at the HU Faculty of Humanities—panic of collapse—as former Pro-Rector Beller described it to all, yourself included. You also knew then, and

⁶ <http://www.the-scientist.com/academia/method.htm>

⁷ beguile; To deceive by means of pleasant or alluring methods

⁸ http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msyberg/YB_files/Beller_to_Senate.pdf

⁹ Former Pro-Rector Mara Beller, you chose to speak to the wrong audience; to the HU Senate, which cannot and does not see and promote the good of the University as a whole. Instead, you should have spoken through the HU Governors and through the media to the Israeli public and to the Jewish people whose university this is. I will elaborate on this point in the near future.

still know, that the Social Sciences are in no better shape. For example, the HU business school has collapsed a decade ago under heaps of deception of the public that keep piling up.

But panic of collapse is in total, irreconcilable conflict with ranking 6th in the world in “Best places to Work in Academia.” Nevertheless, you have deliberately chosen to cover up former Pro-Rector Mara Beller’s sounding of the alarm, and, instead, to misinform the HU community of an absurd, misleading ranking. If this is not deception—of the embarrassing type we have come to expect from Hebrew University top administration—then what is?

The Hebrew University deserves a trustworthy administration that does not habitually deceive it and the public. It is the Hebrew University Governors’ foremost duty to ensure that the University gets one.

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3 Academically select Senate

Responding to the government’s September 2003 resolution to improve university governance, the Hebrew University has resolved to reduce its self crippling, oversized Senate to a more functional membership of about ninety, which is close to 10% the size of the former Senate. Since the Senate’s mission is purely academic, it should include as members only the academic elite of the Hebrew University professoriate; namely, the top 10% or so of that group.

Therefore, those who are not convinced that they belong in the Hebrew University academic elite should resist being elected into the Senate, unless they are prepared and willing to publicly demonstrate their excellent academic credentials when publicly called upon to do so by doubting observers. Let the Hebrew University professoriate demonstrate to the Israeli public, especially to its politicians, how only those are elected who unquestionably belong in the elected body.

4 HU needs an honest president

Professor Magidor, an honest president and a real university leader should have, among other virtues, both the backbone and the dignity to publicly respond to former Pro-Rector Mara Beller, to this letter, and to those soon to follow.

–Yaacov Bergman