Toward a Student Exchange Program between SDSU and Tel Aviv University

Report on Travel to Israel, May-June 2001

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Introduction

This travel took place in the framework of the proposal by Lawrence Baron, the Nasatir Professor of Modern Jewish History and Director of the Lipinsky Institute, and Alexis Koster, Professor of Information and Decision Systems and Graduate Advisor for the MSBA in Information Systems. This proposal calls for the establishment of a student exchange program between SDSU and Tel Aviv University. The main two areas of study for SDSU students would be Business and Judaic Studies. Due to surgery, Professor Baron could not participate in the travel to Israel. My three days of meetings at Tel Aviv University were very positive. I also took advantage of my stay in Israel to initiate contacts with two other universities, the Ruppin Institute and Ben Gurion University of the Desert in Beer Sheva.

Meetings at Tel Aviv University

Business School

I met with Professor Seev Neumann at Tel Aviv University Recanati Business School on May 30, 2001. The school has its own building on campus. Professor Neumann is the Mexico Professor of Information Systems. He is also the Director of International Programs in the Recanati Business School. He enthusiastically supports the establishment of the proposed exchange program. The following points were discussed:

- The Recanati Business School offers many classes in English in the MBA program. Therefore the exchange program for business would be opened to SDSU graduate students.
The Recanati Business School has also an undergraduate program. Currently, the undergraduate business program does not offer classes in English. I am under the impression that such business classes could be offered in the future. I also think we could have some business undergraduate students attend graduate business classes that can be considered to be equivalent to 500-level SDSU classes.

Professor Neumann was concerned with a possible exchange unbalance within the Recanati Business School. However, Tel Aviv University, like SDSU, is interested in an overall exchange balance. It is likely that most of the SDSU students in the exchange would attend class in Humanities.

Finally, I learned that the Recanati Business School is ranked third among European business schools, after the London School of Business and INSEAD in France. Therefore, the College of Business Administration can only benefit from this exchange.

Faculty of Humanities

I met with professor Benjamin Isaac and Professor Haggai Erlich on June 5 and June 8. Professor Isaac is Professor of Classics in the Faculty of Humanities. He is also the Director of international programs for the university. Professor Erlich is professor of History. He was the visiting Israeli Professor at SDSU during the academic year 1999-2000. Here are the main points we discussed:

- Professor Isaac as well as Professor Erlich fully support the proposed exchange program.
- The School of Humanities offers classes in English, mostly for foreign students participating in “Year abroad” or “Semester abroad” programs at Tel Aviv University, such as the CSU program. Currently, the registration fee for those classes is higher than for other classes. Within an exchange program, this could cause a problem since SDSU students would only be expected to pay their SDSU fees.
- Tel Aviv University would provide university residences for SDSU exchange students.

Meeting at the Ruppin Institute

The Ruppin Institute offers undergraduate business degrees. Started by an association of Kibbutzim and Moshavim (systems of agricultural and industrial establishments based originally on collective property), it is primarily dedicated to providing business graduates to this system. The Ruppin Institute is located in a rural area between Tel Aviv and Haifa and would offer a very quiet place of residence for exchange students. I met with professor Joseph Yassur there on May 29. We agreed that a student exchange program is not possible in the short-term because the Institute does not offer classes in
English. However, the opportunity exists for faculty exchanges. Professor Yassur was a visiting professor in the College of Business Administration at SDSU several times in the past.

Visits at Ben Gurion University

Ben Gurion University is located in Beer Sheva, a city of 180000, which is the northern gateway to the Negev desert. I met with professor Peretz Shoval, the head of the Information System Engineering Department, on May 31, 2001. We agreed that we could consider setting up an exchange program in the future. I visited the Sde Boker campus of the university in the heart of the Negev Desert on June 3. This campus is dedicated to desert studies and receives many foreign students.

Status of the SDSU-Tel Aviv University Exchange Project

A meeting took place in Summer 2001 with Professor Lawrence Baron, Robert Carolin and Yvette Randall of the Office of International Programs and myself. We recognized that there are two problems in the way of the proposed official exchange agreement. Because there currently exists a CSU program at Tel Aviv University, the signature of a student exchange agreement will take more time and effort to accommodate some CSU rules. The CSU Office of International programs has indicated a willingness to work around this problem, in part because the agreement involves a new CSU-wide Judaic Studies major. The second problem stems from the tense political situation. We are aware that few American students are willing to travel to Israel under current circumstances. We hope that this situation will be resolved by the time an agreement is signed and the structures are in place for the implementation of the agreement.

Follow up to my Visit to Ben Gurion University and Sde Boker

My visits to Ben Gurion University and Sde Boker and subsequent meetings with Professor Meir Zamir, Professor at Ben Gurion University and the current Visiting Israeli Professor at SDSU showed that Ben Gurion University had some exciting programs in the areas of Hospitality and Tourism, Information Systems, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and desert studies. In consequence, I will be submitting a proposal for an exchange program with Ben Gurion University together with Jay H. Harris, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and with Carl Winston, the Director of the new Hospitality and Tourism Management Program at SDSU.