University, college students express dissatisfaction with level of campus academics, cost of living

*IDC given highest grades for quality of courses, HU gets lowest marks for grading system*

*By DANIELLE ZIRI*

Fewer students in Israel are satisfied with the quality of teaching at higher education institutions, according to a survey release by the National Union of Israeli Students as the new academic year began on Sunday.

The survey, conducted as part of the NUIS annual students report, examines Israeli students’ level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching at their academic institution according to factors including: The quality of courses, the quality of lecturers’ teaching, the quality of teaching assistants’ instruction, teacher’s attitudes towards students, grading system, the overall study program and the overall satisfaction with the institution.

For each element, the 9,268 respondents were asked to grade their sentiment on a scale from one to five, one being “not satisfied at all” and five being “very satisfied.”

Among the factors found to have a high average score are the teachers’ attitudes toward students, with a 3.9 average score and a 71 percent high satisfaction; the quality of courses, with a 3.7 average score and a 63% high satisfaction; and the overall satisfaction level with the academic institution, which was graded at an average of 3.7, with 62% of the respondents reporting high satisfaction.

In contrast, the overall study track, the grading system and the quality of lecturer’s teaching were graded among the least satisfactory fields.

Although the figures show only a small decrease from the 2012 survey – a 3.67 average in comparison to last year’s 3.62 – students do not appear to have experienced any improvement in the fields surveyed.

“For 10 years, we’ve seen a deterioration of the higher education system,” NUIS chairman Ori Reshtick told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday. “Its budget has decreased, there are less and less lecturers, and less and less attention paid to the quality of teaching.

“We here a lot of talk about the Nobel Prize winners, but they are a result of the academic system from 20 or 30 years ago,” he added.

For almost all of the elements, the highest scores were recorded in private colleges, followed by colleges of education and public colleges. The report showed that universities were, on average, only ranked fourth in the different categories. In fifth place are colleges of engineering.

In terms of the quality of courses, for example, the highest satisfaction level was recorded at the IDC Herzliya, while the lowest was observed at the Sha’arei Mishpat College in Hod Hasharon. For quality of lecturers’ teaching, the Netanya Academic College won the highest score while the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology was ranked at the bottom of the scale. As far as the grading system goes, students are most satisfied at the Weizmann Institute of Science, while the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was given the lowest score.

Reshtick said that higher education institutions in Israel should take the data seriously and see it as a “warning sign.”

“We see a lot of lecturers today who don’t know how to teach,” he added. “They teach because they were asked to, because it’s part of their jobs. We need to have more teaching development workshops for them.

“In the case of the Technion, it is a really good school and a really good research center, but they probably consider the research more important than the quality of teaching,” Reshtick told the Post.

Beyond the quality of Israeli academia, the NUIS report also revealed that students are continuing to struggle with the increasing cost of living.

More than half of respondents said they receive financial assistance from their parents during their studies, 41% of whom said they receive up to NIS 9,000 a year, 18% said they get between NIS 9,000 and NIS 12,000 a year, and 41% reported receiving over NIS 12,000 a year.

The average annual financial aid students receive from their parents stands at NIS 15,280, an increase of NIS 925 from last year.

Some 39% of students also said that they live with their parents or relatives, which saves them additional expenses.

In addition, the majority of respondents, 78%, said they work during their studies, 64% of whom do so during the academic year and 14% during vacations only. Only 22% of them do not work at all.

In terms of average monthly salary during their studies, 48% of students responded that they earn between NIS 1,000 and NIS 3,000 a month, 20% said that they earn up to NIS 1,000, 19% between NIS 3,000 and NIS 5,000 and 13% more than NIS 5,000.

The average monthly wage for a student during the school year stands at NIS 2,872, NIS 358 lower than it was last year.

Finally, the report also revealed an 8% increase in the number of students on scholarships this year.

Reshtick, addressing the findings, said that “the data indicate that the cost of living of Israeli students is worsening year by year, unfortunately without a proper solution found by the state.

“Every year, at the opening of the academic year, are all concerned about it,” he said. “But soon after, everyone returns to their typical winter dormancy, and the student population continues to deal with the high cost of living.

“Students expect the government to understand that the coming year is crucial, not only in terms of handling the issue of Iran, but also in dealing with issues of survival of the Israeli middle class and students in the United States. We also have a strong situation with the high cost of living that we wish to improve.”
STUDENTS ATTENDING the Hebrew University of Jerusalem walk to class yesterday.

(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

particular,” Reshtick continued.

Some 308,335 students started the 2013-2014 academic year on Sunday in 66 higher education institutions across the country. These include seven research universities, the Open University, 37 academic colleges, and 21 colleges of education, according to data provided by the Education Ministry.

At the weekly cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu congratulated the students and explained that under his previous government, he had dedicated NIS 7 billion toward a multi-year plan to strengthen higher education.

“According to all opinions and according to all those authorized elements that deal with the matter, including the heads of our universities and colleges, this flow and the way in which it is being implemented have led to a turning point in higher education,” he stated, “I say this because it might be forgotten.”

Netanyahu added that he had made this investment “out of the recognition that education in general, including the treetops, not just the roots and the trunk, but the treetops of higher education” which “ensure our future, our qualitative advantage and of course our excellence.”

Such investments, he said, will help foster more Nobel laureates.

“Anyone who thinks otherwise will be proved wrong. There is great genius, which sprouts and flowers here.... I meet these budding geniuses, as the defense minister and many others among you certainly do, in a series of elite IDF units, including intelligence and others,” he added, “They have contributed, and will contribute, greatly to the State of Israel.”

Tovah Lazaroff contributed to this report.