1. **Background**

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the Israeli Council of Pre-Military Preparatory Courses promoted two programs on Judaism within its preparatory courses: “Diversity in Judaism” and “Jewish Peoplehood”. These programs were designed to require certain outputs (i.e. a certain number of lessons and sessions on various subjects, as detailed in Table 1). However, specific content was not mandatory; that is lessons are transmitted by the instructors and teachers of the preparatory courses without any lesson plans or instructions provided by the Council.

**Table 1: Requirements for Diversity in Judaism and Jewish Peoplehood programs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Requirements for preparatory courses participating in the “Diversity in Judaism” program** | **Requirements for preparatory courses participating in the “Jewish Peoplehood” program** |
| 1. Eight or more hours per week (four or more lessons) on Judaism / Zionism / Jewish Peoplehood delivered by the teachers of the preparatory course. 2. Three sessions on the topic of diverse Jewish worldviews. 3. Four sessions on Diaspora Jewry   In addition, instructors are required to participate in a training day. | 1. Four sessions per year or two intensive days on the subject. 2. One annual meeting with Diaspora Jews   Note: this program has only been implemented since January 2018 |

This evaluative study was carried out by conducting a survey among students of these pre-military preparatory courses. Respondents included 1,378 students[[1]](#footnote-1) in 24 different preparatory courses[[2]](#footnote-2), as shown in Table 2. The survey was conducted in May-June of 2018, the end of the academic year for the preparatory courses. In order to enable a single duration, students’ responses at the end of 2017/18 (T1) were compared with responses from students at the beginning of the previous academic year -- 2016/17 (T0).

For each of the program goals, indices were constructed from the questionnaire items, which constitute various expressions of the examined objective. These were validated using statistical tools. These indices served as tools to assess whether the program met its goals and influenced the attitudes of the students. It should be noted that changes in the indices do not necessarily constitute proof of the success of the program. The hypothesis that the program, rather than other factors, brought about an observed change requires further investigation.

**Table 2: Pre-military preparatory courses offering the Jewish Peoplehood and Diversity in Judaism programs**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of preparatory program** | **“Diversity in Judaism” only** | **“Jewish Peoplehood” only** | **Both** | **Total** |
| **General** | 5 | 3 | 8 | 16 |
| **Torah study\*** | 1 | 4 | 3 | 8 |
| **Total** | 6 | 7 | 11 | 24 |

In the framework of the study, a comparison was made between the responses of students in preparatory courses which offered the Diversity in Judaism program and those in courses which offered the Jewish Peoplehood program. This comparison revealed that in most areas, there were no differences in outputs. Given that participation in the programs did not result in a consistent increase in outputs relevant to the programs’ goals, only the Diversity in Judaism program, the more significant of the two programs, and the only one implemented from the beginning of the year, was evaluated.

**Table 3: Comparison of outputs of Diversity in Judaism and Jewish Peoplehood programs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Program** | **Requirements** | **Output measured** | **Outputs compared to students in preparatory courses that did not participate in the program\*** |
| **Diversity in Judaism** | Eight or more hours per week on Judaism / Zionism / Jewish Peoplehood delivered by the teachers of the preparatory course | Number of weekly classes on Judaism – self-reported by students | These courses offered **fewer classes** on these subjects.  A **similar** number was offered in general and Torah-study courses. |
| Three sessions on diverse Jewish worldviews | Number of streams of Judaism encountered – self-reported by students | Students in general preparatory courses were introduced to a **similar** number of streams of Judaism.  Students in Torah-study courses were introduced to a **greater** number of streams of Judaism. |
| Four sessions on Diaspora Jewry | Number of annual sessions on Diaspora Jewry—self-reported by students | **Similar** number |
| **Jewish Peoplehood** | Four additional lessons per year or two intensive days on Diaspora Jewry | Number of annual sessions on Diaspora Jewry—self-reported by students | **Similar** number |
| One yearly meeting with Diaspora Jews | Participation in meeting – self-reported by students | **Similar** number |

1. **Findings of Evaluation of Diversity in Judaism Program**

The Council of Pre-Military Preparatory Courses established three goals for the Diversity in Judaism program:

1. **Affinity for Judaism**: To develop and / or strengthen affinity for Judaism among students in preparatory courses.
2. **Familiarity with various streams of Judaism**: To familiarize students in preparatory courses with a variety of streams in Judaism and to increase their openness to them.
3. **Familiarity with Diaspora Jewry**: To familiarize students in preparatory courses with Diaspora Jewry.

In order to analyze the extent to which the preparatory programs met the program goals, survey questions were constructed for each goal, with indices to measure the primary aspects of the topic being examined. For each index, we examine whether there was a difference in the scores of preparatory course students at the beginning of the previous academic year and the end of the current academic year. The underlying assumption of this analysis is that there was no significant difference between last year’s cycle of students and the students in the current cycle.

Separate comparisons were carried out for general preparatory courses and the Torah-study preparatory courses. The general courses are further divided into secular and mixed (religious and secular) courses. The Torah-study courses are further divided into courses for males and females.

* 1. **Results related to the goal of increasing affinity for Judaism**

Overall, in the general courses, both those which were secular and those which were mixed (secular and religious), the scores at the end of the year were significantly higher than those at beginning of the year for all indices related to affinity for Judaism. In contrast, in the Torah-study courses, there were no significant differences in affinity for Jewish between the beginning and end of the year. This may be due to the already high level of affinity for Judaism reported by students in the Torah-study courses at the beginning of the year (average of over 4 on all indices[[3]](#footnote-3) and over 87% reported practicing Jewish ritual behaviors at T0). However, in Torah-study courses for females, despite the high starting point (4.2 or higher on all indices and 96% report practicing Jewish ritual behaviors at T0), there were significant differences between the beginning of the year and the end for two of the indices.

It should be emphasized that although in the general preparatory courses, all the scores at the end of the year were significantly higher than those at beginning of the year (and given the absence of change in most of the Torah-study courses, the gap was narrow) they were lower or equal to the scores in the Torah-study preparatory courses at the beginning of the year. It should also be noted that the findings described above regarding the results of the various indices are similar to those found last year (2016/17).

**Table 4: Indicators of development of affinity for Judaism in general preparatory courses[[4]](#footnote-4)**

**Table 5: Indicators of development of affinity for Judaism in Torah-study preparatory courses**

* 1. **Results related to the goal of increasing familiarity with various streams of Judaism**

Examination of preparatory course students’ degree of familiarity with various streams of Judaism was carried out using five indices. Of these five indices, only one revealed a significantly higher score at the end of the year as compared with the beginning in all the preparatory courses; the index “knowledge on the subject of diversity in Judaism”.

In contrast, for the indices “identification of Judaism as Orthodox practice” and “openness to cultural complexity”, [[5]](#footnote-5) in all the types of preparatory courses, no significant difference was found between the beginning and end of the year. For the index “openness to other streams”,[[6]](#footnote-6) a difference was found between the beginning and end of the year for mixed courses and Torah-study course for females, but no difference was found in Torah-study courses for males or in the courses for secular students.[[7]](#footnote-7) It should be noted that the average scores at the beginning of the year for all indices related to this goal were significantly higher among students in secular preparatory courses as compared to scores among students in Torah-study courses, with the exception of the index for “curiosity about diversity in Judaism”. It should also be noted that the findings described above regarding the results for these various indices are similar to those of last year (2016/17).

**Table 6: Indices of familiarity with streams of Judaism in general preparatory courses[[8]](#footnote-8)**

**Table 7: Indices of familiarity with streams of Judaism in Torah-study preparatory courses**

* 1. **Findings related to the goal of increasing familiarity with Diaspora Jewry**

In terms of the extent to which students in the preparatory courses were familiar with Diaspora Jewry, the indices on the subject of the attitude towards Diaspora Jewry were consistently higher among those in Torah-study preparatory courses than among those in the general courses. In addition, while overall the students in the preparatory courses attributed importance, and even great importance, to the connection between the Jews in the State of Israel with Diaspora Jewry, they personally attested to a moderate or at best moderately high connection to and knowledge of Diaspora Jewry.

In terms of the program’s impact, it was found that in the secular preparatory courses, the end-of-year scores were significantly higher than those at the beginning of the year. In the other preparatory courses (general mixed, Torah-study for males and Torah-study for females), there were no significant differences between the beginning and end of the year. It should be noted that apart from the findings regarding the secular preparatory courses, the other findings were similar to those of previous year.

**Table 8: Indices for familiarity with Diaspora Jewry in general preparatory courses[[9]](#footnote-9)**

**Table 9: Indices for familiarity with Diaspora Jewry in Torah-study preparatory courses**

* 1. **Comprehensive findings**

The findings of the evaluation of the Diversity in Judaism program raise two issues that deserve particular emphasis:

1. **Improvement in students’ level of knowledge during the year**. In almost all cases, measures of students’ subjective knowledge related to the three program goals show higher scores at the end of the year compared to the beginning. In particular, the scores of students in the secular preparatory courses testify to their higher level of knowledge related to all three goals at the end of the year. This trend of change in the level of knowledge also took place in the previous evaluation year.
2. **Relationship between number of sessions and scores on indices**. No difference was found in the absolute majority of indices examined between the courses which reported (to the Council of Pre-Military Preparatory Courses) that they offered eight or more hours weekly on Jewish subjects and those which offered less than eight hours. In other words, no correlation was found between outputs (number of lessons) and results (scores on outcome measures).
3. **Students attitudes towards Jewish studies during the preparatory year**

In general, students in the preparatory courses expressed quite positive attitudes towards Jewish studies. For almost all of the indices of students’ attitudes towards Jewish studies, the scores were between medium to high or very high. In particular, students in the Torah-study courses demonstrated strongly positive attitudes towards Jewish studies. For all indices, they had higher scores than did the students in the general preparatory courses.

In comparison to indices of attitudes among students at the end of the previous year, in the current year, students in secular preparatory courses and students in Torah-study courses for females had significantly higher scores on the indices “impact of Jewish content and its mode of transmission” and “meetings with representatives of various streams of Judaism”. (For the latter index, scores were also higher among students in Torah-study courses for males).

On the other hand, in the mixed (secular and religious) preparatory programs, scores were lower in the current year than in the previous year, or there was no significant difference. It should also be noted that the students in all the courses demonstrated a less positive attitude regarding the extent to which the works / Midrashim that the students prepared contributed to their attitudes about and familiarity with Judaism as compared with other indicators of attitudes. Further, this was the only index for which students gave only a moderate score.

**Figure 1: Impact of Studies and Contents on Jewish Studies**

**Figure 2: Students’ Response to Meetings with Representatives of Various Streams of Judaism**

*The circle in the figures indicates a significant difference of at least 5%. This is the required level of significance throughout this report. The asterisk indicates that in this case the significance level is only 10%.*

1. **Summary of Findings**

The findings for all indices are summarized in Table 10. They are divided in two sections. One section pertains to the goals, and the second section pertains to the type of preparatory course. Following this, there is a discussion of the question of attributing the findings to the impact of the plan.

**Table 10: Summary of Findings**

*Key:*

*Yellow = No difference from the beginning of the year*

*Light green = Moderate score at the beginning of the year and significant difference between the beginning and end of the year*

*Dark green = High score at the beginning of the year and significant difference between the beginning and end of the year*

* 1. **Findings according to goal**
     1. **To develop or strengthen affinity for Judaism among students in preparatory courses**

A difference was found between the beginning and end of the year for all indices in the general preparatory courses. Differences were found for some indices in the Torah-study courses for females. No significant change was found with the previous year.

* + 1. **To familiarize students in preparatory courses with a variety of streams in Judaism and to increase their openness to them**

In all of the courses, a difference was found between the beginning and end of the year for the index of knowledge of streams of Judaism. A difference was found in some of the courses for measures of openness to and curiosity about various streams of Judaism. No differences were found for other indices. There was no significant change from the previous year.

**4.1.3 To familiarize students in preparatory courses with Diaspora Jewry**

Only in the secular courses was a significant difference found between the beginning and end of the year for all indices related to familiarity with Diaspora Jewry. No differences were found in the other courses. In comparison to the previous year, there was an increase in all relevant indices only in the secular courses.

* 1. **Findings according to course type**
     1. **Secular courses**
* Scores were higher at the end of the year compared to the beginning of the year for the majority of indices.
* Indices of students’ attitudes towards Judaism were higher in comparison to the previous year.
  + 1. **Mixed courses**
* Scores were higher at the end of the year compared to the beginning of the year for indices of affinity for Judaism and the majority of the indices for familiarity with various streams of Judaism
* Scores were lower for indices of attitudes towards Judaism in comparison to the previous year.

**4.2.3 Torah-study courses for females**

* Scores were higher at the end of the year in comparison to the beginning of the year for the majority of indices of familiarity with various streams of Judaism and for some of the indices of affinity for Judaism, despite initially high scores.
* Scores related to students’ attitudes were higher as compared to the previous year.

**4.2.4 Torah-study courses for males**

* Scores were significantly higher at the end of the year in comparison to the beginning only for the index “knowledge of diversity in Judaism” and not for other indices.
* Indices of students’ attitudes were higher in comparison to the previous year only for the topic of meetings with representatives of various streams of Judaism.

**4.3 Question of attribution of findings**

Although the findings indicate differences in a positive direction between the positions of the students at the beginning of the year and the end of the year for many of the indices, there remains a crucial question for this evaluation regarding attribution. That is, the extent to which these changes during the year can be attributed to the participation of the preparatory courses in the programs offered by the Council of Pre-military Preparatory Courses. This question is examined from several angles.

**4.3.1 Outputs**

In order to determine that the program was responsible for the observed change among students, it was expected that this change would be affected by the amount of content they received (outputs: number of sessions, lessons, etc.) or their quality / character (changes in content, either in the lesson plans or from the instructors). However, as discussed in the background of the evaluation, participation in the Diversity in Judaism program did not result in an increase in outputs compared to preparatory courses that did not participate in the program. Further, the program has no content components. Therefore, the evaluation cannot attribute a direct influence of the program on the students.

**4.3.2 Qualitative research**

This year, no qualitative research was conducted. However, a study carried out in the previous year indicated that participation in the Diversity in Judaism program did not require most of the preparatory courses to increase the number of classes or to change the content transmitted to the students. Since the course requirements have remained almost unchanged over the years, there is no reason to conclude that this finding is different in the current year.

**4.3.3. Control group**

There was no adequate control group for courses that participated in the program which could help isolate the effects of the program. Six preparatory courses did not take part in the Diversity in Judaism program: three secular courses and three Torah-study courses. However, since these preparatory courses offered a similar number of outputs as the preparatory programs that did participate in the program, it is not possible to use them as a control group.

**4.3.4 Self-reporting**

Students in the general preparatory courses reported that the sessions and meetings on the subject of Judaism had a high impact, and students in the Torah-study preparatory courses reported a very high impact. However, the students’ attribution of influence is more indicative of satisfaction than impact. As evidence, the findings indicate a greater difference in attitudes between the beginning and end of the year among students in general preparatory courses rather than in the Torah-study courses. That is, the extent of influence is inversely proportional to the students’ satisfaction with Jewish studies.

In conclusion, it is not possible to attribute the findings regarding the differences between the beginning and the end of the year to the Diversity in Judaism program, as opposed to changes students underwent in the preparatory programs that are not directly related to the program.

1. **Recommendations**
   1. **General recommendations**

**5.1.1 Differentiation between Torah-study preparatory courses and general preparatory courses**

In order to prevent “preaching to the converted” there should be separate requirements and goals for the general preparatory programs and for the Torah-study preparatory programs, in which the students have significantly different starting positions. For example, the requirement for Jewish studies should be cancelled in the Torah-study preparatory courses and the requirements related to familiarity with various streams of Judaism should be increased.

**5.1.2 Introduce a content component**

In light of the lack of influence of the number of lessons (participation in the program does not affect the extent of Jewish studies and the extent of Jewish studies does not affect the achievement of goals) it is recommended to consider introduction of a content component for the program. For example, provide training and access to lesson plans.

**5.1.3 Refine the requirements of the Jewish Peoplehood program**

In light of the lack of impact of the Jewish Peoplehood program on the extent of the lessons and meetings on the subject of Diaspora Jewry, it is recommended to refine the distinction between the requirements of this program and the requirements of the Diversity in Judaism program, with better supervision over its implementation.

**5.1.4 Differentiate between types of goals**

In formulating the goals, there should be a distinction between the goals related to change in perception and goals related to increasing knowledge.

* 1. **Recommendations for general preparatory courses**
     1. **Preserve the requirements for the Diversity in Judaism program**
     2. **Explore opportunities to learn from successes**

Explore whether it is possible to identify what factors brought about the improvement in scores for indices of familiarity with Diaspora Judaism among students in the general preparatory courses as compared with the previous year. Explore whether it is possible to draw conclusions from courses participating in the program in which no difference was found.

* 1. **Recommendations for Torah-study preparatory courses**

Adapt the goals of the Diversity in Judaism program to the Torah-study preparatory courses:

* + 1. **Affinity for Judaism**

In light of the extremely high scores at the beginning of the program, ask the following question: “What process should a student in a Torah-study preparatory course undergo related to attitude towards Judaism?” Measure changes relative to the responses received.

* + 1. **Familiarity with various streams of Judaism**

It should be understood what realistic goals can be set for the Torah-study preparatory program, especially for males, in relation to Jewish pluralism (for example, the perspective of non-acceptance or non-recognition should be understood).

1. The survey was completed by 1,049 respondents, representing approximately 76% of the total number of respondents. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Four of the preparatory courses did not complete the programs: three general preparatory courses and one Torah-study course. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. All the questions, and accordingly all the indices, are on a scale of 1-5, except for the measure of Jewish practice, which is given in percentages. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In tables 4-9, an arrow indicates there was a significant difference between the results at the beginning and end of the year. A green arrow pointing up indicates that the result at the end of the year was higher. The equal sign indicates that there was no significant difference. Next to the arrow is the size of the difference between the beginning and end of the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The extent to which the student was familiar with and open to various interpretations and expressions of Jewish tradition and culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The extent to which students supported the option of non-Orthodox practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. However, the index in secular preparatory programs may be affected by a high score for this index score at T0 (4.45 on average) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In tables 4-9, an arrow indicates there was a significant difference between the results at the beginning and end of the year. A green arrow pointing up indicates that the result at the end of the year was higher. The equal sign indicates that there was no significant difference. Next to the arrow is the size of the difference between the beginning and end of the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In tables 4-9, an arrow indicates there is a significant difference between the results at the beginning and end of the year. If the result at the end of the year is higher, there is a green arrow pointing up. The equal sign indicates that there is no significant difference. Next to the arrow is the size of the difference between the beginning and end of the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)