



January 2011

**Response to the Committee for the Evaluation for the Middle Eastern Studies Program<sup>1</sup>**

The Department for Middle East Studies is proud of its achievements in research and teaching as presented in the report (outlined in an appendix to this letter). In brief, the committee favorably commented on the Department's **vision** when first established in the mid-1990s and its consistency in executing this vision so far. The committee further favorably mentioned the **quality of publications** by Department members. In **teaching**, the main focus of the report, the committee acknowledged the Department's ability to attract and retain high quality BA students (relative to other Departments in Israel). The committee also suggested "high level of graduate work." Moreover, the committee positively cited the international MA program (MAPMES) and special departmental projects such as a peer-reviewed, student-ran journal, *Jama'a*. **The committee made no specific requests for changes in departmental teaching or research.** The Department, however, recently conducted a full-day brainstorming meeting, to study the evaluation report. It reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to Arabic Language and Culture (see below) as its first priority in future development plans.

**The committee made recommendations at the university and CHE level, which we fully support:**

**a. Arabic Language and Culture.** In its immediate recommendations, the committee suggested "[A] full faculty appointment is also needed in the Department's Arabic language and culture program." Moreover, "[T]he absence of a tenured or tenure-track faculty member with credentials in Arabic linguistics and pedagogy is a serious deficiency that needs to be corrected to ensure the continuation of the high quality of this part of the Department's mandate" (pp. 8-9). We strongly believe that an addition of a tenure-track faculty will allow the department to pursue our development plans. Along the same line, since 2007, we asked the CHE's approval of a plan for an extension of teaching in our Arabic Language and Culture program to a "maslul" (54 credit points, as opposed to "hativa" or 28 credit points as it is now). (The approval to the CHE was submitted in the past as part of the university's five-year development plan. According to the Academic Secretary, this plan is resubmitted nowadays). A maslul in Arabic Language and Culture will allow the department to expand the number of BA students and, in the future, MAs and PHDs, as well as to conduct research in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> The response is referring the department-specific report.



**b. Library.** The committee recommended that "... high priority should be given to **hiring a specialist** on the Middle East with suitable skills in Arabic and to increasing the acquisitions budget" (p. 8). The committee also commented that "[T]he poor state of the library requires immediate remediation." The Dean wishes to emphasize the **critical importance of the library** as the main research laboratory for the Middle East Department, and the Humanities in general. The state of the BGU library is amongst the poorest in Israel and it is impossible to expect to attract serious research students or faculty unless the university finally takes responsibility for investing major resources in this facility. This issue has been constantly raised during the past ten years. The University must find significant monies to invest in the library, to attract the desired students and faculty.

Sincerely,

Prof. David Newman  
Dean  
Faculty of Humanities  
And Social Sciences

Dr. Relli Shechter  
Chair, Dept. of Middle-East Studies

Prof. Yael Edan  
Deputy Rector



## Appendix I: Citations from the committee's report

**a. Vision and consistency in execution:** The report suggests that the department was successful in breaking away from “the Orientalist ethos that inspired the founding generation of Middle East specialists at programs established at earlier dates. (p. 5). More so, “[I]ts recent foundation has contributed to the Department’s being in major ways *au courant* with the best practices of European and North American programs (p. 5). The department has also managed to realize such vision in a consistent manner: “... the Ben-Gurion faculty manages to be more comprehensive, both chronologically and methodologically, than some other institutions” (p. 5).

**b. Quality of publication:** “Taken in the aggregate, BGU faculty members have an active program of international publication and research, and many publish with internationally recognized presses, and their work commands major reviews and comments, and often appear on the reading lists of North American and European graduate seminars.” (p. 5).

**c. Teaching: BA.** Relative to other departments, the Department of Middle East Studies was able “to attract and retain high quality students. ... the average psychometric scores are comparatively high” (p. 6). Furthermore, “[T]he dropout rate, averaging 6.8% over the period 2004-2008 is startlingly low in comparison with other Israeli Middle East study programs” (p. 6). About a third of BA recipients continue their studies at BGU or elsewhere.

**Arabic Language and Culture:** “[U]nlike many Middle East programs elsewhere in Israel, Arabic is taught within the Middle East Department. Structurally this is a plus for the program, although inadequate staffing is a shortcoming. Likewise, Middle East Languages and Literatures is an integral part of this Middle East program, rather than a separate department as occurs elsewhere. This is an added plus that means that the quality of supervised graduate studies more readily emulates the standards of cultural studies as currently understood internationally” (p. 7).

**MA and PhD.** The committee approved of our emphasis on teaching theory and methodology; the interdisciplinary nature of advising, including flexibility in co-advising students with members of other departments; and the departments’ student-edited publication (Jama’a). Regarding our international MA program (MAPMES: “... the Committee was favorably impressed both as to the quality of the education being imparted and to the constructive interrelations between the Israeli and international students” (p. 8). Finally, “A review of MA and PhD theses presented in English, the abstracts of those presented in Hebrew



plus a review of the sources used in Arabic and European languages, and interviews with graduate students indicates a high level of graduate work” (p. 8).