



**Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Study
Programs**

Ben-Gurion University

The Faculty of Humanities

**The Department of Hebrew Literature Evaluation
Report**

Evaluation Report

February 2013

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Chapter 1: Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Hebrew Literature during the academic year 2011 – 2012.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education, who serves ex officio as a Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a Committee consisting of:

- **Prof. (Emeritus) Arnold Band, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Los Angeles, USA – Committee Chair**
- **Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yehuda Friedlander, Department of the Literature of the Jewish People, Bar-Ilan University, Israel**
- **Prof. Nili Gold, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. David Roskies, Department of Jewish Literature, The Jewish Theological Seminary, USA¹**
- **Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Departamento de Hebreo, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yosef Yahalom, Department of Hebrew Literature, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel**

Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati and Ms Maya Alayoff - Coordinators of the Committee on behalf of the CHE

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Hebrew Literature, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

¹ In addition, Prof. David Roskies holds a position at Ben-Gurion University.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2010).

Chapter 2: Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on May 13, 2012 during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Hebrew Literature study programs.

The Committee held the site visits to all of the five departments in May 2012.

During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including the senior management, faculty, staff, and students.

In view of the fact that Professor David Roskies holds a position at Ben-Gurion University, and in order to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest, Professor Roskies did not participate in the evaluation of the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion University.

This report deals with Hebrew Literature studies in the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion.

The Committee's visit to the Ben-Gurion University took place on May 28-29, 2012. The Committee thanks the management of Ben-Gurion University, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Hebrew Literatures for the self-evaluation report (SER) and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit at the institution.

This report was prepared following the guidelines of the Council for Higher Education. It is a synthesis of the analysis of the SER, the interviews conducted with faculty members, the administration and students, and it summarizes observations and makes recommendations intended to strengthen the Department.

The schedule of the visit, including the list of participants from the institution, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Studies in the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion University

- *This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

Executive Summary

In our discussions with the senior administration of the Faculty we have noted that unlike other departments of Hebrew Literature in Israel, the Department of the Ben-Gurion University has grown significantly between 2001 and 2010, and the university should be proud of this development. We also discussed planning for the coming years. We are convinced that concerted action is to be taken in the near future, to maintain this achievement and avoid deterioration by 2020.

Finally, the administration of the university should not be allowed to forget that the Department of Hebrew Literature at the Ben-Gurion University, or any other university in Israel, must fill a national mission: the study and fostering of the national Hebrew culture.

Background

We found the SER itself an impressive document in which the department as a whole participated. The presentation was clear and stressed both the significant history of the department and the rich array of the faculty activities and publications. This sense of history shapes the keenly felt pedagogical mission of the department.

The need for maintaining the strengths and reputation of this important department is connected with four major problems that came to our attention and probably affect a variety of issues that will be raised:

1. The diminution of the strength of the Humanities at the in the Israeli universities between 2000 and 2010. While this department has been spared this disastrous diminution, one must be on guard less this tendency to diminish the Humanities affect this department, too.
2. The retirement of professors of the past generation and the failure to replace them with younger scholars. They have been replaced so far only on the junior level effective this coming academic year. It is, by no means enough to run a coherent program.
3. The sharp decline in the number of students in the Humanities in general and in Hebrew Literature, in particular. This is a national problem that must be addressed.
4. The number of students whose first language is not Hebrew (mostly Arabic speaking students)) is large and the department must continue to address this issue vigorously as it has in the past.

Mission, Goals and Aims

We found the SER itself an impressive document in which the department as a whole is represented. The presentation was clear and stressed both the significant history of the department and the rich array of the faculty activities and publications. This sense of history shapes the keenly felt academic and pedagogical mission of the department.

The sense of Hebrew Literature as a crucial national mission seemed to be echoed in our meetings with the Rector, Deputy Rector and the Dean. We find the SER well written, objective, and adequately self-critical. We hope that the administration realizes fully that this department, *alone among similar departments in Israel*, has made major strides in the past 12 years – moving from academic inadequacy to major standing -- and that they will continue to contribute to concrete efforts to develop and strengthen this department.

The mission statement of the study program of the department is well expressed. The goal of the Hebrew Literature Department is to emphasize the cultural connections throughout history: *Midrashic* Literature; Hebrew Literature in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the early modern period; Modern Hebrew Literature including contemporary Israeli Literature.

The integration of the historical, theoretical, and comparative perspectives of Hebrew literature seems to be very positive. The historic and cultural background allied with courses in literary

theory should present the students with a systematic introduction to Hebrew Literature. The Department has also initiated courses in creative writing and in publication opening the possibilities for employment in these fields upon graduation.

During the past 12 years, the Ben-Gurion University has made major strides in the creation of a major center for the study of Modern Hebrew Literature. Under the leadership of Prof. Yigal Schwartz, the faculty has increase measurably as has the number of students at all levels. The *Heksherim* Institute for research in Hebrew Literature has attracted attention with its scholarly publications and archives of important writers. It sponsors *Mikan*, an important scholarly journal in modern Hebrew Literature edited by graduate students in the Department. All these activities have put Beer Sheva on the literary map which it never was before.

Teaching and research

The variety of research fields in Hebrew Literature as listed in SER and as it was shown to the committee in the exhibition of the publications is Impressive.

The folklore unit at BGU deserves special mention for its teaching and research. Created in 1999, it already attracts good, dedicated students who are encouraged to do creative research, often among communities in Israel. It has two full-time positions and cooperates in many projects with the faculty in Ladino studies. With the retirement of the senior professor in Folklore in Jerusalem, the vitality of the Ben-Gurion Center will assume even greater national and international importance.

The variety of courses listed in the study program is impressive, but we still wonder if they are adequate to fulfill the noble goals stated in the Mission Statement.

In the following paragraphs, we will point to some lacunae.

1. There are significant lacunae in offerings in Midrash, and Medieval Hebrew especially of the Renaissance and Baroque period. The Department is fully aware of this problem
2. Though is not primarily a matter of this Department, It was noted that there is a weakness in offerings in Bible and Second Temple Literature. This weakness ultimately affects the Hebrew Literature Department, too.
3. Many of the introductory courses are taught by Adjunct Teaching Staff, or Junior Academic Staff. We believe that such crucial courses should be taught by the more experienced and accomplished senior staff.

4. While there are many well designed courses, there are no seminar courses until the third year of the B. A. program. Seminar course should be introduced earlier, probably in the second year.
5. We received little information about the courses in Yiddish and Ladino offered on campus.
6. There is no graduate seminar for doctoral students.
7. We are under the impression that students enrolled in "Creative Writing" are not capable of doing the work in the regular literature courses.

Recommendations

1. The department should increase the offerings in Midrash, and Medieval Hebrew especially of the Renaissance and Baroque period.
2. We recommend that the faculty/university consider expanding the choice in courses in Bible and Second Temple Literature. Since the lack in these courses ultimately affects the Hebrew Literature Department, too.
3. Introductory courses should be taught by senior staff.
4. We recommend that Seminar courses should be introduced earlier in the degree program , probably in the second year.
5. There should be a seminar for doctoral students offered.
6. The faculty should admit only the best students for "Creative Writing" program.

Students and Learning

The variety of students is impressive. They come from all parts of the country, and not only from Beer Sheva, some as transfers from the *Ahvah* College (The building of the railroad connection with the center of the country has made a great difference). As opposed to some other universities in Israel, the number of students in Hebrew Literature has increased of the past few years. Some faculty and students, however, complain that the level of students has declined somewhat. According the information in the SER the admission criteria are relatively low, consideration should be given to raising the entrance requirements. On the whole, students seem to be very satisfied with the instruction they receive in the department.

There are many students in the Department from the Bedouin population - between 25% to 30% - whose native language is not Hebrew. While they make a great effort to advance in their

Hebrew studies and both the Department and the BGU as a whole is extremely sensitive to this problem and committed to dealing with it, it still exists as a major problem in this department. We recommend that this effort be both commended and maintained and that special preparatory courses be created and maintained for this population.

We understand that students have to pay for courses above those required in the curriculum. This seems to us counterproductive to any sensible educational goals. We should encourage eager and ambitious students, and not penalize them.

Students complain about the low level of the "*Targilim*" which are ordinarily taught by junior or adjunct faculty. These crucial courses should be taught by senior faculty.

Recommendations:

1. Entrance requirements should be raised.
2. More preparatory courses in Hebrew should be maintained to the students whose Hebrew is not their mother tongue.
3. Revision should be made on the "*Targilim*" (content and teachers).
4. The department should encourage its students—on all tracks—to avail themselves of the course offerings in the Faculty of Humanities, specifically for the purpose of studying the Hebrew Bible, the Mishna, the Talmud, the midrashim, and a thousand years of Hebrew homiletically and ethical writing. We urge the department to take responsibility for the acquisition of Judaic literacy, something in short supply in the Israeli educational system, as key to achieving Modern Hebrew literacy.

Faculty

There seems to be some disagreement regarding the pace of the advancement of faculty within the department. The committee has become aware of a tension between the administrators and the chairperson regarding the timing of presenting the files for advancement of faculty.

There seems to be much confusion in the minds of advanced graduate students, junior faculty, and adjunct faculty regarding of what is necessary for their advancement to tenure position in a university, be it at Ben-Gurion University or elsewhere. They wonder what sorts of

publications are necessary, in what language, whether they should seek a post-doctoral appointment abroad, etc. In general, we have found that this group, especially the junior faculty and adjunct faculty, is very disaffected since they work many hours often in several different institutions, for relatively low pay. One should not forget that precisely these young scholars who can see little professional future, are the ones who teach many of the introductory courses, and are the future of the department or of the profession seen nationally, or internationally.

This problem seems to be shared by all universities in Israel.

Finally, the administration of the university should not be allowed to forget that the Department of Hebrew Literature in Ben-Gurion University, or any other university in Israel, must fill a national mission: the study and fostering of the national Hebrew culture. The Dean of Humanities, in particular, should be aware of the unique intellectual enterprise he has in this department and should do everything to nourish its continued growth.

Recommendations

1. The retirement of full professors needs to be replaced with younger scholars. The recent retirement of Prof. Dvora Bergman, Tova Rosen and Iris Parush has been dispiriting. Some replacement has been made, as in the case of Dr. Amir Banbaji.
2. It is obvious that a concerted effort must be initiated now to prepare for the future. The present lecturers must be inspired to advance as rapidly as possible to the professorial rank. They should be encouraged to participate fully in the intellectual life of their disciplines through publications and participation in scholarly conferences. When new positions are made available, the best possible candidates should be engaged, and not necessarily those who have been trained in Ben-Gurion University. In general, given the likelihood that the Humanities in general will not be as well supported as they should be, cooperation with the other universities in the country should be encouraged.
3. It is obvious that the department cannot operate well without additional funds to finance the proper teaching positions to replace those lost. The assignment of so many introductory courses to junior faculty is an obvious sign of financial straits.
4. When seeking to replace retiring faculty with new blood, priority must be given to reinstating the teaching of medieval Hebrew poetry and the literature of the Haskalah.

Alumni

The committee met some of the alumni. They expressed warm memories of their student days in the department and cherish their informal contacts with their teachers and cohorts.

The Department has not established a formal organization of its alumni, nor does it keep any formal regular contact with them.

Recommendation

1. To establish a formal organization of the Department's alumni, and with the financial support of the University, to maintain contact with them, through e-mail communications, regular meetings, conferences, work-shops, and lectures by faculty members who could report about advances in the study of Hebrew literature.

Infrastructure

The Committee was impressed by the library facilities in general and by the new on-line services that the library was in the process of implementing. The facilities associated with the Heksherim Institute as add to the strength of this department.

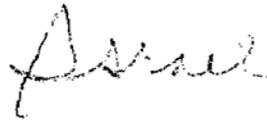
Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations

1. Given the general impressive progress in the development of the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion since 2000, precisely when departments in other Israeli university were starved for funds and were not allowed to replace retiring faculty, we strongly urge all the various factors of the university continue their wise support of the Department of Hebrew Literature. By this we mean the administration in all its ranks, the chairpersons of the Department, and the faculty themselves.
2. The retirement of full professors needs to be replaced with younger scholars. The recent retirement of Profs. Dvora Bergman, Tova Rosen and Iris Parush has been dispiriting. Some replacement has been made, as in the case of Dr. Amir Banbaji.
3. It is obvious that a concerted effort must be initiated now to prepare for the future. The present lecturers must be inspired to advance as rapidly as possible to the professorial rank. They should be encouraged to participate fully in the intellectual life of their disciplines through publications and participation in scholarly conferences. When new positions are made available, the best possible candidates should be engaged, and not necessarily those who have been trained in Ben-Gurion University. In general, given the likelihood that the Humanities in general will not be as well supported as they should be, cooperation with the other universities in the country should be encouraged.
4. It is obvious that the department cannot operate well without additional funds to finance the proper teaching positions to replace those lost. The assignment of so many introductory courses to junior faculty is an obvious signs of financial straits.
5. We understand that students have to pay for courses above those required in the curriculum. This seems to us counterproductive to any sensible educational goals. We should encourage eager and ambitious students, and not penalize them. This recommendation is relevant not only to Ben-Gurion University but to all the other universities in Israel.
6. Finally, the administration of the university should not be allowed to forget that the Department of Hebrew Literature in Ben-Gurion University, or any other university in Israel, must fill a national mission: the study and fostering of the national Hebrew culture. The Dean of Humanities, in particular, should be aware of the unique intellectual enterprise he has in this department and should do everything to nourish its continued growth.

Signed by:



Prof. Arnold Band
Committee Chair



Prof. Dan Ben-Amos



Prof. Yehuda Friedlander



Prof. Nili Gold



prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos



Prof. Yosef Yahalom

Appendices

Appendix 1- Copy of Letter of Appointment



January 2012

שר החינוך
Minister of Education

Prof. Arnold Band
Department of Comparative Literature
University of California, Los Angeles
USA

وزير التربية والتعليم

Dear Professor Band,

The State of Israel undertook an ambitious project when the Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) established a quality assessment and assurance system for Israeli higher education. Its stated goals are: to enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies; to provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel; and to ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena. Involvement of world-renowned academicians in this process is essential.

This most important initiative reaches out to scientists in the international arena in a national effort to meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher educational system today. The formulation of international evaluation committees represents an opportunity to express our common sense of concern and to assess the current and future status of education in the 21st century and beyond. It also establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process among scientists around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial endeavor.

It is with great pleasure that I hereby appoint you to serve as the chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Arnold Band, (Chair), Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Prof. Yehuda Friedlander, Prof. Nili Gold, Prof. David Roskies, Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Prof. Yosef Yahalom.

Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as the chair of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,


Gideon Sa'ar
Minister of Education,
Chairperson, The Council for Higher Education

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, The Quality Assessment Division
Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati, Committee Coordinator

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Appendix 2- Site Visit Schedule

Hebrew literature - Schedule of site visit – Ben-Gurion University

Monday, May 28, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
10:00-10:30	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Rector – Prof. Zvi Hacoen Deputy Rector – Prof. Steve Rosen Dean – Prof. David Newman
10:30-11:00	Meeting with head of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	Prof. David Newman
11:15-12:00	Meeting with the academic and administrative heads of the Department of Hebrew Literature	Prof. Tamar Alexander – Department Chair Prof. Yigal Schwartz - ex-Department Chair (2002-2007, 2008-2010) Sigal Edri – Administrative Coordinator
12:00:13:00	Meeting with senior faculty and representatives of relevant committees.	Heads of study programs: Prof. Nissim Calderon - Modern Hebrew Literature Section and Creative Writing track Mr. Shimon Adaf – Creative Writing track Dr. Haviva Ishay - Middle Ages Hebrew Literature Section Dr. Haim Weiss - Folk Literature, Agadda & Midrash Section Prof. Yigal Schwartz , Ms. Tami Israeli – Head and Coordinator of publishing track Instruction Committee: Prof. Yizhak Ben-Mordechai – Coordinator of MA and PhD Studies Promotions, Appointments, planning and development committee: Prof. Tova Rosen, Dr. Hamutal Tzamir Senior faculty: Dr Amir Banbaji; Prof. Haim Be'er; Dr. Yuval Harari; Ms. Nidaa Khoury, Dr. Gideon Nevo; Dr. Peter Lehnardt; Prof. Ilana Rosen; Dr. Hana Soker-Schwager; Dr. Batya Shimony; Dr. Anat Weisman.

13:00-13:45	Lunch	In the same room
13:45-14:30	Tour of departments facilities and library	Tour of Heksherim, in the archives of Israelis writers – Prof. Yigal Schwartz; Tour of Haim Schwarzbaum Archive for Folklore Research and MMFI project – Dr. Yuval Harari; Tour of Gaon Center for Ladino Culture – Prof. Tamar Alexander and Dr. Eliezer Papo.
14:30-15:15	Meeting with Junior Academic Faculty	Modern Hebrew Literature Section: Nirit Korman (PhD); Hadas Shabat-Nadir (PhD); Dekel Shay-Shori (PhD); Moria Dayan (MA); Tamar Setter (MA) Folk Literature and Literature of the Midrash and Aggadah Section: Noga Cohen (PhD); Lital Liberman-Avital (PhD); Noa Valden (MA); Ron Lasri (MA) Middle Ages Hebrew Literature Section - Shira Maziel (MA); Pnina Hazan (MA)

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
09:30-10:15	Meeting with Adjunct faculty	Dr. Maayan Harel; Dr. Shira Stav; Dr. Svetlana Natkovich; Dr. Uria Kfir; Dr. Hagit Rafel;
10:15-11:00	Meeting with BA students	Up to 10 students
11:15-12:00	Meeting with MA students	Up to 10 students
12:00-12:45	Meeting with PhD students	Up to 10 students
12:45-13:30	Lunch	In the same room
13:30-14:15	Meeting with Alumni	About 8 alumni from different study tracks and different years: Ms. Nassrin Elazazma, Ms. Ronit Chacham, Ms. Zipi Gurion, Ms. Naomi Tishler, Ms. Hagit Sabag, Mr. Eli Shai, Mr. Yoel Perez, Mr. Eliraz Shor
14:15-15:00	Closed-door meeting of the committee	
15:00-15:30	Summation meeting with heads of department and institution	Rector – Prof. Zvi Hacoheh Deputy Rector – Prof. Steve Rosen Dean – Prof. David Newman Chair – Prof. Tamar Alexander