

April 22th, 2013

**RESPONSE TO THE REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL
EVALUATION COMMITTEE**

1. We would like to thank the Committee for the dedication with which they undertook the evaluation of the state of Hebrew literature study programs in Israel and we are very pleased that the committee saw fit to praise the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University for being the one department of all Hebrew literature departments in the country to have grown and evolved into a “major center” of Hebrew Literature Studies in the past decade. The Committee expressed great appreciation for the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University for its fertile combination – both in teaching and in research – between the fields of theory, history and thematics on one hand and broad coverage of the various areas of Hebrew literature throughout its history. The Committee acknowledged the department’s vigor, due in part to the significant support it gets from the *Heksherim* Institute, headed by Prof. Yigal Schwartz, the major architect of the Department’s accelerated growth. Following is an excerpt from the Report:

"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" (p. 7).

2. The Committee emphasized repeatedly that it is extremely important for the University institutions to recognize the importance of the Department of Hebrew Literature, to recognize its many achievements throughout the past decade, and to allow it to further consolidate these and to maintain its vitality and prestige:

"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 [...] and that they will continue to contribute to concrete efforts to develop and strengthen this department" (p. 6).

Here we can only add that the University clearly recognizes the value of the Department of Hebrew Literature. The University financially supports the Heksherim Institute and also gives the Department of Hebrew Literature an increased budget in recognition of the latter's importance to Ben Gurion University and to the study and fostering of Hebrew culture.

3. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the Department's way of combining between diverse fields of study, the various sections that cover an extremely wide range of Hebrew Literature – Midrashic Literature, Medieval

Literature, Enlightenment Literature and the Literature of Modernity - and the wide variety of courses it offers. the Committee also mentioned with approval the special programs for Creative Writing and Publishing, which open employment options in the field:

"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" (p. 7).

4. The Committee expressed great appreciation of the Department's impressive research output:

"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" (p. 7).

5. The Committee made special mention of its appreciation of the Department's Folklore Studies, both in terms of its instruction and in research:

"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" (p. 7).

6. The Committee took positive note of the fact that in contrast with other Universities and with a general decrease in the number of students enrolled in the Humanities, the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University actually recorded an increase in enrollments. The Committee also mentioned students' own expressions of strong satisfaction:

"The variety of students is impressive. They come from all parts of the country, and not only from Beer Sheva[...]. As opposed to some other universities in Israel, the number of students in Hebrew Literature has increased of the past few years [...]. On the whole, students seem to be very satisfied with the instruction they receive in the department" (p. 8).

Having enumerated these achievements, the Committee then pointed out certain lacunae which it recommends be dealt with. It should be noted that the Committee stressed that these lacunae also emerged in the Department's self-evaluation – a process of self-scrutiny which also met with the Committee's approval. The Committee suggested a number of excellent ideas to deal with these problems, and we intend to adopt them. In the following paragraphs we refer to issues that need attention and to the manner in which we propose to tackle this:

1. The Committee mentioned that introductory courses should be taught by senior lecturers. The Committee was aware that a number of professors recently left the Department, something which resulted in a situation in which junior staff members were teaching introductory courses.

We are also aware of this problem and intend to deal with it by scheduling senior staff to teach these courses next year.

2. The Committee mentioned that we must raise the level of the Department's student admission requirements.

We have already complied with this by elevating the requirement from 450 S' to 530 S'.

3. The Committee mentioned the need for more appropriate and systematic training of students in the Creative Writing Program for the MA.

Shimon Adaf, head of the Program, is already working on a systematic curriculum. We have moreover already added a separate Historical Introduction course for MA students who require enhancement in that field.

4. The Committee recommended setting up a seminar for research students, especially for PhD candidates.

We shall start running such a seminar from the start of the next academic year.

5. The Committee asked for more information about Ladino and Yiddish Studies: The Department includes a two-track Program for Jewish Literatures: Ladino and Yiddish (28 credit points for each): Ben Gurion University is considered a leading international center for the teaching and study of Ladino culture. We offer two courses for teaching Ladino as a language (a total of about 80 students are enrolled), an introductory course of the Program: "Issues in Sephardi Jewish Literature", a BA seminar, and a semestrial seminar for the MA. There are currently three students who are writing MA dissertations, and two PhD students. All of these are being supervised by Prof. Tamar Alexander, some of them jointly with Dr. Eliezer Pappo. Last year Alexander and Pappo were

awarded a \$119,000 grant by the ISF. Working alongside the Department, there is the Gaon Center for the Study of Ladino Culture, headed by Prof. Tamar Alexander; she is assisted by Vice-director Dr. Eliezer Pappo. The Center has gained a respected position in Israel and abroad. It organizes conferences, supports the publication of books dedicated to Sephardi culture, publishes an academic journal, “Il Prezente”, awards scholarships to students and maintains relations with the community of Ladino enthusiasts in the south of Israel. Moreover, the Center hosts experts and researchers in the field of Ladino culture.

Yiddish Studies too have been enjoying a recent boost through the Department of Hebrew Literature’s partnership with *Yad Hanadiv*’s highly acclaimed MA program for Yiddish Studies. This is a collaborative project between Ben Gurion University, the Hebrew University, and Tel-Aviv University. The degree is awarded by the Department of Hebrew Literature, with a specialization in Yiddish. The sudden departure of Prof. David Roskies has left us with a real lacuna regarding the position of a Yiddish researcher who can direct the program at Ben Gurion, especially where it comes to our continued participation in the abovementioned prestigious collaboration which was awarded two million NIS. In the current academic year, we received Dr. Roy Greenwald as a post-doctoral student; he is an outstanding researcher in the field of Hebrew and Yiddish Literature, who has gained the recommendations of the top Hebrew and Yiddish literary scholars worldwide. He is already teaching two seminars on bi-lingual literatures – Hebrew and Yiddish - this year, and he is supervising two dissertations. We are processing his full joining of the Department so we can continue as full partners in the *Yad Hanadiv* inter-university partnership. For a number of years, in addition, we have been running a course in Yiddish for Beginners which is attended by students campus-wide (35 enrollments in the

current year), and the Faculty has promised to add a course in Advanced Yiddish in the next academic year.

6. The Committee recommended establishing a mechanism that maintains contact with University alumni.

We are working on this. Among our graduates are successful authors and major active members of Israel's cultural scene. We intend very shortly to create the appropriate structure for fostering our connection with them.

7. It should be stressed that the Committee mentioned that the majority of scholarly papers published in the field of Hebrew Literature should be written in the Hebrew language, as the main research community is situated in Israel.

We more than agree with the Committee and we would like to address this comment to the Faculty and the University. We agree nevertheless with the Faculty's opinion that part of the publications will be in English, addressing the international academic community.

8. The Committee mentioned an issue that was frequently raised in its meetings with the Department and in the Department's own report, regarding the need to improve the training of students from the Bedouin community, for whom Hebrew is not their first language.

We have started designing and constructing a variety of tools to support students by means of language support lessons which will be provided by the Students Dean.

9. And for a final, important issue: In addition to its strong appreciation of the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University and of the broad

spectrum of Hebrew Studies it offers, the Committee repeatedly underlines the need for another appointment in the field of Midrashic Studies, a field that is an indispensable foundation for the study of Hebrew Literature. The Committee, it seems, was impressed by the number of students for advanced degrees in this field and felt that this research area cannot be shouldered by one researcher only, who is responsible for supervising all the students. One single lecturer, moreover, cannot possibly offer the variety of courses needed to cover this important and extensive area of knowledge. We join the Committee in stressing the great importance of adding a position in Midrash Studies. Obviously we need the help of the University in this matter.

Ben Gurion University, we would like to note, has always regarded the Department of Hebrew Literature as its "flagship" and given it much support. Naturally, we are very grateful for this support. We are also aware that the University is coping with another period of cutbacks. Still we hope that a way will be found, in the near future, to also reinforce the field of Midrash Studies.

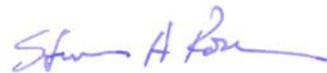
Sincerely,



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