

**Self Evaluation by the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature –
Responses to the Committee's Recommendations Appearing in the Specific Report**

General comments of the Department/University

(D) The Department received the Committee's report and the faculty members reviewed it carefully.

We thank the Committee for the good will it displayed throughout the evaluation process and for the enormous amount of work it invested in fulfilling its mission.

The Department is also satisfied with the Committee's appreciation of the Department's activities, especially regarding its comments about the high academic level of our faculty members, the good work atmosphere in the Department, and more specifically – the high level of the Folklore Division and the activities of the Creative Writing Program.

Likewise, the Committee showed particular understanding of the central worrying issues confronting the Department: the dwindling of the academic staff dealing with Hebrew Literature, following retirement of members and as a result of the problems in making new appointments given that positions that free up are transferred out of the Department by the University*. Furthermore, we are delighted by the Committee's explicit and unequivocal support—both verbally during the meeting and in the written report—of our demand to have new appointments.

The Committee understood its mandate to be to check Hebrew Literature studies only. As a result of its deep concern the Committee at times overlooked the complex structure of our Department, which is also responsible for Comparative Literature and the Creative Writing Program, which understandably also appear explicitly as departmental objectives as formulated in the Department's independent self-evaluation report. In general, we feel that the Committee was attentive to and understood the challenges the Department faces in the near term and the difficulties our faculty members face, and that primarily, the Committee demonstrated high evaluation of the Department's activities and level of teaching and research—and for this we again thank the Committee.

***(U)** With the retirement of faculty members the vacated position is not automatically replaced by a new recruitment. The recruitment process at the University is based on the principle of academic excellence. When an appropriate candidate will be found for the Department, we will seriously consider recruiting.

| Committee's recommendations (Chapter 4, pp. 12-13) February 2013 | University's (U) / Department's (D) responses April 2013 |
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| <p>General: Our recommendations pertain only to the Hebrew Literature section of the department and not to the Comparative Literature section which we feel is beyond our mission. It must be said, however, that the importance of Hebrew Literature, the national literature of the State of Israel, is hard to recognize in this combined department in which two thirds of the budgeted lines are in non-Hebraic literatures.</p> | <p>The Department joins the Committee in its worry about the scope of the representation of Hebrew Literature in the framework of the Department's general mission. The reason for the disproportion between the Hebrew Literature and Comparative Literature tracks is that in the past few years, all faculty who retired came from the former track, whereas not even one faculty member retired from the latter. Consequently, the recent difficulties facing new appointments devolve mainly on the Hebrew Literature track, and have, indeed, led it to a crisis point.</p> <p>We are aware of this crisis and are doing the best we can to handle it, which efforts we will elaborate upon later. At this point we only ask to comment that even though at the moment the Hebrew Literature track suffers from a unique problem, and as a result is deserving of especially urgent treatment, the task of the self-evaluation with which the Department was charged falls, according to the instructions we received both in writing (the guidelines distributed in order to prepare the Report) and orally (preparatory meeting held at Ma'ale Hahamisha in the winter of 2011) on the entire Department and on all the study tracks and units within it. The Committee's comment that it feels that an examination of the Comparative Literature track "is beyond their mission" is perhaps understood in light of the worry about the place of Hebrew Literature in the framework of the Department, yet we feel that this understanding of the mandate given to the Committee skews its recommendation too much in the direction of isolating Hebrew Literature.</p> |
| <p>1. This department has to present a plan for development over the next few years. This said, there are areas that cannot wait for a long range plan. The situation is critical and must be recognized as such by the administration.</p> | <p>(D) We are happy to assert that since the meeting with the Committee, the Department has begun intensive processes toward new appointments, through an international call, and even though at the moment, not even one appointment has been authorized, there are two appointments in the field of Hebrew Literature about which we are in an advanced stage of negotiations with the University authorities;. We hope that as a result of these efforts, the Hebrew Literature track will shortly emerge from the crisis in which it finds itself and return to its former glory. With the Committee's report and its support in this matter, we have every reason to laud the report.</p> |
| <p>2. Since there are now only two senior positions in Modern Hebrew Literature, and they are not that young, the department must appoint a scholar in this area within the next two years. The appointment should be selected from a national or even world-wide pool of candidates.</p> | <p>(D) We completely agree with the criticisms scattered through the report regarding the lack of Modern Hebrew Literature teachers and the complete absence of accredited Medieval Poetry teachers. This is exactly the problem with which we are trying to cope. Also, please see the Department's response to Recommendation 1.</p> |

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| <p>3. There is no professor holding a position in Medieval Hebrew Literature, a field in which this university has long had a permanent position and in which there are still doctoral students working. Courses and the direction of students are handled on a voluntary basis by a retired professor. Given the importance of this field for both Hebrew and Arabic cultures, the lack of a permanent senior instructor is, indeed, serious.</p> | <p>(D) Please see the Department's responses to Recommendations 1 and 2.</p> |
| <p>4. In general, efforts should be made to integrate the study of Spanish and Arabic literatures with the study of Medieval Hebrew poetry in Spain, and to ensure the future study of medieval Hebrew secular poetry (the Golden Age in Andalusia, Hebrew poetry in Christian Spain, in Provence and Italy, and the rhymed and non-rhymed prose). This is a significant area in which the University of Haifa can assume an international leadership role in scholarship, considering its excellent library holdings, and its student population that consists of Jews and Arabs. It is imperative, nationally, and for the University of Haifa in particular, to train a scholar whose cultural and academic background will enable him to conduct appropriate comparative studies between medieval Hebrew and Arab literatures.</p> | <p>(D) On page 6, it is noted that the Department does not have even one Spanish or Italian lecturer. This is indeed true. As a consequence of the sorry situation in Hebrew Literature, we are unable, at least at this stage, to remedy this through a regular appointment; however, we are in contact with the Atlantic Studies Program in the School of History in an effort to get a teacher who can teach (not on tenure track) Spanish Literature (and American Latino), and when we resolve the situation in the Hebrew Literature track, and are able to turn once more to developing Comparative Literature, we will seriously consider developing the Romanic Literature field.</p> |
| <p>5. The academic study of our national Hebrew literature is of prime importance for a society that has developed, over the ages traditional tools for the teaching of Aggadah, midrash, and rabbinical literature. Academic studies of Hebrew literature are relatively new</p> | <p>(D) One of the strengths noted by the Committee head, Prof. Arnold Band, in the summary meeting with the Committee held on May 20th, 2012, is the integration between the two tracks, Hebrew Literature and Comparative Literature. There is no need to say that we were happy to hear this, given that the Department nurtured this point in particular and sees it as one of its unique facets. We were, therefore, very perplexed to read in the summary letter some evaluations seemingly diametrically</p> |

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| <p>in Jewish culture and it is incumbent upon us to continue and develop them. Hebrew literature has a historical depth of millennia, its study requires an independent department, as the study of English and Arabic literatures do.</p> | <p>contradicting this assessment. We totally agree with the criticisms scattered through the report regarding the lack of Modern Hebrew Literature teachers and the complete absence of accredited Medieval Poetry teachers. This is exactly the problem with which we are trying to cope. However, the report also includes comments that seem to imply that this reduction in the Hebrew Literature field is also tied up with ideological-academic decision. The Committee summarizes the report by complaining that there is no independent Department of Hebrew Literature. The Committee also protests the loss of the uniqueness of Hebrew Literature within the range of fields and topics with which the Department deals: "In general, it must be said that the uniqueness of Hebrew Literature, the national literature of the state of Israel, is often lost within this complex of literary courses" (p. 10). "The Department, indeed, offers a broad range of theories, concepts and methods in literary theory, but the common denominator with Hebrew literature is minimal at best" (p. 6). Here we are no longer discussing problems of budget and retirement of staff members, but about the product of academic ideology. These matters are indeed the consequence of the worldview maintained by the Department, which was also formulated explicitly in the independent evaluation report, in the paragraph regarding the program's objectives. There for each degree offered, the overall perception in the integration of the tracks and what is unique about each track in this framework is clearly laid out. Hence, for example, the general objective of undergraduate studies in both tracks, together, is: "To introduce students to a wide range of literary works in a variety of cultural contexts, and to expose them to diverse critical approaches, analytical methods and terminology in order to improve their cultural orientation and literary sensitivity" (p. 20 in the Department's Self Evaluation Report). In the framework of graduate studies in both tracks, the report explains the objective as: "To broaden and deepen students' knowledge of various literatures, their major trends and developments; to provide students with theoretical knowledge, methodological skills and academic experience" [---] (p. 21 in the Department's Self Evaluation Report). We build our study program in light of this perception, which is anchored in the mutual integration of the two tracks, and even if and when we resolve the problem that we now face as a result of lack of budgeted teaching positions, and we will be able to offer Hebrew Literature the way it should be offered, we will still remain loyal to this perception. The Committee's comments that are cited above do not agree with this, neither with the Department's declared objectives also presented in its report nor with the praise of the Committee's Chair for the integration between the two tracks.</p> |

Department's list of comments on and corrections to the Committee's report

| General notes made by the committee February 2013 | Department's responses April 2013 |
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| <p>The study program for the BA in Hebrew Literature is enriched by the demand to have students study a set number of courses in Comparative Literature, but this implies less exposure to Hebrew texts. Since the students now come to the university with relatively poor backgrounds in Hebrew Literature, their exposure to Hebrew texts in the BA program is probably not sufficient. (pp. 8-9)</p> | <p>(D) The requirement that students in all tracks take a number of courses in a second track is also a basic touchstone of the Department and is clearly stated as an objective of the Department: Students in these programs are required to take the equivalent of 12 hours from the other program in order to establish the foundation of a broad framework for appreciating literary texts in different contexts. (p. 20 in the Department's Self Evaluation Report).</p> <p>This is, therefore, an essential part of our view regarding the integration of the two tracks in the Department, which we spoke about above. We are aware, of course, that there is a price for the degree of exposure to the declared field of the track, but in our view, the issues that students are exposed to in this way are no less significant for their development as researchers and professionals.</p> |
| <p>In the discussion of the graduate program, the Committee claimed that: "...the demand to have students study both modern, and medieval Literatures and folklore, probably limits the students exposure to texts in any one area. One wonders if it is wise to continue the demand for breadth even at the MA level" (p. 9).</p> | <p>(D) Our response is that [a] in graduate as opposed to undergraduate studies, the sections are organized hierarchically according to what the student chooses: first section, second section, third section, and the scope of studies in each section is in descending order (three courses, two courses). This is, accordingly, the beginning of specialization. We do not believe that at this stage of studies students are prepared enough to completely waive other section even if they are not intending to specialize in them. [b] The real stage of professional advancement actually happens beyond the stage of listening to lectures, during the writing of the final paper, to which the entire third year of graduate studies is dedicated. In other words, it is impossible to judge the level of professional advancement of the program only according to the list of students' required courses.</p> |

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| <p>While most instructors are senior, one wonders about the academic qualifications of the professor of Creative Writing who is assigned a central course here (p. 9).</p> | <p>(D) One of the strengths noted by the Committee Chair, Prof. Arnold Band, in the summary meeting that the Committee held on May 20th, 2012 was the quality of the Creative Writing Program. There is no need to say that we were happy to hear this, because the Department has nurtured this program in particular and views it as making the Department unique. The Creative Writing Program was also praised in the Committee's report, so we find this comment puzzling.</p> <p>It is absolutely clear that in order to operate the program, we must hire artist-teachers. The teachers teaching this program are not allowed to supervise or evaluate final papers (MA theses and doctoral dissertations), and certainly do not participate in professional procedures in the research track (for example, guidance in the area of promotion and evaluation of academic faculty, writing an opinion about the academic work of colleagues, etc.). They are, however, very definitely allowed in addition to the writing workshops they run, to give theoretical courses in reading literary texts, primarily to students in the Program but not just them. Likewise, in the appointment and promotion processes of the artist-teachers in this track, the academic quality of their teaching is discussed.</p> <p>The inclusion of these teachers in the theoretical study program is integral to the perception of the objectives of the Creative Writing Program, which sees itself as responsible not just for offering writing workshops (which are available in a number of different frameworks, academic and non-academic), but also for providing broader academic education, which combines theoretical studies with a research orientation and theoretical and practical studies with a creative orientation. The viewpoint appears in the objectives of the Creative Writing Program: "To deepen students' understanding of the interrelation between creative writing and literary studies". (p. 22 in the Department's Self Evaluation Report).</p> <p>This objective cannot be achieved by simply appending pure research courses to creative workshops but only by offering a certain amount of theoretical courses that are given by artist-teachers. And again—both the fact that this objective is an integral part of the Department's objectives and the fact that the Program was praised verbally and in writing in more than one place in the Committee's report, this seeming skepticism about the quality of the theoretical courses given by the artist-teachers is confusing.</p> |
| <p>We are also puzzled by the lack of differentiation between the types of courses. We cannot tell if all courses are lecture courses, or if some are dedicated to the intensive study of texts. We note that there are few BA seminar courses (p. 9).</p> | <p>(D) Introductory courses are clearly marked as such; additionally, required and elective courses are clearly distinguished as are beginner and advanced courses. In contrast, we accept the assertion that there is a lack of seminar courses at the BA level. This is an issue that we are now working to improve.</p> |

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| <p>There is abundant evidence that admission requirements to the undergraduate program are very lax. The percentage of failing students is very high. The graduate students seem to be better prepared to do the work necessary for proper graduate studies and we did not hear of any complaints in this regard.</p> <p>It is obvious that requirements for admission to the undergraduate program have to be raised considerably (p. 10-11).</p> | <p>(D) This subject is a recurring one that is almost annually discussed at departmental meetings. In principle, we have no objections to raising the admission requirements as long as we are guaranteed that the reduction in the number of students that will result from this will not impact the Department's resources and ability to operate and hire.</p> |
| <p>We found it strange, however, that we met few Arab students, none in the BA group though Haifa is known for its hospitality to Arab students (p. 11).</p> | <p>(D) Regarding this matter, we must state that [a] the undergraduate representatives actually include an Arab student (Ms. Abeer Khalaily). [b] In selecting the student representatives we made every effort to give representation to all sectors in the existing student population at the University. Nonetheless, in light of our obligation to also represent all the study programs and the different study stages, and in light of our dependency on the students' availability and readiness to serve as representatives, we were unable—and we did not deem it absolutely necessary—to also reflect among the student representatives, the proportions of different sectors. We would have been happy if more Arab students were included in these groups, but those that were, faithfully represented the junior and senior students in the Department.</p> |
| <p>The alumni we interviewed were all sincerely grateful for the education they received at the University of Haifa and are mostly employed in areas dealing with their training here. It impressed us, however, that they were all Haifa residents and apparently had been such before they came to the university. While this creates a sense of community, it also engenders provincialism (p. 11).</p> | <p>(D) We are very sorry that this is the impression that was given. In actuality, we have graduates of all levels around the country. When we invited our graduates to meet the Committee, many of them could not come because of work and other reasons, and in the end, those that were able to come were the ones who live in Haifa.</p> |