



**Committee for the Evaluation of Arabic Language and Literature Study
Programs**

Haifa University
Department of Arabic Language and Literature
Evaluation Report

June 2014

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Chapter 1 Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Arabic during the academic year of 2014.

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

- Professor David J. Wasserstein - Department of History, Vanderbilt University - Tennessee, USA. Committee Chair
- Professor Li Guo - Department of Classics and Program of Arabic Language and Culture, University of Notre Dame - Indiana, USA
- Professor Beatrice Gruendler – Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, Yale University - Connecticut, USA
- Professor Otto Jastrow - Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University - Estonia
- Professor Joseph Sadan - Professor emeritus, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tel Aviv University, Israel

Ms. Erica Rashkovsky, Ms. Daniella Sandler and Ms. Dvora Klein - Coordinators of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:¹

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Arabic Language and 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.

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

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 entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's October 2011 Guidelines for Self-Evaluation.

Chapter 2 Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on 16 May, 2014, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Arabic Study programs in Israel.

In May 2014, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University and Bar Ilan University. During the visits, the Committee met with members of numerous constituencies at the institutions, including administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the following members of the staff of the Council for Higher Education, who facilitated our work from the start to the end of this long process: Michal Neuman, Yael Elbocher, Dvora Klein, Erica Rashkovsky and Daniella Sandler.

This report deals with the Department of Arabic, Haifa University. The Committee's visit to Haifa took place on 25 May, 2014. The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the management of Haifa University and the Department of Arabic Language and Literature for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit at the institution.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of the Arabic Language and Literature Study

Program at Haifa 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.

1. Executive Summary

Haifa University's Arabic department stands at a critical crossroads. A number of facts contribute to making Haifa a potential center of Arabic studies of great significance. It has excellent faculty, with an unusual degree of knowledge of both classical and Modern Standard Arabic at all levels (spoken and written) and academic excellence in research and publication. All of them display genuine and deep commitment to their students, to their work and to the discipline overall. Their students reflect some of the benefits of this, in their own commitment and in the general atmosphere reigning in the department. The collaboration among Jews and Arabs in the Department is particularly impressive. The Library has one of the best collections in the field in the country and continues to develop (funds seem more or less sufficient, though becoming tighter in recent years with consequent threats to the strengths of the collection). Library staff is professional, knowledgeable and dedicated. The Department publishes *al-Karmil*, which has recently become a peer-reviewed journal and, including articles of high academic standard in Arabic as well as in European languages, attracts submissions from international scholars and enhances the visibility of the Department both in the West and in the Arab world. The Department like the University serves both a geographical and an ethnic constituency within the larger context of the country as a whole. Among its recent successful innovations is an additional track, without thesis, in the MA, to train high school teachers.

At the same time, the Department appears to function largely as support for Arab students' search for cultural identity. This emerges, for example, in their requests for specific courses and their criticisms of the program.

The University needs consciously and deliberately to choose which direction it desires this Department to pursue: whether it wishes to become merely a support for the cultural identity of Arab students, or to be – what it can become - a successful and significant regional center of research and teaching in the field and an academic ambassador beyond the borders of Israel itself. This is the ambition expressed in the mission statement of the Department (*Self-Evaluation Report*, pp. 23-24).

The Committee heard about a general trend in the University over the last two decades, driven largely by financial considerations, in the direction of the sciences. The higher administration made it very clear to the Committee that expansion of resources for this Department was not a realistic expectation. Arabic, however, above all, the largest department in the Faculty of Humanities, with the largest number of students in the country, is one area where this University can excel with relatively little difficulty or stretching of tight budgets. It should do so.

In order to realize this potential, the University needs to lend the Department its commitment and support. This does not imply a very large financial investment. Most of the Committee's recommendations are cost-neutral or virtually so, but we feel that they are far-reaching in their implications and will have great effect. What is already in place is very precious. The Committee feels that the Department should be enabled to aim still higher.

2. Organizational Structure

Observation and findings

The Committee noted with concern that the Department lacks adequate senior faculty. It has only one full professor, and he is currently serving as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. Academic leadership is in consequence weak.

Recommendations

Advisable changes:

- The Department should have more senior faculty, whether via encouragement of promotion or by new appointments, to provide it with the academic leadership that it needs.
- The Department should deepen cooperation with other departments - Middle Eastern History, Comparative Literature, etc. - so as to increase the variety of courses available to students, further academic interaction among faculty in different disciplines, and lessen the danger of intellectual and cultural isolation of the students. In order to achieve this goal, a second subject should be made obligatory.

3. Mission and Goals

Observation and findings

The Committee noted the Department's definition of its mission and goals for the future. These are impressive. However, the Committee felt, as mentioned above, that the Department functions to some extent as a support for the cultural identity of its Arab students. This is not the function of a university department.

Recommendations

Desirable changes recommended:

The Department should work to improve the correlation between the mission and goals that it sets for itself within the larger academic community and the role it actually fills.

4. Study Programs

Observation and findings:

The vast majority of the BA students in the program are arabophone and enter with a good high school level of knowledge of Arabic grammar. The instruction in grammar offered in the Department is perceived as adding little if anything to that received at high school.

At BA level, there appears to be a disproportionate number of courses on traditional Arabic grammar. On the other hand, the committee noted with approval that the program contains two obligatory courses, "Introduction to the Semitic Languages" and "Arabic dialectology", which locate the language in a broader context.

Some students felt that there was not a sufficient difference in level between BA and MA courses.

Graduate students are largely unacquainted with each other and unable to benefit from each other's learning, experience, criticism and ideas. Particularly for doctoral students, the absence of exams and an oral defense, as also the lack of a dissertation-writing group and a doctoral colloquium, leaves them isolated intellectually and in academic terms.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- At BA level, more courses should be provided, with greater variety of topic; e.g., more courses on poetry and prose (classical and modern).

- More generally, instruction in grammar should be calibrated with the teaching of advanced western linguistic scholarship and scholarship on Arabic grammatical theories.
- At MA level, more varied courses should be available, especially on popular culture, on literary criticism, and on general linguistics; and the Committee noted a desire for availability of instruction (perhaps via co-operation with Jerusalem) on Shi'ism.
- At graduate level, introduction of exams and an oral defense, in order to filter out those who do not meet the requirements.
- At the graduate level, more insistence should be placed on the students' practising expository writing and speaking in English in order to make them competitive and able to collaborate internationally.
- At graduate level, a regular (at least bi-weekly) seminar or colloquium should be established, for graduate students and others from inside and outside the institution to present their work in progress and discuss it with their peers. This should be mandatory and for credit. (This in addition to any staff seminar that the department holds.)
- At PhD level, introduction of a dissertation-writing workshop.

5. Human Resources / Faculty

Observation and findings:

The faculty are excellent and their work is published in peer-reviewed academic book series and journals. Four are or have been holders of Maof fellowships and one of an Allon fellowship.

All faculty are seriously over-worked. In addition to a weekly teaching load of 8 hours, many of them supervise as many as 5 MA theses and 3 PhD dissertations, alongside administrative work. This seriously compromises their ability to pursue academic research. There is only one full professor and as he is currently serving as Dean, the Department lacks sufficient faculty, and hence academic leadership, at the highest level. Some graduates remarked that they see advisors rarely and only for very short periods of time, and even then the faculty cannot give them their full energy and attention, as they are overworked. This fails to give writers of MA and PhD theses the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The ratio of faculty to students is 1:33, the worst in the Faculty of Humanities, and three times as high as that in General History (1:11). All this is in a context of a selective admission rate of around 22% for the BA. This heavy ratio constitutes a

severe handicap for all concerned – teachers and students alike – harming performance in teaching, in research and in overall guidance.

Junior faculty appear not to receive pro-active mentoring from within the department about research activity or guidance about the requirements for promotion.

Faculty are not provided with computers in their offices.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- The University needs seriously to attack the problem of the teacher-student ratio in the Department and bring it closer to the Faculty average, in order to give students the quality of teaching which they need and to which they are entitled and to enable faculty to carry out the research that forms an essential part of their jobs. This can be done either by raising the number of faculty – giving the Department more posts – or by lowering the number of students.
- All faculty should supervise a smaller number of graduate students, to improve their ability to meet with graduates and give them more time.
- Junior faculty should be provided with adequate office space, with no more than two to an office.

Advisable changes:

- Encouragement should be given for the promotion of promising faculty to the most senior levels.
- Junior faculty need to be fully and clearly informed about the expectations and requirements for promotion and to receive encouragement and guidance about how to set about fulfilling these.
- Junior faculty should be given greater opportunity to teach courses in the areas of their own research.
- Computers should be provided in faculty offices.
- Some adjuncts' courses have recently been cut or shortened because of budgetary constraints – these cuts should be restored.

6. Students

Observation and findings:

Students at all levels did not know as much English as is to be expected in an Israeli university. Graduate students seemed, perhaps paradoxically, to know less, and all felt uncomfortable with the language. Many expressed insecurity or described themselves as insufficiently prepared to produce scholarly works in the language. English training is often insufficient. This may be systemic since the first non-native language that most of them learn in high school is Hebrew.

A number of undergraduates expressed a desire to study only language while others desired more variety in the elective courses on offer. This was even more the case among MA students. Several students requested courses in methodology and in English expository writing.

Graduate students' acquaintance with other foreign languages of western scholarship appeared limited and not up to the level required for serious scholarly work in a university and contact with foreign scholars.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

The Committee recommends that all students at all levels be offered a preparatory course in the use of English as a scholarly language. All students should pass a test of their capacity in the language.

Advisable changes:

- The Department should encourage the acquisition of foreign languages in addition to English.
- Greater efforts need to be made to recruit Jewish students – at the moment there are almost none in the Department.

7. Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Observation and findings:

Teaching and learning outcomes are measured by a variety of methods, with a strong emphasis on written examinations. Student results varied from year to year, as was shown in the Self-Evaluation Report, with an impressive tendency towards avoidance of grade inflation.

8. Research

Observation and findings:

The Committee was impressed with the research capabilities and achievements of the faculty, operating as they do under the constraints outlined above. The Library is well-stocked, its collection relatively well maintained with a responsiveness to faculty needs. And faculty produce research across a fairly wide range of subjects. However, their ability to carry out research is hampered by financial limitations – affecting the supply of computers and support for graduate students, as well as the more general needs of faculty in this area.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- The University should give faculty pro-active encouragement, through the appropriate offices, to apply for grants, both internally and externally. Such grants will stimulate and support their own research and that of graduate students. (Currently many graduate students need to work outside the University to support themselves and their families and have limited time to participate in such extra-curricular but academically necessary and fruitifying activities as workshops and conferences).

9. Infrastructure

Observation and findings:

- A dearth of office space seriously hampers the ability of faculty, in particular junior faculty, to function as is necessary. Six junior members of the faculty share a single office. This makes it impossible for each of them to meet students, to do research, to hold other meetings, and generally to work as members of an academic community. Some need to come in on an extra day, because of this, in order to be able to schedule meetings with students at times that do not conflict with their colleagues.
- Faculty are not provided with computers.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- While the Committee understands the constraints under which the Department and the University operate in this area, it feels that it is vital that adequate provision be made for office space for junior faculty. This is a necessity, not an optional extra, for them to do the work for which they are there: teaching, meeting and advising students, carrying out research, consulting with colleagues, etc. There should be no more than two faculty members to an office.
- Similarly, faculty should be provided with computers. These are an essential tool of academic research and writing in the modern age.

10. Self-Evaluation Process

Observation and findings:

- The Committee was impressed with the care and diligence which the Department displayed in the collection of material and its preparation in the Self-Evaluation Report.

***Any other topics the Committee would like to address**

The journal *al-Karmil* is a central part of the Department's vision and mission for its future: it publishes articles not only in European languages but also (unlike many other journals in the field) in Arabic, reaching out thus to a larger audience than many comparable academic journals. It performs an essential function in the Department's outreach to the broader academic world. It needs to be given the (relatively modest) support necessary for it to continue in this role.

Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable

Short term [~ within 1 year]:

Despite the difficulties under which the University labors, the Committee felt that a number of immediate steps – mostly cost-neutral – would help to improve conditions and promote the quality of both teaching and research in the Department. They would also offer the University the opportunity to improve the correlation between its mission statement and the reality of its position as the major academic institution in the north of the country. These include the following:

1. Institution of English competence examinations for students at all levels, to make Arabic-speaking students in particular part of the larger student body and connect them to the wider intellectual community.
2. Restoration of cuts to adjunct teaching, to retain the widest possible range of course-offerings for students.
3. Establishment of a PhD dissertation-writing workshop.
4. At graduate level, a bi-weekly colloquium should be introduced to enable students to meet each other and get to know each other's work, stimulating their own work and thinking.
5. Clarification for junior faculty of the requirements for promotion and tenure.
6. Pro-active encouragement to faculty at all levels to apply for and win grants, to support research and graduate students.
7. Supply of computers for junior faculty.
8. Improvement in the supply of office space, especially for junior faculty.

Intermediate term [~ within 2-3 years]:

In the medium term, the Committee felt that the following steps would lead to a deeper transformation of both the quality and the character of the Department:

1. The Department should be given more senior faculty, whether through internal promotions or through new appointments, to provide stimulating academic leadership.
2. Faculty supervision of graduate students should be reduced, to free them for research and other teaching duties and to provide graduate students with the quality of supervision that they need.
3. The Department should deepen co-operation with other Departments – e.g., Middle Eastern History, Comparative Literature – to expose students to other disciplines and broader intellectual currents and show them the value of crossing disciplinary boundaries, and to give faculty greater opportunities to develop inter-disciplinary intellectual and academic activity.

4. At the BA level, admission requirements should be tightened, to raise the quality of the student body generally.
5. At BA level more, and more varied, courses should be offered, lessening the dominance of Arabic grammar and language study in the curriculum.
6. Grammatical study should be calibrated with western scholarly models.
7. At the MA level, there should be a larger and more varied program of course offerings.
8. At PhD level, there should be exams and an oral defense.
9. The journal *al-Karmil* should be given the support it needs to function as the University's window to the academic world outside Israel, in particular in the Arab world.

Long term [until the next cycle of evaluation]:

1. Efforts should be made to increase the number of Jewish students in the Department.

Signed by:



Professor Beatrice Gruendler



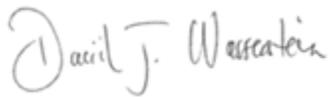
Professor Li Guo



Professor Otto Jastrow



Professor Joseph Sadan



Professor David J. Wasserstein (Chair)

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



May 2014

Prof. David J. Wasserstein,
College of Arts and Science,
Vanderbilt University, TN
USA

Dear Professor Wasserstein,

The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) strives to ensure the continuing excellence and quality of Israeli higher education through a systematic evaluation process. By engaging upon this mission, the CHE seeks: 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.

As part of this important endeavor we reach out to world renowned academicians to help us meet the challenges that confront the Israeli higher education. This process establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

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

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 the study programs in Arabic Language and Literature. In addition to you, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Joseph Sadan, Prof. Beatrice Gruendler, Prof. Li Guo, and Prof. Otto Jastrow.

Ms. Daniella Sandler will be the coordinator of the committee.

Details regarding the operation of the committee and its mandate are provided in the enclosed appendix.

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

Sincerely,

Prof. Hagit Messer-Yaron
Deputy Chairperson,
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE
Ms. Daniella Sandler, Committee Coordinator

Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

Schedule of Site Visit - The Department of Arabic Language and Literature
University of Haifa
Sunday May 25, 2014

Time	Subject	Participants	Location
09:30-10:00	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. David Faraggi , Rector Prof. Perla Werner , Vice Rector Ms. Ruchama Elad-Yarum , Manager, Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector Dr. Michal Daloya , Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector	Eshkol Tower Room 1520
10:00-10:30	Meeting with head of Faculty of Humanities	Prof. Reuven Snir , Dean of the Faculty of Humanities	
10:30-11:15	Meeting with the academic head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment in the Department	Prof. Ibrahim Taha , Head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature Prof. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger , Head of the dept. evaluation project	
11:15-11:30	Break		Eshkol Tower Room 1520
11:30-12:30	Meeting with senior academic staff*	Dr. Jalal Abdalghani Dr. Ibrahim Geris – Head of the MA committee, Vice Deputy of discipline committee Prof. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger Dr. Masud Hamdan Dr. Ali Hussein – Dept. liaison with the Uni' library Prof. Ofer Livne-Kafri - Dept. liaison with the Uni' library Prof. Vardit Rispler-Chaim – Head of the PhD committee, Head of MA for Arabic teachers program Dr. Arin Salamah-Qudsi – BA advisor	Eshkol Tower Room 1520
12:30-12:50	Meeting with Adjunct academic staff**	Dr. Judith Dror Dr. Clara Srouji-Shajrawi	

Time	Subject	Participants	Location
12:50-13:00	Meeting with Junior academic staff**	Mr. Abdelnaser Jabarin	
13:00-13:45	Lunch (closed-door working meeting of the committee)		Main Building, Restaurants Plaza, Staff dining room
13:45-14:30	Prof. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger, Prof. Ibrahim Taha, Dr. Ali Hussein and Prof. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Department library liason) will accompany Campus Tour: library (Ms. Yardena Lewenberg-Library staff will accompany), classrooms, offices		Campus
14:30-15:15	Meeting with BA students**		Eshkol Tower Room 1520
15:15-16:00	Meeting with MA students**		Eshkol Tower Room 1520
16:00-16:45	Meeting with PhD students**		Eshkol Tower Room 1520
16:45-17:15	Closed-door working meeting of the committee		Eshkol Tower Room 1520
17:15-17:30	Summation meeting with the academic head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment in the Department	Prof. Ibrahim Taha , Head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature Prof. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger , Head of the self-evaluation project	Eshkol Tower Room 1520

Time	Subject	Participants	Location
17:30-18:00	Summation meeting	Prof. David Faraggi , Rector Prof. Perla Werner , Vice Rector Prof. Reuven Snir , Dean of the Faculty of Humanities Prof. Ibrahim Taha , Head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature Prof. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger , Head of the dept. evaluation project Ms. Ruchama Elad-Yarum , Manager, Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector Dr. Michal Daloya , Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector	Eshkol Tower Room 1520

* The heads of the institution and academic unit or their representatives will not attend these meetings.

** The visit will be conducted in English with the exception of students who may speak in Hebrew and anyone else who feels unable to converse in English.

Committee Members:

- **Prof. David Wasserstein** - Department of History, Vanderbilt University - Tennessee, USA. Committee Chair
- **Prof. Li Guo** - Department of Classics and Program of Arabic Language and Culture, University of Notre Dame - Indiana, USA
- **Prof. Beatrice Gruendler** - [Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations](#), Yale University - Connecticut, USA
- **Prof. Otto Jastrow** - [Estonian Institute of Humanities](#), Tallinn University – Estonia
- **Prof. Joseph Sadan** - Professor emeritus Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tel Aviv University – Israel

CHE Representative:

- Ms. Erica Rashkovsky - Committee Coordinator