



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

Tel Aviv University
Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies
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: ¹

- Professor David J. Wasserstein - Department of History, Vanderbilt University - Tennessee, USA. Committee Chair²
- 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, USA³
- Professor Otto Jastrow - Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University - Estonia
- Professor Joseph Sadan - Professor emeritus, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tel Aviv University, Israel⁴

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. Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Arabic, 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**.

² Professor David J. Wasserstein did not act as chairman during the Committee's visit to TAU. This role was filled by Professor Otto Jastrow.

³ Professor Beatrice Gruendler was not present at meetings for TAU.

⁴ Professor Joseph Sadan was not present at meetings for TAU.

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 at Tel Aviv University. The Committee's visit to Tel Aviv took place on 21 May, 2014.

The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the management of Tel Aviv 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 Arabic and Islamic Studies Study Program at Tel Aviv 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

- The Committee finds that the department is in a precarious situation. One reason is the recent retirement of its two senior professors, who have not yet been replaced. A second is a current severe imbalance between a small relatively senior group of faculty and a large and very junior group mostly without proper faculty lines (*teqanim*). Partly in consequence of all this, there is very little teaching of subjects related to the classical period of Islam. The department also appears to be under constant threat of being swallowed up by the Department of Middle Eastern and African History. The Committee received the impression that relevant members of the higher administration lacked a real commitment to the survival of the department.
- Arabic forms a distinct set of academic disciplines and intellectual endeavor. Arabs form 20 percent of Israel's population; Arabic is a major vehicle of culture and politics in the region; and half the country's Jewish population is descended from immigrants from the Arab world. In consequence, the Committee feels, the Department must remain an independent unit within the University and not become merely an ancillary institution for another department or set of disciplines. The Committee feels that serious, urgent and immediate changes are necessary to assure the survival and continuation of Arabic at Tel Aviv University.
- It is clear that the faculty members in the Department work hard to maintain solid student numbers and to promote their own research activity. The Committee sees the problems of the department as systemic, not as personal or individual.
- The Committee heard that certain courses in the Department are funded by the income from enrichment courses for the public offered by members of

the Department. The Committee considers that this is wrong. Departmental courses should be funded by the Planning and Budgeting Committee through the University. Income from extra activities such as enrichment courses for the public should not be used for essential activities of the University. This removes academic control from the Planning and Budgetary Committee and is fundamentally inappropriate.

2. Organizational Structure

Observation and findings:

- The Committee found it wasteful, inefficient and divisive to have two separate Arabic language programs – one in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies and one in the Department of Middle Eastern History. This should be differently organized. The Arabic Department is the obvious home for the centralization and organization of such instruction. To bring incoming Middle Eastern History students to the necessary level a preparatory course could be created. In view of the worsening level of Arabic instruction in high schools and declining numbers of students taking the language, such a preparatory course would serve the student body at large and would be likely also to attract more students to the Department.
- The faculty-student ratio seems out of balance – roughly 150 undergraduates and 40 graduates, as against 4 full faculty members (one retiring in a couple of years), 4 50% faculty members, and a number of junior faculty. In addition, and partly because of that imbalance, faculty members supervise too many graduate students, both at MA and at PhD level.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- The University should establish a single program for the teaching of Arabic, centered in the Arabic Department, its obvious home. This would have the added advantage of strengthening that department.
- Numbers of graduate students should be reined in until the Committee's recommendation for more faculty posts is realized.

3. Mission and Goals

Observation and findings:

- The statement of Mission and Goals of the department on p. 27 of the Self-Evaluation Report, while worthy, is vague and in need of sharpening.

Desirable changes recommended:

- Revise the statement of Mission and Goals to make it sharper and less vague, giving a clearer notion both of the larger goals of the Department and its program and of the ways in which it sets out to attain those. Incoming or potential students should be able to understand clearly from this statement, used in appropriate contexts, exactly what awaits them.

4. Study Programs

Observation and findings:

- The Department “aims to offer a stimulating and comprehensive curriculum for its students” (*Self-Evaluation Report* p. 27), and overall it attains its teaching and learning goals *as stated*.
- However, salient subjects are missing from the curriculum or are insufficiently represented. These include Qur’an and hadith, classical literature, classical poetry, and modern theater.
- Little teaching takes place through the medium of Modern Standard Arabic.
- The Committee was surprised that no serious consideration is given to systematic and scholarly teaching of Palestinian Arabic; this in turn makes it difficult for Hebrew-speaking students to communicate with their Arab colleagues in the language.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Courses in classical and related subjects – including Qur’an, hadith, classical literature and Islamic religious fields - need to be added to the curriculum.
- A more systematic and scholarly introduction to spoken Palestinian Arabic should be offered, over more than a single year.

Advisable changes:

Attention should be given to increasing students' active use of the language – both spoken and written composition - taking account of differing levels of language proficiency at entry.

5. Human Resources / Faculty

Observation and findings:

- The faculty structure is out of balance: too few senior scholars, too many junior faculty with full or partial lines and too many adjuncts of various sorts. A strong department needs a strong faculty with strong senior academic leadership. Coverage of subjects is inadequate and spotty.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- The Committee recommends an immediate allocation of at least two senior posts, in classical fields, to be filled by open, international search. The Committee was unpersuaded by the claim advanced that suitable candidates for such posts in these fields are not available. A tendency to appointing former students of the Department to posts in the Department seemed strong and unhealthy. Candidates for these and other posts should be actively sought out from other Israeli universities and abroad.

Advisable changes:

- The balance between established posts (*teqanim*) and other types of post needs to be strengthened by the allocation of more established posts at senior and middle rank. These should be especially in such subjects as Qur'an and hadith, classical literature and classical poetry.
- More, and more varied, courses should be offered in specific areas: especially classical literature and modern literary theory, modern theater, media Arabic.

6. Students

Observation and findings:

- The Committee found the students, graduate and undergraduate, warm and engaged with a strong esprit de corps.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- Standards of proficiency in English must be raised. This language is a necessity, not an optional extra, in modern scholarship, both at student and at research levels.
- Admission requirements in Arabic for majors should be raised. The Committee noted that there were problems in this area.

Desirable changes recommended:

- Mentoring for graduate students should be improved.
- In addition, one simple measure that would be very helpful would be the introduction of a regular colloquium in which graduates can present their work for discussion by their peers.

7. Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Observation and findings:

The Committee noted that syllabi were often insufficiently detailed.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- Preparation of syllabi should be given more attention; syllabi should be more detailed and include clear information about expectations of the student, about what will be studied when, and about course requirements through the semester.

8. Research

Observation and findings:

The Committee was impressed overall with the quantity and the high caliber of the research profiles of the members of the Department.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- More grants should be brought in to help finance both faculty research and the work of graduate students. Faculty should be pro-actively encouraged to apply for such grants.

9. Infrastructure

Observation and findings:

- **The Library** faces and presents serious problems in this area. Books are insufficient and many copies of frequently-used books are decaying and in need of replacement. Ordering books from the Arab world presents some difficulties but is not impossible. There is no dedicated Arabic librarian.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Substantial investment needs to be made in order to bring the Library up to the standard required for it to be a fully-functioning teaching and research center. The needs in Arabic and Islamic Studies clearly overlap with those of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, and these recommendations should be implemented in close coordination with changes made in and for that Department. In particular, the Library needs:
 - (i) more secondary literature and journals (especially replacing lost subscriptions);
 - (ii) more Arabic texts in all fields (both by classical and by modern authors);
 - (iii) more scholarly books in European languages; and
 - (iv) Subscriptions to major databases.
 - (v) Students' research should be seen as giving an impulse to collection development – e.g., the field of children's literature is under-represented.

- (vi) A dedicated librarian for Arabic should be appointed.
- (vii) In addition, the Library should be given the resources necessary to catalog and bring to the shelves in Special Collections the books left to it by the late Franz Rosenthal, as well as other such material. Such gifts enhance the quality of the collection as well as the research capabilities offered by the institution and add to the reputation of the Department as the repository of the library of one of the very great scholars in the field.
- The Library is the beating heart of any serious university and must be treated accordingly.

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

The Committee strongly condemns the use of income from enrichment courses for the public to pay for essential activities of the Departments, such as teaching courses for students. This practice should cease at once. Such enrichment courses are excellent, but they should not be used to replace monies supplied by the Planning and Budgetary Committee.

Chapter4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable

The Committee wishes to stress once again that it was impressed with many of the basic features of the Department, its faculty, and its students as it understood them from the Self-Evaluation Report and its visit. However, much needs to be done. At the same time, while the Committee's recommendations are not cost-free, they are also not very costly in the context of national needs and a large and successful University, and particularly so if considered also in the context of possible co-operation and coordination with the Department of Middle Eastern and African History. Tel Aviv University has the potential to be a major national, regional and international center of teaching and research in Arabic, Islamic and related fields. It should take the opportunity to reach its full potential.

Short term [~ within 1 year]:

1. Cease use of income from enrichment courses from the general public to finance essential activities of the Department that are/should be financed by the Planning and Budget Committee through the University.
2. Fill two senior posts by proper, open, international competition.
3. Give active support to the needs of the Library in the following areas:
 - (i) More secondary literature and journals (especially replacing lost subscriptions);
 - (ii) More Arabic texts in all fields (both by classical and by modern authors);
 - (iii) More scholarly books in European languages; and
 - (iv) More subscriptions to major databases.
 - (v) Students' research should be seen as giving an impulse to collection development – e.g., the field of children's literature is under-represented.
 - (vi) A dedicated librarian for Arabic should be appointed.
 - (vii) In addition, the Library should be given the resources necessary to catalog and bring to the shelves in Special Collections the books left to it by the late Franz Rosenthal, as well as other such material. Such gifts enhance the quality of the collection as well as the research capabilities offered by the institution and add to the reputation of the Department as the repository of the library of one of the very great scholars in the field, thus helping to attract scholars, students and further donations.

4. Add more courses in classical and related fields, including: Qur'an, hadith, classical literature and Islamic religion.
5. Add a systematic and scholarly course in spoken Palestinian Arabic to provide more than simply a one-year introduction.

Intermediate term [~ within 2-3 years]:

1. Establish a single Arabic-language program within the University, to save money and resources, provide more unified approach to the teaching of the language, and increase the strength of the Department.
2. Rein in the numbers of graduate students, to enable faculty to devote sufficient time to their own research and allow them to give better quality of guidance to the graduates who are accepted.
3. Appoint additional faculty at senior and intermediate levels, especially in Qur'an, hadith, classical prose and classical poetry, to achieve the desired balance between fields represented in the Department and make possible a balanced curriculum for students.
4. Provide more courses and more varied courses, especially in classical literature, modern literary theory, modern theater, media Arabic.
5. Improve the quality and detail of course syllabi, so that students have a better idea of what to expect when during the course of a semester.
6. Revise the statement of Mission and Goals (and related documents) to allow potential and existing students to get a clear and concise understanding of what the Department offers them.
7. Work towards a more active use of the language by students: both written composition and speech should be improved.
8. Raise the quality of students' English – this is a necessity not an optional extra in modern scholarly work and in the world outside the academy.
9. Raise the admission requirements for Arabic majors.
10. Establish a regular (bi-weekly) colloquium for graduate students, to enable them to discuss their work with their peers and benefit from scholarly interaction with each other.
11. Improve mentoring for graduate students, to enable them to work better and prepare them for future work.

12. Work pro-actively to encourage faculty to apply for research grants, to support their own work and the work of their graduate students.

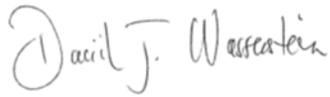
Signed by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "O. Jastrow", written above a horizontal line.

Professor Otto Jastrow (Chair)

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Li Guo", written above a horizontal line.

Professor Li Guo

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David J. Wasserstein", written above a horizontal line.

Professor David J. Wasserstein

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 at Tel Aviv University
Wednesday, May 21st 2014 - Webb building, Room 401

Time	Subject	Participants
08:30-09:15	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Aron Shai , Rector Prof. Dina Kovetz-Prialnik , Vice Rector Prof. David Horn , Head, Academic QA
09:15-09:45	Meeting with head of Faculty of Humanities	Dean
09:45-10:30	Meeting with the academic and administrative heads of the The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies	Chair - Dr. Mahmoud Kayyal
10:30-11:45	Meeting with senior academic staff *	Prof. Camilla Adang, Prof. Yishai Peled, Prof. Mahmud Ghanayim, Prof. Nasir Basal Prof. Uri Rubin, Dr. Khoury Jeries, Dr. Ahchmed Agabria
11:45-12:30	Meeting with Junior academic staff **	Dr. Aliza Shnizer, Mr. Madi Kablan Mrs. Beata Sheyhatovitch
12:30-13:30	Lunch (in the same room)	Closed-door working meeting of the committee
13:30-14:10	Meeting with Adjunct academic staff	Dr. Amir Lerner, Dr. Avi Tal, Mr. Israel Shrenzel Mr. Amin Abu Shaikha
14:10-14:55	Meeting with BA students**	Mr. Or Hareuveny, Ms. Fatima Rayan, Mr. Jmal Asii Ms. Irina Gladchenko, Ms. Shifra Montag
14:55-15:25	Tour of facilities: classrooms, library, offices	Chair Dr. Mahmoud Kayyal
15:25-16:05	Meeting with MA students**	Ms. Maison Qadri Shibi Ms. Sahar Droby Ms. Manar Qashua-Shibi Ms. Lior Ben-Ari
16:05-16:45	Meeting with PhD students**	Ms. Yavor Yolanda Mrs. Beata Sheyhatovitch Ms. Roze Shaaban Mr. Khalid Kabha
16:45-17:15	Closed-door working meeting of the committee	
17:15-17:45	Summation meeting with head of Dept.	Chair - Dr. Mahmoud Kayyal

17:45-18:15	Summation meeting with heads of institution	Prof. Aron Shai , Rector Prof. Dina Kovetz-Prialnik , Vice Rector Prof. David Horn , Head, Academic QA
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* 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.