



**Department of Philosophy**  
**Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities**  
**Ben Gurion University of the Negev**

**Report of the External Evaluation Team**  
**for**  
**The Council of Higher Education**

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The following document is the Evaluation Committee's report on the Department of Philosophy of Ben Gurion University of the Negev to the Quality Assessment Unit of the Council for Higher Education (CHE). In keeping with the template provided by the CHE, the report is divided into three parts, A: General Background and Executive Summary, B: In-depth description of subjects examined, and C: Recommendations.

***Part A – General Background, Committee Procedures, and Executive Summary***

**General Background**

The report is based upon the Evaluation Committee's interviews on the Ben Gurion campus and its study of the Department's Self-Evaluation Report (2008). The Evaluation Committee (EC) is composed of Professors Paul Davies, Richard Eldridge, Jacob Joshua Ross, Gila Sher, and the committee's chair, Daniel Dahlstrom. Ms. Michal Kabatznik served as the CHE coordinator. Each member of the committee received and studied the Department's Self-Evaluation Report individually in advance of the committee's meeting in Ben Gurion. Shortly before its on-site visit, the members of the EC met and conferred to determine the number and ranking of questions to pose during its interviews as well as to assign different members of the committee with the responsibility of leading the respective discussions with the different groups of interviewees. The Department of Philosophy in Ben Gurion University, housed on the third floor of the Helen Diller building (Building 74) on the Marcus Family Campus, teaches philosophy to undergraduate and graduate students alike.

The EC conducted its interviews of the Ben Gurion University Department of Philosophy on Wednesday and Thursday, June 10 and 11, 2009. In successive meetings on the first day, the EC met with members of the university administration (including the rector, deputy rector and head of university quality assessment, the dean of the humanities and social sciences faculty), the department chair, representatives of relevant departmental committees, senior academic faculty, tenure track faculty, and the heads of the Jacques Loeb Center and the Program in the Cognitive Sciences. On the second day, the EC had meetings with the following groups: junior academic faculty, adjunct lecturers, BA, MA, and PhD students as well as Alumni, followed by a summation meeting with the rector, dean, and department chair. The EC was highly satisfied with the level of forthrightness, cooperation, and seriousness of those who participated in these meetings. No question went unanswered or was evaded. The EC was also extremely impressed by the clarity and sophistication, frankness and detail of the Department's Self-Evaluation Report.

### **Committee Procedures**

The Committee members received the self-evaluation reports in January, 2009, and discussed them via email.

The Committee held its first meeting on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel and the quality assessment activity, as well as General Philosophy study programs.

In April and June, 2009, the Committee members visited the institutions offering General Philosophy study programs. During the visits, the Committee met various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.

**This report deals with the Committee's general impression of the field of General Philosophy within the Israeli system of higher education.**

The Committee wishes to thank the management of the institutions and the general philosophy departments for their self-evaluation reports and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visits.

## Executive Summary

The Department of Philosophy of Ben Gurion University is a very well-organized and very well-run department with an uncommonly clear self-understanding, with respect to both its capacities and its challenges. The department is composed of faculty members who are accomplished researchers and teachers. Together they provide undergraduate and graduate students alike with superb opportunities for philosophical learning in a curriculum that puts a premium on both developing students' analytical skills and providing them with expert instruction in traditional and contemporary issues and approaches. The Department's regular colloquia series includes an impressive array of local, national, and international scholars as speakers and, despite some grouching, the colloquia appear to be largely successful in bringing faculty and students together on a regular basis. We were particularly impressed by the climate of collegiality and openness, seriousness and dedication to students. It is clear that the Department has a rich appreciation of the personal and cultural significance of a philosophical life. Equally commendable is the attitude of mutual trust that the members of the Department have cultivated on the basis of this appreciation. By no means is this ethos, developed over many years, something to be taken for granted.

The greatest challenge facing the department is preserving the high quality of its curriculum, teaching, and research in the face of recent and impending retirements. By the end of 2008, with the retirement of 2 faculty members, the size of the department decreased to 9 FTE's. Of the present faculty, 8 are 100% full time in the Department while one is 50%. By the end of 2009, one will be retiring and by the end of 2011 another. After these retirements the department will shrink to 8 FTE's.<sup>1</sup> The Department states that it "expects to 'stabilize' at only 8 full-time positions in the next few years". However, in our opinion, the department staffed at even 8 FTE's lacks the critical mass required to meet its curricular obligations as a department in a research university, offering graduate degrees. With a high student-faculty ratio of 20:1 (28:1 if one counts minors; see Section 3 below for details), the members of the department are currently overextended by any normal measure. In order to sustain the Department's success in research and the high-level undergraduate and graduate education it provides, the Department needs the Administration's authorization(a) in the short run (within the next two years) to replace retiring professors, with the aim of restoring the Department to its size – 10.5 FTE's –

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<sup>1</sup> Our understanding of these matters (based upon correspondence with the Chair and the Department's Self-Evaluation) is as follows. Until the end of 2008 the Department had 10.5 FTE's of which 9.5 were permanent and 1 a temporary FTE given to it until a specific professor retired. With the retirements of 2 Professors the department decreased to 9 FTE's. In addition, 0.5 of another FTE was taken from the Department, which left it with the remaining 0.5 of the FTE (this 0.5 FTE is still unoccupied, and the Department used it during 2009 to finance part-time teachers, as well as for fellowships for its graduates). With the retirement of another faculty member at the end of 2009, 0.5 of his FTE will be taken from the Department, which will leave the Department with the remaining 0.5 of his FTE. So by the end of 2009 the Department will decrease to 8.5 FTE's. Finally, with the retirement of yet another faculty member by the end of 2011, 0.5 of the FTE will be taken from the Department, reducing it a total of 8 FTE's. We are grateful to the Chair of the Department for providing us with these exact details regarding past and impending retirements and their impact on the size of the senior academic faculty.

prior to this recent spate of retirements and (b) in the long run (within the next five years) to hire additional faculty members to increase the size of the Department to 12 FTE's. In addition to providing the Department with the researchers and teachers for presently uncovered but important areas in philosophy, achieving this goal would yield a respectable 15:1 student to faculty ratio (21:1 if minors are included). But above all, it is essential that the Department be allowed to replace the retiring professors. In this respect we concur wholeheartedly with the Department's view that a decision against replacing professors retiring in AY 08-09 is "a short-sighted policy of savings ... which is likely to have an adverse impact on the future of science and scholarship throughout the Israeli system of higher education, especially in the basic sciences and the humanities, where the prospects of private and commercial funding are not promising".

To its credit – and, again, signaling its clear self-understanding – the department has come to collective decisions about its additional research and teaching staff needs. Its highest priorities are in ancient philosophy and in ethics/political philosophy; next in line come philosophy of science and continental philosophy. What speaks for philosophy of science in particular is the presence of the fledgling, but highly promising Program in Cognitive Studies (under the direction of a member of the Department), the proposed joint BA in philosophy and physics, and the Loeb Center for the History and Philosophy of Life Sciences. What speaks for continental philosophy is a generally recognized need for a greater variety of course offerings. Perhaps some of these needs can be met by means of joint appointments (e.g., a political philosopher jointly appointed by philosophy and politics & government).

Other challenges facing the Department, addressed in more detail below, include finding more support for its graduate students, completing its revision of the MA program, supervising its teaching assistants, requiring more writing assignments in its courses and providing better feedback on those assignments,

The Department of Philosophy at Ben Gurion University is in a particularly strong position to face its challenges. Superb hirings over the past five years have provided a valuable complement to an excellent cadre of more senior faculty.

### ***Part B – In-depth description of subjects examined***

This part of the EC's report is divided into five sections, each of which corresponds to a separate section or chapter of the Department's Self-Evaluation:

1. Departmental aims and self-conception
2. Research profile and academic staffing needs
3. Study program
  - 3.1 Undergraduate program (BA)
  - 3.2 Graduate programs (MA & PhD)
4. Teaching and learning
5. Self-administration and physical infrastructure

## **1. Departmental aims and self-conception**

The following well-crafted sentences, elaborating the Department's sense of its "humanistic mission," are a model for any department of philosophers anywhere in the world:

...it [philosophy] is an investment of society in its own well-being, namely, the kind of well-being that comes about by personal reflection, cultural criticism, moral evaluation, and deep thinking on matters of intellectual concern. Although we operate in small and narrow circles, as befits our level of specialization, we believe the whole of society is the ultimate beneficiary of our activities, through the education we provide our students, the writings we contribute to public and intellectual debate, and the forms of criticism and reflection we help disseminate.

In keeping with this mission statement, the Department regards itself as "a pluralistic center of philosophical scholarship" and it aims at "being a centre of excellence in scholarship, research, and teaching in all major fields of Philosophy, ancient as well as early modern and contemporary".

This aim is laudable but hardly in reach, given the Department's recently reduced size and the constraints under which it labors. The Department has clearly been a centre of excellence in scholarship, research, and teaching in areas such as the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of law, and ethics & political and social philosophy but the professors prominent in all three areas either have retired or are about to retire. The Department continues to be a centre of excellence in analytical philosophy, particularly analytical philosophy of mind, logic, and cognitive science where there is the requisite "critical mass" of members of the Department –indeed, including relatively newer members – producing first-rate work in complementary ways in this area. This centre of excellence holds considerable promise and, particularly in light of the Department's constraints and size, must figure centrally in any planning for the future. The Department also has excellent scholars in other notable areas (e.g., critical theory, German idealism) but there is not the same "critical mass" of faculty members working in these areas. More importantly, given the Department's aims, it lacks sufficient full-time employees who are researchers and instructors in several other areas that are normally mainstays of an undergraduate philosophy curriculum (not to speak of a graduate curriculum). For example, as noted by the Department itself, there are no senior faculty members specializing in ancient philosophy.

## **2. Research profile and academic staffing needs**

The Self Evaluation Report lists over 200 pieces of research produced by 19 members of faculty. This impressive and wide-ranging profile describes a department with not only an established research reputation and culture but also a distinct tradition and identity. There is individual work of internationally recognized quality in analytic philosophy in such areas as the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language, and metaphysics. Members of the department have also distinguished themselves internationally by their publications in a variety of other fields: philosophy of religion, applied ethics, early modern philosophy, metaphysics, Kant and post-Kantian idealism, philosophy of biology, phenomenology, and aesthetics. There is also significant work in the philosophy of education. Faculty speak well of the research opportunities at Ben Gurion. Many mention the departmental colloquia and the opportunities to present their work to colleagues. Students at all levels seem

appreciative of the role research plays in the life of the department, in particular, the way in which it helps foster an intellectual and pedagogical community.

Much of the work listed in the report is produced by part-time, affiliated, and untenured members of faculty, and much is also produced by members close to retirement. There are thus important questions as to future directions and identities and these will obviously have an impact on issues of replacements and appointments. In many ways this is a department in transition. Viewing the research interests of the younger faculty, it might be said to be a transition from a more eclectic, interdisciplinary approach, as exemplified perhaps by work in the philosophy of religion that is able to draw on different traditions, to more analytically and historically focused approaches. Some of the first class research in metaphysics, comprising the work of at least three members of faculty, exemplifies this latter specialization.

As already noted in the Executive Summary above, the Department has itself identified its most significant lacunae: ancient philosophy, ethics/political philosophy, philosophy of science, and continental philosophy. While the Department, even with hiring in each of these areas, would not be what it self-describes as "a centre of excellence in scholarship, research and teaching in all major fields of Philosophy" (see Section 1 above), it could approach that ideal by attempting to hire individuals whose areas of research are complementary (for example, someone whose area of specialization is Aristotle's ethical writings and area of competence is contemporary ethical theory).

### **3. Study program**

The Department has well-designed study programs and has clearly identified problems in its self-evaluation. From 2006 to 2008, 167 undergraduate students were admitted into the BA program; given a relatively low dropout rate (12%), the number of undergraduate students pursuing a BA in AY 07-08 was approximately 147. In AY 08-09, there were 144 students majoring in philosophy; 25 active MA students, and 11 PhD students (figures based upon correspondence with the Chair). On the basis of these figures (counting only majors, MA, and PhD students), the student to faculty ratio is 20:1, a ratio that is on the high side (by international standards). The Chair informs us that for the AY 08-09 there were, in addition, 47 undergraduates taking a 28 credits minor in philosophy, 22 undergraduates taking a 14 credits minor in philosophy (all belonging to the General Studies Program), as well as 3 undergraduates taking a 28 credits minor in political philosophy, and 1 student taking a 14 credits minor in this program. If these students are also included, in AY 08-09 there were 253 students pursuing minors, majors, or higher degrees in philosophy; with a faculty of 9 FTE's, the ratio of students to faculty is an excessive 28:1.

#### **3.1 Undergraduate program (BA)**

The Department's well-conceived and organized structure of BA studies aptly reflects its "humanistic mission" and its conception of philosophy as "an investment of society in its own well-being," based on "personal reflection, cultural criticism, moral evaluation and deep thinking on matters of intellectual concern". However, there are some difficulties with the undergraduate program. The program is principally designed for the major but more attention must be paid to the fact that most undergraduate students enrolled in the



Department are doing a minor in philosophy rather than a major. No doubt the alternative of "critical thinking" to Logic II (including quantificational theory) is more suitable for those doing the minor. But logic is not mandatory for the minor at all.

The students seem to be very happy with the first-year program and the guidance that they received during the first year. By their own testimony, a large part of this effective guidance is due to the help that teaching assistants give them to think for themselves and express themselves clearly in well-designed writing projects that are both useful and challenging. However, students also remarked that this sense of progress, together with the challenge and usefulness of the writing assignments, declined in their second and third years of study. (In the opinion of some students, the decline is noticeable already towards the end of the first year.) In the second and third year there are few tutorials (courses with teaching assistants) and less writing is required of students; perhaps not surprisingly, some students complained that the courses were not sufficiently challenging. In addition, we learned that a teaching assistant for a course in the second year felt overburdened by his duties since he alone is responsible for reading and providing extensive feedback on all the writing assignments (approximately 70). Adding a teaching assistant in this course is a patent desideratum as is, generally, introducing more tutorials and thus adding more teaching assistants in at least some courses in the second year.

Teaching assistants as a whole indicated a need for more guidance from their lecturers and the department. As a means of insuring that teaching assistants understand their responsibilities and achieve a uniformly high level of instruction, it would also be advisable to have someone from the department designated specifically to counsel and supervise them in this role.

In general, instructors should be requiring writing projects and, where they exist, more extensive and challenging projects than are presently assigned in courses in the second and third years. The feedback given by lecturers on written projects currently submitted to them was clearly spotty, despite the department's emphasis on giving feedback (as stated in its Self-Evaluation). This feedback is essential to a philosophical education at every level, but perhaps never more so than when undergraduate students are being introduced to the rigors of philosophical arguments and the complexity of philosophical issues. Hence, the lack of adequate feedback in this regard is a matter of grave concern that the department should take every step to address. Again, additional teaching assistants would be helpful in this regard.

Students criticized the limited selection in course offerings. In particular, they complained about a lack of courses in continental philosophy, Indian philosophy, and Buddhism. The Department, given the present size of its teaching staff, clearly cannot be all things to all students and its own identification of its need to hire someone in continental philosophy is not its highest priority. Nevertheless, the Department may well be able to address some of these complaints through the use of adjuncts capable of teaching in the above-mentioned areas or perhaps through courses offered by other departments that might be cross-listed in the philosophy department. Finally, we encourage the Department to require a higher admission standard, as is presently contemplated.

### **3.2 Graduate programs (MA & PhD)**

From 2006 to 2008, 30 students were admitted into the Master's Program; given a relatively healthy dropout rate (12%), there were approximately 26 students pursuing the Master's in AY 07-08. As noted above, the figures for AY 08-09 are 36 graduate students (25 MA, 11 PhD). The Department has an outstanding graduate program. The MA program offers two tracks: (i) Research track (MA thesis), and (ii) Non-research track (without thesis). The PhD program offers three tracks: (i) Regular PhD track, (ii) Combined MA/PhD track, and (iii) Direct PhD Track. In addition, the department is centrally involved in the development of a graduate program in cognitive science, headed by a member of the department. The faculty is first rate and very active in introducing improvements to the graduate program. Students' satisfaction from the program is very high. We commend the philosophy department for its dedication, as well as the level of excellence and congeniality of the graduate program.

We examined the following main structural features and issues regarding the graduate program: (1) the size of the program, (2) the program's teaching staff relative to the fields of philosophy, (3) the cognitive science interdisciplinary program, and (4) the structure of the MA and PhD programs.

#### **3.21 Size**

With approximately 36 graduate students, the graduate program is on the small side, though the number of students is suitable for a faculty that has declined to 9 FTE's. With three upcoming retirements and hardly enough new positions assigned to replace them, it is about to go down to 8 faculty. This is a dangerously small number for a serious graduate program. It is absolutely essential that all the retired positions be filled right away. It is also very desirable that the number of faculty increase to 12 FTE's.

#### **3.22 Fields of philosophy**

The department's strengths lie in philosophy of logic, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind. As iterated already above, the department's short-term hiring preferences are: ancient philosophy, ethics/political philosophy, continental philosophy, and philosophy of science. Its long terms preferences are: philosophy of language and mind. We fully concur.

#### **3.23 The cognitive science interdisciplinary program**

The department is engaged in the development of an interdisciplinary graduate program in cognitive science, in which it plays a major role. This will be the first program of its kind in Israel, and it will complement the highly successful BA cognitive science program at the Hebrew University. Six of the department's members are involved in the program, and one of its members, is the program head. We believe this program will be very successful, and we commend the department for its central role in its development. But the program needs more support from the university, in the form of office space and administrative staff. Indeed, the program has no budget and we believe that, in consultation with the head of the program, the university ought to provide a basic budget to run the program's operations.

### **3.24 Structure of MA& PhD programs**

Overall, the MA and PhD programs are very well designed and operated. The faculty is extremely dedicated to these programs and the students' satisfaction is very high. The department is currently engaged in an excellent revision of its MA program, and we commend it on its active approach to improving the program. We have two criticisms of the MA program: we find (a) certain grade requirements too low and (b) the number of hours required too high. With regard to (a), both the grade requirement of 65 to advance from one year of MA studies to the next, and the grade requirement of 75 on the MA thesis are too low (see our recommendation below). With regard to (b), we applaud the Department for reducing the number of requisite hours from 32 to 30 but we advise it to consider reducing the number even more to 28 hours. One way to reduce the time would be to have a smaller number of more intensive courses, perhaps more hours in a single meeting (e.g., 4 credit hour MA seminars). Finally, we have a suggestion: adding a list and home pages of all MA and PhD students in the department's web page.

## **4. Teaching and learning**

This section focuses on practices, strategies, and attitudes in teaching and learning, in contrast to curricular structures and requirements.

### **4.1 General assessment of the pedagogical situation**

As is evident from the research activities of the faculty members, the Ben-Gurion department is generally oriented toward analytic philosophy while also making efforts to represent the wider history of philosophy and subject areas that have more to do with politics, culture, and values, at the levels of both teaching and research. This is a largely centrist orientation, relative to international professional norms in the English-speaking world, and it has significant positive effects for the students at all levels. These positive effects, however, are sometimes less striking than they could be, owing to the lack of sufficient permanent faculty members to implement the department's aims fully.

Students at all levels – BA, MA, and PhD – described with enthusiasm and universal agreement the department's openness, warmth, and accessibility. Comments such as "it's like a second home," "the department embraced me and my interests," and "I could talk to anyone in the department about any topic in philosophy" were common. This atmosphere is significantly due to both the department's centrist orientation (analytic + history + culture and values) and to the campus at Beer-Sheva – the only full 'campus experience' university in Israel. The campus and campus life attract BA students from throughout Israel to the university, and the philosophy department has over the years devoted itself to maintaining a culture of philosophical activity and discussion on campus. This culture extends to the MA and PhD programs as well. The relatively low dropout rate at all levels (10-12%) compared to other universities speaks to the success of the department in attracting and retaining student interest at all levels. The levels of financial support for MA and PhD students are the best or close to the best in Israel.

#### **4.2 Assessment of the pedagogical situation at each level (BA, MA, & PhD)**

Because the issues in the pedagogical situation of the undergraduate and graduate programs are different, we address each of them in turn in the following subsections.

##### **4.2.1 Teaching and learning in the undergraduate program**

As already noted, BA students reported that they wished to work harder than they now do, especially to do more (and more challenging) writing and to receive more feedback on it. They would value longer and more numerous exercise sections, with more opportunity for discussion. As already noted, the addition of tutorials and teaching assistants, particularly for the second year of BA studies, would be highly desirable. There was some sense that the department is overly weighted toward analytic metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind and language, with comparatively little attention given to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy, Ancient Greek philosophy, and perhaps non-Western philosophy. The faculty members whom we interviewed judged that the BA students are comparatively stronger than the MA and PhD students, though quality of students has increased at all levels over the past ten years or so. Adjunct faculty members reported that the quality of BA students especially is very good: the students are more committed to intellectual life than elsewhere.

##### **4.2.2 Teaching and learning in the graduate program**

MA students also felt welcomed by the atmosphere within the department. More strongly than the BA students, they were sensitive to the lack of variety in departmental course offerings. Many stayed on at Ben-Gurion to do the MA because of the welcoming atmosphere, even when their interests were significantly in European philosophy and the philosophy of culture. They reported no problem in finding advisors for MA theses—no advisors say no, and it all gets worked out—but they are also aware that significant aspects of the curriculum (and centers of their interests) are both currently under-represented and threatened by imminent retirements. Funding (fellowships and scholarships) for MA students is better than at other Israeli universities, but is still inadequate. It is especially regrettable that MA (and PhD) students are not able to serve as teaching assistants after the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the MA. Just as they are getting good at it, they are forced to stop, owing to union requirements. Both the MA students serving as junior faculty and the BA students noticed this. It is both unrealistic and undesirable – as the department’s own report emphasizes– for students to complete an MA in philosophy in two years. The evaluation committee notes that this expectation, given the character of the Israeli BA and the financial support available, is not in keeping with international norms. The MA students reported that perhaps 1 (legendary, apocryphal?) student has ever finished the MA in two years. The department has rightly streamlined and redesigned its MA program in order to promote more timely completion of the MA. (We were gratified to hear from the Chair that the Department has already endorsed our committee’s recommendation that it decide on special 4 credits MA seminars 2 years in advance.) The changes that the department has introduced and is introducing (See 3.2) are both pedagogically sound and effective in promoting degree completion. Nonetheless, three years post-BA to completion of MA is and should be the normal expectation, and third year MA students deserve some financial support.

As at other Israeli universities, the PhD degree is primarily a research degree. While some seminars in students' areas of interest are available, they spend by far the predominant amount of their time on their own research and writing. They are, regrettably, not able to serve as junior faculty members. PhD students reported that the analytic orientation of the department is becoming a constraint on the work that they are able to do. Their own dissertation topics struck us as somewhat eclectic and less significantly connected with the predominant research activity of the department than might be hoped. Most have come to Ben-Gurion because they wanted a change of atmosphere (especially from Tel Aviv) and because financial support at Ben-Gurion was more reliable and more generous than elsewhere. They appreciated the warmth and availability of faculty members.

Alumni also praised the atmosphere within the department. Both connections among students and the attentiveness of faculty members were "an inspiration," again in contrast with Tel Aviv. Perhaps because they are older than current students and some changes (and cutbacks) have taken place in department staffing, they were particularly aware of and critical of the analytic orientation of the department and the lack of variety in departmental course offerings. One student also reported that the department is now less successful in cultivating relationships with universities abroad than it used to be, so that it is difficult now (unlike in former times) to spend a semester or year abroad as a graduate student. The point is well-taken; given the Department's current shrinking size and the unavailability of certain offerings, both graduate students and faculty could profit from exchanges with other departments, both in and outside Israel. Graduate students should be encouraged to take advanced courses in other departments and the Department should promote faculty-exchanges with other departments and enter into more sustained dialogue with colleagues in other departments. In this respect, we are encouraged by the prospects for the New Israeli Philosophy Association, chaired by the Department's own Professor Isaac Nevo.

#### **4.3 Philosophical culture and professionalism**

One underlying issue that affects departmental life at all levels, but especially faculty life, has to do with the unique history and traditions at Beer-Sheva in relation to international professional life. The founding generation of the philosophy department, now in or nearing retirement, devoted itself to developing a broad philosophical culture 'in the desert.' This was a culture characterized by a very wide range of interests in general culture, including religion, art, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology, among many other topics. This culture is reflected in the weekly departmental colloquia that have brought students and faculty together for open discussion for many years. Finally, this culture is in keeping with the expectations and traditions of the university overall as a campus in the desert. In some contrast, over the past ten to thirty years (depending on location), professional work in academic philosophy has become increasingly specialized. In order to do significant professional work, younger philosophers especially now often feel compelled to learn a great deal of linguistic theory or physics or psychology or computer science and to interact with professionals in other fields as much as in philosophy. This tendency is reflected in emerging interdisciplinary programs all over the world.

In the view of the committee, both the historical tradition at Beer-Sheva and the recent professional developments should be honored, however difficult it is to do so, when faculty members feel pulled one way or the other: sometimes toward 'general' discussion and

collegiality and teaching, sometimes toward specialized, professional work. The members of the department seem aware of this tension. It is less clear that they have yet to find the significantly full habits of addressing it for which one might wish. We urge them, on all sides, to try to do so. The philosophy department at Ben-Gurion University can, with significant support for staffing and teaching, be both an accomplished professional department and one committed to the engagement of philosophy with a more general, more public culture. In this way, again, with significant support, it can become a model for the teaching and practice of philosophy in Israel.

## **5. Self-administration and Physical Infrastructure**

### **5.1 Self-administration and Departmental Promotion & Tenure Process**

As evidenced by the quality of the department's self-evaluation, it is a very well run department. Its highly dedicated chair works efficiently with the administrative staff and members of the faculty who in turn appear to approve his cooperative approach and administrative procedures.

We did register complaints about a lack of departmental support from the senior faculty in connection with a recent tenure case. We do not, as a committee, have sufficient information to make any responsible judgment about these complaints. But in light of them, the Department might be advised to consider introducing a mentoring program to head off difficulties that give rise to such complaints. Under a mentoring program, a different member of the senior faculty is assigned to be the mentor of each untenured, tenure track junior faculty member, with the responsibility of counseling him or her on departmental and university practices, requirements, and expectations, including those for promotion and tenure. Particularly in a department of this size, mentoring would not be terribly time-consuming and it could contribute significantly to the collegiality and to the mentored professor's sense of being comfortable in the department, not least during the sometimes anxious years prior to being tenured.

Finally, there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of the departmental faculty and those of the administration over the counting and compensation for a significant number of students who were not majors but enrolled in philosophy classes (e.g., psychology, history, and politics students as well as some 30+ interdisciplinary Humanities/General Studies students). This discrepancy needs to be resolved. We note that the normal practice is to allot faculty positions on the basis of overall student enrollment and not solely enrollment of majors.

### **5.2 The status of adjuncts**

Without teaching assistants in courses other than logic, adjuncts teach several introductory courses (sometimes in multiple institutions). Adjuncts indicated that, despite their hectic schedules, they consider themselves more a part of this department than any others in which they teach. Nevertheless, given the large student to faculty ratio and the importance of adjuncts to the undergraduate program, the Department would be well-served by integrating adjuncts more formally into its self-administration, perhaps having one of the adjuncts represent the interests and concerns of adjuncts at meetings.

### **5.3 Physical infrastructure, Administrative Staffing, and Library**

Though the office and class space for the department is quite adequate, lack of accessibility (particularly in Building 74) for students with special ambulatory needs is simply unacceptable. The administrative coordinator efficiently carries out her various tasks, occasionally with the help of a student assistant. The tasks of the administrative coordinator are more than enough for someone working full-time in that position. However, we have heard that the administration regards this position as only a three-quarter time position. If so, we urge the administration to reconsider this evaluation and formally recognize it as a full-time position. The library suffers from the reduction of its budget for the purchase of new books and journals; this problem is nationwide.

### ***Part C – Recommendations***

We make the following recommendations to the Department, the University Administration, and/or the Council of Higher Education and distinguish them in terms of their urgency. The most urgent recommendations are those requiring either immediate or steadfast attention to insure the quality of the research and education that the Department provides. We employ check marks to flag our judgment of the respective level of urgency of a recommendation: three check marks '√√√' for the most urgent, two check marks for the next most urgent, one check mark for a less urgent but nonetheless pressing recommendation. Unchecked recommendations signal practices or policies whose adoption we consider highly advisable. As a means of minimizing redundancy, we present at most very brief justifications for these recommendations but conclude each recommendation with a parenthetical reference to the pages in Parts A and B where the relevant justification or discussion can be found.

#### **Recommendations for the University Administration and the Department**

**1. Replacing retirees √√√**

We recommend that the Administration authorize the Department to replace professors who have been full-time in the Department but have retired or will retire between 2008 and 2011, in order to restore the Department within the next two years to its size – 10.5 – prior to this spate of retirements (Executive Summary, pp. 5f; Section 1, p. 7; Section 3.21, p. 10; Section 4.1, p. 11).

**2. Adding senior academic staff √√**

We recommend that the Administration authorize new full time positions to the Department so that the faculty number increases over the next five years to 12 FTE's. (Executive Summary, pp. 5f; Section 1, p. 7; Section 3.21, p. 10; Section 4.1, p. 11).

**3. Special needs √√**

We strongly urge the Administration to make facilities accessible to students with special ambulatory needs (Section 5.3, p. 15).

**4. Full Compensation for Teaching √**

The Department and the University Administration must resolve any discrepancies on the counting and compensation for non-majors enrolled in philosophy courses (Section 5.1, p. 14).

**5. Establishing the full-time position of the administrative coordinator √**

We recommend that the Administration formally recognize and establish the position of the department's administrative coordinator as a full-time position (Section 5.3, pp. 15f).



**6. Support for MA studies**

We recommend that the Administration look for ways to increase support for MA students, including the practice of hiring them as teaching assistants for a third year (Section 4.22, p. 12).

**7. Library Support for Acquisitions**

We recommend that the University Administration strive to provide the library with a budget sufficient to make more substantial acquisitions of new books and journals (Section 5.3, p. 15).

**Recommendations to the Department**

**1. Hiring priorities   √√**

We recommend the following two stages and order of priorities for hiring in the Department. In the first stage, the Department's first priority should be a scholar with a specialization in ancient philosophy; the second priority should be someone who combines ethics and political philosophy; specialists in continental philosophy and philosophy of science come next but we leave it to the Department to determine which of these is the third and which the fourth priority. In the second stage the Department should hire in philosophy of language and mind. (Executive Summary, p. 5; Section 2, p. 7; Section 3.22, p. 10).

**2. Asserting the importance of writing   √√**

We recommend that the Department take steps to insure that, in its courses, teachers are requiring sufficient more challenging writing assignments and providing feedback on that writing (Section 3.1, p. 8; Section 4.21, p. 12).

**3. Increasing tutorials and the number of teaching assistants   √√**

We recommend that the Department (a) add at least one more teaching assistant for the tutorial in the second semester and (b) introduce more tutorials, i.e., courses with teaching assistants in the second year of the program (Section 3.1, p. 8; Section 4.21, p. 12).

**4. Revision of MA Standards and Curriculum   √√**

We recommend that the Department (a) raise from 65 to 75 the minimal grade required to advance from one year of MA studies to the next, and (b) raise from 75 to 80 the minimal thesis grade required for graduating from the MA program. (Section 3.24, p. 11).

**5. Accelerating the pace of MA completions   √√**

We recommend that the number of required credit hours for the MA with a thesis be reduced to 28 and for the MA without a thesis to 36 (apparently the minimum required for such a program by the Council for Higher Education) and commend them for any steps already taken in this direction since our on campus interviews (Section 3.24, p. 11; Section 4.22, p. 12).

**6. Supervision of Teaching Assistants   √√**

We recommend that the Department take steps to insure that teaching assistants are adequately supervised and counseled and that the respective professor or instructor, for whom someone serves as a teaching assistant, make visitations to the teaching assistant's classes and report to the Department on the quality of the teaching assistant's teaching (Section 3.1, p. 8).

**7. Cognitive Science Program   √**

We recommend that the university administration allocate a basic budget for the cognitive science program in consultation with the head of the program (Section 3.23, p. 10).

**8. Interuniversity #1: expanding educational horizons**

We recommend that the Department, as a means of broadening students' horizons, encourage and create channels for graduate students to take advanced courses at other universities (Section 4.22, p. 12).

**9. Interuniversity #2: promoting faculty exchange**

We recommend that the Department attempt to develop faculty exchanges with other departments of philosophy, both in and outside Israel (Section 4.22, p. 12).

**10. Mentoring**

We recommend that the Department introduce a mentoring program for junior faculty (where a different member of the senior faculty is assigned to be the mentor of each untenured, tenure track junior faculty member, with the responsibility of counseling him or her on departmental and university practices, requirements, and expectations, including those for promotion and tenure) (Section 5.1, pp. 14).

**11. Internet and Graduate students**

We recommend that the department add a list and home pages of all its MA and PhD students on its internet web page (Section 3.24, p. 11).

**Recommendations to the Council of Higher Education**

**1. Increasing financial support for graduate students   √√√**

Given (a) the dependency of the quality of both undergraduate and graduate philosophy programs on the level of support that MA and PhD students receive and (b) the paltry level of this support by international standards, we strongly recommend that the CHE explore every possible avenue for increasing that level and duration (from two to three years) of support (Section 4, p. 11).

**2. PhD's as teaching assistants   √√**

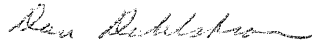
The union agreement affecting the hiring of PhD students as teaching assistants may be nationwide and may require that the CHE, either in conjunction with or in place of Ben Gurion University, seek to renegotiate this agreement in such a way that removes the

financial obstacle to hiring PhD students as teaching assistants. We recommend that the CHE do whatever it can to aid the universities in regard to this matter (Section 4, p. 11).

**3. Expectations for length of MA studies ✓**

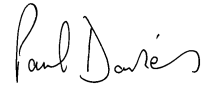
We recommend that the CHE recognize that MA students should be expected to complete their MA degree within 3 years of enrolling in a master's program in philosophy.

**Signed by:**




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Prof. Daniel Dahlstrom, Chair



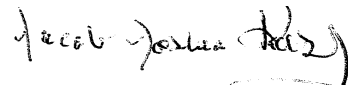
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Prof. Paul Davies



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Prof. Richard Eldridge



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Prof. Jacob Joshua Ross



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Prof. Gila Sher

**Appendix 1- Copy of Letter of Appendix**



מדינת ישראל

STATE OF ISRAEL

**Minister of Education**

Tuesday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Professor Daniel Dahlstrom  
Department of Philosophy  
Boston University  
USA

Dear Professor Dahlstrom,

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of General Philosophy Studies. The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Daniel Dahlstrom - Chair, Prof. Paul Davies, Prof. Richard Eldridge, Prof. Jacob Joshua Ross, and Prof. Gila Sher. Ms. Michal Kabatznik will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as 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*  
Gideon Sa'ar  
Minister of Education  
and Chairperson of the Council for Higher Education

*Enclosures:* Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees  
cc: Ms. Riki Mendelzvaig, Secretary of the Council for Higher Education  
Ms. Michal Neumann, Head of the Quality Assessment Unit  
Ms. Michal Kabatznik, Committee Coordinator



October 07

## **Appendix to the Letter of Appointment for Evaluation Committees (Study Programs)**

### **1. General**

On June 3, 2003 the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to establish a system for quality assessment and assurance in Israeli higher education. Within this framework, study-programs are to be evaluated every six years and institutions every eight years. The quality assessment system came into effect in the academic year of 2004-2005.

The main objectives of the quality assessment activity are:

- To enhance the quality of higher education in Israel;
- To create an awareness within institutions of higher education in Israel of the importance of quality evaluation and to develop internal self-evaluation mechanisms on a regular basis;
- To provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel;
- To ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

**It is not the CHE's intention to rank the institutions of higher education according to the results of the quality assessment processes. The evaluation committee should refrain from formal comparisons.**

## **2. The Work of the Evaluation Committee**

- 2.1 The committee shall hold meetings, as needed, before visiting the institution, in order to evaluate the material received.
- 2.2 The committee shall visit the institution and the academic unit being evaluated – if possible - within 3-4 months of receiving the self-evaluation report. The purpose of the visit is to verify and update the information submitted in the self-evaluation report, clarify matters where necessary, inspect the educational environment and facilities first hand, etc. During the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution, faculty members, students, the administrative staff, and any other persons it considers necessary.
- 2.3 In a meeting at the beginning of the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution (president/rector, dean), the heads of the academic unit and the study-programs, in order to explain the purpose of the visit. At the end of the visit, the committee will summarize its findings, and formulate its recommendations.
- 2.4 The duration of the visits (at least one full day) will be coordinated with the chairperson of the committee.
- 2.5 Following the visit, the committee will write its final report, including its recommendations, which will be delivered to the institution and the academic unit for their response.
- 2.6 In the event that a member of the committee is also a faculty member in an institution being evaluated, he/she will not take part in discussions regarding that institution.

## **3. The Individual Reports**

- 3.1 The final reports of the evaluation committee shall address every institution separately.
- 3.2 The final reports shall include recommendations on topics listed in the guidelines for self –evaluation, such as:
  - The goals and aims of the evaluated academic unit and study programs.
  - The study program.
  - The academic staff.
  - The students.
  - The organizational structure.

- The broader organizational structure (school/faculty) in which the academic unit and study program operate.
- The infrastructure (both physical and administrative) available to the study program.
- Internal mechanisms for quality assessment.
- Other topics to be decided upon by the evaluation committee.

#### **4. The structure of the reports**

##### ***4.1 Part A – General background and an executive summary:***

- 4.1.1 General background concerning the evaluation process, the names of the members of the committee, a general description of the institution and the academic unit being assessed, and the committee's work.
- 4.1.2 An executive summary that will include a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic unit and program being evaluated.

##### ***4.2 Part B – In-depth description of subjects examined:***

- 4.2.1 This part will be composed according to the topics examined by the evaluation committee, and based on the self-evaluation report submitted by the institution.
- 4.2.2 For each topic examined the report will present a summary of the findings, the relevant information and analysis.

##### ***4.3 Part C –Recommendations:***

- 4.3.1 Comprehensive conclusions and recommendations regarding the evaluated academic unit and the study program according to the topics in part B.
- 4.3.2 Recommendations may be classified according to the following categories:
  - ***Congratulatory remarks and minimal changes recommended, if any.***
  - ***Desirable changes recommended*** at the institution's convenience and follow-up in the next cycle of evaluations.
  - ***Important/needed changes requested for ensuring appropriate academic quality*** within a reasonable time, in coordination with the institution (1-3 years)
  - ***Essential and urgent changes required, on which continued authorization will be contingent*** (immediately or up to one year).
  - ***A combination of any of the above.***

##### ***4.4 Part D - Appendices:***

The appendices shall contain the committee's letter of appointment and the schedule of the on-site visit.



### **5. The General report**

In addition to the individual reports concerning each study program, the committee shall submit to the CHE the following documents:

- 5.1 A general report regarding the status of the evaluated field of study within the Israeli institutions of higher education.

**We urge the committee to clearly list its specific recommendations for each one of the topics (both in the individual reports and in the general report) and to prioritize these recommendations, in order to ease the eventual monitoring of their implementation.**

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Evaluation Committee Report, Philosophy, Ben Gurion University

**Appendix 2- Site Visit Schedule**



THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
BEN GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV  
10th – 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Evaluation Committee meeting, room 343, 3th, Building 74.

**Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009:**

Time	Subject	Participants
10:00-10:45	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Jimmy Weinblatt -Rector Prof. Yael Edan- Deputy Rector, Head of Quality Assessment System Prof. Moshe Justman - Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty
10:45-11:30	Meeting with the heads (academic and administrative) of the Humanities Faculty*	Prof. Moshe Justman (Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty) Ms. Rachel Damri (Chief of Administration, Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences)
11:30-12:15	Meeting with the heads (academic and administrative) of the Department of Philosophy	Dr. Yakir Levin (Departmental Chair) Ms. Liz Shabtay (Departmental Administrative Coordinator)
12:15-13:00	Meeting with representatives of relevant departmental committees *	Dr. Isaac Nevo (member of Departmental Council) Dr. Dalia Drai (Chair of PhD Teaching Committee) Dr. Ido Geiger (Chair of M.A. Teaching Committee) Dr. Hagit Benbaji (Chair of B.A. Teaching committee)
13:00-13:45	Lunch	Ms. Yael Krimerman Nave Ms. Thom Roffe Ms. Yael Velter Mr. Uri Shapira Dr. Amit Saad Ms. Anat Lan (Second year Committee representative)
13:45-14:30	Tour of campus (Including classes, studios, library, offices of faculty members, computer labs etc.)	
14:30-15:10	Meeting with Senior Academic Faculty*	Prof. Tziporah Kasachkoff Prof. Adi Parush

		Dr. Yakir Levin (Departmental Chair) Dr. Dalia Drai Dr. Isaac Nevo Dr. Abraham Mansbach
15:10-15:45	Meeting with Tenure track faculty*	Dr. Ido Geiger Dr. Hilla Jacobson Dr. Hagit Benbaji
15:45-16:00	Meeting with the heads of the Jacques Loeb Centre	Prof. Ute Deichman (Head of the Jacques Loeb Centre) Dr. Anthony Travis (Jacques Loeb Centre)
16:00-16:15	Meeting with head of Graduate Program in the Cognitive Sciences	Dr. Hilla Jacobson (Head of the Graduate Program in the Cognitive Sciences)
16:15-16:45	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee	

**Thursday June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009:**

Time	Subject	Participants
10:00-10:45	Meeting with Junior academic faculty*	Mr. Gidi Kolmick Mr. Ben Ben-arie Ms. Dana Katz Ms. Efrat Bentzur Mr. Yuval Gov-ari Mr. Ben Goldstein Mr. Uri Shapira
10:45-11:30	Meeting with adjunct lecturers*	Dr. Pini Ifergan Dr. Marius Cohen Dr. Nali Taler Dr. Michael Wineman Dr. Eran Dorfman
11:30-12:15	Meeting with B.A. students**	Mr. Itay Marom Mr. Raz Atlas Ms. Avigail Buhler Ms. Tal Hayun

Evaluation Committee Report, Philosophy, Ben Gurion University

		Mr. Tomer Givol Mr. Roy Rozen Ms. Dana Schlifer Mr. Jonathan Warshevski Mr. Nissan Levi Ms. Anna Natapov Mr. Noam Frank Ms. Shinrit Maman Mr. Barak Peled (First year Committee representative) Ms. Suzan Groot Mr. Gal Cohen (Second year Committee representative)
12:15-13:00	Meeting with M.A. students**	Ms. Romi Ovnat Mr. Alon Messer Mr. Gilad Ben Tal Ms. Ruth Navon Mr. Gidi Kolnick Mr. Ben Ben-arie Ms. Efrat Bentzur Ms. Dana Katz Mr. Yuval Gov-ari Mr. Ben Goldstein Ms. Tal Veinshel Gilboa
13:00-13:45	Meeting with PhD Students**	Ms. Yael Krimerman Nave Mr. Itay Ehre Mr. Nir Fridman Mr. Noam Yuran Mr. Sergev Sandler
13:45-14:30	Lunch	Prof. Yuval Lurie Prof. Tziporah Kasachkoff Dr. Yanni Nevo Dr. Ido Geiger Dr. Yakir Levin
14:30-15:15	Meeting with Alumni**	Dr. Robert Albin Dr. Rami Israel Dr. Ruth Mansur Dr. Lior Aviman Dr. Ariel Sarid Dr. Gal Vehezkel Ms. Efrat Liberman Mr. Samer Sh'hada Mr. Evlon Moritz

		Ms. Noga Raved Ms. Guy Finkelstein Mr. Hai Brener Mr. Adam Rubin Mr. Tomer Ofri Mr. Yiftah Gavish
15:15-16:00	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee	
16:00-16:30	Summation meeting with heads of the institution, faculty, and the Dept. of Phil.	Prof. Jimmy Weinblatt -Rector Prof. Yael Edan- Deputy Rector, Head of Quality Assessment System Prof. Moshe Justman - Dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Dr. Yakir Levin (Departmental Chair)

\* 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.