

22 February 2011

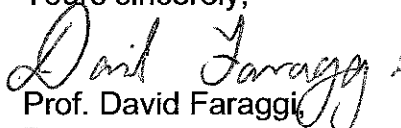
The Committee for the evaluation of
by
Ms. Marissa Gross
Coordinator
Quality Assessment Unit (QAU)
The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Shalom,

**Re: Response to the report of the Evaluation Committee in the field of
Middle Eastern History at the University of Haifa**

On behalf of the University of Haifa, I'd like to express my gratitude for the work of the Committee and for their insightful comments. The Department of Middle Eastern History has responded to the specific comments of the Committee in the attached letter.

Yours sincerely,


Prof. David Faraggi
Rector

cc: Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, President
Prof. Batia Laufer, Vice Rector
Prof. Reuven Snir, Dean of Faculty of Humanities
Dr. Michael Eppel, Head of Department of Middle Eastern History
Prof. Nahum Finger, Chairman, Subcommittee for Quality Affairs
Council for Higher Education
Ms. Michal Neuman, Head, Quality Evaluation Unit, Council for Higher
Education

The Response of the Department of Middle Eastern
History to the Report and Recommendations of the Committee for
Evaluation of Middle Eastern Studies Programs on behalf of the
Council for Higher Education

The Department of Middle Eastern History is grateful for the Committee's report and recommendations. These were studied carefully and contributed to our ongoing debate surrounding the Department's future plans and perspectives. We hereby present our response and comments concerning the Committee's report.

1. Immediate recommendation: *The University of Haifa urgently needs to replace faculty retired over the last decade if it intends to retain its international standing in Middle Eastern studies (p. 9).*

Strategic planning to replace these faculty members must begin immediately and replacement positions must be created if the Department is not to lose its international and domestic standing (p. 5).

Develop a strategic plan for replacing retiring faculty that realistically addresses the choices that must be made between disciplinary diversity, country coverage, and inclusion of Islamic subjects (p. 11).

Over the past two years, the Department has held discussions devoted to refining its vision and future plans. We believe that we must put more emphasis on broad themes, such as Modern Islam; Social History; Islam in Central Asia, India and the Caucasus; press and electronic media in the Muslim and Arab states; and regional oil and economic development.

In view of the past and upcoming retirement of two-thirds of the current faculty members, the Department absolutely agrees with this most urgent recommendation. It is the most crucial issue if we are to preserve the Department's international standing, much less its mere existence, in the future.

The conclusions of the discussions in the Department were presented by the past and present heads of the Department to the former Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and

the former University Rector. However, the authorities of the University failed to respond at that time.

A strategic plan to replace the eight retiring faculty (over the next four years) by hiring six new faculty members was submitted to the acting University Rector and the acting Dean of the Faculty of Humanities in the fall of 2010. This time, the Department's plans and requests were examined thoroughly and with serious consideration.

Although the Department is still waiting for a positive and concrete response, we have initiated preparations to recruit new faculty members. We are preparing to advertise a national and international call for scholars to join our staff and hope to embark on finding the best candidates from the moment that approval is granted by the University authorities.

2. Intermediate recommendation: *Review the BA and MA curricula as faculty changes occur to see whether a thematic and more topically diverse array of courses might stem the decline in enrollments and reduce dropout rates (p. 11).*

...the Committee is of opinion that country by country coverage is an outmoded approach to studying the region (p. 6).

The themes of most undergraduate and graduate courses are broad and cover more than one country. Almost all of the courses, except the pro-seminar, focus on broad themes relating to regional issues. During their undergraduate studies, every student participates in only one or two courses devoted to one Middle Eastern country alone. The single course that they take on a specific country serves as a case study for understanding wider regional issues in depth and within a broad context. While we accept the need for courses to have greater disciplinary and regional breadth, we contend that besides acquiring a comprehensive view on some region-wide issues or worldwide themes, students of Middle Eastern studies still need to have profound insight into one specific country or sub-regions of the Middle East.

Some recommendations relating to the range of courses and the focus of research have already been implemented. Following is a breakdown of the courses being taught in the Department:

Prof. Yitzhak Weismann devotes most of his research and courses to *Sufism*, modern Islam, and Islam in India and Central Asia.

Dr. Soli Shahawar focuses on topics related to Central Asia, Islam in the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf in his research as well as in his courses.

Dr. Fruma Zachs is currently working on the subject of Christians in the Middle East and women in Arab societies through the prism of literature and the press.

Prof. Gad Gilbar and Prof. Onn Winckler conduct their research and teach courses in Middle Eastern economy, economic history, demography, tourism, and oil.

Prof. Uri Kupferschmidt covers the social and material history of Middle Eastern societies.

Prof. Avner Giladi's courses are devoted to the issues of Islam and Islamic society.

Most of Dr. Michael Eppel's courses focus on the Middle Eastern international arena and inter-Arab relations.

3. Intermediate recommendation: *As for the MA and PhD programs, the entering enrollments are holding up well, but the dropout rate—66.7% for the MA—is a matter of concern (p. 8).*

In an attempt to address the drop in graduate students, the Department reached out this past year to recruit secondary school history teachers in Haifa and the Galilee who hold a BA in Middle Eastern History from one of Israel's universities. The result of the Department's call to secondary school history teachers for the academic year 2010-2011 brought more than 70 applicants. Of those, we chose the top 28 who met our high standards, and they have now begun their studies.

4. Long term recommendation: *Pursuant to suggestions that are contained in the Committee's general report, Haifa should seek to play a constructive part in the evolution of programs for library cooperation, less commonly taught languages, centers of excellence dealing with currently understudied areas, such as Central Asia and the Caucasus, South and Southeast Asia, and Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and North America (p. 11).*

Regarding the proposed development of programs for less commonly taught languages, such development must stem from long-term strategic planning on the breadth of the department's focus and courses. Turkish and Persian courses are currently offered as part of the Department's teaching program. In undergraduate programs (BA), students can choose to study either Persian or Turkish instead of Arabic or, in special cases, in addition to Arabic. We are also examining the possibility of offering Kurdish.

In the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11, the Department made an extraordinary effort, together with the Faculty of Humanities and the Dean of Advanced Studies, and financed Urdu studies for a very promising PhD student who is writing about Muslims in India (supervised by Prof. Yitzhak Weismann).

An Azeri-speaking student is currently preparing her MA thesis on the Azeri national movement (supervised by Dr. Soli Shahawar).

Regarding Southeast Asian studies, we are examining the possibilities of cooperation with the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Haifa, which focuses on south and southeast Asia. The courses of Prof. Yitzhak Weismann on Muslims in India are also open to students from the Department of Asian Studies.

The implementation of most of the long-term recommendations depends on the level of financial resources allocated by the University of Haifa authorities and the CHE (VATAT).

Dr. Michael Eppel

Head, Department of Middle Eastern History