



Committee for the Evaluation of General History & Jewish History
Study-programs

**Department of General History
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Evaluation Report**

August 2007

Contents

Chapter 1: Background	3
Chapter 2: Committee Procedures	4
Chapter 3: Department of General History, Ben Gurion University of the Negev	5
Chapter 4: Recommendations for the Department	7
Chapter 5: Recommendations for the University	8

Chapter 1- Background

At its meeting on March 8th, 2005 the Council for Higher Education (hereinafter: the CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the fields of General and Jewish History during the academic year 2005-2006.

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

- Professor Anita Shapira - Jewish History Department, Tel-Aviv University, Committee Chairman
- Professor Jehuda Reinharz - President of Brandeis University, USA¹
- Professor Peter Schaefer - Department of Religion, Princeton University, USA
- Professor Jay Winter - History Department, Yale University, USA
- Professor Myriam Yardeni - Department of General History, University of Haifa

During the on-site visits, there was a need to recruit two additional committee members²:

- Prof. Yosef Kaplan – Department of the History of Jewish People, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem³
- Prof. Emmanuel Sivan – Department of History, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem⁴

Within the framework of its activity, the committee was requested to⁵:

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, which were submitted by institutions that provide study programs in General and Jewish History, and to hold on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Present the CHE with final reports for the evaluated academic units and study programs - a separate report for each institution, including the committee's findings and recommendations, together with the response of the institutions to the reports.
3. To submit to the CHE a report regarding its opinion as to the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education. The committee will submit a separate report to the CHE in this matter.

The first stage of the quality assessment process consisted of self-evaluation by the institutions. This process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2005) and on the basis of the Specific Questions for the Fields of General and Jewish History which were compiled by the committee.

¹ Prof. Reinharz took part in the early phases of the committee's work, but due to illness was unable to join the committee for the site visits and participate in writing of the reports

²Two committee members from abroad were unable to serve due to illness; we are grateful to Professors Kaplan and Sivan for standing in at short notice.

³ Prof. Kaplan participated only in the evaluation of the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University

⁴ Prof. Sivan participated only in the evaluation of the Department of History at Tel Aviv University.

⁵The Document with Terms of Reference of the committee is attached as **Appendix 1**

Chapter 2 -Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meeting on March 5, 2006, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning General and Jewish History study programs in Israel and the quality assessment activity.

During the months of July and August 2006 the committee members received the self-evaluation reports and in September 2006 they began to hold discussions regarding these reports.

In October and November 2006 the committee members conducted a full-day visit to each of the eleven departments (in six universities). During the visits, the committee met with the academic leadership of the institution and that of the academic units under evaluation, representatives of committees, academic staff members, teaching assistants and students.

In accordance with the committee's request, the institution publicized in advance the fact of the committee's visit and it invited academic staff members, administrative staff and students to meet with the committee in order to sound out their opinions concerning the General and Jewish History study programs offered at the University.

This report deals with the Department of General History, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

The committee's visit to the Department of General History took place on October 29, 2006. The schedule of the visit, including the list of participants representing the institution, is attached as Appendix 2.

The committee members thank the management of the University, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of General History for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit to the institution.

Chapter 3 - The Department of General History, Ben Gurion University of the Negev

1. Teaching Staff

The Department of General History has structural problems. On the one hand, it split off from a formerly unified department with the department of Jewish History and the track of Israel Studies and began to function as an independent department only in 2003. There were multiple causes of the split, some personal, some substantive. By 2000 only 20 per cent of the courses in the united department were devoted to general history.

One of the main reasons of the split between History Programs in 2003 was the special status of Israel Studies program: the members of the (combined) History department had no part in the original appointments of the members of Israel Studies track and its study program.

This situation would be problematic under any circumstances, but given the low staffing provision in the department, there is considerable doubt that the department, as well intentioned and dedicated as it is, can offer a full range of B.A. and M.A. classes.

The staff consists of: 1 full professor, 3 associate professors, 4 senior lecturers and 2 lecturers. The number of external teachers was drastically reduced after 2003, and the department is unable to cover all the periods in the B.A. and M.A. courses. Two staff members devote 50 percent of their time to the department. Even more importantly, the teaching load of the staff consists only of 6 hours a week, instead of the norm of 8 hours a week in other universities. There are no senior staff members who specialize in the 19th and 20th centuries, and only one lecturer (the head of the department) teaches non-European history. The research potential of the staff is evident, and the young members of the department are promising scholars. Some members of the department publish their research in prestigious journals and publishing houses and enjoy a high reputation in their fields. Collectively, though, the department is in difficulty. It lacks the critical mass to do the job it is charged to do. The University must recognize the seriousness of the problem, and work to bolster the department both internally through the commitment of resources to fund additional posts and externally by fashioning a school of history to mobilize the resources available in other departments where history is taught. At the same time, the number of teaching hours per week should be increased to 8 for all full-time faculty, according to the teaching load set by Planning and Budgeting Committee. This change would bolster student choice and widen the range of historical knowledge students will be able to encounter in their work in the department.

2. Teaching program and teaching

Teaching program

The teaching program reflects all the problems encountered by the small number of the teaching staff: too many frontal (introductory) lecture courses and very little choice left for the students, if any. The department even had to cancel the first-year "targilim" because they were overcrowded. The "training" of the students was transferred to the second year courses and seminars. With the evidence of only three years of work as a separate department, it is difficult to evaluate the flexibility (or non-flexibility) of the teaching program in the B.A. As far as the M.A. is concerned, there is practically no choice of courses left for the students. The Ph.D. is totally under the auspices of the Kreitman School of Advanced Graduate Studies. That School offers Kreitman Foundation scholarships to outstanding students, some of whom have gone on to teach in the department.

The teaching program poses many other problems, especially concerning the second language requirement in the M.A. program. In some periods (Ancient and Medieval and sometimes Modern History), the students have to complete the study of a second language at their own expense, and the department gives no credit for this. The English-language reading requirements are very low, sometimes 1-2 pages weekly for a course and some 400 pages a year.

The department sees an advantage in developing a concentration in cultural history, reflecting the work and interests of a number of colleagues. To do so, they need to obtain further teaching positions, but their current needs come first, since they cannot cover important areas and historical periods within their existing curriculum.

In particular, their profile is almost entirely Eurocentric. At a time when European history is developing a trans-national character, the Department of General History is dedicated to an older set of concerns, located almost entirely in the national history of Continental Europe. Updating is overdue.

Teaching

There is no committee to check syllabi. The lecturers do not examine the reading requirements of their colleagues. Some students indicated that the courses overlap despite their small number.

3. Students

The student body of the department became less heterogeneous since the split. The department has substantially diminished the number of students accepted in the third year from Achva College. The number of students is relatively stable, 40-46 in each year of the B.A., and 11 (7 with a thesis) in the two years of the M.A.

Some students have severe complaints concerning the introductory courses (poor teaching, lack of interest of teachers), but generally speaking there is a high rate of satisfaction as far as the openness of the teaching and administrative staff is concerned and their helpfulness.

There are no venues offered by the department to help graduate students avoid isolation and introduce them to current trends in historiography and multi-disciplinary work.

4. Library and other facilities

The library is poor, and the budget allocated to each staff member for the purchase of new books for the library is unsatisfactory. It allows the purchase of approximately 5-8 books a year. The subscription to electronic journals is also unsatisfactory: there are 50 such journals, hardly covering new work in important fields. The students (and the staff members) have to use inter-library loans, which can be very expensive for students.

The offices of staff members are poorly equipped.

5. Self-Evaluation process

The evaluation process was a collective one and all members of the department were involved. The department cooperated with the committee and gave more detailed information on several topics.

Chapter 4 - Recommendations for the department

It is recommended that the department:

1. Increase the number of teachers and therefore expand students' choices of courses in the department.
2. Improve and enrich the teaching of languages in the department, especially in the graduate study programs. Students should not have to pay for such instruction separately from their tuition fees.
3. Take steps to exploit the assets of other departments (especially Jewish History and Middle East Studies) in establishing the array of courses offered to students in the department, and to take advantage of cognate courses in the departments of Arts, Politics and Government, Hebrew Literature, Foreign Literature and Linguistics.
4. Establish a methodological seminar for M.A. and Ph.D. students (perhaps together with the department of Jewish History).
5. Place greater emphasis on writing courses, to enhance the reading and writing aptitudes of students in Hebrew and English.
6. All these recommendations could be implemented in a School of History as a federal umbrella for all the history departments and "history" courses from other departments.
7. The Department should establish a teaching committee, which would be responsible for teaching quality control.
 - A. Its remit will be to ensure that there is no overlapping of course offerings, that teachers change topics of classes every few years.

The committee will check the syllabi of all department teachers and approve them. The committee will receive the teachers' reports at the end of each semester.

- B. The members of the teaching committee will visit the classes of young scholars on the regular basis, and no less than twice a semester, and will report to the chair. They will review the students' teaching evaluations and take any necessary steps with regard to teachers who are in need of improvement. In case of repeatedly poor performance, the teacher will take a remedial course in teaching. This applies to senior teachers as well.
8. The committee recommends that more is done to ensure that students are required to read more historical material in English than is presently the case. Collective scrutiny of syllabi is the only way to do this.

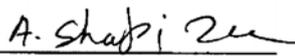
Chapter 5 - Recommendations for the university

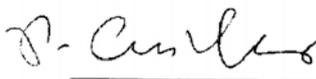
1. The committee considers that the Department of General History has an important task to fulfill in the framework of a scientifically and technologically oriented university. This can only be done when the department reaches a critical mass. At present this is not the case. When more resources are available, the department's work should be re-directed to offer a number of introductory or foundation courses for students from other departments and faculties. This would enhance the capacity of the department to offer a more varied and attractive curriculum, serving the university community as a whole.
2. The best way to accomplish these essential goals is to establish a portmanteau structure, a School of History, in order to coordinate and optimize all the resources of teaching and research in history within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.
3. The University must provide as a matter of urgency more teaching positions in the department.
4. The University has to improve considerably the capacity of the library to buy books, journals and to subscribe to electronic databases.
5. The University has to pay more attention to the quality of teaching in the promotion process of faculty members.

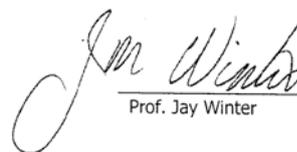
Implementation of the recommendations

The committee recommends that the institution will submit a progress report to the CHE within two years.

SIGNED BY:


Prof. Anita Shapira
Chairperson


Prof. Peter Schaefer


Prof. Jay Winter


Prof. Myriam Yardeni