



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

**Department of History
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Evaluation Report**

August 2007

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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 History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The committee's visit to the Department of History took place on October 31, 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 the Department of History for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit to the institution.

Chapter 3 -The Department of History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

1. Teaching Staff

Most of the members of the department are senior scholars (12 full professors, 3 associate professors, 2 senior lecturers); in addition, there are two non-tenured lecturers and a number of junior staff members. The department is still among the largest in the country, although it has shrunk considerably over the last years and will be shrinking further due to upcoming retirements.

With regard to the fields covered, there is a strong focus on European history and, within the larger field of European history, of German history. This preponderance doesn't seem to be the result of a carefully considered and structured planning process; rather, it developed over time, mainly due to funding from outside sources. The department does not see this as a disadvantage that ought to be corrected in favor of more appointments and course offerings in non-European history, or that at least such an option ought to be discussed among the members of the department. All the positions on the department's priority list for future appointments are related to Europe, and the department finds some truth to its classification as being the last stronghold of the ideal of the German university.

2. Students

The statistics for the years 2000-2005 show a relatively high and stable number of first-year students studying towards a BA in General History (111-157-137-150-154-130), but there appears a consistent pattern of a steep decline of students finishing their degree: of the 111 students who began in 2000, only 45 reached their third year, and 20 the fourth year. The figures for the subsequent years are similar: 157 (2001) – 78 (third year) – 31 (fourth year); 137 (2002) – 48 (third year) – 26 (fourth year); 150 (2003) – 59 (third year).

The figures for M.A. students are similar.

The distribution of Ph.D. students among the faculty is very uneven: three professors share among them the bulk of Ph.D. advisees.

The department hasn't set up a mechanism to keep in touch with its graduates or to help them find jobs.

3. Physical Infrastructure

The department's infrastructure is impressive. Each tenured faculty member has his or her own office; many retired faculty members keep a room.

Classroom facilities are abundant, even not used to full capacity. A sufficient number of classrooms are equipped with computers, internet connection, and

multimedia appliances. The classrooms are well maintained, although the lack of air-conditioned classrooms (only 10 out of 88 classrooms are air-conditioned) remains a major problem during the summer.

The library facilities suffer from the split between the National Library on the Givat Ram campus and the Bloomfield Library for the Humanities and Social Sciences on the Mt. Scopus campus. There is no systematic coordination between both libraries with regard to the purchasing process. The Library Authority at the Hebrew University which serves as the umbrella for all the university's libraries (except for the National Library) spends about 60% of its budget on electronic databases and e-journals; the remaining 40% are insufficient to sustain a nearly adequate research library for students and teachers. Unfortunately, the situation will become much worse when the National Library achieves its desired independence: whereas the National Library will continue to cover the needs of the Jewish History Department, it won't be able to serve adequately the needs of General History.

Chapter 4 - Recommendations for the department

1. The department's curriculum needs updating. Its Eurocentric focus is not compatible with the general shift to trans-national and trans-European histories at most universities today. This situation is even worsened by the department's specialization in German history. The department is strongly recommended to broaden its curriculum with regard to courses being offered and future faculty being hired.
2. The department is strongly encouraged to expand its cooperation with other departments within the Humanities, in particular with the Jewish History Department. Despite the fact that some members of the department specialize in Jewish History rather than in General History, there is no systematic coordination of the teaching program. Moreover, some members of the department supervise Ph.D. students in Israel Studies without having the necessary expertise in this area.
3. Under the pretext of "academic freedom," the senior faculty members enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their choice of course topics. The department does not share a feeling of corporate responsibility for the contents of its program; the department Chair does not review the syllabi of all the courses offered in the department. The department should constitute a teaching committee that would be in charge of teaching quality control and of establishing a culture of continuous self-evaluation within the department. The task of this committee is:
 - to check the syllabi of all the department's faculty members and to approve them: all syllabi will define the respective course in ways which enable the students to attach particular readings to particular meetings/weeks of discussion.

- to ensure that there is no overlapping between courses (within and outside the department) and that teachers change the topics of their courses every few years.
- to visit classes of younger and external scholars on a regular basis and to report to the Chair on their findings.
- to review the students' teaching evaluations of all faculty members (including senior faculty) and to recommend to the Chair the necessary steps to be taken with regard to teachers whose evaluations are inadequate.

In order to foster a culture in which teaching is a collective responsibility of the department as a whole, the Chair should initiate, once a year, a discussion in the department regarding the curriculum. This discussion would enable the department to check its teaching foci and priorities and to update its curriculum, taking into account trends in other countries and new developments in inter-active and web-based learning.

4. Despite the fact that the overall assessment of teaching and research in the department is very high and that the students expressed great admiration for their teachers and devotion to their profession as future historians, the committee encountered an atmosphere of isolation and despair among some students (in particular graduate students). Some students of the advanced degrees complain that they face difficulties in the process of finding a supervisor for their theses.

To mend this situation, the Chair should establish a committee that coordinates the research topics of the department's graduate students and the students' supervision. Not only the department's teaching but also the research conducted under its roof is a collective responsibility that should be discussed and coordinated. To improve the "corporate identity" of the department's members, it would be useful if the Chair or a committee organized departmental colloquia on a regular basis which serve as an ongoing forum of exchange among all of the department's members. Such colloquia should also include visiting speakers and students from other departments or universities.

5. The department should be more open to supporting and guiding its students in practical matters regarding applications for scholarships and grants as well as for positions after they have received their Ph.D.
6. The department, in conjunction with the administration, should find the means that will allow the students (especially the graduate students) to learn languages without paying additional fees.
7. The department should offer courses in spoken languages (English, French, and German) as part of the curriculum for graduate students.

8. The students need courses devoted to academic writing (Hebrew and English).
9. The department should put more emphasis on the question of grade distribution and grade inflation. The average B.A. and M.A. grades are much too high.

Chapter 5 – Recommendations for the university

1. The committee has observed a dangerous situation: a number of faculty members are about to retire within the next five years, the resources at the disposal of the departments of history are shrinking. At the meeting with the committee the rector indicated that the number of scholarships, money in research and job positions allocated to Humanities and History reflect the plans of the university to invest in this field. The committee asked for, but has not received the data supporting this statement.
2. The Hebrew University presents a quite unique mix regarding the structure of its schools, institutes, and departments. The General History Department is part of the Institute of Arts and Letters, whereas the Jewish History Department belongs to the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies. In addition, there exists the Institute of Contemporary Jewry as yet another unit that prides itself as a multidisciplinary institution. And finally, there is a School of History hovering above these units with, at present, little power to influence their curricula.
3. The committee acknowledges the attempts of cooperation between General History, Jewish History, and Contemporary Jewry (which were stronger in Jewish History than in General History). The committee proposes a model that retains the present distinction between the two departments of General History and Jewish History but that strengthens the role of the School of History in the university.

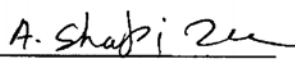
More concretely, the committee suggests that the School of History be established as a kind of “federation” that combines under its umbrella all the departments in the university that teach some aspects of history (not only the two departments under discussion but also, e.g., Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, History of Art, and other histories). Accordingly, the School of History should be granted much more significant status within the university. The Head of the School should be a full professor and a member of the faculty appointments and promotion committee. The School of History should not only coordinate the courses taught in the framework of the School, but should also have power over the topics and syllabi of such courses. The creation of a core curriculum, required for all students in all the relevant departments (including area studies with historical orientation), should be considered.

4. The committee recommends that the university authorities insist on a better coordination between the National Library and the Mt. Scopus Library. The Mt. Scopus Library budget for books and journals in General History needs to be increased considerably.
5. There was palpable evidence of animosity towards the evaluation process, both within the History Department as well as in the university administration. The university didn't seem to understand the difference between a self-imposed evaluation committee (such as the so-called Gager committee) and the Council for Higher Education committee, established by the Minister of Education. **It is important to emphasize the need to find a modus vivendi here, since self-evaluation is not an option; it is a necessity. There are special problems undoubtedly in a University with as distinguished a history of excellence as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. But since each university is part of a pool of human and material capital serving the population as a whole in higher education, each university must engage in the same exercise of upgrading teaching and assuring higher quality teaching in history. It is in this spirit that the committee offers these recommendations.**

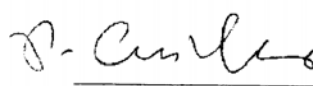
Implementation of the recommendations

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

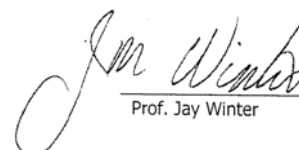
SIGNED BY




Prof. Anita Shapira
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Prof. Peter Schaefer



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