



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

**Department of Jewish History
Bar-Ilan University
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 Jewish History, Bar-Ilan University

The committee's visit to the Department of Jewish History took place on November 20, 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 Jewish Studies and the Department of Jewish History for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit to the institution.

Chapter 3 - Department of Jewish History, Bar Ilan University

1. Teaching staff and study program

The department has 15 professors and associate professors on its staff. In addition in 2006, there were six lecturers and five senior lecturers, many of whose academic promise and achievement is outstanding. The department is the largest department of Jewish history in the country. It is well-staffed, both relatively vis-à-vis the general history department, and vis-à-vis other Jewish history departments in the country. Problems will occur when a number of senior professors retire. In an endnote, we include a full list of the internal teaching staff, which does not include instructors. The names are given to ensure accuracy; there are some discrepancies in the data given on those teaching in the department. Hence more extensive data are presented here than in other departments. In future standardized data on staff membership will be required of all departments engaging in self-evaluation.¹

These human resources give the department a wide array of choices with respect to the academic program. The balance between and among fields appears to be sound.

2. Students

Student numbers are comparatively robust, though there was a short-term decline in B.A. and M.A. students in 2005-6. Still, the department is healthy and apparently attractive to students. In the last year for which data are available, there were 240 students studying for the B.A. degree; 64 for the M.A., and 34 for the Ph.D. degree. In 2005-6, there were 98 majors and 142 minors in the department.

3. Library and other facilities

The Wurzweiler Central Library holds an impressive collection in the field of Jewish history. The problem of access for handicapped people is troubling, as are the safety risks associated with ceilings composed of wooden frames for library stacks.

The overall state of the library is poor. Holdings are scattered; computer stations are very few and in heavy demand. The acquisition budget is extremely limited. The library buildings are run down; the chairs are run down; the coordination of services is chaotic. This was the only time in all our visits to Israeli universities that no one came to guide us through the facilities. That very lack of coordination hinted at much more severe material shortcomings in the capital invested in the work of the two history departments in the university.

Of equal significance is the run-down state of the building housing the Department of Jewish History. The building was the place in which we held our meetings. It is dirty and the furniture is well past its life expectancy. Staff rooms are inadequate.

Chapter 4 - Recommendations for the department

1. The teaching program needs updating. There are too many frontal lectures, especially in the M.A. program, but also in the B.A. program. There seems to be virtually no systematic cooperation with the department of General History. Cross-listing as between the two departments is not the practice. The program concentrates on Jewish history endogenously, without the benefit to the students from taking courses on Western Europe, the United States, North Africa, and so on, from a general historical perspective. Administrative obstacles in higher university circles foreclose the possibility of joint teaching between members of the two history departments in the same faculty.
2. The position of junior teaching staff vis-à-vis senior teaching staff needs adjustment. Junior teachers are not fully integrated into the forums that decide policy and the future trajectory of the department. Integration and mentoring go hand in hand.
3. Despite the resistance of some members of the department to the idea that the teaching and the writing of history are inseparable, there is a clear need to require undergraduates in the department to take a course in writing skills.
4. There is a need to require students at the M.A. level to take a course in methodology and research skills, to allow students to become acquainted with Social Science methodology. In addition, a course on historiography would be helpful at both the B.A. and M.A. levels.
5. The Department should establish a teaching committee, comprised of three senior faculty members. This committee would be in charge of teaching quality control.
 - A. Their remit is to ensure that there is no overlapping between courses, that teachers change the topics of classes and themes addressed in them every few years. They will check the syllabi and approve them. To this end, staff will be encouraged to provide syllabi which define the course in ways which enable students to attach particular readings to particular meetings or weeks of discussion. Some colleagues, especially younger ones, do this already.
 - B. The members of the teaching committee will visit classes of younger and external scholars on a regular basis, and no less than twice a semester, and will report to the Chair on their findings. They will review the students' teaching evaluations, and take the necessary steps with regard to teachers whose evaluations are not adequate. In case of repeatedly poor performance, the teacher will be strongly

advised to take a remedial course in teaching. This applies to senior teachers as well.

6. The chair of the department should initiate every year a discussion in the department regarding the curriculum, with the aim of fostering a culture in which teaching is a collective responsibility of the department as a whole. This discussion would enable the department to update the program taking into account trends in other countries and new developments in inter-active and web-based learning.

Chapter 5 - Recommendations for the University

1. University authorities must upgrade library facilities so that handicapped people can use the stacks. In addition, a review of safety standards in a library in which wooden frames abound is urgent. The rooms and offices of the Department of Jewish History are rundown, and in need of serious refurbishment.
2. The practice of funding promotions from within the bloc grant to departments is entirely deleterious. It is wrong on principle, since promotions are based on academic criteria; it is devastating to the morale of junior staff members; it is unethical, in presenting departmental heads with an impossible choice as to how to distribute the meager resources available to them. This practice must be changed as soon as possible.
3. Given the strength in personnel of the Jewish history department, and the weakness in personnel of the general history department, the University should give thought to creating a School of History which would be the place to rationalize the teaching of history throughout the university. Bringing the departments of Middle Eastern History, Land of Israel Studies, general history and Jewish history together in this informal, federative, way, would ensure continued independence of departments and maximize the usefulness to the university as a whole of all the historians on the staff.
4. The University should give thought to the possibility that all history departments and area studies departments with historical outlooks form a core curriculum, required for all students. This form of service would help redefine the work of these departments in positive and creative ways, and provide a service to the university population as a whole.
5. On balance, we find the attitude of the university authorities to the Humanities in general and to the study of history in particular to be unsatisfactory. There is little sense of the significance of a symbiotic relationship between Jewish history and general history, and on the need for Bar Ilan University to support the teaching of general history precisely to provide a broader picture of the world than is available when the study of Jewish history dwarfs that of general history. The balance between the two departments, and cooperative activity

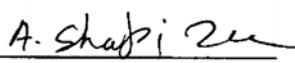
between them, are presently at a poor level. Serious attention is required to ensure the health and survival of both departments.

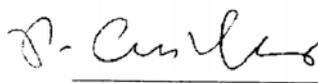
6. There was abundant evidence of animosity toward the evaluation process, and the minor involvement of faculty members in writing the report. Much of the blame rests in higher university circles, but some rests in the department itself. Aside from an understandable unwillingness to take on new work, this approach does not serve the interests of the department, its teachers, and its students. There was also clear evidence of a divide between data held by the department and by the university authorities. It is apparent that the dean and head of department are minor players compared to higher university authorities. The result is a poor report, lacking the openness and thoughtfulness of other university departments about rigidities, problems, and shortcomings in the work of the department.

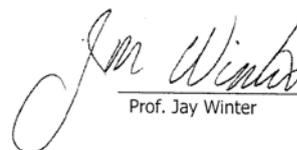
Implementation of the recommendations

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

¹ Table 1. Full-time Academic staff, Department of Jewish History

Professors

Baumgarten: Ancient
Feiner: Modern
Michman: Modern
Orfali: Medieval
Rosman: Early modern
Toaff: Medieval

Associate Professors

Bacon: Modern
Bar-Ilan: Ancient

Baumel: Modern
Densky: Ancient
Gillis: Modern
Horowitz: Early modern
Rosenfeld: Ancient
Schremer: Ancient
Spitzer: Medieval

Senior lecturers and lecturers

Caplan: Modern
Friedheim: Ancient
Gaimani: Early modern
Harel: Modern
Hildesheimer: Modern
Malkiel: Modern
Meron: Modern
Baumgarten: Medieval
Source: Tables 2.A, 2.B.