



**Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Literature
Study Programs**

The University of Haifa

The Faculty of Humanities

The Department of Hebrew Literature

Evaluation Report

February 2013

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Chapter 1: Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Hebrew Literature during the academic year 2011 – 2012.

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:

- **Prof. (Emeritus) Arnold Band, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Los Angeles, USA – Committee Chair**
- **Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yehuda Friedlander, Department of the Literature of the Jewish People, Bar-Ilan University, Israel**
- **Prof. Nili Gold, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. David Roskies, Department of Jewish Literature, The Jewish Theological Seminary, USA¹**
- **Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Departamento de Hebreo, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yosef Yahalom, Department of Hebrew Literature, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel**

Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati and Ms Maya Alayoff - Coordinators of the Committee on behalf of the CHE

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Hebrew Literature, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2010).

¹ At the time of the evaluation, Prof. David Roskies also held a position at Ben-Gurion University.

Chapter 2: Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on May 13, 2012 during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Hebrew Literature study programs.

The Committee held the site visits to all of the five departments in May 2012 .

During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including the senior management, faculty, staff, and students.

This report deals with Hebrew Literature studies in the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa.

The Committee's visit to the University of Haifa took place on May 20-21, 2012. The Committee thanks the management of the University of Haifa, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature for the self-evaluation report (SER) and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit at the institution.

This report was prepared following the guidelines of the Council for Higher Education. It is a synthesis of the analysis of the SER, the interviews conducted with faculty members, the administration and students, and it summarizes observations and makes recommendations intended to strengthen the Department.

The schedule of the visit, including the list of participants from the institution, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Studies in the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa

- *This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the Haifa University is clearly in a critical state and demands immediate and decisive attention. The Hebrew section has recently lost another central faculty member to retirement and no replacement is forthcoming at present. This leaves the teaching of Modern Hebrew Literature, the National Literature of the State of Israel, with only two senior regular (not Creative Writing) academic lines. There is no senior instructor for Medieval Hebrew Literature. It was our distinct impression that the Rector who, on this campus, ultimately controls all new appointments, does not understand the emergency this department faces. Until the administration changes its attitude, any discussion of normal long range planning is pointless. On the other hand we must commend the Dean of Humanities, the Departmental Chair for trying to cope with this impossible situation. The critical state of the department today demands immediate attention precisely because this department fulfills such a crucial role in the cultural life of the northern sector of the State of Israel and still contains within it dedicated, talented scholars and academic units of renown.

Background of the Department

To understand the unique composition of the department, one must examine its history. Initially, the University of Haifa, which was founded in 1972 had two separate departments for Hebrew and General literatures. The faculty of the latter consisted of professors of different national literatures who did not have independent departments of their own within the Faculty of Humanities. This department joined with Department of Hebrew Literature in 1982-83 to form the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature. The united department accepted into its ranks, as late as two years ago, two instructors of the Department of French Literature which was closed at that time, even though neither adhered to a comparative methodology. Among the members of the united department there are full-fledged members who are scholars of other European literatures, whose involvement with Hebrew literature is secondary at best, though they are important scholars in their own respective fields. On the other hand the Department does not have even a single scholar of either Italian or Spanish literatures that, at different historical periods, had significant influence on Hebrew literature. The Committee recognizes the scholarly value of having the studies of European literatures alongside the study of Hebrew literature, since literary theory and the critical methodology of textual analysis have both been developed within the scholarship of European languages. The Department, indeed, offers a broad range of theories, concepts, and methods in literary theory, but the common denominator with Hebrew literature is minimal at best. The department, though called the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, has six senior positions in Hebrew Literature and 12 in Comparative Literature, by no means a favorable proportion. Nevertheless, we found that the collegial atmosphere in the department was excellent. The department is so heterogeneous, that it is, indeed, very difficult to make coherent, generalizing statements about it.

Current Status of the Department

Both the Dean of Humanities and the Departmental Chair presented us with a depressing picture of the status of the Department which shares the problems of the entire Humanities Division of which it is a part. Since the Haifa University has little extra-mural support, and attracts few grants, 80% of the budget comes from the state and this depends upon student enrollment. Initiatives to raise funds inevitably favor the natural sciences which, it is hoped, can attract such funds. There is, therefore, a built in bias against the Humanities and Hebrew Literature suffers because of this. Our meeting with the Provost, a scientist, confirmed this description of this attitude, and the concern of the administration of the faculty and the department. Both the Dean and the Chairman expressed the fear that whenever a position is vacated in the Humanities, it is diverted to the sciences. The situation in Hebrew Literature is truly catastrophic. There are now only six senior lines in Hebrew Literature: of these two are in Folklore or Midrash; two are in Creative Writing; and only two in the entire field of Modern Hebrew and Israeli Literature. Clearly, most classes are manned by either adjunct or junior faculty who are underpaid and frustrated. They see little future ahead of them in the academic world, and certainly not in Haifa.

The Study Program

The Department's curriculum is a synthesis between two programs: a curriculum in world literature, and a curriculum in the in-depth-study of a single national literature, namely Hebrew literature. This program combines the study of canonic texts with folk-literature and with contemporary literature; of courses in literary theory with courses in creative writing; of courses that follow historical perspectives with courses that concentrate on the principle of generic analysis. Furthermore the Department offers a broad range of interdisciplinary courses that addresses issues of the relations inherent between literature and philosophy, psychology, history and anthropology. In contrast to well-structured programs in traditional departments, the Department allows students to formulate their own personal program, but at the same time to build it upon solid academic principles that are explored in historical, generic and theoretical courses.

Yet, after the presentation of the impressive diversity of courses in the Department, the faculty expresses in their SER a deep concern regarding the fragmentation of methods and contents, lack such diversity makes it impossible to obtain a specialized training in any field. In order to achieve greater harmony between the two dominant directions, the Hebrew and the Comparative, of the unified Department, the SER recommends to construct the study program on a historical basis. Such a principle has been already applied to the study of Hebrew literature, and it is suggested to construct the comparative literature courses on that basis as well. The Department recognizes that it is next to impossible to follow two different theoretical organizational principles in the same department. On the other hand, the SER recommends to increase the number of comparative inter-cultural courses. This might, in fact, compound the excessive heterogeneity of the program.

The Department has achieved a considerable measure of success in methodology in its Folklore Studies, a field that is characterized by comparative analysis. This is a core field within the department, and it draws, among other things, upon the treasure trove deposited at the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA) founded by Professor Dov Noy). Two senior and three junior scholars teach folklore. In examining the association between this discipline and the study of Hebrew Literature, it is necessary to remember that in this non-canonic field, it is not necessary to relate to Hebrew texts. From this perspective as well, folklore studies can become an integral part of a department that is concerned with comparative literary studies, in the absence of a full-fledged department devoted to Hebrew literature studied comparatively.

The department, furthermore, houses a vibrant Creative Arts Program for M. A. students and attracts important creative talent of national, at times international, reputation, to teach courses in creative writing and in a new program in editing. These instructors also teach individual courses in Modern Hebrew Literature thus enriching that program which, as mentioned above, needs serious reinforcement.

The BA Program

The study program for the BA in Hebrew Literature is enriched by the demand to have students study a set number of courses in Comparative Literature, but this implies less

exposure to Hebrew texts. Since the students now come to the university with relatively poor backgrounds in Hebrew Literature, their exposure to Hebrew texts in the BA program is probably not sufficient. When one adds to this the basic fact that most of the instruction is not offered by senior faculty, one wonders about the quality of their instruction in this crucial area. In addition, since students must study medieval literature and folklore, the room for study of the classics of Modern Hebrew literature is truly minimal. Given the absence of a specialist in Modern Hebrew poetry, it is obvious that this area will be under-represented. We are also puzzled by the lack of differentiation between the types of courses. We cannot tell if all courses are lecture courses, or if some are dedicated to the intensive study of texts. We note that there are few BA seminar courses.

The MA program

The MA courses are all seminars and have relatively few students in them allowing for more individual instruction. Again, the demand to have students study both modern, and medieval literatures and folklore, probably limits the students' exposure to texts in any one area. One wonders if it is wise to continue the demand for breadth even at the MA level. At this level, one expects depth of study in one area. While most instructors are senior, one wonders about the academic qualifications of the professor of Creative Writing who is assigned a central course here.

The Ph.D Program.

The Ph D. program is small and carried by three or four instructors of high academic standing.

Since the medievalist is actually retired and the others are not that far from retirement, it is obvious that the university must bend every effort to allocate resources

Faculty

In practical terms, out of the 18 senior professors of the unified department, 2 teachers were on leave or have retired, and 3 others were teachers of Creative Writing. Out of the remaining 13 scholars, only 4 senior scholars taught Hebrew literature. A single senior teacher taught the broad field of literature in the late antiquities (Aggadah, midrash and *piyyut*), the Middle Ages, the renaissance, and the Baroque. Completely absent from the curriculum are the broad area of religious poetry, Palestinian *piyyut*, Sephardic *piyyut* and mystical poetry. In general, it must be said that the uniqueness of Hebrew Literature, the national literature of the State of Israel, is often lost within this complex of literary courses. The faculty as a whole, however, is active in research, in publication, in attracting recognition for its work, in organizing international conferences. The professors of Creative Writing together with the other Professors of Modern Hebrew Literature organize lectures, readings, and conferences which attract significant audiences from off campus. The folklore section is one of the foremost folklore institutions in the country.

As said above and will be repeated below, the department must be authorized to make several senior appointments in the near future: in Modern Hebrew poetry, in Modern Hebrew prose, and in Medieval Hebrew literature

Students

There seems to be a significant difference between the quality of undergraduate and graduate students. The admission requirements for undergraduate students are admittedly low since the department, and the university as a whole, gets its budget based on student enrollment. It is not clear what percentage of the undergraduate students are not native Hebrew speakers, or, how they are integrated into the Hebrew Literature program. There is abundant evidence that admission requirements to the undergraduate program are very lax. The percentage of failing students is very high. The graduate students seem to be better prepared to do the work necessary for proper graduate studies and we did not hear of any complaints in this regard.

It is obvious that requirements for admission to the undergraduate program have to be raised considerably.

The students we met were all interesting, alert, and mostly happy with their studies. As one would expect, certain courses and instructors were highly praised one was criticized. We found it strange, however, that we met few Arab students, none in the BA group though Haifa is known for its hospitality to Arab students.

Alumni

The alumni we interviewed were all sincerely grateful for the education they received at the University of Haifa and are mostly employed in areas dealing with their training here. It impressed us, however, that they were all Haifa residents and apparently had been such before they came to the university. While this creates a sense of community, it also engenders provincialism.

Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations

Our recommendations pertain only to the Hebrew Literature section of the department and not to the Comparative Literature section which we feel is beyond our mission. It must be said, however, that the importance of Hebrew Literature, the national literature of the State of Israel, is hard to recognize in this combined department in which two thirds of the budgeted lines are in non-Hebraic literatures.

1., This department has to present a plan for development over the next few years. This said, there are areas that cannot wait for a long range plan. The situation is critical and must be recognized as such by the administration.

2. Since there are now only two senior positions in Modern Hebrew Literature, and they are not that young, the department must appoint a scholar in this area within the next two years. The appointment should be selected from a national or even world-wide pool of candidates.

3. There is no professor holding a position in Medieval Hebrew Literature, a field in which this university has long had a permanent position and in which there are still doctoral students working. Courses and the direction of students are handled on a voluntary basis by a retired professor. Given the importance of this field for both Hebrew and Arabic cultures, the lack of a permanent senior instructor is, indeed, serious.

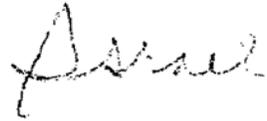
4. In general, efforts should be made to integrate the study of Spanish and Arabic literatures with the study of Medieval Hebrew poetry in Spain, and to ensure the future study of medieval Hebrew secular poetry (the Golden Age in Andalusia, Hebrew poetry in Christian Spain, in Provence and Italy, and the rhymed and non-rhymed prose). This is a significant area in which the University of Haifa can assume an international leadership role in scholarship, considering its excellent library holdings, and its student population that consists of Jews and Arabs. It is imperative, nationally, and for the University of Haifa in particular, to train a scholar whose cultural and academic background will enable him to conduct appropriate comparative studies between medieval Hebrew and Arab literatures.

5. The academic study of our national Hebrew literature is of prime importance for a society that has developed, over the ages traditional tools for the teaching of Aggadah, midrash, and rabbinical literature. Academic studies of Hebrew literature are relatively new in Jewish culture and it is incumbent upon us to continue and develop them. Hebrew literature has a historical depth of millennia, its study requires an independent department, as the study of English and Arabic literatures do.

Signed by:



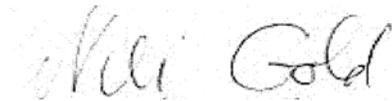
Prof. Arnold Band
Committee Chair



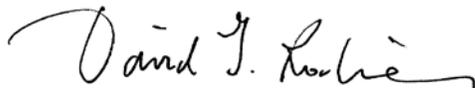
Prof. Dan Ben-Amos



Prof. Yehuda Friedlander



Prof. Nili Gold



Prof. David Roskies



prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos



Prof. Yosef Yahalom

Appendices

Appendix 1- Copy of Letter of Appointment



January 2012

שר החינוך

Minister of Education

Prof. Arnold Band
Department of Comparative Literature
University of California, Los Angeles
USA
وزير التربية والتعليم

Dear Professor Band,

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 21st 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 the chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Arnold Band, (Chair), Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Prof. Yehuda Friedlander, Prof. Nili Gold, Prof. David Roskies, Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Prof. Yosef Yahalom.

Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as the 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,
Chairperson, The Council for Higher Education

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, The Quality Assessment Division
Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati, Committee Coordinator

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כתובת אתר ממשל זמין: <http://gov.il>

כתובת אתר המשרד: <http://www.education.gov.il>

Appendix 2- Site Visit Schedule

**Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature - Schedule of site visit –
University of Haifa**

Sunday, May 20, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
10:30-11:15	Opening session with The heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. David Faraggi , Rector Prof. Perla Werner , Vice Rector Prof. Reuven Snir , Dean of the Faculty of Humanities Ms. Ruchama Elad-Yarum , Manager, Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector Ms. Michal Daloya , Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector
11:15-12:00	Meeting with the heads of the Faculty	Prof. Reuven Snir , Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
12:13-15:00	Meeting with the academic and administrative heads of the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature	Prof. Gabriel Zoran , Head of the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature Ms. Michal Liebster , Administrative Assistant to the Head of the Department and Office Manager
13:00-13:45	Meeting with senior faculty and representatives of relevant committees*	Dr. Ruth Amar Prof. Nitza Ben-Dov Dr. Shahar Bram Dr. Larisa Fialkova Dr. Vered Lev Kenaan Prof. Ronit Matalon Dr. Julia Matveev Dr. Vladimir Paperni Dr. Ravit Raufman Dr. Heddy Shait Dr. Dina Stein Prof. Dennis Sobolev Prof. Yosef Tobi
13:45-14:30	Lunch	in the same room
14:30-15:15	Tour of campus	Dr. Larisa Fialkova , Ms. Cecilia Harel , Ms. Yardena Lewenberg

Monday, May 21, 2012

Time	Subject	Participants
9:30-10:15	Meeting with BA students**	up to 10 students
10:15-11:00	Meeting with MA students**	up to 10 students
11:15-12:00	Meeting with Junior academic faculty and Adjunct faculty *	Dr. Erela Brifman-Rassis Dr. Esther Juhasz Ms. Neta Meltzer Dr. Haya Milo Dr. Ayelet Oettinger Dr. Youval Shimoni Dr. Tsafi Sebba-Elran Dr. Rachel Zoran
12:00-12:45	Meeting with PhD students**	up to 10 students
12:45-13:30	Lunch	in the same room
13:30-14:15	Closed-door meeting of the committee	
14:15-15:00	Meeting with Alumni**	BA: Mr. Itai Ilan, Mr. Maor Lisia, Ms. Adva Shay MA: Ms. Chen Bar-Itzhak, Ms. Nili Klinger, Ms. Hila Zewi PhD: Dr. Goni Ben-Israel Kasuto, Dr. Sharon Meir, Dr. Haya Milo
15:00-15:45	Summation meeting with heads of department and institution	Prof. David Faraggi , Rector Prof. Perla Werner , Vice Rector Prof. Reuven Snir , Dean of the Faculty of Humanities Prof. Gabriel Zoran , Head of the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature Ms. Ruchama Elad-Yarum , Manager, Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector Ms. Michal Daloya , Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation, Office of the Rector

* 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.