

Tel Aviv University
The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities
Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies

**Response to the Evaluation Report of the Committee for the
Evaluation of Arabic Language and Literature Studies in
Israel**

January 2015

On May 21, 2014 an international Committee for the Evaluation of Arabic Language and Literature Studies in Israel on behalf of the Council for Higher Education visited the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University. This visit followed upon the self-evaluation report submitted by the Department in February 2013. During the visit, the Committee met with faculty, students and graduates of the Department as well as with members of university administration.

After its visit to the Department and reviewing the self-evaluation report, and in light of the information gathered through interviews, discussions and observation, and other available information, the Committee submitted, in June 2014, its report evaluating the activities and functioning of the Department. The report included the Committee's findings and recommendations. Furthermore, the Committee submitted a general report regarding the state of Arabic Studies in the higher education system in Israel, which included recommendations to improve this field.

In its general report the Committee emphasized the importance of teaching Arabic in Israel, due to the presence of a large Arab population in the country, and also due to the fact that Arabic is the language of culture and politics in the region, and in addition because half of the country's Jewish population are descendants of immigrants from the Arab world. The Committee noted, however, that Arabic Studies

אוניברסיטת תל-אביב @ TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

in Israel are now experiencing a deep crisis, while some twenty years before Israel was one of the leading countries in the academic study of Arabic and related fields. The Committee pointed out the need to take action on a national scale, changing priorities and allocating resources and special budgets, to return Israel to its leading position in the field.

The Committee's recommendations in the general report included a timetable for action. In the short term it was recommended immediately to appoint faculty through an international search, to recruit students more efficiently, provide scholarships and research grants as well as suitable supervision for graduate and postgraduate students, organize seminars for graduate students, provide support for research by faculty members and their graduate students, improve the resources of the libraries at the various institutions and increase coordination between them regarding the purchase of books, and to add computers for teaching and for the use of both teachers and students. In the intermediate term it was recommended to recruit Arab students and faculty, modify the structure and content of the courses, teach in Modern Standard Arabic, teach courses on Colloquial Palestinian Arabic, cooperate with Middle Eastern Studies departments, add offices for faculty, support large-scale projects and the publication of academic journals, create alumni organizations, and establish specialized centers of excellence. In the long term it was recommended to expand the discipline of dialectology.

Most of the recommendations offered here appear also in the report relating specifically to the Department at Tel Aviv University and will be addressed in detail below. However, it should be remarked that some of the recommendations require inter-university coordination and specific budgetary allocations from the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) in the Council for Higher Education. We can only hope that these recommendations will be taken into account in any future planning of the higher education system.

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

According to the report discussing the Department at Tel Aviv University in particular, the Committee was favorably impressed by the research profiles of the faculty members and praised their motivation and determination to give their students maximum attention and input, and also highlighted the pride and sense of belonging of students and graduates in the Department. However, it also expressed deep concern about voices heard occasionally from the higher echelons in the university calling for the merger of the Departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern and African History. The Committee not only believes that these are two distinct disciplines that cannot be integrated, but it is also convinced that such a merger would have profoundly negative consequences for Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University.

We are convinced of the correctness of the Committee's view regarding the serious implications of such a merger, and will work to realize the Committee's vision, according to which "Tel Aviv University has the potential to be a major national, regional and international center of teaching and research in Arabic, Islamic and related fields."

The Committee also warned of the precarious situation in which the Department finds itself, especially after the retirement of senior faculty who taught core academic subjects such as classical Arabic literature and early Islam and who have not been replaced. This has caused an imbalance in the curriculum and a considerable decline in research in these areas by graduate and postgraduate students. In addition, the Committee pointed out deficiencies in the curriculum, admissions requirements, library services, management of income from enrichment courses taught by the Department, student supervision, contact with alumni, the recruitment of research grants and the like. Accordingly, the Committee saw fit to include in its report a series of operative recommendations whose implementation should, in its eyes, halt the decline of the Department and help it reach its full potential.

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

However, it should be kept in mind that since the preparation of the self-evaluation report (2013), the Department has made continued efforts in recruiting students, and recent years have indeed seen an increase in student numbers. Currently it has close to 225 students, close to a hundred (100) of whom are new students who began their studies in the current academic year (2014-2015). While this increase is certainly welcome, it also creates many challenges for the Department. Thus, for example, we face a serious problem of overcrowded exercise courses (sometimes as many as 60 students or more), in addition to a significant overload in the supervision of graduate students, especially in the fields pointed out by the Committee. These difficulties are added to the problems noted by the Committee, and certainly require immediate solutions.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that despite these challenges, hardships and difficulties the Department has not been sitting by idly but tries with everything in its power to provide its students with a rich and varied curriculum and to attract new audiences. During the past year, various cultural activities were organized by the Department, such as an excursion to some of the Arab towns in the Triangle area, a trip to Jerusalem where Islamic sites were visited, an artistic competition among students, and a spoken Arabic course for students and the general public. In addition, the Department will open a new certificate program in Arabic proofreading and editing starting next year (2015-2016), and will hold an international conference on classical and modern Arabic literature in May 2015.

After receiving the Committee's reports and reviewing its findings and recommendations, several meetings and consultations were held between the Head and faculty of the Department on the one hand, and the Head of the Department and members of the University administration on the other. During these meetings and consultations the Committee's findings and recommendations were discussed and a work plan was formulated that will allow the Department to maintain its existing momentum and to expand and grow, and that will prevent a decline in the quality of

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

teaching and research and in the academic standing of the Department. This work plan, adopting most of the recommendations of the Committee, should be implemented in the short term as follows:

Committee Recommendation	Steps toward implementation (within 1 year)
<p>1. Cease use of income from enrichment courses from the general public to finance essential activities of the Department that are/should be financed by the Planning and Budget Committee through the University.</p>	<p>The use of the Department's income from enrichment courses to the general public will be coordinated with the Dean. Funds will be spent exclusively to the benefit of the Department.</p>
<p>2. Fill two senior posts by proper, open, international competition.</p>	<p>Immediately filling, by international search and tenure-track procedure, a senior post in one of the two main fields in the Department: classical Arabic literature or early Islam. In case outstanding candidates from both fields present themselves, the University may consider filling two positions.</p>
<p>3. Give active support to the needs of the Library in the following areas:</p>	<p>The library will be provided with the resources needed to acquire the necessary</p>

אוניברסיטת תל-אביב @ TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

<p>(i) More secondary literature and journals (especially replacing lost subscriptions);</p> <p>(ii) More Arabic texts in all fields (both by classical and by modern authors);</p> <p>(iii) More scholarly books in European languages; and</p> <p>(iv) More subscriptions to major databases.</p> <p>(v) Students' research should be seen as giving an impulse to collection development – e.g., the field of children's literature is under-represented.</p> <p>(vi) A dedicated librarian for Arabic should be appointed.</p> <p>(vii) In addition, the Library should be given the resources necessary to catalog and bring to the shelves in Special Collections the books left to it by the late Franz Rosenthal, as well as other such material. Such gifts enhance the quality of the collection as well as the research capabilities offered by the institution and add to the reputation of the Department as the repository of the library of one of the very great scholars in the field, thus helping to attract scholars, students and further donations.</p>	<p>books and databases to turn it into the hub of research and educational activities of faculty and students. In addition, teachers are expected to cooperate with the library in its efforts to increase its collection in Arabic Language & Literature and Islam.</p>
---	--

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

<p>4. Add more courses in classical and related fields, including: Qur'an, hadith, classical literature and Islamic religion.</p>	<p>More courses will be added in fields such as Qur'an, hadith, classical literature and Islamic religion, depending on the appointment of additional faculty.</p>
<p>5. Add a systematic and scholarly course in spoken Palestinian Arabic to provide more than simply a one-year introduction.</p>	<p>A course in spoken Palestinian Arabic will be added to the curriculum, while the addition of courses in the study of spoken Palestinian Arabic will be deferred for two years. Meanwhile, students may take the relevant courses taught by the Department of Semitic Linguistics.</p>

As for the intermediate term, the work program will be as follows:

Committee Recommendation	Steps toward implementation (within 2-3 years)
<p>1. Establish a single Arabic-language program within the University, to save money and resources, provide more unified approach to the teaching of the language, and increase the strength of the</p>	<p>The University decided to leave the teaching of the Arabic language in the existing frameworks, but at the same time to highlight the uniqueness of the Department as a framework in which</p>

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

Department.	Arabic is taught in a high level.
2. Rein in the numbers of graduate students, to enable faculty to devote sufficient time to their own research and allow them to give better quality of guidance to the graduates who are accepted.	The Department will take care to limit the number of graduate students supervised by each faculty member, to allow him/her to devote more time to his/her research and to provide more high-quality supervision to students. The Department also raises the admission requirements to the research track so that students in this track will be of high quality.
3. Appoint additional faculty at senior and intermediate levels, especially in Qur'an, hadith, classical prose and classical poetry, to achieve the desired balance between fields represented in the Department and make possible a balanced curriculum for students.	In order to achieve the desired balance between fields represented in the Department, additional faculty at senior and intermediate levels will be appointed, especially in the fields of Qur'an, Hadith, classical prose and classical poetry, on condition that they are excellent scholars.
4. Provide more courses and more varied courses, especially in classical literature, modern literary theory, modern theater, media Arabic.	The Department will increase the number and variety of courses, especially in classical literature, modern literary theory, modern theater, media Arabic.

TEL AVIV @ אוניברסיטת תל-אביב UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

5. Improve the quality and detail of course syllabi, so that students have a better idea of what to expect when during the course of a semester.	Teaching faculty are required to improve the quality and detail of the syllabi of their courses, so that students will know better what to expect during their studies.
6. Revise the statement of Mission and Goals (and related documents) to allow potential and existing students to get a clear and concise understanding of what the Department offers them.	The Department will revise the information published in prospectuses and brochures about studying aims in the Department to enable potential and existing students to receive a clear and concise insight in what the Department is offering them.
7. Work towards a more active use of the language by students: both written composition and speech should be improved.	In its curriculum the Department will place greater emphasis on improving students' written and oral expression in Arabic.
8. Raise the quality of students' English – this is a necessity not an optional extra in modern scholarly work and in the world outside the academy.	Graduate students will be required to take a screening test to determine their level of English and will take advanced English courses to the extent needed.

אוניברסיטת תל-אביב @ TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

<p>9. Raise the admission requirements for Arabic majors.</p>	<p>Admission requirements will be brought into line with those of the Faculty of Humanities, taking into account the needs of the Department.</p> <p>For the next year (2015-2016) the Department decided that all candidates for graduate studies must pass an entrance test.</p> <p>In undergraduate studies there remains a clear difference between admission requirements of the Islamic Studies track and those of the Arabic Language and Literature track.</p>
<p>10. Establish a regular (bi-weekly) colloquium for graduate students, to enable them to discuss their work with their peers and benefit from scholarly interaction with each other.</p>	<p>The Department will establish a regular (bi-weekly) colloquium for graduate students, which will enable them to discuss their work with their peers and benefit from this interaction.</p>
<p>11. Improve mentoring for graduate students, to enable them to work better and prepare them for future work.</p>	<p>Department faculty are required to improve their mentoring and supervision of graduate students to enable them to work more efficiently and prepare them</p>

אוניברסיטת תל-אביב @ TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

THE LESTER AND SALLY ENTIN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
החוג ללימודי הערבית והאסלאם

قسم الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

	for future work.
12. Work pro-actively to encourage faculty to apply for research grants, to support their own work and the work of their graduate students.	The Research Authority in the University and the Research Committee in the Faculty of Humanities will keep encouraging faculty to submit applications for research grants that will benefit themselves and their students.

Finally, we should like to thank the Committee for its professional work, and hope that its findings and recommendations will help the development of the Department and its reputation.

Prepared by

Dr. Mahmoud Kayyal

Head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies

Tel Aviv University

kayyalma@post.tau.ac.il