



**Committee for the Evaluation of Arabic Language and Literature Study
Programs**

Bar Ilan University
Department of Arabic
Evaluation Report

June 2014

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Chapter 1- Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Arabic during the academic year of 2014.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education, who serves ex officio as Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a Committee consisting of:¹

- Professor David J. Wasserstein -Department of History, Vanderbilt University - Tennessee, USA. Committee Chair
- Professor Li Guo - Department of Classics and Program of Arabic Language and Culture, University of Notre Dame - Indiana, USA
- Professor Beatrice Gruendler – Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, Yale University - Connecticut, USA²
- Professor Otto Jastrow - Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University - Estonia
- Professor Joseph Sadan - Professor emeritus, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tel Aviv University, Israel

Ms Erica Rashkovsky, Ms Daniella Sandler and Ms Dvora Klein - 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 Arabic, 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 entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's October 2011 Guidelines for Self-Evaluation.

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

² Professor Beatrice Gruendler was not present for meetings at BIU.

Chapter 2-Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on 16 May, 2014, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Arabic Study programs in Israel.

In May 2014, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University and Bar Ilan University. During the visits, the Committee met with members of numerous constituencies at the institutions, including administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the following members of the staff of the Council for Higher Education, who facilitated our work from the start to the end of this long process: Michal Neuman, Yael Elbocher, Dvora Klein, Erica Rashkovsky and Daniella Sandler.

This report deals with the Department of Arabic at Bar Ilan University. The Committee's visit to Bar Ilan took place on May 18th, 2014.

The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the management of Bar Ilan University and the Department of Arabic for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit at the institution.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of Arabic Study Program at Bar Ilan

University

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.

1. Executive Summary

In general the Committee found the Study Program excellent and not lacking any essential quality. At the same time, the Department suffers from a lack of sufficient faculty for its needs and its ambitions. It remains very text-oriented in its teaching, and it does not maintain a sufficiently large or broad range of courses – the Committee noted a desire for more courses in both classical and modern fields of Arabic. And the Department's own plans call for a new member of faculty to deal with Islamic law (*fiqh*); such an addition would strengthen the Department itself and also deepen possible links with Jewish studies.

The study of colloquial and of media Arabic does not advance beyond the elementary, and is not pursued using scientific textbooks. Similarly, there is virtually no teaching through the medium of Arabic. Classes are often over-crowded – a function of insufficient numbers of faculty and the imposition of a minimum bar for the holding of courses. Junior faculty are required to supervise graduate students, which prevents them from devoting the necessary time to their own research and writing, activities vital to their advance in their careers.

Funding for support of research (especially at the level of purchase of computers) and publication appears to be inadequate to the needs of faculty. Similarly, office space is grossly inadequate to what is required for serious academic work.

The existence of two libraries – a seminar library and the central library – is wasteful of resources and does not appear to offer any special benefits, though the fact that there are two dedicated librarians in the field is excellent and clearly of help to both students and faculty.

Students did not all know English well enough for university study, whether at undergraduate or at graduate level.

These are all serious criticisms, especially for a University that not only prides itself on this Department and the discipline of Arabic but also stresses the obvious linkages tying this discipline to Jewish studies, a flagship discipline of this University.

The Committee was impressed with the human relations inside the Department and with the relationship of the Department with the University administration and the Library. The administration broadly supports the aims of the Department, and students and secretarial staff inside the Department appear to cooperate well with each other too.

While the Committee was impressed with the achievements of the Department and of its faculty and students, it felt that greater support from the University's central administration was needed in order to enable the Department to fulfil its considerable potential.

2. Organizational Structure

Observation and findings:

The Arabic Department belongs to the Faculty of Humanities and is housed in a building devoted to the study of languages and cultures. It shares areas of interest with the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, which forms part of the Faculty of Jewish Studies and has its physical home elsewhere.

3. Mission and Goals

Observation and findings:

The Committee found the mission and goals of the Department as laid out in the Self-Evaluation Report very well suited to the needs of the discipline and those involved in the Department at all levels.

4. Study Programs

Observations and findings:

- The Arabic language is rightly the heart of the program. In general the Committee found the Study Programs excellent and not lacking any essential quality. The Committee did feel, however, that some adjustments would improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- Teaching at BIU is heavily text-oriented and the spoken language is not emphasized to a sufficient degree. Classes in colloquial and media Arabic do not advance beyond the elementary. The scientific study of Arabic dialects is not represented. And there is very little, and virtually no organized, teaching through the medium of Arabic.
- Joint courses for students of the Department and others brought together students of very differing levels of proficiency, leading to unsatisfactory results and frustration.
- Classes were described as over-crowded (with a general University-mandated minimum of 15-18 students for a course to run).
- In the BA program there was some imbalance between course provision in modern areas and that in classical.

- The Committee heard a repeated desire for more modern courses, particularly in media-related areas and on contemporary political issues in the region.
- It also heard a desire for more, and more varied courses on classical themes.
- The Committee noted a desire among the students, especially at graduate level, for some form of colloquium which would bring them together to discuss and exchange ideas. At the moment some of the PhD students seemed not even to know each other.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- Placement tests should be administered on entry to the University to classify students' levels of proficiency in the language and classes provided to reflect these differences.
- More lectures should be offered through the medium of Modern Standard Arabic.
- Classes should be reduced in size, to enable greater participation by students and more effective use of the faculty.
- Teaching should include training in the use of Modern Standard Arabic in spoken discourse, at a level beyond one year.
- Teaching of dialectal Arabic should be treated as a scholarly subject, and should be based on existing textbooks and grammars and accompanied by classes on dialectology. Teaching in this area should go beyond a one-year elementary course.
- More courses should be offered on classical Islamic themes, literary and historical, to enable broader choice of subjects by students.
- The Chair should regularly monitor teaching and syllabi of junior faculty.

Desirable changes recommended:

- Addition of one faculty member to teach *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Bar Ilan is particularly well placed to benefit from such an appointment, which would respond to widespread demand from students and faculty during our visit and encourage cooperation at all levels among colleagues and departments such as Arabic and Jewish Studies. Bar Ilan's character as a religious university would enhance the attractiveness of such offerings to Muslim and Jewish students alike.
- Establishment of a doctoral/graduate colloquium series to bring graduate students into regular contact with each other and make possible scholarly interchange among graduates.

5. Human Resources / Faculty

Observations and findings:

The Department has 9 permanent positions as well as 2 part-time positions and 2 teaching units. The faculty appear to enjoy excellent working relations: the human climate struck the Committee as unusually warm and collegial. Relations with the University administration seem excellent and there was frequent admiration for the Department's secretarial staff and its helpfulness especially to students. There was widespread admiration for the devotion and efficiency of the Chair, Dr Livnat Holtzman.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Given the constraints in human resources under which the Department operates, and the numbers of students in the Department, the Committee sees the addition of at least 2 senior teaching positions as essential. One should be in the field of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and the other in Classical Arabic.
- Junior faculty are supervising graduate students, both formally and in semi-formal ways: the Committee recommends very strongly that this practice be eliminated. It prevents junior faculty from pursuing their own research and producing the publications necessary for their professional advancement. In the Humanities, graduate supervision, especially by junior and non-established researchers, is not part of the activity of research in the same way as in the sciences.
- One change that the Committee does NOT recommend is the loss of any Librarian post if the Seminar Library is combined with the Central Library.

Advisable changes:

- The Committee recommends the addition of 3 full-track Teaching Associate positions to make possible the improvements suggested above in the language provision.
- Mentoring of junior faculty should be more formalized, with clear indication of requirements for professional advancement and regular assessment of performance.

6. Students

Observation and findings:

- The students were unanimous in their expression of appreciation for the atmosphere in the Department, as also for the learning and devotion of their teachers.
- The Department does an excellent job in attracting enrolments. But the down side of this is over-large classes in which students scarcely play an active learning role.
- Some courses are required but carry no credit, and there are not enough electives to choose from. It was pointed out, however, by faculty that if credit were given for the “creditless” courses, there would be less room in the students’ programs of study for new electives.
- While the general quality of the students appeared high, the Committee felt that in some cases they did not know English sufficiently for university study, especially at the advanced level.
- Alumni whom the Committee met, many of them working with Arabic, had extremely positive memories of their time in the Department.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- It is vital that the University act to improve the student-teacher ratio in the Department. At present there are seven faculty members and a total of 199 students (from BA through to PhD). This ratio is far too unwieldy.
- At graduate level, requirements should be toughened, to include proficiency tests in English and acquisition of a second foreign research language such as French or German.

Desirable changes recommended:

- The Departmental culture should change, to encourage students to speak more Arabic among themselves. This could be done by, e.g., establishment of an Arabic Club.
- Support should be given to PhD students for language editing and publication of dissertations in English.

7. Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Observation and findings:

- The Department does an excellent job in teaching, ranking in the top three departments among the eleven in the Faculty of Humanities. The Department won a collective teaching prize in 2012-13 and five of the Department's members have won Outstanding Lecturer's Awards in the last four years. Student evaluations offer praise for the teaching in the Department; teachers who score low on these are offered the opportunity to participate in Teaching Workshops. Learning is assessed by the teachers on the basis both of testing and of classroom experience and reactions. The Committee was impressed by what it saw during an improvised classroom visit.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

- Teacher training should be enhanced, by increased offerings of pedagogical workshops, especially for faculty at early stages of their careers.
- Some syllabi seen by the Committee appeared inadequately detailed. Syllabi should be fuller and clearer, offering potential students a good idea of what to expect and at what stage of the course.
- More attention should be given to advances in technology for use of databases and innovation in classroom teaching.

8. Research

Observation and findings:

The Committee was impressed by the quantity and the quality of the research productivity of the members of the Department. However, quantity and quality varied from one faculty member to another. The department has particular strengths in science in the Islamic world, in Judeo-Arabic and in Mamluk studies, as well as, among the junior faculty, in modern literary and language studies.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Funding for research is inadequate or wholly absent, especially for the junior faculty. This is essential. In addition, support is needed for (i) language editing for publications in English or other international languages of scholarship, and (ii) publication subventions. Support of these latter two kinds is commonly included in grants in the hard sciences but is unknown in the humanities where it is all the more necessary,

especially in Israel. Junior faculty should receive support for sabbatical research in addition to the existing support for conference attendance.

Advisable changes:

- Some faculty have had success in applying for external grants, including very prestigious ones such as GIF and ISF. But for most, support is necessary in preparation of applications, both at the individual level and more broadly institutionally through provision of a course or workshop in grant-writing.

Desirable changes recommended:

- Support for organizing and holding of academic conferences and workshops should be increased in order to enhance the scholarly profile of the Department and its members and to bring the Department's scholars into closer contact with scholars abroad, especially at a time when such contacts are under threat.

9. Infrastructure

Observation and findings:

- The Arabic Department occupies space in a fine new building. However, office space is limited and faculty members have to share offices, making privacy for the individual or for faculty wishing to meet students difficult and academic work impossible. The building itself is far from the two libraries.
- Two libraries, each with a dedicated librarian, serve the discipline, the Central Library and an Arabic Seminar Library. The conditions of the Seminar Library are sub-standard – windows that will not open or close properly, inadequate air-conditioning, lack of proper protection of the books from dust and moisture, absence of electronic protection for the books, mice and other pests, damaged ceilings, unidentified refuse falling from the ceilings, possible remains of asbestos (The Library is located in the “Asbestonim”). The two libraries are complementary, but mainly in the sense that books and journals are split without any system or consistency between the two collections, which in addition are not close together; wireless Internet connection is inconsistent and often weak.
- The Library's holdings are not up to date or adequate to modern scholarly and pedagogical needs. In particular, electronic data bases did not appear to be up to international standards.

- Faculty need to buy their own computers, which are not funded from University or Departmental sources. In the present age, computers and computing systems are a basic tool of all academic work.
- There do not appear to be any departmental computers for students to work on.
- In the Libraries computers supplied by the University are usually hand-me-downs from the science departments, meaning that they are old, slow and inconvenient to use. Again, new computers are as much a necessity for Humanities research and teaching as they are for sciences.
- Classrooms were too small for classes of the sizes currently admitted. The one that was visited was crowded and awkward in shape.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Library holdings: the Committee recommends an immediate allocation of funds (i) to resolve the problems in the Library plant; and (ii) to buy books and electronic data bases in order to bring the holdings up to strength and to maintain them adequately. In the Humanities as in the sciences it is vital for research literature to be as up to date as possible.
- Funds should be allocated for purchase and supply of computers for faculty and also for departmental use by students.

Advisable changes:

The supply of office space for faculty needs to be improved, so that each faculty member has a separate office in which to receive students and to work. Faculty cannot be expected to work at home or in an office shared with other scholars.

- Library: the Committee recommends the fusion of the two libraries. This will avoid duplication of resources, make it possible to be rid of the problems in the Seminar Library in the Asbestonim, resolve the matter of the distance between two collections, and save costs. Above all it will make good academic and pedagogical sense. As mentioned above, the Committee recommends strongly **against** losing the services of either dedicated librarian. They are central to the successful fulfilment of both the Library's and the Department's mission.
- Library computers should be kept up-to-date and provided new.
- Better management of classroom space, for example by limits on numbers of students in a course, would be helpful.

10. Self-Evaluation Process

Observation and findings:

- The Self-Evaluation report was full, detailed, comprehensive and informative. The Department did a superb job in preparing itself and the Committee for this visit and inspection. The Committee received an update (to May 2014) to the Self-Evaluation Report which was also informative and helpful to the Committee. The contents of the report reflected the reality on the ground, and gave an excellent picture of the department's activities at every level.

Recommendations:

- It would be useful for future such inspections to include more detailed examples of student evaluations of teaching.

Chapter4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable

Intermediate term [~ within 2-3 years]:

1. Placement tests should be administered on entry to the University to classify students' levels of proficiency in the language and classes provided to reflect these differences.
2. More lectures should be offered through the medium of Modern Standard Arabic.
3. Classes should be reduced in size, to enable greater participation by students and more effective use of faculty.
4. Teaching should include training in the use of Modern Standard Arabic in spoken discourse, at a level beyond one year.
5. Teaching of dialectal Arabic should be treated as a scholarly subject, and should be based on existing textbooks and grammars and accompanied by classes on dialectology. Teaching in this area should go beyond a one-year elementary course.
6. More courses should be offered on classical Islamic themes, literary and historical, to enable broader choice of subjects by students.
7. It would be useful to coordinate teaching of some subjects with the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, as a way both of achieving savings and increasing efficiency and of increasing the contacts among students and faculty in relevant areas.
8. The Chair should regularly monitor teaching and syllabi of junior faculty.
9. Junior faculty should so far as possible be spared supervision of graduate students. This will enable them to devote time to the necessary research and writing work that they must do in order to earn promotion and tenure.
10. Addition of one faculty member to teach *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Bar Ilan is particularly well placed to benefit from such an appointment, which would respond to widespread demand from students and faculty during our visit and encourage cooperation at all levels among colleagues and departments such as Arabic and Jewish Studies. Bar Ilan's character as a religious university would enhance the attractiveness of such offerings to Muslim and Jewish students alike.
11. Establishment of a doctoral/graduate colloquium series to bring graduate students into regular contact with each other and make possible scholarly interchange among graduates.

Signed by:



Professor Li Guo



Professor Otto Jastrow



Professor Joseph Sadan



Prof. David J. Wasserstein (Chair)

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



May 2014

Prof. David J, Wasserstein,
College of Arts and Science,
Vanderbilt University, TN
USA

Dear Professor Wasserstein,

The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) strives to ensure the continuing excellence and quality of Israeli higher education through a systematic evaluation process. By engaging upon this mission, the CHE seeks: 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.

As part of this important endeavor we reach out to world renowned academicians to help us meet the challenges that confront the Israeli higher education. This process establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial enterprise.

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 the study programs in Arabic Language and Literature. In addition to you, the composition of the

Committee will be as follows: Prof. Joseph Sadan, Prof. Beatrice Gruendler, Prof. Li Guo, and Prof. Otto Jastrow.

Ms. Daniella Sandler will be the coordinator of the committee.

Details regarding the operation of the committee and its mandate are provided in the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as the Chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Prof. Hagit Messer-Yaron
Deputy Chairperson,
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE
Ms. Daniella Sandler, Committee Coordinator

Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule



לשכת סגנית הרקטור
Office of the Vice Rector

בס"ד, י"ב אייר תשע"ד

12 מאי 2014

Arabic - schedule of site visit

י"ח אייר תשע"ד, Sunday, May 18, 2014

Location: the Fred and Barbara Kort Language Studies Building (1004), Room no. 312

Time	Subject	Participants
8:00-8:30	Closed-door meeting of the committee	
9:00-8:30	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice-Rector and In charge of Quality Evaluation
9:00-9:40	Meeting with the Dean of Faculty of Humanities	Prof. Joel Walters, Dean, Faculty of Humanities (with Skype) Prof. Shifra Baruchson-Arbiv, (Acting) Dean, Faculty of Humanities Mr. Efraim Singer, Administrative Faculty Head of Humanities
9:45-10:40	Meeting with the chair of the Department of Arabic and the author of the Self-Evaluation Report	Dr. Livnat Holtzman, Chair, Department of Arabic
10:45-11:30	Meeting with senior academic staff (representatives of relevant committees)*	Prof. Binyamin Abrahamov Prof. Y. Tzvi Langermann Prof. Eliezer Schlossberg Prof. David Doron Dr. Basilius Bawardi

		Dr. Mordechai Kedar Dr. Almog Kasher Dr. Koby Yosef Dr. Dorit Gottesfeld
12:15-11:30	Meeting with Junior academic staff *	Dr. Geula Elimelekh Dr. Hilla Peled-Shapira Dr. Sharon Shitrit-Sasson Dr. Rafik Abu-Baker Mr. Izchak Rottenshtreich Dr. Merav Nadler-Akirev
12:15-13:15	Lunch (in the same room)	Closed-door meeting of the committee
13:15-14:15	Tour of facilities: classroom, libraries, lab, offices	The Arabic Seminar Library: Mrs. Dina Baum; The Central Library, Open Stacks and Acquisition Unit: Dr. Rochelle Kedar and Dr. Geula Elimelekh; The Linguistic Laboratory (Building 1004 room 407); the offices of the Department (especially room 303 with a private book collection of Dr. Isaiah Goldfeld). The tour will be conducted by Dr. Basilius Bawardi, Dr. Almog Kasher and Dr. Hilla Peled-Shapira
14:15-15:00	Meeting with BA students**	
15:00-15:45	Meeting with MA students**	
15:45-16:30	Meeting with PhD students**	Eiman Abu-Kishek Badoura Halabi Yuval Dagan Lubna Attili Dalia Peled Aleef Faranesh Nasr Sarsour
16:30-17:15	Meeting with Alumni**	Uri Tal Avihay Lieter Dan Feiler Shani Shalhav Dr. Avi Tal Dr. Ahmad Alataune
17:15-17:30	Closed-door meeting of the committee	

17:30-18:00	Summation meeting with heads of institution and dean of faculty of Humanities and the chair of the department of Arabic	Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice-Rector and In charge of Quality Evaluation Prof. Shifra Baruchson-Arbiv, (Acting) Dean, Faculty of Humanities Dr. Livnat Holtzman, Chair, Department of Arabic
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* 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.