



EVALUATION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDIES ARIEL UNIVERSITY

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
STUDIES IN ISRAEL

February 2023

Section 1: Background and Procedures

- 1.1** In the academic year 2022, the Council for Higher Education [CHE] put in place arrangements for the evaluation of study programs in the field of Political Science in Israel.
- 1.2** To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed a Committee consisting of¹:
- **Prof. Yossi Shain** – *Chair*. Romulo Betancourt Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, Israel, and Professor of Government and Diaspora Politics Emeritus Georgetown University, USA.
 - **Prof. Abraham Diskin** – Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science, The Hebrew University, Israel.
 - **Prof. Nicholas Valentino** – Department of Political Science, and Research Professor in the Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, USA.

Anat Haina served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

- 1.3** The evaluation process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (January 2022). Within this framework the evaluation committee was required to:
- examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Political Science and International Relations;
 - conduct on-site visits at those institutions participating in the evaluation process;
 - submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the academic units and study programs participating in the evaluation;
 - set out the committee's findings and recommendations for each study program;
 - submit to the CHE a general report regarding the evaluated field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study;
- 1.4** The evaluation committee examined only the evidence provided by each participating institution — considering this alongside the distinctive mission set out by each institution in terms of its own aims and objectives. This material was further elaborated and explained in discussions with senior management, lecturers, students, and alumni during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.
- 1.5** In undertaking this work, the committee considered matters of quality assurance and quality enhancement — applying its collective knowledge of developments and good practices in the delivery of higher education in Political Science (mainly from

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

European and North American countries) to the evaluation of such provision in Israel.

Section 2: Executive Summary

Ariel University is characterized by positive developments in several aspects. The number of faculty members and students at all levels grows consistently, and it is clear that there is also a constant impressive development in the physical construction of the campus.

The Department for Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science is very unique, as it presents a mixture of studies usually provided in Israel by two separate study programs. The self-evaluation report provided to the Committee was not well organized, so it was quite a complicated task to evaluate the program. Regardless, from the self-evaluation report (SER) and the Committee's visit, it seems the Department has some sort of an identity crisis regarding Political Science: On page 4, the SER reads "Political science in Ariel university is an integral basic component of a single cohesive unit that combines political science with Middle Eastern studies." Later on the same page we get a different characterization: "...Political science in our department should be seen as providing theoretical framework and new research methods for more traditional Middle East studies, as well as a constituent utilized by the department to join other departments in constructing dual-degree programs." This places Political Science as a lens through which to view and research the Middle East region, rather than creating a cohesive and theoretically distinct field of inquiry. The bottom line is that this unit does not offer a comprehensive survey of theories and empirical findings in the field as a whole. Instead, it currently focuses almost exclusively on those theoretical approaches (and therefore those subfields) that might help students understand the particular conflicts and institutional arrangements in the region.

This limited treatment of Political Science is revealed by the rather narrow scope of courses in the field, and is further evident through the limited number of political science academic staff in the Department. Given problems resulting from the University's location and the present military conflict, it is obvious that Ariel University in general and especially a department focusing on both Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science face challenges regarding research and budgeting.

We suggest that the department will positively consider our recommendations to improve teaching and research. During our meetings with the outgoing and the incoming department chairmen and other AU officials, some of these recommendations were mentioned and our impression is that there is a strong will to implement such changes.

It is perhaps beyond the scope of our committee, but we find it necessary to comment that both faculty and students mentioned that Arab language instruction is insufficient. It seems that an improvement is definitely necessary given the unique character of the department.

Section 3: Observations

3.1 The institution and the parent unit

In July 2007, CHE of Judea and Samaria approved the status change of the then-college to a University Center. The University Center was officially accredited as Ariel University in

December 2012. The self-evaluation report (SER) described the development of the University as based on the goals of its founders – to develop an institution of higher education dedicated to academic excellence, and to create opportunities for academic education for underprivileged communities within the Israeli population (p. 12).

The Evaluation Committee was presented several times during the meetings and in the self-evaluation report, that the University's goal is to promote research. The Rector of the University described the movement of the Department for Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science from a teaching unit to a research unit, and indicated that he sees the recruitment of excellent researchers to the Department as an important mission.

The Dean of the faculty regarded the multidisciplinary nature of the Department as a given, rather than something to be changed in order to provide a broader Political Science curriculum. More precisely, he stated that he supports the current structure but would support the separation to two disciplinary departments, if such desire rises from within the department. He also said that he is committed to improving the Department, and will support establishing of labs for researchers if needed. He also said that he is entrusted with ensuring the academic level of the Department meets the common standards, and acknowledged the need to add expertise in statistical methods and other research methodologies, and experts in various fields (like International Agreements).

The Chair of the Department admitted that Ariel is politically excluded and carries the false stigma of a right-wing University. They have significant trouble receiving European and ISF grants due to their location, so they prefer to turn to private funds or collaborate with other institutions. One faculty member indicated that the University itself tries to ease this by supporting the faculty members with research funding from internal sources.

The SER summarized the political issue as follows:

Our great disadvantage is that we are a small department in a relatively new university that is controversial – particularly in the field of political science. [...] To bypass academic bias, we strive for excellence; we do it by the cooperation of our staff with each other, often in the form of advisory forums, or the form of conducting research together and publishing jointly. (p. 73)

3.2 Internal Quality Assurance

The written self-evaluation report provided to the Committee was not well organized, explanations and descriptions were too short or unclear, numbers were inconsistent within the document, and many details were missing. Important syllabi were not provided. Later on, upon request during the visit, some of the missing syllabi were provided. It was not clear which courses are elective, and to what degree program they refer. Some supporting documents required were missing, and the CHE templates were not used in some cases. The Chair of the Department admitted the report was written entirely by him (to some degree contradicting the claim within the report that administration and faculty members helped in its production), and took full responsibility for the omissions. The Committee felt that the Chair was being very straightforward and honest, and also that he did most of the work himself. While laudable in terms of individual effort, the CHE mandates that this process be a much more collective effort.

From the information provided to the Committee from the interviews with administration and the self-evaluation report, it is obvious that the research and teaching abilities are evaluated in one way or another, on a regular basis. The self-evaluation report also mentioned that casual discussions about the weaknesses and strengths of the Department are held occasionally and contribute to the improvement of the study program, its goals and vision. Regardless, it is not clear if an action plan was set, what the long-term goals of the Department are, or what help the Department hopes to receive from the University to achieve these goals (p. 19).

In the case of the adjunct teachers, the Committee heard that the examination of both syllabi and publications is mainly initiated by the adjuncts themselves. While the Committee was impressed with these adjuncts, this procedure is unacceptable. It places too much responsibility on non-permanent faculty who are in a very vulnerable professional position, and may also produce curricula inconsistent with the goals of the department. This could also put the Department in a difficult spot if it hopes to hire additional tenure track positions, because it has been treating the adjuncts as if they were already in such positions and might give them what will be perceived an unfair advantage in the hiring process.

The Committee recommends the Department adopts formal quality assurance mechanisms. All faculty members need to be evaluated in a proper way; study program and syllabi should be reviewed in the same manner, regardless of the instructor who holds the courses. Further, the responsibilities and roles of adjunct faculty should be reviewed as well. It is recommended that the program as a whole be evaluated regularly in a formal process, and not informally or in an ad-hoc manner. It is further recommended that institutional mechanisms monitor the internal reviews.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Internal Quality Assurance:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
None provided.					

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Internal Quality Assurance:

	1	2	3	4	5
		X			

While the Department did not provide a numeric performance assessment, the Committee felt that significant improvements were necessary in Internal Quality Assurance. Most

importantly, it is necessary for the Department to take CHE evaluations much more seriously, to bring the materials available and reporting detail into line with expectations.

3.3 The Department/Study Program

The Department for Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science presents a mixture of curriculum usually provided in Israel by two separate departments. Nonetheless, this arrangement was approved some time ago, and the Committee was tasked with examining the contemporary advantages and disadvantages of the program.

As this information was not presented clearly enough in the self-evaluation report, there seem to be three basic options for the undergraduate studies:

1. Single major: a program that combines Middle Eastern studies, political science, and Arabic.
2. Double major: a program that combines Middle Eastern studies and political science (without Arabic).
3. Double major: a program that combines a major in either political science or Middle Eastern studies with a second major in a different department in the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Humanities.

The single major is composed of 32 credits Political Science, 30 Middle East, 20 Arabic, the rest (42) are electives, seminars, and courses which were not detailed called "Israel Heritage". The studies in the Department can also be taken with specialization tracks, which are (I) Analyzing Political Affairs, (II) Arabic Language Studies, (III) Foreign Policy, (IV) Non-academic Teaching Certificate.

The Analysis Track aims to equip the students with skills to analyze the geopolitical affairs, and make up for the need of such expertise in decision-making organs. The track includes studies of the Arabic language, and three track-specific courses: Data Mining; a course for writing position and policy papers; and a theoretical and practical course about negotiation. Syllabi of the last two courses were not provided, and it was not clear in the appendix study program tables at what year they are taught.

The Arabic Language Track awards students a "Middle Eastern Studies" degree, although it contains the basic political science courses, which are taught to all track and major combinations: Government and Politics in a Comparative View; Public Administration; Political Thought; Regimes; Introduction to International Relations; and two courses about Israel's political history and governing authorities.

The Foreign policy track-specific courses are Israel's Foreign Policy, Israel's Security Policy, Public Diplomacy, International Crisis Simulation, and a Foreign Policy Practicum. "Public Diplomacy" is taught in English, and based on the UN model Club. It has participated and won in international competitions, and was described to the Committee as providing easier access to work in the public sector and foreign policy. It was not clear whether it co-exists alongside a "regular" UN model club, ArMUN, or is the only UN model club (p. 42). "The International Crisis simulation" is a joint seminar course with the Royal Military College of Canada conducted online in English. The SER emphasizes the practical element in the courses.

The SER elaborates on the practicum course in the Foreign Policy track (p. 33, 37), which consists of 100 hours of internship in the Knesset, government offices, NGOs, or other organizations. It also states that about 20% of the students turn into employees in the practicum sites once the practicum is over. The SER described the benefits of the Foreign Policy track, stating that graduates of the track can earn various other diplomas during their studies, such as a diploma from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for participating in the Israel UN model association; diploma for completing the International Crisis Simulation; and a diploma from CHE, on completing the practicum. These diplomas are probably only symbolic documents for completing the said courses.

Some incorrect information regarding the practicum program supported by CHE was included in the SER. This might have been a simple mistake, and unintentional. First, there does not seem to be any diploma or certificate from CHE for completing a practicum. As the Committee understood from CHE representatives, the practicum course should provide an accompanying theoretical background relevant to the internship work. The provided syllabus for the practicum course was not detailed enough, and described the course as writing CVs, preparing for interviews, learning the basics of policy papers, and learning how to write a research about their internship experience. It sounds like basic job market preparation, rather than a theoretical discussion relevant to Foreign Policy or to the activities at the various internship sites. Further, as a prerequisite to their graduation, students are required to submit a statement document about completing their internship hours, a document with the student's feedback about the work experience, and an evaluation from the supervisor at the internship site. This practice suggests that the internship sites and the student's work may not be evaluated until right before the student's graduation, and then only through self-report. **It is recommended for the Department to review the practicum course requirements, processes, and means of evaluation, in order to improve the internship experience for both students and organizations.**

The MA program has only recently been launched. It is given as a "Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science" program, and can be taken with or without a research thesis. The program is described to be "based upon the theoretical and practical knowledge that links the worlds of Middle East and Political Science" (p. 60), and many of the thesis students take an advisor from each field. There are about 50 MA students in the Department, including a few international students. Candidates for the MA program must have a BA in Middle Eastern studies and Political Science with an average grade of 85, and record of Arabic studies. Those who do not fit this, must pass supplementary courses with the average of 85. Almost all the courses at the MA level are in Middle Eastern Studies, and research is required to be related to the field as well.

PhD studies in the program are going on for about four years through personal supervision by the Department's faculty through Ariel University's Graduate School. At the time of writing the report, the Department had about 20 PhD students (p. 62). PhD students gather every two months for a workshop run by the Chair of the Department, to present their studies. This training process is archaic, and no longer practiced in Political Science departments in Israel in major departments in the world. Students are now trained by multiple faculty, and have multi-member committees who work with them throughout the dissertation proposal and writing phases. It is unclear whether there are enough English courses to offer to non-Hebrew speaking students.

Curriculum changes and updates are often initiated by the heads of the tracks, who consult with the Chair of the Department. The Teaching Committee discusses the logic of the suggested changes. It is not clear whether there is a regular constructed process for updating the curriculum. New courses require the approval of the Dean of the Faculty and then the Rector. Course syllabi are sent to the track coordinator for approval, and then to the Department's Teaching Committee which reviews all syllabi to avoid repetition and evaluate the level of the course. Adjunct faculty members reported that they wrote their own syllabi, based on information from other institutions, and did not necessarily have them approved. **The Department is required to construct and implement a regular and clear process for reviewing the content of the study programs, be it in syllabi approval, new courses, or other changes.**

As some of the students and faculty insisted, they study and teach "political science in the Middle East". This interdisciplinary mixture, it seems to the Committee, provides too few mandatory courses in stand-alone Middle East and Political Science programs. Thus, language courses in Arabic are not mandatory as is the usual case in other ME departments, and there are no "101" introductory courses as is usually the case in PS departments. Most Political Science courses are said to be elective, and the Committee worries not many students take them. Further, most basic PS courses are taught by adjunct faculty, and it is concerning that Political Science is perceived this way in the Department which insists on the importance of the field. As far as political studies are concerned, the Department should consider including an "Introduction to Political Science" course and devote more learning hours to a number of mandatory political science courses at the expense of elective courses, including courses on the Middle East. **The Committee recommends moving toward offering more proper core courses in the major subfields of Political Science (International Relations, Comparative Politics, Normative Democratic Theory, and Behavior). These should be a mandatory part of the program, and staffed by the tenure track faculty.**

In addition, a question has been raised whether the present program is too focused on "area studies" rather than on political science per se. To this, the Dean of the Faculty responded, that the two fields are not balanced, but enrich each other. The relations and interactions between the Middle Eastern states and their societies and international relations are more important." The Chair of the Department claimed it is a combined department of Middle East and Political Science, but Middle Eastern studies are more dominant in it. On another occasion, the Chair said, "We are not pretending to be a Political Science department, because we are not a Political Science department."

The Chair of the Department said that students study all relevant methodology, through Faculty courses (not departmental ones). The Committee is further concerned of the methodological skills acquired during the studies, and their relevance to political science research. This again raises the question of interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinary of the program; is it a department that combines the knowledge of the two fields, and nurtures skilled graduates with expertise in both, or does the Department create a unique holistic field of knowledge, more fitting to the title of "area studies", whose graduates are professionalized in the political aspects of the Middle East countries.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Study Program:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
None Provided.					

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Study Program:

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

The Department did not give itself a numeric score, but the Committee felt at least minor improvements were necessary. The problem with the limited curriculum in Political Science is significant, and the training of graduate students is not fulsome enough in theoretical and substantive subfields or in research methodology, to produce graduates who are likely to be successful academics at most or all Political Science departments at other universities in Israel.

3.4 Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Teaching regulations are defined by the University Senate, and include office hours, presence during exams, and submission of grades. According to the SER, teaching evaluation is almost exclusively based on student surveys, conducted on the end of semester. The surveys are described as "encouraging self-assessment" (p. 53), although it is not clear how. The data of the surveys plays a part by the Department for retention and promotion decisions, and also as means to recognize and reward outstanding teachers. Poorly performing faculty are referred to teaching improvement workshops. The SER states that the Department is aware of the flaws of the system, mentioning the anonymity of the students allows students who did not attend a class to fill out the survey (p. 29).

Besides the surveys, the Chair of the Department also meets with students "throughout the year", for feedback, comments, and requests (p. 13,50). Unfortunately, the SER does not detail how regularly these meetings occur, or how this feedback is used to improve the undergraduate learning experience. The Chair of the Department also monitors the performance of new lecturers during their first year of teaching. Mentoring or professional supervision is provided when necessary (p. 48). Peer review is said to be rarely used in evaluating of teaching (p. 53). **The Committee recommends enhancing the use of peer-review and other mechanisms besides student surveys, to more thoroughly evaluate teaching performance.**

The Academic Assessment and Development Unit organizes regular training sessions and workshops for improvement of teaching tools and skills. Faculty are encouraged to participate in these workshops, especially new colleagues looking to enhance their teaching effectiveness. In the SER, under "professional and pedagogical development", there are

details about four mandatory departmental seminars a year. These seminars host guest speakers from other universities or departments in Ariel, who present their researches, and during 2021 the seminars were held with speakers from within the Department. The 2021 sessions are described to contribute greatly to the collaboration within the department (p. 83), and **the Committee recommends making the departmental seminars a part of the routine in the Department.** Further, the SER describes that institutional funds are available for faculty to travel to conferences and workshops, but participation is covered only when the faculty members present (p. 84).

No data was provided about student performance; page 29 in the SER indicated information about teaching evaluation, not student performance. Learning outcomes are set per study track, and for the study program in general, but were not detailed as well. Learning outcomes are stated in the syllabi

Assignments and exams are said to be prepared and graded by the course instructor, and are evaluated by the Teaching Committee. The instructors are free to grade according to their own judgement, but in case of extremely high or low grades, the Chair of the Department is required to approved the grade and grading process.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Teaching and Learning Outcomes:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
None provided.					

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Teaching and Learning Outcomes:

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

The Department did not give itself a numeric score, but the Committee felt it could not evaluate the Teaching and Learning Outcomes appropriately. As details and information were hardly provided, the need for minor improvements is mostly applicable to the recommendations written above.

3.5 Students

Details regarding student numbers provided in the self-evaluation report were later revealed to be inaccurate; in actuality, there are about 100 BA students per cohort. Only about 15

students study Political Science with a major different than Middle East. The Committee heard an assumption that this would be the number if the unit was a stand-alone Political Science department. A faculty member suggested that "Middle Eastern Studies is doing a service to Political Science by giving them students." The Committee was disappointed by this, of course, because it implied that not enough attention and resources were being allocated to Political Science in order to attract students to the Department in this area.

The admission criteria to the BA program are quite low and some in the Department expressed their concern about the quality of the student body on average. It is important to mention that according to the data provided, there are very high rates of admittance on probation, meaning students who fail to meet to admission criteria. **CHE's regulations allow admittance on probation for 10% of the enrolled students per cohort, the Department and University must make sure this standard is kept.** Besides that, in the SER it was mentioned that the Department would like to enlarge the number of students, considering the tracks which include Arabic language training to be limiting. It was also claimed that the Department wishes to reduce the attrition numbers, but no data about attrition was provided.

Regardless of the concerns about the quality of students, the Committee's meetings with students of all levels left a positive impression. Students seemed to be knowledgeable, most were fluent in English, and were generally satisfied with both their studies and especially with the faculty. Several students emphasized the fact that the Department was very nurturing, so much so in fact that they wanted to go on and receive graduate degrees (MA's for the most part) in the same unit. Graduate students who previously studied in other universities emphasized this positive approach, lauding the availability and openness of their teachers compared to their experience in other institutions.

A common theme was that this rather small set of faculty members was tight knit and created a sense of family with both undergraduates and graduate students. The Committee was struck by how unique the Department was on this dimension, and could think of only one potential downside: becoming too attached to one's undergraduate institution can sometimes reduce the motivation to move on to other places of higher education, perhaps stunting the intellectual "cross-pollination" that many academics consider critical for challenging existing ideas and beliefs by bringing them into discussion with those of different backgrounds and perspectives. This is, however, only something to keep in mind rather than a reason to discourage what the Committee believes is a very positive aspect of the departmental culture in general.

The Committee was told by departmental faculty that undergraduate students often use their degree in Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science to work in the Knesset, for NGO's in the foreign policy sector, local governmental authorities, and national security. About 50% work in the private sector. It was noted that many local police and security agencies attempt to recruit on campus but few students want to take these jobs (which was understandable and perhaps even more now that conflicts have risen after the attacks of Oct. 7).

Student complaints, depending on their nature, are referred either to the Dean of Students, or to the Chair of the Department. It is unclear how complaints are handled by the Chair, but on page 66 of the SER, it says that most problems are solved simply by giving time and attention to the complaining student. "Even when no solution is at hand, sharing the difficulties might accomplish half the way to overcoming them."

It should be noted that the information on the number of MA students and PhD candidates mentioned in Appendix B of the self-evaluation was misleading and that, in fact, the number of advanced students was at least ten times higher than the number reported in the self-evaluation report. This raises concerns on the Committee that the senior (and other) teaching staff can practically handle the relatively high number of advanced students. **Attention and frank discussions need to take place about whether the faculty/student ratio is sustainable, especially regarding the MA program.**

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Students:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Students:

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Committee was impressed with the undergraduate and graduate students in the Department. However, it was not clear that this department could produce graduates in Political Science per say that would compete with those from similar departments at other universities. The number of Political Science majors, at any level, who spoke with the Committee was minimal.

3.6 Academic Faculty and Human Resources

Comprehensive data about the faculty members of the Department was not included in the material received. According to the self-evaluation report, the department is composed of 11 members, of varying ranks, including two senior teachers for Arabic (p. 81).² Only four members of the faculty are traditionally trained political scientists. The majority of the regular faculty are trained as Middle East and Arabic scholars and the remaining are adjunct lecturers; the Committee met three adjunct faculty members, but no information about their proportion in the Department was provided.

The adjunct faculty members seem to hold most of the Political Science teaching load – with each teaching about 6 courses in the fields of international relations, data mining, foreign policy of Israel, and security policy of Israel. One of the adjunct lecturers, Dr. Eyal Rubinson,

² The highest ranks are associate professor (1 member), and senior lecturer (4 members).

also teaches a course unrelated to his expertise or described fields of interest, about "Communications and Technology in the Arab World". The adjunct faculty members disclosed to the Committee that they do not necessarily feel supported like tenured faculty members, and are torn between their need to work and teach and their desire to research publish, so they can develop their academic careers.

There appears to be good collaboration between the two sides of the Department, to the extent that most of those the Committee spoke with insisted there was a seamless integration and no conflict. This was very encouraging to hear, and the Committee is inclined to believe it, but nonetheless the small size and broad interdisciplinarity of the Department means that there are several important gaps in the curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

It is quite evident to the Committee that the political science academic staff is too limited. As mentioned above, most Political Science departments offer multiple courses in 4 major subfields: Comparative, International Relations, Political Theory, and Behavior. A fifth is often called "Methods", but many departments in Israel tend to farm out courses in research methods to other units such as Statistics or Psychology, as is the case here. The Department is therefore quite unusual in its structure, despite the way it was characterized as mainstream (or trend setting) by several administrators the Committee spoke with.

The bottom line is that important subfields of political science – especially international relations, but also political behavior and political theory, do not have sufficient faculty to meet what would be the student demand in any other top political science department in Israel. Furthermore, cutting-edge research published in top journals in the field often depends on a depth of expertise across several faculty members with a given subfield. While this faculty is making a lot with what they have, they are too small and organized in such a way that this Committee believes they probably will not make a substantial contribution to the field focused on in this review (Political Science). The Committee believes this thinness on the Political Science side of the department should be addressed as soon as possible.

The Committee recommends hiring a senior faculty member (in a tenured position), in the expertise of international relations or comparative politics. Additional hires in political behavior and public opinion formation would be strategic, since many of the students at both the undergraduate and graduate level mentioned this area as one of keen interest. Other Political Science departments in Israel have invested recently in each of these three areas.

Besides that, the SER describes the recruitment goals as determined and handled by the Chair of the Department. The main criteria as having a PhD degree from an accredited institution, for an appointment of 2-5 years, depending on the tenure status (tenured, tenure-track or non-tenured). The SER states that new faculty members are given priority in recruiting if they can add to their teaching both academic skills and professional capabilities (p. 81), although the contribution of such capabilities is not described. For promotion, the policies and procedures are distributed to faculty members by the unit of Appointments and Promotion at the Rector's office, although it seems that the Department considers the promotion process and requirements as "common knowledge" and "absolute clear" (p. 71, 73). In the meetings with faculty members, one mentioned that the process was indeed very clear to them, and that the Chair of the department guided them of what was needed to be done.

As for the management and administration of the Department, the Teaching Committee is said to consist of all senior members in the Department ("to let as many staff members as possible participate in the process", SER p. 77), meaning all four senior lecturers and the Chair of the Department (associate professor).

The Chair of the Department is elected for a term of three years, which can be extended for another term by vote. Those eligible to be candidates or to vote, are of the ranks of senior lecturer and higher; meaning again all four senior lecturers and the single associate professor.

Acting as the Chair was described to the Committee as a service work, which consumes one's time. And although the Chair stated in the SER "I experienced no restriction of my ability to run the department" (p. 77), among the many responsibilities of the chair, one can find interviews of potential students, advising students, going over syllabi, approving grades and appeals, leading PhD workshop, option to participate and vote in all meetings of department committees, besides "creating the physical and operational infrastructure for the teaching system, as well as academic and research activities" (p. 75). Later on in the report, it is stated that leading to excellence in scholarly matters and education, can be achieved through sharing and allocating responsibilities. But one can wonder if allocating some of the chair's responsibilities is even possible in the small department, which seems to have everyone involved in its management anyway.

The Administrative staff are in charge of "managing all aspects that affect the students" (p. 86), and it was even mentioned that in several cases the Chair approached former students of the Department to apply to be a new secretary (p. 78). There are no TAs, and faculty members are required to prepare and grade the students' assignments and exams.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Academic Faculty and Human Resources:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Academic Faculty and Human Resources:

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

The Committee felt that the Department must invest more faculty resources in Political Science if it is going to continue to claim that this is a joint department. The enthusiastic claims that the interdisciplinarity of the department was its greatest strength were well meaning and well taken, but there is only so much that can be done with so few faculty teaching and publishing in what the rest of the discipline would consider to be mainstream Political Science research.

3.7 Diversity

Three of the regular 10 faculty members are females, and the student body also seems to be quite diverse along the lines of gender. None of the regular faculty are Arab, though the Department Chair mentioned that an Arab lecturer from Lod may soon join the Department. This is not a criticism of the Department per se, since the University administration indicated that only a tiny number, fewer than 5, PhD's from the Arab Israeli community are employed at the University at this time. The Committee was impressed with the commitment to diversity expressed by the Dean, and hopes his vision for hiring to achieve that goal can be made a reality.

Only a minority of students are local residents or residents of Judea and Samaria. The campus attracts some Arab students who are Israeli citizens, but the vast majority, over 90%, are Jewish. AU expresses its interest to have Palestinian students, but this goal is not met due to objections of the Palestinian Authority.

Students at all levels insisted that there is a very tolerant atmosphere concerning political stands. Students insisted that while they are not often exposed to diverse backgrounds in class or anywhere on campus, there was also no topic that the department discouraged them from engaging with because it was too "sensitive". The students also insisted that there was no tension regarding inclusivity of the campus to LGBTQ students, and all the students the Committee met agreed there was tolerance along these lines. Contrary to its external image, based perhaps mostly on stereotypes driven by its location, as a far "right-wing" university, many AU faculty members, including department members, recently participated in activities critical of the "right-wing government". The Committee hopes the faculty's tolerance for political, ethnic, gender, and religious diversity continues to grow. A tolerant and inclusive intellectual environment, diverse in terms of ethno-religious backgrounds, class, and political ideology, is crucial for learning and contributing to knowledge in the social sciences.

According to the self-evaluation report (p. 88), the Department's policy is to admit, hire, and evaluate solely based on "professional factors", and "according to their academic abilities." Several administrators with whom the Committee spoke insisted that gender and ethnic origins do not factor into these decisions, "even in the slightest." While seemingly laudable in the abstract, this approach is now decades outdated and ignores what a broad set of research studies have shown about the benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusivity in academic settings. The stated approach is simply out of touch with the evidence, and puts the Department at risk of unnecessarily harsh external judgements, especially given the fragile political/geographic circumstances in which Ariel University finds itself.

The current conflict and security threats may put discussions about many dimensions of diversity on hold. Still, universities were founded in part as protected spaces where students from a wide variety of backgrounds and groups, even ones in conflict, can learn with and from

each other. This is why all advanced democracies in the world invest so much in higher education: The societal and economic benefits of learning in diverse spaces far outweigh the costs.

The fact is that diversity is not at odds with maintaining high academic standards, and the Department demonstrates this in several important ways. The female faculty and students the Committee spoke with were impressive scholars, and they compare favorably on any dimension with other faculty in Israel and in universities around the world. During our discussions, faculty and students treated each other with deep respect and expressed genuine care for each other regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic background. This is an achievement to be proud of, rather than to deny. It takes work to create a culture of respect across lines of difference, and this unit seems to be doing that.

The current approach is also grossly out of step with every other Political Science department with which members of the Committee are familiar. All other departments reviewed in this cycle demonstrated substantial commitment to, and effort toward, diversifying their faculty and student body along several dimensions. Again, the current war may surely set some of that progress back, but Ariel is in a very important position for setting the proper tone on this issue.

There is no evidence presented in the Diversity section in the self-evaluation report that the Department is working to improve the representation of Arab or Palestinian students, faculty, or staff. The current conflict has presumably put efforts to bring religiously diverse students to campus to a halt. There were a variety of explanations offered for this prior to the current conflict, and they included outright pressure from the PA for Palestinian students to avoid Ariel completely. Nonetheless, at least some members of the Committee would hope that the Department would take a more conscious and purposive approach to this dimension as soon as security considerations permit. Ariel, like other places of higher learning in Israel and around the world, can be a place where seemingly intractable conflicts are studied and solutions discovered. It could be a place, perhaps someday, where both sides of the conflict can come together safely to learn and debate the solutions that must be found for peace to endure. This might sound naive at the moment, and the Committee does not ignore the importance of protecting the security of current Ariel students. As soon as is practicable, however, programs to improve the diversity of students and faculty beyond gender should be undertaken.

Recommendation: When security conditions permit, active discussions about hiring Arab faculty and attracting Palestinian and/or Israeli Arab students should be undertaken.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Diversity:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Diversity:

	1	2	3	4	5
		X			

The Department, by its own admission, is not working to diversify its student body, faculty, or administrative staff. The report is woefully lacking in detail, and conveys the clear sense that active work toward equity, diversity, and inclusion is somehow at odds with maintaining high standards of performance and academic impact. This view is, according to the Evaluation Committee, misguided and out of step with the majority of other departments in Israel and in other parts of the world. Including diversity, equity, and inclusion as an important goal in academic settings – one that is not in fact at odds with maintaining high standards on any dimension – is now standard. In fact, a great deal of research demonstrates how beneficial such efforts can be in improving the climate, morale, and productivity of intellectual settings.

Having said all this, and as mentioned above, the Department should give itself a bit more credit for the diversity and inclusivity it has actually achieved (whether intentionally or by accident). The gender breakdown in the Department does not match that of the student body (which now seems to have a large majority of female students), but the younger faculty ranks contain more women, and these scholars are very impressive. The students clearly benefit from working with these scholars, by their own enthusiastic admission. There is no reason to ignore the benefits of diversity (along the lines of gender or any other dimension) in describing what contributes to the Department's current success and future potential. It is simply a missed opportunity.

3.8 Research

The self-evaluation report, as well as the University representatives we met, emphasize the importance of research. The Rector described the University's goal to promote research, and his goal to recruit more excellent researchers to the department. Research is also described as a part of the Department's vision – to "lead groundbreaking research projects, in Israel and abroad, that will provide its members with prominent status in worldwide scholarship." (p. 21).

When considering the quantity of publications, the Department publishes about 30 papers per year for all faculty members together. Regardless, these are not mainstream Political Science publications in terms of their placement. Further, the Committee cannot evaluate the outlets of those published in Middle East Studies outlets.

The SER noted that the Department preferably publish in journals cited in the Web of Science, have high impact factors, and are rated Q1-Q2, but sometimes "compromise between the university's demands and professional demands", and "socialize professionally" and publish for scientific associations which awarded grants for a research (p. 92)

The SER states that the Department's policy has always been to promote research that is not strictly local and does not focus solely on Israeli issues (p. 91). But out of the 25 publications listed in table 16 in the appendices, at least 9 regard Israel or Palestine; and two of the four researchers with expertise in Political Science subfields, published only about Israeli issues or compared the Israeli system to other cases.

As for collaboration or multidisciplinary, it should be noted that one of the Middle Eastern experts published (in Manchester UP) a typical political science book. Furthermore, he continues to publish and research in collaboration with one of the political scientists of the department. Such collaboration contributes not only to research per se but also to the cohesiveness of the department.

Department research budgets are allocated annually, and are based on the quality of an individual's previous work and the total number of faculty. The use of each allocation is not limited to specific activities, but should be approved by the University (it can be travel, conferences, statistics, research, and so on). Since the budget is dependent on publications, one can assume that not all faculty members receive the same amount. One non-tenured faculty member told the Committee that they would like to attend a conference abroad, but have no budget to do so. While this system rewards excellence, it also will fail to catalyze good work among younger faculty who need to get off to a good start. There should be a minimum allocation for each faculty member so that they can continue their research and present it to others at conferences, especially for the younger faculty. This tends not to be how internal funds are allocated.

There were good and generous intentions expressed by the Dean and others for the Department. The Dean mentioned that if needed, he would find and provide the space for a research lab. The University Research Authority Unit sends every researcher a weekly list of grant opportunities. The SER states that there are also instruction sessions given by professionals from different fields and other universities, but it may refer to the departmental seminar mentioned in section 3.4 "Teaching and Learning Outcomes".

The Department also benefits from the institutional research center MECARC (Middle East and Central Asia Research Center). It is described as an interdisciplinary center in which researchers from various fields contribute their theoretical knowledge to Middle East. The Department itself publishes two academic journals – *Journal of Interdisciplinary Middle Eastern Studies* and *National Resilience, Politics and Society* (which is peer-reviewed).

Outstanding BA students are assigned to work as research assistants for faculty members, using a scholarship from the University's research budget. Others are employed in the MECARC. Every other year, best 15-20 seminar papers are given the opportunity to present their work in a poster exhibition in the Department, and all students and faculty are invited to attend. Further, the SER noted that BA students are given the chance to turn their seminar paper into an academic article along with their primary mentor. This seems like a very promising initiative, but no further details or data on this topic are provided.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Research:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Research:

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

The reason the Committee recommends improvement here is mainly due to the placement record and research productivity of the Department, especially in Political Science. The output simply does not match that of most other Political Science departments in Israel, and the placement is not for the most part in mainstream disciplinary journals. The impact of the research is therefore limited. This could be a dimension of significant growth potential.

3.9 Infrastructure

The Evaluation Committee did not have the chance to visit the campus, so the following is based on the self-evaluation report and meetings with the various stakeholders.

At the time the self-evaluation report had been composed, the two campuses of the University, which are separated by a city road, consisted of 20 buildings containing approximately 51,000 square meters. New modern buildings with classrooms well equipped with modern facilities have been added in recent years to the campus. The Dean of the Faculty emphasized that office and lab space can presently be generously allocated for different purposes due to the physical development of the campus.

The Department was recently moved to a new building, where all faculty members have their own office space (except adjunct faculty). The members of the Department consider it a great improvement from the previous location, where they had to share rooms. The Department still wishes for a room for gathering and holding meetings and conferences.

The Department reports that there is a problem with the Arabic titles in the library – the librarians are not proficient in Arabic, so mistakes often happen, and the collection is not well organized. Regardless, the library functions as a large study space, and there seems to be sufficient access to journals and books for the academic faculty and students.

The Department evaluated its overall performance in Infrastructure:

(1=unsatisfactory, 2=needs significant improvements, 3=needs minor improvements, 4=satisfactory, 5=highly satisfactory)

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Evaluation Committee evaluated the Department's overall performance in Infrastructure:

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

Based on the information provided, the Committee concurs with the Department's evaluation.

Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The overall position and academic stature of the Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science Department is impacted above all by the origin of Ariel University as a college, and the early decision to design the place with an emphasis on Middle Eastern affairs and Political Science as a minor. These choices naturally have narrowed the scope of the Department, number of students, curriculum, scholarship, and future trajectory. Even though some growth has taken place – it is a small unit without a real signature in the broader community of Political Science in Israel or abroad. This nonetheless does not impact commitment to excellent teaching and emphasis on students.

The identity of the Department should be made consistent and clear, and be reflected in its teaching, research, and composition of the academic staff. The current state of the Department does not fit its title of “Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science”. It is neither a dual-major of the two fields, nor a holistic integrated field of study more fitting to “area studies”. The Department should take conduct a deep evaluation process and decide on its identity.

Focusing on the relations of Middle Eastern states and nurturing graduates professionalized in the political aspects of them, it would be better suiting with a title different than “political science” such as “Area Studies of the Middle East” or “States and Relationship of the Middle East”. Considering the scope of political science courses, and the lack of methodologies specific to the field, graduates of such a department, which took the double-major track, and studied only the political science “minor”, may have insufficient knowledge of the field compared to their peers in other institutions. Thus, suggesting and thinking of new double-major combinations to take with political science, do not seem like a good idea in the current state of the Department.

If the Department wishes to be a cohesive multidisciplinary unit, that trains its students in both Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science, the Department needs to find a general theme to focus on, and add first rate faculty with the relevant expertise in Political Science. The Department needs to be broadened for internal purposes and promotions as well; it is too small and narrow substantively. It does not adequately train students in the major subfields of the discipline. It has to open to the world, bring more students and establish incentives for recruitment, bring visiting scholars from Israel and beyond, create research centers with big donations, and encourage major publications – like the University has in sciences and technology.

4.2 Recommendations

The Following recommendations regard to strengthening the political science aspect of the program. If the Department chooses to focus on “area studies”, the Committee recommends engaging in a deep evaluation process to identify the needs of such a department.

Essential

- The Department is required to construct and implement a regular and clear process for reviewing the content of the study programs, be it in syllabi approval, new courses, or other changes.
- The proper core courses in political science should be a mandatory part of the program, and be instructed by the highest-level academicians
- Hiring senior faculty members specializing in the fields of political theory, comparative politics, international relations, and regimes (preferably major figures in the field).
- Ensure undergraduate and graduate students are trained in research methodologies of Political Science, by including relevant courses and training. (Data-driven classes, methodologies to produce knowledge)
- Make sure to keep CHE's regulations of admittance on probation for 10% of the enrolled students per cohort.

Important

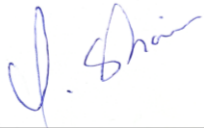
- The Department should review the practicum course requirements, processes, and means of evaluation.
- The Department should adopt formal quality assurance mechanisms.
- The Department or Faculty should examine whether the faculty/student ratio is sustainable, especially regarding the MA program.
- Administration increases resources dedicated to research of existing faculty.
- The Department should enhance the use of peer-review and other mechanisms besides student surveys, to evaluate teaching performance.
- Make sure introductory courses and methodology are taught by core faculty members.

Desirable

- Encourage joint projects and collaborations with political scientists from other universities in Israel.
- Encourage adjunct faculty members to engage in research in order to qualify for positions in the department.
- The Committee recommends making the departmental seminars a part of the routine in the Department.
- When security conditions permit, active discussions about hiring Arab faculty and attracting Palestinian and/or Israeli Arab students should be undertaken.
- Consider adding a course hosting leading political scientists (not necessarily academicians) from Israel or the world, to supplement the missing fields of study in the program.

Signed by:

Prof. Yossi Shain
Committee Chair



Prof. Abraham Diskin



Prof. Nicholas Valentino



Appendix 1 - Letter of Appointment

Dr. Varda Ben Shaul
Acting Director General

ד"ר ורדה בן שאול
מנכ"ל(מ"מ)

כ"ד סיון, תשפ"ג
13 יוני, 2023
סימוכין: LC1235

לכבוד
פרופ' יוסי שיין
אוניברסיטת תל אביב

שלום רב,

הנדון: כתב מינוי - ועדה להערכת איכות בתחום מדעי המדינה - אוניברסיטת אריאל

המועצה להשכלה גבוהה שמה לה למטרה לשפר ולהבטיח את המשך המצוינות והאיכות של ההשכלה הגבוהה בישראל, בין השאר באמצעות תהליכי הערכה שוטפים של תחומי לימוד במוסדות האקדמיים. אני מודה לך על נכונותך לשמש כחבר בוועדת ההערכה הבינלאומית להערכת איכות במדעי המדינה באוניברסיטת אריאל.

במסגרת עבודתה מתבקשת הוועדה:

1. לבחון את הדו"ח והחומרים הנלווים שהגישה האוניברסיטה בנושא.
2. לערוך ביקור (פיזי או מקוון) באוניברסיטה ולהיפגש עם גורמים הרלוונטיים לתהליך המעקב.
3. להגיש למועצה להשכלה גבוהה דו"ח עם ממצאי הוועדה, מסקנותיה והמלצותיה.

במידת הצורך, הוועדה תתבקש להופיע בפני ועדת המשנה ו/או מל"ג. גבי ענת חיינה תרכז את עבודת הוועדה.

אני מאחלת לך עבודה פורייה והצלחה רבה.

בברכה,



ד"ר ורדה בן שאול
מנכ"ל מל"ג/ות"ת(מ"מ)

העתק:

גבי סיגל מורדוך, מ"מ סמנכ"ל הבטחת איכות ומגוון