

EVALUATION OF HISTORY DEPARTMENTS AT BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY

Recommendations by the International Evaluation Committee June 2022

The Departments' Responses, and Evaluation Report Administration (ERA) Comment.

Essential:

Recommendation	General History Response	Jewish History Response
<p>1. Encourage co-teaching, that is, the design of inter-disciplinary courses led jointly by members of different departments across the humanities (and perhaps beyond them). These courses should be offered at all levels of study, that is, as introductory and elective courses as well as seminars. This entails giving faculty members full course-load credit for such co-taught classes.</p>	<p>We would be happy to encourage such courses and take part in this. The Faculty should facilitate discussion between representatives of departments and ensure their cooperation. The Faculty also needs to decide if they are willing to give full course-load credit for this courses. While we want to ensure availability of interdisciplinary courses we want to maintain the History Discipline, and specially developed tools and methods.</p>	<p>The Department of Jewish History looks forward to participating in this important initiative as we believe that our students will only benefit from a wider purview, which will enhance their critical skills and expand their intellectual horizons. With that being said, it is important to limit the number of required collaborative courses because we must ensure, first and foremost, that our students receive the knowledge and tools of our discipline, i.e., history.</p>
<p>2. Cross-list a greater number of courses among the various history departments. With revised procedures for counting enrollments, this practice should also cause less anxiety among the respective departments.</p>	<p>This recommendations is already partially implemented with courses open to students in the Faculty. Further development needs to be done at Faculty level, to establish a committee with representatives of all relevant departments (GH, JH, Arts, European Studies, Politics and Government, Middle Eastern Studies, African Studies) and create a list of courses that</p>	

	<p>each department will offer to its students. That way, the cross-listing will be balanced and would not create a situation in which some departments do not have enough students in their courses.</p> <p>The major obstacle for implementing comes down to departments being credited for the number of students who take their own courses.</p>
<p>3. Make joint appointments of new faculty who are able to satisfy the needs of more than one department, for instance, an expert in American Jewry who has earned a PhD in the general field of American history, and a Holocaust scholar who can teach Eastern European history.</p>	<p>The recommendation requires further discussion and actions from both departments, the Faculty and the university. We plan to initiate a sequence of discussions with the related stakeholders regarding this discussion. The outcome of the process should be reported within 6 month</p>
<p>4. Design distinct tracks of study with respective emphases on Jewish, General, or Middle Eastern history but with a “minor” field in one of the other tracks. These tracks can also be based on an inter-disciplinary approach organized thematically or chronologically, for instance, the ancient world; gender and sexuality; or imperialism. These tracks would encompass courses in all three history departments</p>	<p>The recommendation requires further discussion and actions from both departments, the Faculty and the university. We plan to initiate a sequence of discussions with the related stakeholders regarding this discussion. The outcome of the process should be reported within 6 month</p>
<p>5. Merge forces and resources across departmental boundaries at the graduate level, and particularly in MA studies. This</p>	<p>To some extent this is already being implemented. The Department of General History offers a methodology seminar to MA students for other history related departments, such as Jewish History which encourages their students to attend.</p>

<p>should entail at the very least a joint seminar for MA students in methodology.</p>	<p>There are also conferences and cross departmental seminars between the History departments.</p> <p>During the first semester we will discuss with the Dean and other historical departments the possibility of strengthening our collaboration at the MA level.</p>	
<p>6. Establish a faculty-wide committee to explore these ideas and offer new ones – collaborations that can also reach beyond the formal bounds of history to include programs in African studies, European studies, and government and politics, among others</p>	<p>This is an excellent recommendation that we deeply appreciate.</p> <p>This recommendation needs to be discussed at Faculty level. Collaboration within the Faculty is essential, and the only way to advance that is by establishing such a committee. We will gladly take part in this important initiative that would benefit all concerned departments.</p> <p>We hope that such a committee would be established in the coming year (the recommendations regarding a curriculum committee and cross listing depend on the implementation of this recommendation by the faculty)</p>	<p>The department of Jewish History will be glad to take part in this initiative and expects the Faculty to invite relevant department members to participate.</p> <p>Let us not forget that a program which is overly diversified may cause dilution of the rich History discipline and the specific tools and methodology taught.</p>
<p>7. Convene a curriculum committee charged with the task of creating inter-disciplinary and/or inter-departmental programs spanning all historical studies at both the undergraduate and graduate level</p>	<p>This recommendation depends on the implementation of the former one. We naturally accept it as well.</p>	<p>The department of Jewish History will be glad to take part in this initiative and expects the Faculty to invite relevant department members to participate.</p>

<p>8. Discuss and formulate a plan to enable more flexible cross-listing of all undergraduate historical courses. Undergraduates in General History should not have to specially request that historical courses taught in other departments count towards their major. This will enable students to have an even more global and less Eurocentric education in history</p>	<p>This is a good idea, but as noted above, it must be done in collaboration with other departments. We cannot send our students to a large number of courses outside the department unless we assure registration of students from other departments for our courses. We would also like to note, that many of our courses are far from being Eurocentric. We teach African History, relations with Islam in the Middle Ages, Indo-Mediterranean trade in antiquity, the encounters of the Spaniards with the peoples of South America and occasionally courses in Chinese History. Nevertheless, we would certainly like to encourage more organized cross-listing in cooperation with other departments in the faculty.</p>	<p>The Department of Jewish History has been implementing this recommendation for years. We consistently cross-list courses from General History, Middle East Studies and Jewish Thought.</p>
<p>9. Create a plan to stabilize long-term offerings in geographic and chronological areas considered essential but that are not currently offered by faculty in the two departments. Solutions could include hiring new faculty as joint appointments, assigning more courses to adjunct teachers, inviting visiting scholars on a regular basis, or providing students the</p>	<p>The recommendation requires further discussion and actions from both departments, the Faculty and the university. We plan to initiate a sequence of discussions with the related stakeholders regarding this discussion. The outcome of the process should be reported within 6 month.</p>	

<p>opportunity to take courses at other Israeli universities.</p>		
<p>10. Integrate the study of foreign languages into the graduate student package, and eliminate it as an additional expense for graduate students</p>	<p>This is an excellent recommendation that would allow our students to remove bureaucratic and financial obstacles and learn languages that they would need for research. This recommendation needs to be discussed at Faculty level . We have no ability to change current policy that does not depend on the department.</p>	<p>The Department of Jewish History welcomes this recommendation whose implementation depends on the support of the Dean and Rector.</p>
<p>11. Invite (but do not require) PhD students to join the two thesis preparatory courses offered to MA students and to the monthly professionalization meetings.</p>	<p>We will implement this recommendation at the beginning of the academic year and will send such an invitation to our Ph.D. students</p>	<p>We welcome this recommendation and will implement it.</p>
<p>12. Establish a field of teaching in modern and contemporary Jewish history as an integral part of the department’s program despite the restrictions regarding faculty positions</p>	<p>This recommendation is directed at the department of Jewish History.</p>	<p>A. A professor emeritus was appointed as a guest lecturer for 2023. This appointment has enabled us to offer courses on the late modern period during 2023. Courses on the topic of the Holocaust are also included in the curriculum; the lecturer is a member of the department of sociology and anthropology. B. We recently submitted to the Rector’s office a request to recruit a young scholar of the late modern period, but our request was denied.</p>

	ERA COMMENT: The issue of number of faculty in the department was discussed in section 5.4/ 6.4 Human Resources of the report. At present due to the low student to faculty ratio no additional positions are available	
13. Strengthen and undertake initiatives to better integrate the study of Jewish History with that of General History as well as with other departments and fields, e.g. encourage double majors, visiting faculty in under-served fields, co-taught courses, and joint appointments.	Students who wish to do so can study in the two departments. Some of our students do that. There is also a possibility to take a major in JH or GH and a minor in the other department. A co-taught course depends on the willingness of the faculty to give full credit to both lecturers. A visiting faculty depends on extra budget. A joint appointment, as already noted is a bad idea.	A. We research and teach Jewish history within the ambient political, social, cultural and intellectual contexts and, as noted above, we have already been cross-listing courses from other departments for years. B. As noted above, we have implemented the recommendation to enlist guest lecturers. C. As for 'joint appointment' see above. D. For many years we have been combining teaching forces with other departments, such as the Department of Hebrew Literature and the Department of Foreign Literature and Linguistics. We would also be very happy to initiate joint teaching projects with the Department of General History.
14. Disseminate information to adjuncts regarding research and travel funds available to them.	We will send a message about research and travel funds offered by the faculty to all adjunct teachers at the beginning of the semester	Currently this recommendation is not relevant for the department of Jewish History.
15. Make essential renovations and maintain them through either University or department funds	We will be very happy if the university accepts our recurring requests for window-cleaning and reparation or replacement of damaged equipment.	This is a University issue as it relates to a shared building and not within our control.

Important:

Recommendation	General History Response	Jewish History Response
<p>16. <u>Offer a shared set of introductory courses</u> to be required of all history majors which then might include extra weekly sessions led by graduate students offering a more specific thematic focus for undergraduates in, say, Jewish or General History</p>	<p>We are currently struggling to include the entire Western History in our introduction courses. The addition of JH would require extensive teaching hours, and the challenges of integrating two courses into one.</p> <p>Therefore at present this recommendation is not being discussed further between the departments.</p>	<p>As stated above, the introductory courses offered in the Department of Jewish History represent Jewish History within its broad, general context.</p>
<p>17. <u>Introduce curriculum changes</u> that would require history students in one department to enroll in at least two introductory courses in another history department. In effect, the committee includes here courses in Middle Eastern history and not just Jewish and General History</p>	<p>We have done this in the past, the problem is that it augments the number of compulsory courses and reduces the credits of advanced courses. But we will consider this recommendation.</p>	<p>Courses from the Department of General History and the Department of Middle East Studies are included in the list of courses open to students in our department. However, the proposal to obligate students to participate in two introductory courses from other departments is difficult to implement due to technical reasons, such as the scheduling clash between introductory courses.</p>
<p>18. <u>Establish an overarching administrative unit</u> for coordinating collaboration and cooperation among historians and the separate departments of history within the faculty, or what is usually referred to</p>	<p>The establishment of such a unit should be discussed at the Faculty level. In case the faculty decides to follow through, we would like to see collaboration not only between “historical departments” that are</p>	<p>The framework of a school of History is accepted by the Department of Jewish History and this on the condition that the departments included in the school will not be forced to merge and will continue to</p>

<p>as a “school of history” as instituted in other research universities in Israel.</p>	<p>very limited at BGU (in fact only GH and JH are considered historical) but also with a number of departments in Humanities and Social Sciences, such as Middle Eastern Studies, Art, Philosophy, Archeology, European Studies, Politics and Governance, and African Studies.</p>	<p>operate as independent, autonomous units, with the number of faculty members necessary to maintain a full curriculum in their field</p>
<p>19. Explore options for <u>cooperating with other universities</u>. Much as the library system often operates as a nation-wide resource for students and scholars, the same might be said of the country’s various history departments, which are in a position to take advantage of each other’s respective strengths so that students might register for a day of courses each week on another campus in subjects that are unavailable at their home campus. The intent here is to encourage face-to-face and not virtual learning. In parallel fashion, faculty exchanges might also help resolve some of the lacunae.</p>	<p>We will discuss this idea with the dean during the coming year. This is not something that we can do on our own.</p>	<p>This recommendation is relevant for our MA students but would be almost impossible to implement for undergraduate students. The busy schedule of students studying in two departments makes it terribly difficult to allocate a day for travel to another university.</p>
<p>20. As recommended in the 2007 report, <u>continue to improve the library’s collection</u> of relevant books and broaden its databases to include WorldCat and other resources.</p>	<p>We will continue to develop the library resources that are within our control as a department. Broadening of databases and other resources require discussion at Faculty level or even Rector level.</p>	<p>We will continue to develop the library resources that are within our control as a department. Broadening of databases and other resources require discussion at Faculty level or even Rector level.</p>

<p>21. <u>Globalize the research</u> of those General History faculty who focus on “Western Civilization” to expand their teaching offerings as well as make their publications more attractive to editors of prestigious journals and presses</p>	<p>We were surprised by this recommendation for two reasons. First, our department focuses on Western History. While in the US there is a growing tendency to teach about other regions of the world and even neglect Western History to some extent, the situation in Israel is very different. Here the only history taught in high schools is Jewish History. Students arrive at the university totally ignorant about central aspects of Western History. It is therefore essential to have a department that focuses on these subjects. Furthermore, while we teach mostly European history, we are certainly not “Eurocentric”. We emphasize in many of our courses the relations of Europe with other parts of the world – colonialism, slavery, interreligious and cultural influences, and economic interactions that reach beyond political and geographical boundaries. We cannot cover the entire humanity with ten faculty members. This is simply impossible. The solution of combining courses from other departments in our program is a good one, as we noted above. One or two additional positions would also help of course. But it</p>	<p>Not relevant to Jewish History.</p>
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	is unreasonable to expect us to teach about all regions of the world.	
	ERA COMMENT: The addition of faculty is subject to the CHE's student:faculty ratio. At the current moment there are not additional positions open.	
22. Consider <u>creating an introductory course</u> devoted specifically to the period from the 19th century to the present	We already offer two introductory courses for the late modern era. One covers the period from 1789 to the eve of World War I and the other covers the entire 20 th century. Therefore, there is no need of creating another course.	The Department of Jewish History welcomes this recommendation and requests the support of the Dean and Rector for its implementation. The inclusion of an introductory course on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries relies on the long-term employment of a specialist. Currently, the department only employs a single scholar who studies the 19 th and 20 th centuries, and the object of his research is the East. Hence, the department sorely needs at least one more scholar who studies Europe and the West more generally.
	ERA COMMENT: The addition of faculty is subject to the CHE's student:faculty ratio. At the current moment there are not additional positions open.	
23. <u>Strengthen the remedial learning program</u> designed to assist students otherwise struggling with university-level studies to persevere and succeed.	We currently provide support for students, additional remedial assistance is provided by the Dean of Students and at Faculty level.	If we were to offer a remedial learning program, we would have to either forfeit the level of teaching expected from an academic institution or direct our resources to struggling students at the expense of students who expect a proper higher education We are unhappy with both options. In our view, the university should condition the registration for a bachelor's

		degree on adequate language and literacy skills. Hence, we expect all our students to be able to cope with the material studied without special assistance.
24. <u>Increase the amount of writing assignments</u> required for completion of introductory and thematic courses.	Students already complain that our courses are especially demanding. Increasing the amount of writing assignments might cause students to prefer other departments.	In accordance with this recommendation (and independent of it), we decided that in the 2022-3 school year, the grade of the introductory course to the early modern period will not be based on a test, but rather on writing assignments . This decision will be reviewed at the end of the year.
25. <u>Strengthen foreign language instruction</u> through creative uses of electronic media and cooperation with other institutions	The languages program within the Department of General studies is the responsible body, and therefore we would need to discuss with them regarding this recommendation.	We believe this recommendation stems from a misunderstanding. Many research languages can be acquired at Ben-Gurion University. The question that must be discussed is whether a student who studies a research language, whether modern or ancient, receives credits for these studies as part of the degree
26. Create greater <u>availability of funding to support graduate student</u> research and travel	We are already offering travel grants for research to our graduate students, so we doubt that our MA students complained to the committee about insufficient support. In recent years every student who applied for these grants received them. Additional budget would allow us to offer larger grants, but for now we use all our available funds for this important aim.	The department will try to implement this recommendation. It should be noted that a large percentage of the department's budget in the 2023 academic year has been directed to scholarships for graduate students.

<p>27. Create <u>greater inclusivity of non-Jewish students</u>, especially Israeli Arabs and Bedouins.</p>	<p>An important recommendation that is not under our control. We already do everything we can to create greater inclusivity of non-Jewish students. We offer these students help; those of us who read Arabic allow students to submit assignments in this language; we added Arabic to our signs; and we try to offer reading material in Arabic whenever this is possible. Unfortunately, there are hardly any good academic materials in Arabic in most of the areas we teach. It is therefore an issue to be considered at university level to further encouraging non-Jewish students to study in the department.</p>	<p>The department is open and willing to receive non-Jewish students and we encourage their enrollment.</p>
<p>28. Hold each semester a <u>joint colloquium</u> in a common space for faculty and graduate students in both departments to share their research.</p>	<p>We will gladly endorse this recommendation and invite other historical departments to join. The convenor of the departmental seminar will approach the JH departments as well as others to discuss this idea. We will try to implement it already next year.</p>	<p>The Department of Jewish History would be happy to cooperate with the Department of General History in organizing a colloquium and will contact the head of the Department of General History to implement this idea already during the 2023 academic year.</p>

<p>29. <u>Survey the faculty</u> in both history departments for the most important data bases in their field and consider purchasing access to those identified as most essential.</p>	<p>We are doing this every year and whenever we have enough funding, we purchase databases that our faculty need. However, some of these databases are extremely expensive and our library budget is insufficient.</p>	<p>We will adopt this recommendation and assign one of the faculty members to implement it as soon as possible.</p>
<p>30. <u>Order Arabic texts</u> for courses that attract Arabic speaking students</p>	<p>Excellent idea in theory, but according to Arab colleagues, such books hardly exist. In areas in which they do exist, this is already being done.</p>	<p>If the recommendation is to include books containing sources originally written in Arabic, we will try to implement within the master's degree courses where even the non-Arabic speaking students know the language. If the recommendation is to include Arabic written textbook, then it cannot be implemented. There are very few textbooks of a reasonable level in Hebrew and there are no textbooks in Arabic that can serve a course in Jewish history .</p>
<p>31. Expand opening hours of the library.</p>	<p>All library e-resources are available online through IP and Ezproxy services 24/7.</p> <p>During this academic year the library has purchased the article access services through LibKey, which makes it possible to directly access all the online journals to which the library subscribes, from anywhere and in any way, you choose to locate the information.</p>	

	<p>Downloading the LibKey plugin to your PC browser will allow you to easily access and download full-text articles.</p> <p>In addition the library is open physically until 20:00 and during exam periods we are open until 22:00, (typically for 6 weeks).</p>	
32. Implement plans – at least on the MA level – to create an <u>international program</u> in order to attract international students	This recommendation is directed at JH.	We warmly welcome this recommendation but we will need the university's aid in finding the means to fund both a Hebrew and English program.

Desirable:

Recommendation	General History Response	Jewish History Response
33. Increase the number of required undergraduate seminars to 12 or 16 hours, at the expense of thematic or introductory courses.	We are one of the few departments in the faculty that require students to take 8 credits of undergraduate seminars. Most departments require only 4 credits. Therefore, increasing the number to 12 or 16 would only deter students from studying in our department.	This recommendation will be discussed further during the 2023 academic year. The decision made will be implemented in the 2024 academic year. Unfortunately, this matter is not under our control.
34. Offer greater availability of funding to support faculty research and travel.	In the Israel Higher Education system each faculty has a fund for travel and research and can apply to the Israel Scientific Foundation, or any other funding agency for additional funding.	
35. Offer more advice and specific support to young scholars who	A good recommendation that is already implemented at the university level. Young scholars who wish to	We would be happy to implement this recommendation.

<p>submit their first grant applications</p>	<p>submit a grant application receive tremendous support from the Research and Development Authority that offers them guidance in both academic and budget issues, free language editing, and a mentor who reads their proposal</p>	
<p>36. As did the Jewish History Department, the General History Department should offer more precision concerning the dates of members' research awards and publications</p>	<p>We do not understand this recommendation. Our CVs that were given to the committee indicate the exact dates of our research awards and publications. They might have been missing from the excel file by mistake but were still available for the committee members on our CVs and personal websites.</p>	<p>Not relevant to the Jewish History Department</p>
<p>37. Hire a librarian who is a history specialist who could routinely order books for the discipline.</p>	<p>ERA COMMENT: The current dedicated librarian for the History departments holds a BA in General History and a Masters of Library Sciences. Along with work experience serving the department, the current librarian fills the immediate needs.</p>	
<p>38. Provide more adequate funding for graduate student research</p>	<p>We are already offering travel grants for research to our graduate students, so we doubt that our MA students complained to the committee about insufficient support. In recent years every student who applied for these grants received them. Additional budget would allow us to offer larger grants, but for now we use all our available funds for this important aim.</p>	<p>A large percentage of the department's 2023 budget is directed towards scholarships for graduate students, and we aspire to do even better in the future</p>