



# EVALUATION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDIES

## **BEN GURION UNIVERSITY**

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDIES IN ISRAEL

June 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 and International Relations in Israel.
- 1.2 To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed a Committee consisting of<sup>1</sup>:
- **Prof. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey** – *Chair*. Head of Department (2019-2022), Department of Government, LSE, UK, and Fellow of the British Academy.
  - **Prof. Dr. Tanja A. Börzel** – Professor of political science and chair for European Integration at the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany.
  - **Prof. Soo Yeon Kim** – Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore.
  - **Prof. Joel Migdal** – Robert F. Philip Professor of International Studies, University of Washington, USA.
  - **Prof. James Perry** – Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, USA.
  - **Prof. Avner de Shalit** – Political philosopher and Max Kampelman Chair of Democracy and Human Rights, 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.

Upon the BGU's request, CHE asked Professor Börzel to recuse herself from the evaluation of the institution. Regardless, Professor Börzel did not perceive any conflict of interest.

- 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;

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<sup>1</sup> The committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

- 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 European countries and the USA) to the evaluation of such provision in Israel.

## **Section 2: Executive Summary**

On May 15th, 2023, the Committee visited the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University. Notably, the visit had been planned for the previous day but was postponed due to the fragile security situation at the time. The rapid turnaround and cooperation by the Department, faculty, and students are appreciated by the Committee. The Committee met with 10 of the 12 lecturers, the Head of Department, the Rector and the Vice Rector, and the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as students at all levels and alumni.

The visit followed a careful reading of the Self-Evaluation Report, which was clearly written. The Committee understands that the entire Department took part in writing the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), whereby each member was responsible for a section, and it applauds the Department for this broad participation in self-evaluation

The Committee feels that the discussions with the University leadership, the Head of Department, the lecturers, adjunct lecturers, alumni, PhD, MA, and BA students were all sincere, honest and therefore very constructive. The Committee felt that no issue was pushed aside or ignored, and that the members of the Department were willing to benefit from the evaluation process.

The Committee finds that the Department of Politics and Government is a very good Department both in terms of research and teaching. Members of the Department have succeeded in publishing in top journals, they have been winning competitive grants, including an ERC, and are devoted to their teaching and research. Their passion, collegiality, and care for students are widely appreciated by the students.

The Vice Rector defined three main challenges for the University as a whole, and the Department in particular. First was the recent reduction in the number of students in the humanities, and what the Vice Rector defined as the 'soft' social sciences, among them political science. Second was the demographic issue: some of the students in the region,

especially among the Bedouin minority group, come from disadvantaged families, and nearly all of them are first-generation university students. Third, the region has fewer jobs to offer compared with the center or the north of Israel. Despite students enjoying their time at BGU, they tend to leave the region and the city when they graduate.

There is, however, room for improvement for both the University and the Department, and in the following sections this report makes specific recommendations.

## **Section 3: Observations**

### **3.1 The Institution and the Parent Unit**

From the conversations of the Committee with the Rector, the Vice Rector, and the Head of Department, it was clear that collaboration between and among the Department, the Faculty, and the University was good. This was most apparent in the promotions and review process, where the Committee was impressed with the shared understanding of the criteria required for promotion.

In other cases, the Committee observed areas where communication and resources could be improved. Examples of these areas include library resources, classroom IT and hybrid facilities, and the alignment between the University and the Department on issues related to internships. Perhaps the clearest potential for problems to arise may occur with the new recruitment strategy. The Committee discusses this at length in Section 3.6.

Overall, and judging from the closing meeting of the Committee with the Rector, Vice Rector, Dean of the Faculty, and Head of Department, it appears that the Department is reasonably well-supported. As is typical in many institutions, the Committee suggests that all stakeholders strive for better and more frequent communication of expectations.

### **3.2 Internal Quality Assurance**

The Committee deeply appreciates the efforts of colleagues at BGU in preparing a very polished self-evaluation report that is reflective, attentive to detail, and forward-looking. The Committee acknowledges the rigor of the self-evaluation process, which is outlined and detailed in the BGU Quality Assurance Policy document.

The bulk of the tasks involved in producing the SER was undertaken by Department faculty members, who are best positioned to provide the necessary information for the report. The Department leadership appropriately involved other stakeholders such as adjuncts, who were asked to provide syllabi for the Teaching and Learning Outcomes section.

The Committee is mindful of the controversy surrounding the previous CHE review from 2011. The Committee deeply appreciates the good faith and effort of the University leadership and the Department of Politics and Government to take a constructive approach to the recommendations of the previous review, including increasing the number of core faculty, improving the coherence of the curriculum to better reflect core topic areas in Political Science, and improving faculty research performance. Overall, the Committee believes the

current round of evaluation has put the Department and CHE on the same page for advancing academic excellence.

Finally, the Committee would like to express its deep appreciation for the University's hospitality during its in-person visit. As coordinator of the visit, Eve Perelman was both a gracious host and an efficient organizer of the many meetings.

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
				X	

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

	1	2	3	4	5
					X

The Committee feels the Department put its best foot forward both in terms of the preparation of the report and the execution of the visit. The report indicated serious self-reflection on the part of the Department as a whole.

### 3.3 The Department/Study Program

The Politics and Government Department is to be commended for cultivating a highly supportive, tight-knit, and collegial environment for its faculty, students, and administrative staff. The parent unit and Head of Department recognize, and are pleased with, the intellectual energy in the Department and are hoping to leverage this in several ways to address the problems and concerns that they face. Of particular concern are declining undergraduate enrollments, the role of the methods curriculum for BA students, the relative lack of thesis and professional MA students, and a PhD program that, while full of exceptionally bright students from diverse backgrounds, remains somewhat atomized. The Committee noted several common-ground solutions that the Department and the University might adopt to meet these challenges.

The Committee found the study program and the syllabi varied and appropriate, though some reading lists were dated and could be revised to include more current scholarship. In general, the BA and MA students receive a comprehensive curriculum. The syllabi seem to strike the right balance between classical texts and more contemporary work, although, again, some syllabi could be updated to include more recent works of scholarship. **The Committee**

**recommends instructors review syllabi with an eye towards updating readings to include the most recent significant literature in political science.** The students seemed to appreciate the balance between abstract, theoretical concepts and applications to real-world problems. Finally, the faculty themselves feel that, despite their relatively small size, they provide a full-service department, offering curriculum across major subfields, including research methods. This is consistent with what they verbally described as their unique mission for the undergraduate program: *To produce students who are involved with, care about, and understand the role of politics in their society to make positive social change.* Of course, achieving this mission with such a small faculty is challenging.

The Department and the Dean are aware of, and concerned about, declining undergraduate enrollments in the Department over the last few years. The Committee noted that this may be a return to the pre-Covid levels rather than a long-term decline in interest in Political Science.

The Department has begun to advertise the strengths and utility of a political science degree to students on campus and prospective students by hiring undergraduate and graduate students to manage the Department's social media profiles. Information about courses, events, and podcasts appears regularly on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. According to the Head of Department, this seems to be paying off at least marginally, with enrollment increasing this year relative to last (which was the low point in the trend data available to the Committee). The Committee is impressed with and fully endorses this strategy. However, this effort may not be sufficient to increase enrollments adequately.

Another promising strategy for attracting undergraduates to the program may lie in the Professional Internship program already offered by the Department. Currently, approximately 40 students per year are matched with professionals who work in Parliament, Government ministries in Jerusalem, and NGOs proximate to the University. PhD students in the Department oversee the program, matching students and professionals, and teaching substantive courses in the three areas described above. Students receive credit toward their BA for both the internship itself and the relevant coursework.

Both the University administration and the Head of Department would like to expand the number of students who take advantage of these opportunities. One mechanism is to expand internship opportunities into new fields. For example, the Department would like to add internships in sustainability and politics. These efforts dovetail closely with a new University-wide initiative mentioned by the Rector for a "flipped degree" program that links curriculum with on-the-job training in a wide variety of industries and degree fields.

While the current demand for these internship opportunities seems to be met, the Committee noted a few constraints that may be suppressing that demand. Many Ben Gurion students find travel to and from Jerusalem and the internships sites time consuming and costly. **The Committee therefore recommends that the Administration fund modest scholarships and travel reimbursements to incentivize student participation in the internship program.** In addition, currently the internship program is administered almost exclusively by PhD students rather than full-time faculty. The Department might also consider including more experienced faculty in the program, as this could attract more students.

The role of the methods curriculum in the BA program also drew the Committee's attention. Currently, the Department lists several courses in research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, as requirements for receiving the degree. While the Committee found this laudable, various stakeholders conveyed concerns about the provision of research methods.

Some worried openly that any rigorous quantitative (and perhaps even qualitative) curriculum might scare away undergraduates who come to the "soft social sciences" to avoid more technical and mathematical content. On the other hand, students in the Department and elsewhere testify that a more methodologically rigorous undergraduate program could increase enrollments by attracting those seeking job-relevant skills. The Committee feels the Department could deliver work-relevant skills – data analysis, data science, public opinion measurement, and text analysis – by offering more content, not less, on quantitative research methods in the undergraduate curriculum. The Committee suspects that the current program requires attention, but not because students want less rigorous, or fewer, quantitative methods courses. Our reasoning for this conclusion is as follows.

The Committee notes that the existing quantitative methods course that is required of first-year BA students is taught outside the Department. Currently, it is a course in introductory statistics which is offered by the Education Department. The rather modest and reasonable goal of this requirement, according to the Head of the Politics and Government Department, is to ensure undergraduates can read and comprehend original quantitative research in the field. Unfortunately, many students reported that they did not understand the reason they are required to take this course, in part because it lacked sufficient connection to substantive questions of interest in political science. Further, none of the students with whom the Committee spoke felt they received sufficient instruction in quantitative methods to undertake original research of this nature themselves. Several mentioned that they would like training in quantitative empirical methods, and during the conversation seemed to understand that acquiring an understanding of the methods used by political scientists in their own research could be profoundly valuable after graduation in both public and private sector jobs.

Learning basic data analytic skills by becoming familiar with statistical software could help students answer original questions in Political Science and could go a long way toward capitalizing on the current curriculum. For instance, students should be given the opportunity to utilize research methods in subsequent courses during their time as undergraduates. This advice goes for qualitative methods as well. **The Committee recommends a greater commitment to research methods curriculum, especially of a quantitative nature, to capitalize on existing curricular investments, and expand concrete, workplace-relevant skills for students after graduation. The Committee also recommends utilizing the methods learned by students through applications in their own research in Department courses.**

A third challenge in the Study Program involves the relatively low demand for both professional and thesis MA degrees in Politics and Government at Ben Gurion. A student survey highlighted the need for market-relevant skills, similar to the discussion above for BA students. The Head of Department understands that hiring additional faculty to attract a larger MA cohort is currently infeasible, so she and her colleagues have instead proposed a set of joint MA programs with relevant units around campus to take advantage of existing synergies and administrative resources.

They have several initiatives for increasing MA opportunities:

1. A current program whereby BA students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year can begin an MA program, so that they have an MA after 4 years.
2. Creating joint programs for MA students by partnering with other disciplines/departments (communication, sociology, Middle East studies, philosophy).
3. Building joint MA programs with European and African Studies centers.
4. Creating an MA in Sustainable Development and Political Change in Israel that applies the same successful framework that exists in the African Studies MA. Students would write a Master's thesis that is based on a project with an external stakeholder from the local government and NGOs. There already exists some administrative infrastructure to support this in the African Studies Center, and the Head of that Center, Prof. Lynn Schler, has agreed to partner in this effort. This is another example of interdisciplinarity in the Department that the Committee applauds.

In summary, the Head of Department and the faculty are attempting to do a lot with a little by taking advantage of the above synergies within existing programs to enhance the vibrancy of the MA programs by linking them with other units. This is innovative. **The Committee recommends that the University do all it can to support these efforts, especially since the efforts seem to require little in the way of additional financial resources.**

At the PhD level, the Committee found the five students with whom it spoke to be highly motivated, bright, and professional. It is a deeply impressive group, which is already productive in research, and which cares about its teaching role in the undergraduate program. Students maintain that they have excellent relationships with their mentors and receive good intellectual guidance about their projects in general. Despite these laudable qualities, the PhD program struck the Committee as somewhat atomized and lacking in a substantial core curriculum or sense of intellectual community. Students come to campus only about once a week, mostly to do their undergraduate teaching, and rarely have contact with one another. They lack a robust PhD culture, with research collaborations, colloquia for sharing research at various stages, and opportunities for advice and mentoring around professionalization in the academy. Finally, the PhD students do not seem to believe that they are destined for careers as academics. One student mentioned that while they would love to be a professor someday, they do not "dare to hope" for this outcome.

The Committee believes this may be a missed opportunity for the Department. The faculty and the PhD students are highly motivated to produce original, impactful research. The current program still resembles the model that dominated most departments of Political Science for many generations, where a student comes to the University to study with a particular mentor in relative isolation, rarely interacting with other faculty and peers. **The Committee suggests that the Department consider updating its PhD training program, perhaps initially with a colloquium for students to meet regularly to present their work at various levels, and to receive feedback from fellow students and various faculty in the Department.** This could become a for-credit course for all PhD students.



The Department evaluated its overall performance in Study Program: **NONE PROVIDED**

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

	1	2	3	4	5

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

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

While the Study Program has many strengths, some improvements could be made in areas such as student funding for the internship program, a better learning community for PhD students, and so on.

### 3.4 Teaching and Learning Outcomes

The Committee overall concurs with the Department's self-evaluation in the area of teaching outcomes. The SER notes high scores (“fully”) on training current faculty, techno-pedagogical support, and adaptation to online learning. Training for new faculty is not as strong (“to great extent”), but it does not appear to be an area of weakness. The University supports teaching enhancement activities for faculty through the Unit for Promoting the Quality of Teaching and Learning (PQTL). As in the teaching enhancement units at other institutions of higher education, the Unit at Ben Gurion provides teaching workshops for faculty and Teaching Assistants (TAs), individual consultations on teaching issues, and other activities to enhance teaching effectiveness, both locally and internationally.

The Committee is pleased that the Department also provides significant internal resources for teaching enhancement. These include internal workshops for Teaching Assistants and virtual teaching` regular review of courses taught by adjuncts to ensure consistency with Department standards and intended learning outcomes (ILOs); and networking with other Departments in the University through the “Teaching Ambassadors” program. Also, as noted in the SER, several faculty members in the Department have received teaching excellence awards.

Looking ahead, a key issue for teaching effectiveness is how much teaching can and/or should be delivered online. While preference for in-person or virtual classes depends on individual faculty, the larger question exists as to the future of teaching and learning when it comes to the mode of delivery. The Department considers offering various MA programs, some of them exclusively as online programs, and at the same time some faculty offer hybrid teaching to meet student demand. **The Committee, therefore, recommends that the University ensure**

**that equipment for hybrid instructional technology is well maintained for smoothly delivering learning experiences.**

The Committee notes the significant discrepancy between the SER's assessment of intended learning outcomes and teaching outcomes. On ILOs for a graduate in the Department, the SER notes a relatively high correlation of ILOs with the courses being taught in the Department and that this is transparent to the faculty. However, the report is less positive on the review and updates of ILOs and whether these ILOs are adequately and sufficiently communicated to students. The Committee appreciates this self-reflection and recognition that this evaluation serves as an opportunity to improve. **The Committee recommends that the Department formulate a standard operating procedure (SOP) that institutes a timeline for regular reviews and updates of ILOs, and a mechanism for communicating the ILOs to the relevant students.** This SOP should be formulated and implemented within the next academic year. The Committee emphasizes that this is a recommendation on process and not on substance. The Department has already identified the ILOs for undergraduates and graduates, and these are already reflected in course content. What is lacking is a process for reviewing, updating, and communicating to students the ILOs that will best keep the Department moving forward efficiently and effectively.

The Committee recommends that the Department consider adopting the production of podcasts as a learning outcome for its majors. The use of podcasts as a pedagogical innovation offered by faculty in the Department and an effective learning tool was not covered in the SER. However, in the meeting with students, the Committee received extremely positive feedback on this exercise, which was undertaken as part of coursework. Students reported that producing a podcast involved research equivalent to that of writing a full-fledged paper. The exercise helped students not only to build research skills but also leverage modern methods of delivering and communicating the results of their efforts. Students reported a high level of satisfaction with the activity, despite all the work involved in learning new technologies and integrating them with the research they conducted for class. **The Committee recommends that the Department consider such activities leveraging technology and online outlets – perhaps the production of blogs as well as podcasts – as an important learning outcome suited to higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

The Committee also raised the issue of new developments in AI, such as ChatGPT, Google Bard, and other AI software, querying with students on their impressions of the effect that these new developments may have on their learning experience. Overall, the students were sanguine about the challenge of AI in university settings. They did not appear to be particularly reliant on AI, or even impressed by its potential. They said that they were encouraged by their professors to “not be afraid of it” but rather consider it just another tool among many in the learning process. In particular, the students remarked that in their second-year research methods course, they spent two weeks learning best practices in using AI. The Committee was impressed with the sophistication and practical assessment of AI by these students, and in their gratitude that faculty were engaging with these developments in the learning 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
				X	

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

	1	2	3	4	5
				X	

The Committee concurs with the Department's self-evaluation in this area.

### 3.5 Students

The Committee met BA, MA, and PhD students, as well as 8 alumni. Although due to the national security situation the Committee's visit to the campus had to be postponed by a day, the students and alumni went out of their way to show up or use Zoom to meet the Committee.

The Committee was highly impressed by the students' enthusiasm and very high level of satisfaction with the Department. Many of them spoke warmly about both the "Department" as a collective body ("it gave me the experience I needed," "it gave me theoretical as well as practical knowledge," "when I came to study here I found a home") and the individual lecturers, whom they described as "incredible", "genuinely caring about the students and their education", and "devoted to teaching and supervision". The MA students described the program as interdisciplinary in a very satisfactory manner. Both students and alumni appreciated getting to understand "what's going on" in Israel by studying political science at BGU.

Interestingly, 7 out of the 8 BA students the Committee met were not from the region, indeed some of them had lived in the north of Israel or Tel Aviv. Asked what brought them to BGU, they replied that they heard many compliments from friends who had studied at the Department, and they were convinced during the open day or while consulting with faculty members.

The Vice Rector and the Head of Department were under the impression that one of the greatest challenges the Department and the University face is the drop in the number of students who apply and enroll to the Department. The Committee notes:

1. In 2022/23 the drop in number of students enrolling to Political Science departments was not unique to BGU.

2. According to the Head of Department, it seems like the figures are improving towards the coming academic year (2023/24). She thought that this was partly due to the aforementioned special marketing effort by the Department.
3. In addition, the Department lowered its psychometric threshold from 550 to 520 because of the decline in applications to Political Science.

While the Committee did not have a chance to discuss the admission criteria with the University's leadership, the Committee suspects that lowering the threshold is not a good idea. First, as long as other Political Science departments in Israel do not lower their psychometric thresholds, this move by BGU might be misinterpreted by potential students as reflecting a program that is less demanding and therefore less prestigious. Second, and based on the experience of Law faculties in Israel in the past and the PPE program in recent years, the opposite policy could be more effective: raising the threshold could send the message that being accepted to the Department is a challenge, and, accordingly, that the program is very prestigious. **The Committee recommends returning to the previous psychometric threshold.**

The Department offers a one-year BA program for Air Force students. The program is relatively small with six or seven students. The Committee did not have a chance to evaluate this program in any detail. The Committee understands the importance of educating and teaching the cadets and appreciates the efforts made by the cadets and the University to do this successfully. Having said that, the Committee is concerned about the academic experience that the cadets have and questions the depth of learning that is possible in the compressed schedule available to them. These are very gifted and highly motivated students, who could have benefitted from a more relaxed schedule that will allow them to study, read, and research topics more deeply with their excellent and motivated faculty at the Department. The Committee was impressed with the expressed dedication of the faculty to fulfilling their responsibility to facilitate the education of the Israeli military.

The Committee was impressed with the seriousness of the PhD students it met. Alas, there seems to be a lack of thriving PhD community, as students tend not to spend more than a day in a week on campus. Since the culture is that PhD students are not expected to come more often, and it is accepted that they have full time employment outside the campus, students tend to reside far away, e.g. in Tel Aviv, and tend not to participate in the departmental seminars or other departmental activities. This, in turn, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy according to which PhD students have lower expectations regarding their future placement.

The Committee understands that students enroll to the Kreitman School for research students, rather than to the Department. **The Committee strongly recommends that PhD students enroll in the Department as well, that the Department improve the PhD community, and offer special PhD courses.**

According to the Vice Rector and the Dean, scholarships to PhD students are available either through the Kreitman School for PhD students (the Negev Scholarships), or (very few) from the Dean, but they are modest and uniform. This creates an impossible situation in the Department, as in other leading universities in Israel there are graduate schools with attractive scholarships for five years (two years for the MA and three years for the doctoral research) while at BGU the Department can apply only for external scholarships, e.g. Azrieli. **The Committee recommends that the Department, together with the Kreitman School, single out the most talented and promising PhD students and offer them more substantial**

**scholarships, in return for which the students will be expected to spend more time on campus and get involved in the Department’s academic activities.**

The Committee was impressed with the number of alumni whom it met: 8 alumni. Some of them were studying for an MA degree, either in Political Science or in other disciplines, e.g., Clinical Psychology (at a different university), and some were already working full time.

These alumni said they were not particularly keen on having an alumni network, and they were not expecting this. In fact, they remarked that having an alumni network was not part of Israeli culture. However, they did say they were eager to contribute, as alumni, to the Department and to assist current students in coping with their studies or finding a job. They all spoke of the Department in affectionate terms, e.g., “I love this department,” “They [the lecturers] saw me.” **The Committee recommends that the Department better utilize alumni to help undergraduates with internships and job placements, possibly by pairing alumni with individual students.**

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 concurs with the Department’s self-evaluation in this area.

### **3.6 Academic Faculty and Human Resources**

The Department of Politics and Government has a relatively small faculty, with just 12 members. The faculty clearly “punch above their weight” with respect to the quality of research and teaching, as noted elsewhere in this Report.

The Committee was impressed by, and pleased to see, high levels of enthusiasm among the faculty and students. It is clear that there is strong collegiality among faculty, and moreover, the faculty are well-regarded and admired by their students. In short, the Department has created a vibrant, stimulating and caring community, and should be commended for this achievement.

The primary concern of the Committee is that the Department be given adequate staffing resources to enable it to continue to grow and thrive. The concern arises from anticipated retirements; apparently, four of the twelve faculty members are due to retire in the next 5 years. At the same time, the recruitment process at the faculty level is changing to a system whereby individual departments do not necessarily retain posts (upon departure or retirement of a faculty member), but rather must compete with other departments on an annual basis. This new system is not yet in place, and so there is uncertainty as to the merits of it, particularly at the departmental level. The Committee understands that the new recruitment process may better serve the University, for instance by allowing it to rationalize anticipated staffing cuts in faculty across departments. The present Committee is, however, concerned that this new recruitment process may have negative consequences for the Department of Politics and Government by further exacerbating its high teaching load – for instance, using data from the SER, the 2021/22 staff-student ratio for Politics and Government is about twice that of Sociology, with the former at about 1:30, and the latter about 1:16. **The Committee recommends that, notwithstanding the imperative to lower staffing costs at the University level, the Department of Politics and Government at least retain its current number of faculty.** Relatedly, and elsewhere in this report, the Committee discusses the need to grow the expertise in research methodology among Departmental faculty. **The Committee thus recommends that a recruitment strategy over the short to medium term include candidates with expertise and skills in research methodology.**

The Committee examined the promotions, review, and tenure process within the Department of Politics and Government. From the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, to the Head of the Department, to the faculty, both the process and expectations for promotion were clearly stated and communicated. When specifically asked, all faculty to whom the Committee spoke agreed that they had seen and read the promotions document. While it is unclear to the Committee whether the linked document in the SER reflects a University level or Departmental level standard, nonetheless, it sets out reasonably clear and specific criteria expected of junior faculty (including excellence in research, teaching, and service) for all levels of promotion. In short, there appears to be broad satisfaction and a clear understanding of the criteria for promotion, for which the Committee commends both the Department and the University. It is not always easy to institutionalize clarity on promotions and tenure, and yet it appears that at Ben Gurion University, this has been achieved.

During the meeting with adjunct lecturers, the Committee observed high levels of satisfaction with their teaching commitments and the support from the Department. Adjuncts echoed the statement from the Head of Department that once hired, the Department sought to retain adjuncts from year to year, by renewing their contracts. Moreover, the adjuncts commended the Head and administrative staff for their efficiency in notifying the adjuncts about six months in advance to arrange a renewal of contracts. Additionally, the Department is not overly reliant on adjuncts to provide teaching. The relatively low number of adjuncts, their satisfaction, and the organization of their contracts are all commendable.

From the SER, the Committee notes that the Department's administrative staff is occasionally supplemented with students who are paid on an hourly basis. The Head of Department gave the example of students who were employed to market and promote the Department on social media, which demonstrates innovative leadership and management. While

administrative tasks such as marketing would ideally be done by full time administrative staff, the employment of students who are savvy users of social media is sensible.

Overall, the Department is well-managed and the collegial culture within the Department demonstrates an ongoing level of satisfaction among faculty, students, and administrative staff.

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 concurs with the Department's self-evaluation in this area.

### 3.7 Diversity

The faculty of the Department is fairly well-balanced between men and women. Five of the twelve faculty members are female. Of the four appointments made since the last CHE review, half have been female. Notably, the Department has two Arab faculty members among the twelve permanent members. The Head of Department is a woman. The faculty representation includes LGBTQ+.

Despite the mission of the University in serving the South of the country, none of the faculty members is from Mizrahi or Ethiopian backgrounds. Given the University's mission facilitating the spiritual and cultural absorption of Jewish immigrants and the desire to reflect the ethnic makeup of the area there is an imperative to seek outstanding minority faculty members. **The Committee recommends continuing efforts be made in future hiring cycles to identify and recruit top-notch candidates from diverse backgrounds.**

The leadership at all levels expressed a strong commitment to and appreciation of student diversity along a variety of dimensions. The Vice Rector discussed programs to help prepare Bedouin high school students for university study. The campus works hard to integrate soldiers stationed at army bases in the South to study while they serve. The leadership noted

that they had not yet been able to build programming for outreach to older citizens from the surrounding community for continuing educational opportunities.

Programs such as Arab Language Day seem to be attracting hundreds of students, which is encouraging. One member of the Politics and Government faculty is actively involved in recruiting and assisting Arab students from the local region and the Southern periphery more generally. The library employs Arab-speaking staff.

At the Department, students with whom the Committee spoke were nearly equally divided between men and women. The number of minority (mainly Bedouin) BA students enrolling has increased over the longer run. While the Covid pandemic caused sharp declines in enrollment by Arab students in the last few years, several groups the Committee spoke with were encouraged about the longer-term trend of increased interest by Bedouin Arab students in Ben Gurion. The pattern of Arab student enrollment in the BA program seems to reflect this broader trend, since very few second- and third-year BA students were from non-Jewish backgrounds. A much larger share of the first-year students, the first cohort to enroll after the pandemic, are Arab students, particularly Bedouin. At the same time according to the students whom the Committee met, there are no special relationships between Arabs and Jews on, or outside campus.

At the MA and PhD levels, there seems to be an impressive diversity across gender and ethno-religious lines. The Department includes MA students from Ethiopia, and four of the six the Committee spoke with are first-generation college students. One of the four PhD students is Bedouin, and three of the four were women. The alumni the Committee spoke with were equally divided between men and women.

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 Committee commends the Department for extraordinary efforts in achieving diversity among faculty and students.



### 3.8 Research

Although the Department of Politics and Government is relatively small, with only a dozen tenure-line faculty, it has managed to compile an outstanding research record. It has recruited exceedingly well, hiring scholars who have already given clear signs of becoming influential researchers. Nir Barak, for instance, was the last person hired into the Department. Besides having won the Best Dissertation Award from the Israel Political Science Association and multiple prestigious fellowships, he already had seven published articles and chapters before he started at Ben Gurion University.

Also hired since CHE's last review, Gal Ariely had won, before being hired, the 2010 Israel Political Science Association Outstanding PhD Dissertation Award and the 2008 American Political Science Association, Best Paper Award for his co-authored paper. Since then, his book, *Israel's Regime Untangled: Between Democracy and Apartheid* (Cambridge University Press) won the Israel Political Science Association Award for best book published in 2020-2021. He has also published nearly 40 articles in refereed journals and edited volumes.

A third person hired since the last CHE review, Jennifer Oser, also won the Israel Political Science Association Prize for Outstanding PhD Dissertation, as well as two awards for best paper. Before arriving at BGU, she had already published eleven refereed articles in journals and collected volumes. Now, fewer than ten years after being hired, she (like Ariely) is an associate professor and has published 30 articles. Recently, she was awarded a major grant from the European Research Council, the first social scientist at BGU to win this prestigious award.

Veteran members of the Department have also had significant influence on their fields through their research. Guy Ben-Porat, for example, has been a full professor for the last five years. He has authored or co-authored six books, the last of which, *Policing Citizens: Minority Policy in Israel* (Cambridge University Press), was published after his promotion to full professor. Two of his earlier books were award-winning titles. *Global Liberalism, Local Populism: Peace and Conflict in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland* (Syracuse University Press) was a winner of the Czempiel Prize, Frankfurt Peace Research Institute, and *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Modern Israel* (Cambridge University Press) was a winner of both the Shapiro Best Book Award, Israel Studies Association and the Israel Political Science Association's Best Book Award in Israel Studies.

Ayelet Harel is an example of someone who has recently risen to the most senior rank, having emerged as a major figure in comparative politics and Israel studies. Both her books have won prestigious awards. *The Challenge of Sustaining Democracy in Deeply Divided Societies: Citizenship, Rights, and Ethnic Conflicts in India and Israel* (Lexington Press) was awarded the Israel Political Science Association's prize for best book, and her co-authored book, *Breaking the Binaries in Security Studies: A Gendered Analysis of Women in Combat* (Oxford University Press) won the 2021 Ergomas [European Research Group on Military and Society] Guiseppe Caforio Book Award.

The Department has developed a particular characteristic for much of its research. Many members of the faculty tackle issues of social change, democracy, and political engagement and political exclusion in Israel in their articles and books. Senior Lecturer Michal Givoni, for example, investigates issues involving the ethics of humanitarian witnessing, Holocaust

memory, social protest, and occupation. Professor Dani Filc delves into populism and distribution of healthcare in Israel. Senior Lecturer Mansour Nasasra explores issues and problems in the Naqab Bedouin, including their relationship to the Israeli military. Also dealing with issues of Arabs in Israel, Associate Professor Ahmad H. Sa'di explores the subordinate status of Palestinians in Israel. Similar attention to social change and conflict is evident in comparative research. A prime example is Professor Lynn Schler's extensive research on social and political issues in Africa. Both Associate Professor Rebecca Kook and Professor Ayelet Harel have compared minority issues and conflict comparing Israel to other cases – the United States and India, respectively.

The issues of engagement and exclusion in faculty research activities clearly influenced the Department's students as well. Several of the PhD students developed research projects along these lines. One student, for example, is researching the Bedouin community in Rahat. The alumni with whom the Committee met also cited the engagement of the faculty as key reasons it attracted them to the Department and why they felt so attached to it.

The significance and impact of the faculty research are also evident in their success in garnering grants. Not only have the faculty members won individual grants for their research, but several have also been successful in winning major, multi-year grants that have been institution-building. Already mentioned was Jennifer Oser's grant from the European Research Council. Lynn Schler has been awarded a ten-year 3,723,600 NIS grant for the establishment of a national program in African Studies from the Yad HaNadiv Foundation, Jerusalem. The grant is divided between Ben Gurion University, Tel Aviv University, and the Open University of Israel.

Overall, the Committee expresses its deep admiration for the accomplishments of the Department since the previous review. Faculty members have been productive in publications and successful in securing external grants. The Committee looks forward to the continued success of the Department in contributing impactful knowledge in the discipline. Its research reflects the Department's mission of civic involvement and providing its students with an understanding of political and social reality.

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
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					X
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The Committee commends the Department for extraordinary efforts and significant advances in research performance.

### 3.9 Infrastructure

The Committee had a tour, visiting the library, two research centers affiliated with the Department, classrooms, and faculty offices.

The Committee’s main concern is with the library. The Committee was impressed with the relatively high number of students who were using the library when visiting the place. The Committee was told that for many students, especially from minority backgrounds, space in the library is the best option to work on their assignments and reading. The librarians are eager to help the students, and there is an Arab-speaking and a Russian-speaking librarian available. Departments are budgeted for purchasing books for courses or research.

At the same time, according to the faculty members, the library lacks any subscription to international newspapers, e.g., the New York Times and the Guardian, and the University saves money by purchasing substandard subscriptions. Faculty members must either pay for subscriptions from their own budgets or ask colleagues in other universities to send them copies of the most recent articles. The Committee thinks this is regrettable. Students cannot afford to pay for this extra service, and both students and faculty must have access to current and recently published articles. **The Committee recommends that the University compose a working group, including librarians, department heads, and the Rector’s office to discuss how to bring the library up to speed.**

The Committee discussed online teaching with the students, lecturers, Head of Department, and the Rector. The Rector was reluctant to encourage online teaching, although the Committee heard different opinions as well. **The Committee feels that technological maintenance for hybrid classrooms and use of technology in classrooms can be improved, by, perhaps, scaling down the number of classrooms but ensuring proper maintenance.** This could, among other things, enable internationalization (online lectures in seminars, guest lectures from abroad, or seminars in collaboration with other universities).

The Committee was impressed with the faculty offices. In particular, the Committee was impressed with an office that was allocated to the adjunct faculty and was indeed used by them on a regular basis.

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

	1	2	3	4	5
			X		

The Committee urges the Department and University to undertake the specific recommendations made in this area, especially the recommendation to upgrade the library.

## Section 4: Recommendations

### Essential

The University should retain the Department's current faculty number in the face of its multiple upcoming retirements, notwithstanding the imperative to lower staffing costs at the University level.

The Committee recommends that the Department capitalize on existing curricular investments by expanding the research methods curriculum, especially of a quantitative nature. The methods should be utilized in research project assignments in Department courses.

The Department should fund modest scholarships and travel reimbursements to incentivize student participation in the internship program.

The Committee recommends that the Department identify the most talented and promising PhD students and offer them more substantial scholarships, in return for which the students would be expected to spend more time on campus and get involved in the Department's academic activities.

The Committee recommends that the University compose a working group, including librarians, Department Heads, and the Rector's office to discuss how to bring the library up to speed.

### Important

The Department should pursue a recruitment strategy over the short- to medium-term to recruit faculty with expertise and skills in research methodology.

The Committee recommends that the Department, with support from the University and Faculty, design MA programs linking departments, especially since they seem to require little in the way of additional financial resources.

The Committee recommends enrolling PhD students in the Department as well as the Kreitman Graduate School. The Department should develop a full-bodied departmental PhD program, including special PhD courses.

### **Desirable**

The Committee suggests the Department consider returning to the previous psychometric threshold.

The Committee recommends that the University makes a strong effort to ensure that equipment for instructional technology is well-maintained to ensure smooth delivery of students' learning experiences. One way to achieve this is by scaling down the number of such classrooms but ensuring their proper maintenance.

The Committee recommends that the Department formulate a standard operating procedure that institutes a timeline for regular reviewing and updating ILOs, and a mechanism for communicating the ILOs to the relevant students.

The Committee suggests the Department consider adopting learning activities that leverage technology and online outlets – perhaps the production of blogs as well as podcasts – as an important learning outcome suited to higher education in the 21st century.

The Committee recommends that the Department make special efforts in future hiring cycles to identify and recruit top-notch candidates from diverse backgrounds.

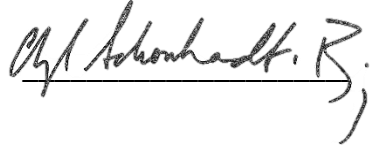
The Committee recommends that the University support the Department efforts to enhance MA programs and partnering with other University programs, especially since the efforts seem to require little in the way of additional financial resources.

The Committee recommends that the Department review syllabi with an eye towards updating readings to include the most recent significant literature in Political Science.

The Committee recommends that the Department utilize alumni to help undergraduates with internships and job placements, possibly by pairing alumni with individual students.

Signed by:

Prof. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey  
*Committee Chair*



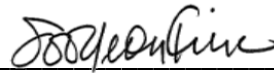
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Prof. Joel Migdal



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Prof. Soo Yeon Kim



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Prof. Avner de Shalit



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Prof. Nicholas Valentino



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## Appendix I: Letter of Appointment



March 2023

Prof. Nicholas Valentino,  
Department of Political Science,  
University of Michigan  
USA

Dear Professor,

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 by accepting our invitation to participate in our international evaluation committees. 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 a member of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of **Political Science and International Relations** departments. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey (chair), Prof. Tanja A. Börzel, Prof. Soo Yeon Kim, Prof. Joel Migdal, Prof. James Perry, and Prof. Avner de Shalit.

Ms. Pe'er Baris-Barnea and Ms. Anat Haina will be the coordinators of the Committee.

I wish you much success in your role as a member of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Prof. Edit Tshuva,  
Vice Chair,  
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

*Enclosures:* Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Sigal Mordoch, Acting Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE  
Ms. Anat Haina, Committee Coordinator