



EVALUATION OF HISTORY STUDIES – GENERAL REPORT

COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF HISTORY DEPARTMENTS IN
ISRAEL

June 2022

Section 1: Background and Procedures

- 1.1 In the academic year 2021-2022 the Council for Higher Education [CHE] put in place arrangements for the evaluation of study programmes in the field of History in Israel.
- 1.2 The Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] participating in the evaluation process were:
 - Ben-Gurion University
 - The Hebrew University
 - The Open University
 - The University of Haifa
 - Bar-Ilan University
- 1.3 To undertake the evaluation, the Vice Chair of the CHE appointed a Committee consisting ofⁱ:
 - [Prof. Steven Fraade](#) – Chair, Yale University, USA.
 - [Prof. Yitzhak Hen](#) – Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel.
 - [Prof. Tamara Loos](#) – Cornell University, USA.
 - [Prof. Dr. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum](#) – Technische Universität Berlin, Germany.
 - [Prof. Michael Seidman](#) – University of North Carolina Wilmington, USA.
 - [Prof. Michael Zakim](#) – Tel-Aviv University, Israel.
 - [Prof. Dr. Christian Wiese](#) – Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Ms. Pe'er Baris-Barnea served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

- 1.4 The evaluation process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (February 2019). Within this framework the evaluation committee was required to:
 - Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in History.
 - Conduct site visits at five 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.
- 1.5 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

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

elaborated and explained in discussions with senior management, faculty members, students and alumni during the course of each one-day visit to each of the institutions.

- 1.6 In undertaking this work the committee considered matters of international context, research, quality assurance, quality enhancement and capacity building.

Section 2: Recommendations

The committee would first like to thank the senior administration, faculty, and students of the five universities that we visited and reviewed: Haifa University, the Hebrew University, the Open University, Ben-Gurion University, and Bar-Ilan University.

All of them welcomed us in a spirit of constructive collaboration and cooperation, as well as honest disagreement. Everyone engaged us in positive and serious fashion, discussing aspects of the pedagogic missions that we share, albeit with local and historical variations. At the center of that mission is the practice of teaching, the chief stakeholders of which are the teachers and the students. We were greatly impressed by the commitment, enthusiasm, creativity, and intellectual rigor with which that mission is daily pursued. In particular, we met faculty who are international leaders in their fields and students who are eager to learn from and with them. We commend the professionalism and dedication of all with whom we met. It is in this spirit that the following appraisals and recommendations are offered for consideration.

History departments nationally have reported a decline in student enrollments at the precise moment when the skills taught in our classrooms, such as the ability to discern reliable “facts” from “fakes,” has become even more vital. How can we teach our undergraduate students sophisticated media literacy through historical materials in an era of information vandalism? How can we teach them how to understand the value of evidence-based interpretation? Of reasoned inference? Of objective standards in our inquiry while recognizing neutrality is difficult if not impossible? We accomplish this by focusing on information, misinformation, disinformation, and how to discern and evaluate relative truth or accuracy within historical context. Teaching students how to bring context and critical thought to historical materials in introductory history courses will serve undergraduates in their everyday assessment of the sources behind the news, events, social media, images and other information in today’s saturated media environment.

History majors learn to process and analyze large quantities of information and transform that data into readable and reasoned prose. This process (analogous to data analysis) prepares them not only for teaching but also for many other types of satisfying professions in business, media, and public service.

1) Academic Program:

The committee has directly engaged in all of its reports the division of historical studies into separate departments in Israeli universities. While the committee recognizes the historical, and even ideological, roots of this division – particularly that which separates Jewish history from the rest of the field – it has also taken note of the scholarly,

intellectual, and institutional difficulties arising from this arrangement. Indeed, because of declining enrollments, the respective history departments have all been reduced in size, hindering their ability to offer a proper course of study, which then further reduces their appeal to students, making it only harder to reverse the downward trend in enrollments. This vicious circle, more apparent in some institutions than in others, is exacerbated by the existing partition between history departments, which effectively spreads thin resources even thinner.

As such, the committee has recommended a broad range of steps for alleviating this situation, all of which endorse, in varying degrees, greater collaboration and coordination among the separate history departments. The goal is to institutionalize a level of cooperation among them which might, if proven effective and satisfactory, lead to their integration, in ways to be determined, of course, by those directly involved in the process. To that end, we urge the CHE to assume an active role in encouraging these steps, which include:

- An increase in co-teaching, namely, the design of courses to be taught jointly by members of different departments (and these include Jewish History, General History, Middle Eastern Studies, Israel Studies, Classics, Asian Studies, and Archaeology, in other words: the study of the human past). Such courses should be offered at all levels while obligating the universities to award faculty members full course-load credit for co-taught classes.
- An increase in the number of cross-listed courses among the various history departments. This should include curriculum changes requiring students in one history department to enroll in at least two introductory courses offered by another history department. Alternatively, general introductory courses can be designed and then required of all history students. Likewise, graduate-level seminars need to be instituted that offer cross-disciplinary approaches to subjects of common thematic interest to students in the various departments.
- The joint appointment of new faculty 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, or a Holocaust scholar who can teach Eastern European history.
- Institute multi-campus options for cooperation. Much as the library system often operates as a nation-wide resource for students and scholars in Israel, 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.
- Establish a faculty-wide committee to explore these ideas and offer new ones in designing a concrete plan of action and implementation. At the same time, convene a special curriculum committee spanning all the relevant history departments, charging it with the task of drawing up inter-disciplinary and/or

inter-departmental programs and study tracks at both the undergraduate and graduate level

2) Quantifying student enrollments:

The CHE's current method for measuring student numbers is based on the total registration of majors in each respective department. The committee believes that this method encourages a bias in the official statistics, undervaluing the much larger number of students who actually take part in classes offered by the history departments, which is a truer gauge of interest among the student body in the study of history. The committee thus recommends that the actual number of students attending classes – and not only the number of department majors – be taken into consideration when allocating budgets as well as determining faculty size.

3) Libraries:

Libraries are as critical to historians as laboratories are to chemists. At the present time, each university operates and supports its own library system. This situation is suboptimal. The limited resources allocated to each library are not enough to sustain an effective academic library that can support research at the highest level. Some major lacunae in the availability of electronic resources and databases were brought to our attention, and some unnecessary overlaps were also noted.

- The committee highly recommends the creation of a national library network for historical studies that will foster and improve free interlibrary loan service and will coordinate the purchase of databases and electronic publications. Such a national library network (which should be based in the National Library of Israel) will enrich the resources available to Israeli scholars and students, and will ease the fiscal burden of overlapping purchases of books and digital publications.

4) Diversity:

The committee recognizes the efforts to establish a more gender-balanced faculties, which have proven successful in some departments. Other departments are still far from realizing this aim and need to develop proactive policies. With regard to different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds, however, the need for diversity has not been recognized. Let alone addressed sufficiently. The first step towards change would be an even greater diversity within the student body. We recognize that efforts in this direction have been made; yet, they need to expand.

- Develop a list of practical measures to address unconscious gender bias to ensure a fair chance for women in the hiring process.
- Maintain the system of funding and support for access to higher education among members of marginalized communities, while improving the system of remedial support and mentoring for these students.

5) Language Training:

Languages are absolutely essential for historians. They provide not only the necessary means of communication of our teaching and research but are also indispensable tools for understanding different cultures and civilizations. They enable us to distance ourselves from our provinciality and discover exciting innovative ideas and concepts. Therefore, language instruction must be available as easily and inexpensively as possible to new generations of historians.

Language acquisition is even more important in an increasingly globalized world. Israeli universities must collaborate in every possible way to offer instruction in as many languages as possible. The means for doing this are not costly. For example, the Open University, whose expertise in distance learning was demonstrated to the committee, could offer online classes in major world languages. This option is especially practical since historians often do not need to speak the languages necessary for their research. The examples of Latin and Greek come to mind, but many historians of modern periods only need to read the languages of their primary and secondary sources. Universities could easily provide guidance on books and online resources available to students who wish to acquire competence in foreign languages. The universities should also offer online assistance from experts to students who have questions or encounter problems of translation.

- Language studies need to be offered at all levels **without** extra fees.
- The CHE should support a national center for the study of foreign languages serving academic purposes, based on the model developed by the Open University.

6) Internationalization:

The committee appreciates that most history departments are engaged in international cooperation. This occurs at either an individual level, with scholars publishing in international journals and publishing houses, participating in and organizing international events, and sometimes applying for international grants. It occurs, to a lesser extent, at an institutional level through collaboration with foreign universities and research centers. However, teaching is an area in which strategic planning is either absent or merely just starting to develop. The internationalization of study programs could certainly be an effective way to raise the visibility of departments and to appeal to foreign students, thus increasing enrollments. Students in history departments in Israel would also strongly benefit from such an encounter with international students. The departments of Jewish History, in particular, have great potential for appealing to European and American students.

- The departments of history, and Jewish history in particular, should be made the cornerstone of international student programs in the humanities.

These programs might include English-language course offerings (including a limited number of online courses), international summer programs, and international MA programs, some or all in cooperation with foreign universities. The committee is aware that implementation of such plans will entail additional

funding – an investment, however, that would dramatically benefit academic life in Israel.

7) Infrastructure:

The infrastructure of the departments visited by the committee are characterized by a great variation in quality – or, to put it bluntly – while some departments are located in modern, pleasant and functional facilities, others have to go about their daily duties in buildings that are far below the standard of a modern state that values education. Since these variations can be found even within a single university, the difference in infrastructure leads to general frustration and a feeling of disrespect for one’s work among those colleagues and students affected by it.

- The institutions should undertake immediate measures to renovate or replace the more deplorable conditions as detailed in the separate campus reports.
- The CHE should establish a committee to review these pressing problems and develop a plan for meeting basic infrastructure requirements.

8) Follow-up and Implementation:

It is important that the CHE establish an effective follow-up mechanism to ensure the implementation of – or at least engagement with – the recommendations made by the committee. The committee believes that an annual progress report (consisting of no more than 2-3 pages), together with an in-depth evaluation to be issued after five years, be required of the universities and submitted to the CHE. This will be the most effective way to ensure that the current committee's recommendations have not been for naught.

	Management & Administration	Self-Evaluation and QA	Study program	Teaching and learning	Faculty and Human Resources	Research	Students	Infrastructure
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Hebrew University	Yellow	Orange	Light Green	Blue	Light Green	Blue	Blue	Red
Ben-Gurion University	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green
The University of Haifa	Orange	Light Green	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Light Green	Light Green
The Open University	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green	Blue	Yellow	Light Green	Light Green	Blue
Bar-Ilan University	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Light Green	Red

General History:

Jewish History:

	Management, administration	Self-Evaluation and QA	Study program	Teaching and learning	Faculty and Human Resources	Research	Students	Infrastructure
Hebrew University	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Light Green	Yellow	Blue	Blue	Light Green
Ben-Gurion University	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green	Blue	Red
The University of Haifa	Orange	Light Green	Yellow	Light Green	Orange	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green
The Open University								
Bar-Ilan University	Orange	Light Green	Blue	Light Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Green	Red

Not acceptable. Not satisfactory		Clearly fails to meet the acceptable threshold level of performance.
Needs much improvement		Is below acceptable threshold level of performance.
Room for improvement		Meets the acceptable threshold level of performance.
Satisfactory		Clearly meets the expected threshold level of performance.
Excellent		Exceeds the expected threshold level of performance.

Signed By:



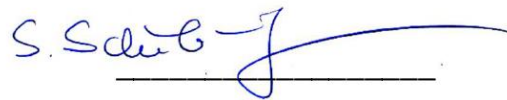
Prof. Steven Fraade



Prof. Yitzhak Hen



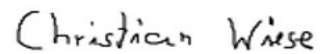
Prof. Tamara Loos



Prof. Dr. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum



Prof. Michael Seidman



Prof. Dr. Christian Wiese



Prof. Michael Zakim

Appendix 1 – Letter of appointment

November 2021

Prof. Steven Fraade
Department of Religious Studies
Yale University
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 the chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of **History** departments. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Yitzhak Hen, Prof. Tamara Loos, Prof. Miri Rubin, Prof. Dr. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Prof. Michael Seidman, and Prof. Christian Wiese.

Ms. Pe'er Baris-Barnea will be the coordinator of the Committee.

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

Sincerely,



Prof. Ido Perlman
Vice Chair,
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

cc: Dr. Varda Ben-Shaul, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE
Ms. Maria Levinson-Or, Senior Advisor for Evaluation and Quality Enhancement
Ms. Pe'er Baris-Barnea, Committee Coordinator