



**Committee for the Evaluation of Middle Eastern Studies Programs**

# **General Report**

**December 2010**

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## **Chapter 1- Background**

During its meeting on October 7, 2008, the Council for Higher Education (hereafter: the CHE) decided to evaluate departments in the fields of Middle Eastern History and, in the case of Hebrew University, the Department of Arabic Languages and Literature, during the academic year 2009 – 2010.

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

- **Professor Dale F. Eickelman – Dartmouth College, USA, Committee Chair**
- **Professor Emmanuel Sivan – Hebrew University, Israel (co-chair)<sup>1</sup>**
- **Professor Jere L. Bacharach – University of Washington, Seattle, USA**
- **Professor Richard W. Bulliet – Columbia University, USA**
- **Professor Ilai Alon – Tel Aviv University, Israel<sup>2</sup>**

**Ms. Marissa Gross - Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.**

Within the framework of its activity, the committee was requested to:

- Examine the self-evaluation reports, which were submitted by institutions that provide study programs in Middle East History/Studies and in the case of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, also the Department of Arabic Language and Literature.
- Present the CHE with final reports for the evaluated academic units and study programs – a separate report for each institution, including the committee's findings and recommendations.
- Submit to the CHE a general report regarding its opinion as to the examined field within the Israeli system of higher education with recommended standards.

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

The first stage of the quality assessment process consisted of self-evaluation, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the institutions under evaluation. This process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's guidelines as specified in the document entitled "The Self-Evaluation Process: Recommendations and Guidelines" (October 2008).

During April-May 2010 committee members conducted full day visits to five institutions (six departments) whose Middle Eastern Studies programs the committee was requested to examine.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sivan did not participate in the review of the Hebrew University to avoid a conflict of interest.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Alon did not participate in the review of Tel Aviv University to avoid a conflict of interest.

## **Chapter 2: Middle Eastern Studies in Israel: a General Overview**

### **2. a. Background**

The Institute of Oriental Studies (IOS) was one of the first academic units of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the first in what later became Israel to include the study of the Middle East. It began in 1926 and in 1962 was renamed the Institute of Asian and African Studies to reflect its broader teaching and research roles. Among the major figures of the first generation were S. D. Goitein, D. S. Banth and L. A. Mayer. The Institute's focus was on Arabic philology and the pre-Ottoman history of the Arab Middle East. Interest in later historical periods led to the creation in 1949 of a Middle East Department, which in 1986 was transformed into the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

During the 1960s and 1970s the Hebrew University's Institute of Asian and African Studies emerged as one of the best centers in the world for the study of classical Islam and the Middle East. The rich resources of the National Library, then a part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, augmented its prestige. Since that time, changes internal to Israel and worldwide developments in Middle East Studies (see following section) have resulted in the relative decline of HUI's international reputation in this field.

Following the 2006 report of the Committee for the Future of the Humanities [the Gager Report], changes have taken place in the administration of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Hebrew University. As of the end of 2009, pursuant to recommendations made by the Gager Report, research activities on these topics were assigned to the Institute of Asian and African Studies while teaching responsibilities remained with the two departments, Arab Language and Literature, and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

Tel Aviv University, officially opened in 1963, from the beginning offered courses related to Islam and Middle Eastern history. Under the leadership of S. Shamir, who transferred from Hebrew University, the Tel Aviv department in its turn gained international renown for studies on the modern Middle East. The Shiloah [subsequently Dayan] Research Center of the Middle East augmented the department's reputation. The Center focused on contemporary affairs, particularly in the Arab world, and assembled a unique collection of newspapers and other documentary materials. An additional institute, the Center for Iranian Studies, was added in 2005.

The University of Haifa, established in 1963, received full academic accreditation in 1972. Its Department of Islamic History, founded in 1966, changed its name to Department of Middle Eastern History in 1974. Its curriculum was modeled on that of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University. The Ezri Center for Iranian and Gulf Studies and the Center for Iraq Studies are also affiliated with the Department.

Formally accredited in 1973, the University of the Negev became the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev following the death of the former Prime Minister. In 1994, a

Department of Middle East Studies was established. Unlike the other departments visited by this Committee, this department includes all aspects of Arabic language and culture. The department has direct responsibility for the international MAPMES [Master of Arts Program in Middle East Studies] and has one research affiliate, the Chaim Herzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy.

The Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Bar Ilan University, established in 2003, is the youngest Middle East-related department among Israeli universities. Its potential competitive advantages include connections to *yeshivot* and to a network of associated colleges.

## **2.b. Current International State of Islamic and Middle East Studies**

Because of its close relationship to the foreign policy and security concerns of various states as well as its inclusion of the social sciences and the humanities, the field of Middle East studies does not have a clear disciplinary definition. The earlier European tradition of Oriental studies, which stressed the reading and editing of classical Arabic texts with more concern for philological matters than for theoretical understandings of text and context, has also contributed to this definitional haziness. European Orientalism was particularly strong in the foundation of what are now called Middle East studies in Israel. The term “interdisciplinary” is often used to suggest that a lack of definition is somehow a virtue. Economists, political scientists, anthropologists, and literary scholars specializing on the Middle East draw their theoretical guidance from their separate disciplines rather than from a theoretical amalgam particular to Middle East studies. Moreover, change in the structure of the field has more often arisen from events in the real world — wars, revolutions, and terrorist attacks — than from conceptual breakthroughs in scholarly thought.

While it would be unreasonable to assess Israeli programs in Middle East studies solely according to the closeness of their resemblance to parallel programs in North America or Europe, where national concerns with the Middle East are often quite different, a comparison with such programs suggests programmatic limitations and opportunities.

### **1. Geographic coverage**

When Middle East studies emerged under this name in the aftermath of World War II, its geographical range was substantially determined by the fact that Muslim populations in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, West Africa, and East Africa were still enmeshed in the colonial domains of France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and the Soviet Union. The Middle East was effectively defined as the Turkish and Arab successor states to the Ottoman Empire plus Iran. The Arabian Peninsula was notionally incorporated into this region, but that inclusion was seldom manifested in Middle East studies curricula and research. In Israel, where the national interest understandably called for a close and detailed study of enemy states, newly established programs primarily sought to teach and pursue research on a single-country

basis—for example, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. By comparison, no North American program aspired to comprehensive single-country coverage. American concerns with the Cold War dictated a region-wide approach with special attention given to countries bordering the Soviet Union or threatened by Communism. Programs in Britain and France concentrated on matters relating to the dissolution of their respective empires.

Today, Middle East studies in North America and Europe have evolved away from the geography of states and toward a geography of Muslim peoples that transcends state boundaries. Most programs continue to see the Middle East of the 1950s (in some places, plus North Africa and/or the Arabian Peninsula) as their core area of interest and instruction, but increasing attention is being given to Muslim peoples in the farther reaches of Asia and Africa, as well as to Muslim communities resident in Europe and the Americas.

This expansion of viewpoint is rooted in: 1) the contemporary currents of Muslim political expression, which are strongly interregional and affect dozens of countries; 2) enhanced geographic mobility that has resulted in the creation of Muslim (and non-Muslim Middle Eastern) diaspora communities that are physically outside the Middle East but remain connected to their homelands, or are believed to be so connected by their non-Muslim host societies; and 3) modern media—including radio, television, cinema, Internet, and mobile telephones—that promote and simplify interregional contact and influence. Finding ways to incorporate this expanded geography into programs that cannot realistically anticipate major increases in funding and staffing is a challenge to programs in Israel and elsewhere.

At a minimum, the tradition in Israel of foregrounding country-specific coverage needs to be reexamined. In a broader perspective, drawing on the example of the recent Israeli initiative in African Studies, which involves multiple universities, consideration should be given to establishing interuniversity consortia focused on currently understudied regions, such as Central, South, and Southeast Asia, and on Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and North America.

## **2. History and Social Science**

At their inception, Middle East studies programs in the United States were strongly disposed toward the social sciences even though many of the social scientists who contributed to the field had little or no capacity for using the languages of the region in their research. This was because modernization theory, based almost entirely on studies of other regions, fit best the dominant policy orientations of the US government. The Middle East was seen as a region on the threshold of modernization, and students of the region were encouraged above all else to study this process. The programmatic goal was to produce MA graduates who could work as regional specialists in government agencies, the military, and private enterprise.

Over time, the demand for individuals trained solely to the MA level diminished. Subsequent trends in the economics and political science disciplines favored culturally neutral theorizing and quantification over regional or cultural specificity. Thus Middle East economics, sociology, and, to a lesser degree, political science became less represented in program staffing and curriculum. Anthropologists continued to study the region, but their theoretical perspectives remained as they always had been—more general than regionally specific. Today, the role of the social sciences in Middle East Studies is supportive but not integral. Departments in the social sciences tend to hire by conceptual subfields first and only secondarily by regional specializations. Although some social scientists focus on the region, the best of them interrelate better with colleagues in their disciplinary departments than with the students of history and culture that predominate in the Middle East field. Middle East studies programs in Israel vary significantly in their incorporation of the social sciences. Many departments of history in Europe and North America are situated within the social sciences instead of the humanities, a further indication of how the history-centered Middle East departments should be encouraged to integrate the humanities and the social sciences. For example, methodologies such as text-mining and statistical analyses might initially appear far from what the French historian Marc Bloch called the “craft” (*métier*) of history, but many significant new approaches to historical issues have centered exactly on such new approaches, which apply equally to Middle East studies.

To some extent the research centers associated with Middle East Studies in the Middle East Studies departments under review provide, within their often limited resources, important opportunities for faculty and students alike to further research and communicate research results through scholarships, conferences, publications, and workshops. Among these centers are the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, the Chaim Herzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy at Ben-Gurion University, the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at Bar Ilan University, and the Jewish-Arab Center at the University of Haifa.

From the standpoint of the interdisciplinary approach that is implied by the term Middle East Studies, it makes sense to foster cooperation and interaction among departments rather than to seek teaching staff dedicated to a social science view of the region. The problem is how to balance the heavy contribution of history, including contemporary history as a theory-free version of Middle East politics, with synergistic contributions from social scientists lodged in departments of anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology and brain sciences, and the other disciplines of the social sciences.

Another issue that earlier characterized Middle East studies in Israel was a high level of Arabic language instruction at the secondary school level. At all institutions reviewed, faculty members remarked on declining level of Arabic language competence among secondary school graduates in the Hebrew-language stream. A recent assessment by an Israeli linguist compared the methods of teaching Arabic and English in secondary schools and universities, concluding that English is taught as a living language, with

Arabic taught as a “textually bound, dead language,” with Arabic classes often taught in Hebrew. (Allon J. Uhlmann, “Arabic Instruction in Jewish Schools and in Universities in Israel: Contractions, Subversion, and the Politics of Pedagogy,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 2 (May 2010): 291-309). This declining level of Arabic language instruction impacts the quality of undergraduate and graduate instruction in Middle East studies in Israel. On paper, Israelis with secondary school degrees from the last two decades possess a basic competence in Arabic. In practice, they do not. The result for Middle Eastern studies in Israel is to reduce the high level of language competence that characterized an earlier generation of Israeli scholars and their students.

A critique of Israeli secondary and post-secondary education in general is beyond the scope of this report, but a consistent theme in the Committee’s discussions with faculty members throughout Israel was the perception that the ability of students to use English as a second language has declined markedly over the last two decades, so that the ability of students to use scholarly resources extensively in English has dropped markedly. Concurrently, students also remarked on the paucity of key works translated into Hebrew and the out-of-date nature of collections of key articles.

### **3. Islamic Studies**

While Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern History have common roots in European Orientalism, the latter term has been trisected into Islamic History, Ottoman History, and Modern Middle East History. During the fledgling years of Middle East studies in North America, this division had a strong linguistic component:

The Arabic language has been used for Islamic History, Ottoman Turkish for Ottoman History, and European diplomatic and archival languages for the modern Middle East. (Persian was in a class by itself and primarily associated with literary studies.) This division has disappeared. Arabic is universally seen as desirable for all periods, Ottoman Turkish is increasingly seen as a requirement for pre-1920s modern Arab history, and Persian is slowly acquiring recognition as more than just a language of poetry. Yet Israel lags behind in providing adequate academic language instruction in these fields, and the inability to replace retiring faculty members at several institutions is eroding the level of instruction at several institutions and the ability of some institutions to produce internationally competitive doctoral research—and the next generation of Israeli-based faculty.

In terms of departmental organization, the dissolution of fixed subdisciplinary boundaries implied by this more capacious conceptualization of language pertinence should be encouraged. Separating pre-modern Islamic history from the history of later periods encourages students of the modern times to limit the chronological depth of their studies. Historians always benefit from broader perspectives. The challenge is to achieve an optimum balance between premodern and modern history and not treat the former as simply a preamble to the latter. It is also apparent that Islamic religious studies as a field embraces questions and methods that go well beyond history. The legacy of mid-twentieth century modernization theory, which mistakenly defined religion as a vanishing

force in the public arena and thereby encouraged a focus on secularism and nationalism, has made it difficult to incorporate teaching about modern Islam, and of necessity its premodern roots, into departmental curricula. This deficiency needs to be addressed at both the staffing and the curricular levels.

### **Chapter 3 : General Recommendations:**

#### *1. General*

In the last decade, departments of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in Israel have been reduced in scope and quality with the retirement of faculty who have not been replaced and the erosion of resources, including libraries, essential to sustain leading research. The picture is not unremittingly bleak. Faculty members, including unpaid retirees, and students often show considerable ingenuity in overcoming many obstacles. These actions have bought time, but unless these negative trends are reversed soon, Middle East Studies in Israel will recede to a second-rate status with leading contributions to the field becoming the exception rather than the norm, and Israel's ability to regain the prominence it once enjoyed in this field—through the capacity to train a new generation of scholars to a high level of critical research—will be permanently damaged.

The Committee believes that the study of the Middle East, which was one of the first fields of specialized scholarship in Israel, remains today of vital interest to the nation as a whole. While most of the self-study documents describe individual university programs in comparison with humanities departments in general, the field of Middle East studies is not purely oriented toward the humanities. In other countries, in fact, such programs are just as often regarded primarily as sites of social science research.

Without knowledge of what aspects of Middle East studies in Israel are addressed in other relevant departments not formally included in Middle East studies, such as Political Science and International Relations, the Committee is not certain that it has gained a definitive picture of the overall coverage of the field. Nevertheless, we offer two general recommendations.

First, humanities education as a whole in Israel is endangered by inadequate funding, faculty attrition, and the deterioration of the academic infrastructure, including libraries. Some of the social sciences, such as economics, struggle to maintain promising faculty members at all levels. Even in this environment, the Committee agrees that the study of the Middle East deserves priority in access to funding and resources. An Israel with only a mediocre standing the Middle East field is in peril of not understanding at a scholarly level the region in which it is destined to play a major role.

Recommendations particular to specific institutions are contained in the individual reports on departments, but in general our conclusion is that Israel cannot afford to nickel-and-dime the academic enterprise of Middle Eastern studies without risking—as is the case today—the ability of its universities to train a new generation of qualified scholars in Middle East studies at a level commensurate with an earlier generation of

scholars. Instead, as specified below, Israel must should consider ways of enhancing coverage of the field that is already suffering from losses of personnel and the conditions necessary to maintain a leadership role in Middle East studies. With the large number of faculty members throughout the country who are reaching retirement, it is crucial for the departments to think strategically about recruitment and for the universities to ensure that the academic lines in Middle Eastern Studies will be renewed or increased.

Secondly, the Committee was surprised to discover how little academic effort in Israel was going into academic teaching and research on Palestinians. As with the Middle East studies field as whole in Israel, this lacuna needs to be conscientiously filled. Again, we feel that enhanced activities are in the national interest of the state of Israel.

## *2. Immediate: Library Resources*

No institution of higher education in Israel has been able to support its libraries at the level desired by faculty, students, and library staff. Within the Middle East field only the University of Haifa has made the acquisition of material related to Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, particularly in Arabic, a relatively high priority. As a result, the University of Haifa's Middle East holdings are universally considered the best in the country. But even with the best efforts of Haifa, it is apparent that the holdings related to Islamic and Middle East Studies are lagging behind what is needed for adequate scholarly research. This applies also to the National Library, which is about to sever its close ties to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Faculty at several institutions brought to the Committee's attention the loss of critical databases, such as UMI (University Microfilms International), as another example of the impact of library cuts on their ability to guide advanced graduate students and keep abreast of the field. Just as we recommend the strengthening of inter-university academic and research consortia, we strongly recommend the development of stronger mechanisms for inter-library coordination and an immediate improvement in the quality of inter-library loan facilities.

The purchase of books in languages other than Hebrew and English has also diminished significantly. As for Persian, Turkish, and the less commonly taught languages of the region, faculty and advanced students have a very difficult time locating books, journals, and newspapers.

Finally, there appears to be a communications gap at several universities between faculty and librarians in terms of general acquisition policy and the role of faculty recommendations. Questions were also raised about how books and/or electronic resources can be acquired outside of specific vendors, who some critics believe are overcharging even though data to verify this claim was not made available.

While recognizing that acquisition of books in Arabic can be difficult, faculty felt that better solutions must be available. The Committee concurs. With CHE leadership, steps can be taken to make more effective use of existing financial resources although additional sums specifically allocated for enhancing Middle East collections are also needed. The CHE should hold a meeting of representatives of university libraries and the

National Library with representative faculty from Middle East departments. While the better libraries will build on existing strengths, it may be possible to identify ways in which individual libraries can extend coverage in one subfield with assurance that other institutions will complement their efforts in other subfields. For particularly expensive books, collective decision-making about which library will make the acquisition can prevent costly duplication. Covering the fees for databases of common interest may be more complex; but when cuts come, it is imperative that at least one institution in Israel continues the subscription. In addition, many Arabic texts pertaining to all aspects of Islamic studies are available on the Internet. Effort should be made to create a centralized list and awareness of such sites.

Another area calling for a common policy involves the acquisition of books in less commonly taught languages, such as Persian, Turkish, and the Central Asian languages. Allocating acquisition funds to Israeli scholars who travel in areas where such books are available, such as Turkey, Qatar, and Tajikistan, and authorizing these scholars to acquire books for their university libraries rather than their private ones alone, could increase the breadth of holdings in Israel. Details on the mechanism for timely reimbursement should be a simple administrative issue, but in the current environment scholars say that there is no such mechanism.

### *3. Intermediate: Less Commonly Taught Languages*

Leaving aside the issues related to Arabic and Hebrew, where each language is often housed in its own department, student enrollments in most other languages have declined, and faculty who taught these languages and retired have not been replaced. For Middle Eastern Studies/History instruction in Turkish, Persian and for some advanced students Ottoman Turkish is of critical importance. Because of Israel's position in the Middle East, as reflected in public debates over Turkish-Israeli relations, the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the importance of various forms of modern Shi'ism, instruction in Persian and Turkish has a national dimension not associated with many other languages. The intensive training of high-school teachers of Arabic and of Middle Eastern cultures and history can also provide employment for MA and other advanced degree holders. One Middle East program has informally taken steps in this direction. Increased support for such initiatives should be considered.

All Israeli universities visited would like to see such courses available for their students. Yet enrollments at any single institution are so low that per student costs often make such courses prohibitively expensive, particularly at the advanced level. What is needed is a national policy toward less commonly taught languages in which the CHE plays a central role.

Using Turkish as an example, the CHE could put out a Request for Proposals [hereafter RFP] whereby one university would take the lead and offer high-quality instruction in Turkish beyond the elementary and intermediate levels. Students interested in the elementary and intermediate levels would enroll at their home university but travel for more advanced instruction to the single university tasked with full-range instruction.

This recommendation should not be interpreted to advocate phasing out scholarly work on Turkey and the Ottoman Empire in any department elsewhere. To the contrary, every department should have at least one full-time faculty member who is able to conduct research in Turkish and serve as resource for graduate students.

The Committee also believes that modern technologies, such as teleconferencing whereby students can see the instructor as well as students at other institutions, should be explored and enhanced. Web-based instructional materials, including DVDs, should also be analyzed for the purpose of enhancing instruction without anchoring students to language labs.

For students desiring advanced language instruction in Turkish, including Ottoman and possibly a Central Asian language such as Uzbek, it should be feasible for students to attend weekly classes at one university if financial support for the commute were made available. A second option would be to create special scholarships to enable more students to study in Turkey itself. (Unfortunately this last option would not be available for students interested in Persian.)

The challenge for the CHE is to draw upon appropriate specialists in long distance language instruction to create an RFP and then dedicate funds to ensure support for a sufficient number of years to test the viability of this approach. If a trial program in Turkish and/or Persian should prove successful, similar programs might be launched for other relevant languages not currently on offer, including Kurdish, Pashto, Azeri, Uzbek, and Urdu.

#### *4. Long Term: Centers of Excellence*

Our recommendations in this section are “long term” only in the sense that unless significant investment in Middle East studies is not immediately undertaken and sustained, the decline in research facilities and sufficient qualified, high-level faculty to sustain earlier levels of strong and influential quality research will be lost.

Israel now lacks the breadth and depth of coverage in many Middle East-related academic fields that was a hallmark of its universities before the twenty-first century. Retirements without replacements, the elimination of positions and even programs, decreases in library and other support, and shifts in student interests have impacted programs across the board and the quality of doctoral studies. The loss of African Studies as a major field of teaching and research where a number of Israeli universities had relatively strong programs is only one example of this trend. Even the retention of the name “African Studies” in the title of the department at Tel Aviv University reflects more a past reality than a present capability.

It is the Committee’s understanding that the CHE created an RFP for centers of excellence and decided to create a national program in African Studies lead by Ben-Gurion University. The Committee knows nothing of the details but commends the CHE

for this initiative and urges them to do the same for other fields, particularly those outside the traditional Middle East as defined in Section 2 above.

For a wide range of reasons, including academic interests and national ones, Centers of Excellence that focus on Islam outside the Middle East such as in Europe and the Americas or Iranian Studies or Central Asian Studies represent ways in which Israeli institutions can combine their limited resources to create a whole greater than its parts. The issue of language acquisition where enrollments in a single institution would be very low and the possibility for advanced levels of language instruction negligible are discussed in the first part of our recommendations. Faculty who are presently tenure-track appointees and even some adjuncts and advanced graduate students would find ways to sustain their specialized interests, have students for their more specialized classes, and feel part of a community of scholars greater than those only at their home institution.

The CHE should track the success of the African Studies model, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and create RFPs with adequate financial backing to offer Israeli universities a relatively low cost solution to covering areas vital to Israel's future as well as participating in the new directions underway in the study of Islam, the Middle East, and the multiple worlds in which Muslims live.

**Signed by:**



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Prof. Dale F. Eickelman,  
Chair



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Prof. Ilai Alon



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Prof. Jere Bacharach



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Prof. Richard W. Bulliet

## Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



March 23rd, 2010

Prof. Dale Eickelman  
Department of Anthropology  
Dartmouth College  
USA

שר החינוך  
**Minister of Education**  
وزير التربية والتعليم

Dear Professor Eickelman,

The State of Israel undertook an ambitious project when the Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) established a quality assessment and assurance system for Israeli higher education. Its stated goals are: 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. Involvement of world-renowned academicians in this process is essential.

This most important initiative reaches out to scientists in the international arena in a national effort to meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher educational system today. The formulation of international evaluation committees represents an opportunity to express our common sense of concern and to assess the current and future status of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. It also establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process among scientists around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

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

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 Middle Eastern Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Dale Eickelman (Chair), Prof. Emmanuel Sivan (Co-Chair), Prof. Ilai Alon, Prof. Jere Bacharach, and Prof. Richard Bulliet.

Ms. Marissa Gross will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as the chair of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix.

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

Sincerely,

Gideon Sa'ar  
Minister of Education,  
Chairperson, The Council for Higher Education

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

cc: Ms. Riki Mendelzvaig, Secretary of the Council for Higher Education  
Ms. Michal Neumann, Head of the Quality Assessment Unit  
Ms. Marissa Gross, Committee Coordinator

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November 2009

## **Appendix to the Letter of Appointment for Evaluation Committees (Study Programs)**

### **1. General**

On June 3, 2003 the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to establish a system for quality assessment and assurance in Israeli higher education, which came into effect in the academic year of 2004-2005. Within this framework, study-programs are to be evaluated approximately every six

The main objectives of the quality assessment activity are:

- To enhance the quality of higher education in Israel;
- To create an awareness within institutions of higher education in Israel to the importance of quality evaluation and to develop an internal culture of self-evaluation, as well as the required mechanisms;
- To provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel;
- To ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

**It is not the CHE's intention to rank the institutions of higher education according to the results of the quality assessment processes. The evaluation Committee (hereinafter "Committee") should refrain from formal comparisons.**

### **2. The Work of the Evaluation Committee**

2.1 The Committee shall hold meetings, as needed, before visiting the institution, in order to evaluate the material received.

2.2 The Committee shall visit the institutions and the academic units being evaluated – if possible - within 4-6 months of receiving the self-evaluation reports. The purpose of the visit is to verify and update the information submitted in the self-evaluation report, clarify matters where necessary, inspect the educational environment and facilities first hand, etc. During the visit, the Committee will meet with the heads of the institution, faculty members, students, alumni, administrative staff, and any other persons it considers necessary.

2.3 The duration of the visits (at least one full day) will be coordinated with the chairperson of the Committee.

- 2.4 Following the visit, the Committee will submit the CHE with:
1. A final report on each of the evaluated departments,
  2. A general reports on the state of the discipline in the Israeli higher education system. The general report will include recommendations to the CHE for standards and potential state-wide changes in the evaluated field of study.
- 2.5 The reports will be sent to the institutions and the academic units for their response.
- 2.6 The reports and Committee's findings will be submitted to the CHE and discussed within its various forums.

### **3. Conflict of Interest Policy**

- 3.1 In order to avoid situations that may question the credibility and integrity of the evaluation process, and in order to maintain its ethical, professional and impartial manner, before issuing their Letter of Appointment members and chairperson of the evaluation Committee will sign a Declaration on Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality.
- 3.2 In the event that a member of the Committee is also a current or former faculty member at an institution being evaluated, he/she will not take part in any visits or discussions regarding that institution.

### **4. The Individual Reports**

- 4.1 The final reports of the evaluation Committee shall address every institution separately.
- 4.2 The final reports shall include recommendations on topics listed in the guidelines for self-evaluation, including:
- The goals, aims and mission statement of the evaluated academic unit and study programs
  - The study program
  - The academic faculty
  - The students
  - The organizational structure
  - Research
  - The broader organizational structure (school/faculty) in which the academic unit and study program operate
  - The infrastructure (both physical and administrative) available to the study program
  - Internal mechanisms for quality assessment
  - Other topics to be decided upon by the evaluation Committee

### **5. The Recommended Structure of the Reports**

#### ***Part A – General background and executive summary:***

- 5.1 General background concerning the evaluation process; the names of the members of the Committee and its coordinator; and a short overview of the Committee's procedures.
- 5.2 A general description of the institution and the academic unit being evaluated.

5.3 An executive summary that will include a brief description of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic unit and program being evaluated.

***Part B – In-depth description of subjects examined:***

5.4 This section will be based on evidence gathered from the self-evaluation report and the topics examined by the Committee during the site visit.

5.5 For each topic examined, the report will present a summary of the Committee's findings, the relevant information, and their analysis.

***Part C –Recommendations:***

5.6 This section will include comprehensive conclusions and recommendations regarding the evaluated academic unit and the study program according to the topics in part B.

5.7 Recommendations may be classified according to the following categories:

- ***Congratulatory remarks and minimal changes recommended, if any.***
- ***Desirable changes recommended*** at the institution's convenience and follow-up in the next cycle of evaluations.
- ***Important/needed changes requested for ensuring appropriate academic quality*** within a reasonable time, in coordination with the institution (1-3 years)
- ***Essential and urgent changes required, on which continued authorization will be contingent*** (immediately or up to one year).
- ***A combination of any of the above.***

***Part D - Appendices:***

5.8 The appendices shall contain the Committee's letter of appointment and the schedule of the on-site visit.

**6. The General report**

In addition to the individual reports concerning each study program, the Committee shall submit to the CHE a general report regarding the status of the evaluated field of study within the Israeli institutions of higher education. The report should also evaluate the state and status of Israeli faculty members and students in the international arena (in the field), as well as offer recommendations to the CHE for standards and potential state-wide changes in the evaluated field of study.

**We urge the Committees to clearly list its specific recommendations for each one of the topics (both in the individual reports and in the general report) and to prioritize these recommendations, in order to ease the eventual monitoring of their implementation.**

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