



**Committee for the Evaluation of Arabic Language and Literature Study
Programs**

**Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Department of Arabic Language and Literature
Evaluation Report**

June 2014

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Chapter 1- Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Arabic during the academic year of 2014.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education, who serves ex officio as Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a Committee consisting of:¹

- Professor David J. Wasserstein -Department of History, Vanderbilt University - Tennessee, USA. Committee Chair
- Professor Li Guo - Department of Classics and Program of Arabic Language and Culture, University of Notre Dame - Indiana, USA
- Professor Beatrice Gruendler – Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, Yale University - Connecticut, USA
- Professor Otto Jastrow - Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University – Estonia²
- Professor Joseph Sadan - Professor emeritus, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tel Aviv University, Israel

Ms Erica Rashkovsky, Ms Daniella Sandler and Ms Dvora Klein - Coordinators of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

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

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Arabic, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.

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

² Professor Otto Jastrow was not present at meetings for HUJI.

3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's October 2011 Guidelines for Self-Evaluation.

Chapter 2-Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on 16 May, 2014, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Arabic Study programs in Israel.

In May 2014, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University and Bar Ilan University. During the visits, the Committee met with members of numerous constituencies at the institutions, including administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the following members of the staff of the Council for Higher Education, who facilitated our work from the start to the end of this long process: Michal Neuman, Yael Elbocher, Dvora Klein, Erica Rashkovsky and Daniella Sandler.

This report deals with the Department of Arabic at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Committee's visit to Jerusalem took place on 22 May, 2013.

The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the management of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Department of Arabic Language and Literature for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit at the institution.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program at the Hebrew University

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.

1. Executive Summary

Arabic is one of Israel's two national languages and needs to be represented by a strong and independent department in Israel's oldest and most prestigious university. The Hebrew University's Department of Arabic Language and Literature has a well-deserved reputation as one of the major centers of such studies in the world. It is unique in the strength in teaching and research that it represents. The institution is unusual in benefiting from a high level of Arabic knowledge in incoming students, often with up to five years, and occasionally rather more, of prior experience. This gives it a major advantage over almost any other academic institution in the western world. Even in western universities of high standard, students come in with virtually no prior knowledge. A first-year BA student in Jerusalem can immediately take a seminar in classical Arabic literature. The Department combines the impressive level of incoming students' proficiency with the equally impressive heritage of the European-American scholarly tradition. The scholarly standing and achievements of the Arabic department serve the western humanistic tradition and the national interest, as well as the cultural heritage of the twenty percent of Israel's population who are Arab and the historical tradition represented in Israel by the forty percent of her population who or whose ancestors immigrated to this country from the Arab world. Members and graduates of the Department of Arabic at the Hebrew University have served their country at all levels, bringing to bear the specific learning acquired or developed there in helping to increase scholarly and popular understanding of Israel's neighbors at critical moments in her history.

That high standard and venerable tradition in teaching and scholarship are in danger now as a result of changes over the past two decades. The Department faces threats on a number of fronts: retirements, non-replacement of faculty, loss of faculty positions, loss of funding, falling away in student numbers, decline of ancillary support such as in the Library, threats of a merger with the Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Department, , loss of institutional recognition and backing.

The Committee is very strongly of the view that the Department should not face the repeated risk of being reduced to the status of a service department providing elementary language courses. The Department should not be merged with the Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Department. It should be retained as an independent unit with the resources needed to sustain it and allow it to flourish.

2. Organizational Structure

Observation and findings:

- The Committee understood that the University has in recent years considered the possibility of merging the Department of Arabic Language and Literature with the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. The Committee considers this misconceived. Arabic Language and Literature and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies are two separate (though naturally inter-related) sets of disciplines, asking different questions, using different approaches and different sets of working tools, with training in different, if complementary, skills and methodologies, producing different kinds of answers, and offering different kinds of scholarly understanding of complex problems. While co-operation between the two departments is useful, and desirable, it is clear to the Committee that a merger would lead quickly and in all likelihood irreparably to the decline and disappearance of all study of the linguistic and literary heritage of Arabic-Islamic civilization.
- Reduction in resources over the last decade and a half has left the department dangerously short on faculty posts. Within the next four or five years, all the senior members of the Department will retire. In addition, junior faculty members are dangerously over-burdened with work, in teaching and even in administration. This seriously impedes their ability to perform the central functions for which they have been trained and employed: teaching and research.
- The Committee considers it vital that the University should retain a separate, independent department in this important area and return it to the status it enjoyed in the past, with the resources to match.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- It is vital for the survival of the discipline at the Hebrew University that senior faculty members who retire be replaced at senior level.

- Not only should individual professors be replaced, but the particular fields that they represent should be as well. The four senior scholars who are scheduled to retire in the coming years represent some seven different sub-fields: all of these should be replaced.
- The work-load of junior faculty, especially in administration, should be reduced, to enable them to pursue both research and teaching.

3. Mission and Goals

Observation and findings:

The Committee was in full agreement with the mission and goals of the Department as laid out in the Self-Evaluation Report. Those reflect a valuable and important intellectual and academic tradition and a contribution to the national interest which it should be the first priority of the University to preserve and maintain.

4. Study Programs

Observation and findings:

- Elective courses did not appear to be numerous enough to offer students sufficient variety or choice. This is in part a product of the severe current shortage of faculty.
- Some students pointed to an overlap in BA and MA courses and credits resulting from lack of sufficient faculty.
- The Committee noted a relative dearth of courses in intellectual and literary history.
- Courses in modern literature were also lacking.
- Students seemed insufficiently trained in correct pronunciation of Arabic.
- There is little if any teaching through the medium of Modern Standard Arabic.
- Graduate students appeared to lack suitable preparation in methods of research and in understanding of theoretical approaches to their subjects.
- At MA and PhD level students lacked the benefits of intellectual and academic peer-review such as would be provided by a regular colloquium or seminar.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Graduate students should be offered a course on methods of research and introduction to theory (The Committee understood that a proposal for such a course was already in the works, in a different part of the University. This is to be welcomed.)

Advisable changes:

- The Committee recommends a bigger choice of courses especially in modern literature, and a better balancing out of courses in language with those in literary and intellectual history.
- High quality of close reading should be accompanied more regularly by integration of theoretical approaches and discussion of secondary literature.
- More emphasis should be laid on correct Arabic pronunciation.
- Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) should be used more often as the language of instruction.
- To this end junior faculty should receive specialized teacher training for active use of MSA.

Desirable changes recommended:

- Establishment of an MA seminar/colloquium for intellectual and academic peer-review.
- PhD colloquium (or perhaps a combination of these two)

5. Human Resources / Faculty

Observation and findings:

- The Department has lost more than half of its faculty positions over the last decade and a half; it is shortly to lose most of those that remain through retirements. It is vital that these be replaced. To restore missing faculty now is less costly than to wait longer, until the reputation of the Department has suffered internationally, when it will take more resources and greater effort to rebuild it.
- The Committee noted with concern that the Department currently has not a single faculty member who is Arab.

- The Committee noted that the secretarial arrangements at the moment leave the faculty, especially the junior faculty, burdened with a good deal of administration. This is not what faculty are trained and employed for.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- It is vital to replace retirees, but to do so in ways that replace the full array of areas of specialization rather than faculty members as such, as each one represents more than one field. (On page 68 of the Self-Evaluation Report three retiring members cover 7 fields).
- The fact that there are no Arabs on the faculty is unrepresentative in itself; it also gives a bad impression of the character of Department. Special attention should be given to the appointment of Arab faculty.
- New secretarial staff should be appointed.

6. Students

Observation and findings:

The Committee noted that 30 percent of BA students in the Department are Arabs; however, numbers and proportions of Arabs go down as one moves up to the graduate levels. Attracting higher numbers of Arab graduate students would mean a greater likelihood of forming more candidates for posts in the Department.

7. Teaching and Learning Outcomes

Observation and findings:

- At the moment many students and potential students in the Arabic Department are ignorant of the many and varied employment opportunities open to them in Israel with a degree from this Department. Because of this, many are reluctant to embark on what appears to them to be a purely intellectual exercise and not a pathway to a career.

Recommendations:

Desirable changes recommended:

Establishment of a workshop course to help with identifying job opportunities outside the academy would be valuable in itself and help in attracting BA students.

8. Research

Observation and findings:

- Research by faculty members of this Department has historically been of the first rank. It is often so still. But it needs support from both inside and outside the University. The Department is also home to several major projects, whose support, whether internal or external, in the modern climate of research funding, must come from grants. The Committee remarked a certain degree of resistance among members of the Department to applying for grants. This is the way such research is supported today, and the Committee urges the Department and its members to seek the necessary funding for their research that is available, in the ways in which it is currently made available, through competitive application to funding bodies.

Recommendations:

Advisable changes:

More effort should be invested, with the support and help of the University administration at all levels, in seeking grants for research, both internally and externally. This will particularly benefit graduate students by providing the necessary funding for their research.

9. Infrastructure

Observation and findings:

- (See above, for secretary.)
- The library is the lung of the humanities. It needs a constant and reliable supply of oxygen. At the moment the collection for Arabic Language and Literature is spotty, with a visible decline beginning in the 1990s.

Recommendations:

Essential changes required:

- Library gaps need urgently to be filled (In part, given the location of the University in Jerusalem, this could be done in collaboration with the National Library of Israel). Important databases and reference works should be locally subscribed to; journal subscription should be maintained at a high level.

10. Self-Evaluation Process

Observation and findings:

- The Department's Self-Evaluation Report appeared conscientious and thorough. Care and diligence, and a good deal of time, have been invested in preparing it.

***Any other topics the Committee would like to address**

- The Hebrew University's Department of Arabic Language and Literature sponsors several important projects. Two in particular aroused the concern of the Committee.
- (1.) The Department is home to *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAI)*. This is one of the foremost academic journals in the field throughout the world. The Committee visited the editorial headquarters of the journal, meeting with its editor and some of its staff and learning much about its editorial processes and funding. They were very impressed by the quality of the contents and by the production values as they were shown them. The journal is a flagship for the discipline and also for the University. It is run on a shoestring, largely with volunteer input from senior retired staff of the Department. Such a project does much for the Department, especially in such a discipline as Arabic Language and Literature, where contacts with scholars and work in the Arab world are rare and at a premium. Student employees receive advanced education and training from their work on the journal, but they need to be paid for their work; and the journal incurs other costs for its production.

The University should provide *JSAI* with the (fairly modest) financial support necessary to its functioning. This should be in the form of a regular annual subvention, to enable the editorial work to go ahead without a repeated need every year to go out and beg.

- (2.) The other important project is the Arabic-Hebrew Dictionary. This project, which started out as an updating of the famous old Arabic-Hebrew dictionary of Shinar-Ayalon (themselves two professors of the Hebrew University), has turned into a completely new dictionary of the modern Arabic written language at a very high level. The Committee members were shown examples of the work and introduced to the staff and to their methods of work during their visit. The dictionary is available online and can easily be consulted by users of Hebrew. The Committee heard that it is regularly used, in the current Hebrew version, by some fifteen thousand individuals a month. Plans are in place for translating it to make it available in the form of an online Arabic-English dictionary. This will make it available to students and users of the Arabic language all over the world. The quality of its production and contents and its ease of use will ensure a very large interest. It will quickly establish itself as a central tool. In this way, research done at the Arabic Language and Literature Department of the Hebrew University will make itself known throughout the world, acting, not just at the academic level, as an ambassador for the department, even in the Arab world.

Here too the costs involved are relatively modest. The University, possibly in concert with other funding sources in the country, should act to give this project the support it needs.

Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable

The Committee wishes to point out that some of the recommendations which it offers here, both at short and at intermediate term, are low-cost or cost-neutral. Others are more expensive, but (i) they are very low-cost in the larger context of a major research and teaching university which is itself a major academic and cultural institution in the country and the region and wishes to remain so; and (ii) they are necessary if the Department and the discipline which it represents are not allowed to deteriorate further but enabled to flourish again as in the past.

Short term [~ within 1 year]:

1. Replacement of retiring faculty.
2. Replacement of fields represented by retiring faculty.
3. Increased support for the Library.

Intermediate term [~ within 2-3 years]:

1. Reduce the work-load of junior faculty, especially in administration.
2. Appoint an efficient secretary, to take work-load off faculty.
3. Add courses in BA on modern literature.
4. Add courses in BA in literary and intellectual history, to achieve better balance with language courses.
5. Add courses for graduates on (i) research methods and (ii) an introduction to theoretical approaches to the subject.
6. Integrate theory and discussion of secondary literature more fully into study of texts.
7. Introduce more teaching through Modern Standard Arabic, in order to improve students' pronunciation and increase their acquisition of the language at higher spoken level.
8. Create an MA seminar to give students peer-review of their work.
9. Create a PhD seminar to give students peer-review of their work.
(These could be a single seminar)
10. Attract more Arab graduate students, in order to create a pool of possible candidates for faculty positions in the future.
11. Make serious efforts to appoint Arabs to faculty positions within the Arabic Language and Literature Department, for example by contacting the other Israeli departments of Arabic Language and Literature for their best graduating Arab doctoral candidates.
12. Create a workshop to acquaint students with potential job opportunities outside the academy.
13. Encourage faculty at all levels to apply for grants to support their research and the research of their graduate students.

14. Provide the necessary financial support for *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*.
15. Provide the necessary financial subvention to make possible the work of the Arabic-English online dictionary.

Signed by:



Professor Beatrice Gruendler



Professor Li Guo



Professor Joseph Sadan



Prof. David J. Wasserstein (Chair)

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



May 2014

Prof. David J. Wasserstein,
College of Arts and Science,
Vanderbilt University, TN
USA

Dear Professor Wasserstein,

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. 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 the study programs in Arabic Language and Literature. In addition to you, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Joseph Sadan, Prof. Beatrice Gruendler, Prof. Li Guo, and Prof. Otto Jastrow.

Ms. Daniella Sandler will be the coordinator of the committee.

Details regarding the operation of the committee and its mandate are provided in the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as the Chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Prof. Hagit Messer-Yaron
Deputy Chairperson,
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE
Ms. Daniella Sandler, Committee Coordinator

Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

The Department of Arabic Language and Literature
Schedule of site visit to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Thursday 22nd May, 2014

Time	Subject	Participants
08:45-09:15	Opening session with the heads of the institution	Prof. Menahem Ben Sasson – President Prof. Asher Cohen – Rector Prof. Barak Medina – Head of the Office of Academic Assessment & Evaluation
09:15-09:30	Travel time	
09:30-10:00	Meeting with the head of Faculty of Humanities	Prof. Reuven Amitai – Dean
10:00-10:45	Meeting with the academic and administrative head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Meir Bar-Asher – Chair
10:45-11:00	Break	
11:00-12:00	Meeting with senior academic staff *	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof. Simon Hopkins• Prof. Michael Lecker
12:00-13:00	Meeting with junior academic staff **	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Michael Ebstein• Dr. Miriam Goldstein• Dr. Ori Shachmon• Dr. Joseph Witztum
13:00-13:45	Lunch (in the same room)	Closed-door working meeting of the committee
13:45-14:30	Facilities: classrooms, library, offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit to the <i>JSAI</i> editorial office (host: Prof. Yohanan Friedmann) and to the Concordance of Classical Arabic Poetry Project (host: Prof. Albert Arazi)
14:30-15:15	Meeting with adjunct academic staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Arik Sadan• Dr. Roy Vilozy
15:15-16:15	Meeting with BA students**	

16:15-17:00	Meeting with MA students**	
17:00-17:30	Meeting with Ph.D students**	
17:30-18:00	Closed-door working meeting of the committee	
18:00-18:15	Meeting with the head of Faculty of Humanities	Prof. Reuven Amitai – Dean
18:15-18:25	Travel Time	
18:25-18:45	Summation meeting with the heads of institution	Prof. Asher Cohen – Rector Prof. Barak Medina – Head of the Office of Academic Assessment & Evaluation Rector's Office

* The heads of the institution and academic unit or their representatives will not attend these meetings.

** The visit will be conducted in English with the exception of students who may speak in Hebrew and anyone else who feels unable to converse in English.