



## **Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Study Programs**

# **General report**

**February 2013**

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## **Chapter 1- Background**

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Hebrew Literature during the academic year 2011 – 2012.

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:

- **Prof. (Emeritus) Arnold Band, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Los Angeles, USA – Committee Chair**
- **Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yehuda Friedlander, Department of the Literature of the Jewish People, Bar-Ilan University, Israel**
- **Prof. Nili Gold, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, USA**
- **Prof. David Roskies, Department of Jewish Literature, The Jewish Theological Seminary, USA<sup>1</sup>**
- **Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Departamento de Hebreo, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain**
- **Prof. (Emeritus) Yosef Yahalom, Department of Hebrew Literature, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel**

**Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati and Ms Maya Alayoff - 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 Hebrew Literature, 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.
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 Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, Prof. David Roskies held a position at Ben-Gurion University at the time of the evaluation.

## **Chapter 2: Committee Procedures**

The Committee held its first meetings on May 13, 2012 during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Hebrew Literature study programs.

In May 2012, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited the Ben-Gurion University, the University of Haifa the Tel Aviv University, the Hebrew University and the Bar-Ilan University. During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee held its first meetings on May 11, 2012, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Hebrew literature Study programs.

**This report deals with the general state of Hebrew Literature study Programs in Israel.**

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<sup>2</sup> Members of the committee, who had a professional connection with any of these universities, did not participate in the visit to that institution or in the deliberations about the committee's work on that institution

## **Chapter 3: Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Study Programs in Israel**

*This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institutions, 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 institutions, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

### **Preface**

Each of the five departments is discussed separately and offer recommendations specific to each department in the individual reports. In the general report we will discuss and offer recommendations which pertain to all five departments.

1. All five departments share the general problems of the Israeli universities in which the Humanities, and within them, Hebrew Literature, are relegated to a secondary status after the sciences and studies leading to the economic market. This state is deplorable and should be resisted in all circumstances since it undermines the goals of the university in Western Civilization.
2. All five universities have suffered from the drastic budgetary cuts in the first decade of the current century, cuts which decimated many programs and reduced them to a position from which they may never recover. Only Beer Sheva's Department of Hebrew Literature has escaped these drastic cuts because of a special arrangement made between its President, Avishai Braverman, and Prof. Yigal Schwartz in 2000.
3. All five Hebrew Literature Departments were created to service Israeli culture and are inextricably bound up with the ideals and destiny of the State of Israel.
4. All five departments we studied do research in and teach the national literature of the State of Israel and are keenly aware of this historical responsibility.
5. In all cases, the faculty of these departments testify to the unfortunate ignorance of incoming B.A. students of their own national literature. University instructors have to work with students who have a minimal knowledge of even the great writers of Hebrew Literature.

## **Final Observations and Recommendations for All Departments**

It is clear that the faculties of these departments are serious scholars of high academic achievement and dedicated to their teaching profession. While they are not of equal strength, excellent work can be found in all departments. Their publications are numerous, of high quality, and each university has its own professional periodical open to all scholars in the field. As one would expect, most of their publications are in Hebrew and we strongly assert that this is as it should be, that scholars in Hebrew Literature should not be expected to publish in English to be considered widely respected scholars. After all, the intellectual center of Hebrew Literature is in Israel, not in America or England.

Each department is comprised of sub-sections of varying strengths: Modern Hebrew Literature, Medieval Hebrew Literature, Midrash, Folklore and, in some cases Yiddish and Ladino Literature. In no case are all these subsections adequately manned. There are departments with two to three lines in Modern Hebrew Literature, and some with six. Few today maintain an expert in Haskalah Literature, once one of the main areas in Modern Hebrew Literature. In some cases, Medieval Hebrew poetry is not adequately represented. Furthermore, in some departments the faculty is reasonably young, while in others several significant senior scholars have recently retired and have not been replaced. We have noticed that in some cases faculty retire early, at the age of 62 rather than at the mandatory age of 68 and all calculations for retirement and faculty renewal should take this fact into account.

It is obvious that except for the happy circumstance of Beer-Sheva, all the departments we have studied are significantly weaker than they were in 2000, before the decade of radical budgetary cuts. Given this chaotic situation, it is imperative that each department draws up a plan for **faculty renewal** over the next few years. **Faculty renewal** should be the prime goal of all these departments over the next five years. It is not evident that such plans exist. Each department should present a list of positions to be filled as a result of recent and future retirements. When a position becomes available, the search for the new scholar should be widely advertised, and on a competitive basis. Departments should not be allowed to restrict the search for new faculty to their own graduates.

Both initial hiring and promotion practices for faculty are not clear in most of the departments we have visited. This is not a situation unique to these departments: it is rather, endemic to the entire academic community. There are many suggestions for rectifying this situation, often referred to as "Best Practice" policies. They involve such items as: a. full transparency; b. published rules; c. reasonable process for timely promotion; d. a board of appeal; e. a committee to supervise this process.

While we understand the demand for publications in English in foreign periodicals for scholars doing research in the sciences or in other areas of scholarship where the centers of intellectual activity are in Europe or America, our committee feels it is unreasonable to demand that scholars in Hebrew literature publish extensively in English. Indeed, the natural intellectual home for Hebrew Literature is in Hebrew and in Israel, therefore the lion's share of scholarly output in Hebrew literature ought to be published in Hebrew. We believe that for the purpose of appointments and promotions in Hebrew literature, the institutional demand for publication in English ought to be limited to a small, defined percentage of one's scholarly output.

### **Junior and Adjunct Faculty**

Junior and adjunct faculty in all departments teach far too many basic courses that should properly be taught by senior, more experienced instructors. This, of course, is the result of inadequate financing; it is, simply, cheaper to hire junior or adjunct faculty. As a result, in several of the departments we visited we found a group of talented, dedicated, but exploited and frustrated young scholars. Since the future cadre of senior scholars will eventually be drawn from this group, the prognosis for the future is not bright. This group could also benefit from more research funds allowing them free time to do research, prepare papers, participate in conferences. In many cases, they are not provided funds to attend scholarly conferences outside Israel.

### **Undergraduate students and program**

1. Every attempt should be made to raise the level of the students majoring in Hebrew Literature. In general we get the impression that the requirements for admission to Departments of Hebrew Literature are lower than in other departments.
2. All undergraduate students should have dedicated advisors to guide them in the choice of courses. This important work should not be left to random scans of the computer or departmental secretaries.
3. Since the study of literature depends so heavily on the ability to analyze texts, courses in text-interpretation (targilim) should be mandatory. In general, a return to the traditional three-staged system of shiur (lecture), targil (text study), and seminar should be strongly encouraged. It introduces order into programs which are otherwise whimsical and chaotic.
4. While some departments strive to offer readings in the central texts of major authors, some do not. Instead one finds courses on topics that interest the instructor, but provide the student with little sense of historical structure. Given the poor literary backgrounds of most entering students, this emphasis on major modern classical texts is crucial.

5. While most departments have introduced courses on methodology and the theory of literature, at times this tendency is promoted to the detriment of courses in major authors. Given the literature ignorance of entering students, this policy is unwise.
6. Some departments have introduced “panorama” courses open to all students in the Humanities. While this endeavor is welcome, since it can introduce non-majors to the riches of Hebrew Literature (their own national literature), these courses should be closely monitored by senior staff since they can easily deteriorate into low-level courses which deter majors in the field from registering in these courses.

### **Graduate students and program**

1. The graduate program should assume that entering students have studied in an undergraduate major in Hebrew Literature that has exposed the student to the classics of Hebrew Literature.
2. Every graduate student should have a designated advisor or supervisor.
3. All first year students should have a mandatory methodology course that includes writing of papers that are critiqued by the instructor.
4. In general, graduate students need more experience in writing research papers that are carefully critiqued by their instructors.

### **Student financial support**

In all our meetings with graduate students and junior faculty, we encountered the same legitimate request that more fellowships be in this area during the past few years, it is clear that without adequate support now, there will be fewer and fewer specialists in this crucial field in the future.

### **Inter-university cooperation**

Since no university can possibly cover all the variegated areas of Hebrew Literature, and some universities are sadly deficient in more than one area, it is only logical that greater cooperation be encouraged between universities. In the past, students in one university have indeed taken courses with an expert in an area not available on their home campus. This practice should be more strenuously encouraged. For this, cooperation is necessary in the university at the highest levels of the administration. The CHE should, indeed, do everything to bring about this logical pooling of resources. It is our impression, however, that cooperation between universities, even on the highest administrative level, is minimal.



**Conclusion**

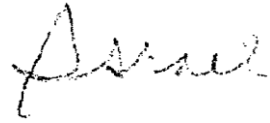
The CHE and the university administrations must not forget what is so evident to the professors and students in the field. The study of Hebrew Literature is unlike any other subject in any Israeli university since it studies and nourishes the creative culture of the State of Israel which is, after all, the only Hebrew speaking state in the world. When it comes to allocation of funds, Hebrew Literature should not be considered together with other subjects for which there are institutions of learning throughout the world. It is evident to us that the neglect of this fundamental area in the national culture can only undermine many aspects of Israeli life.

**Signed by:**



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**Prof. Arnold Band**  
**Committee Chair**



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**Prof. Dan Ben-Amos**



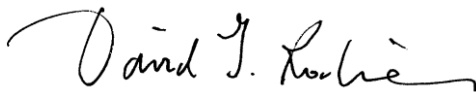
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**Prof. Yehuda Friedlander**



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**Prof. Nili Gold**



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**Prof. David Roskies**



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**prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos**



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**Prof. Yosef Yahalom**

# Appendices

## Appendix 1- Copy of Letter of Appointment



January 2012

שר החינוך

Minister of Education

Prof. Arnold Band  
Department of Comparative Literature  
University of California, Los Angeles  
USA

وزير التربية والتعليم

Dear Professor Band,

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 Hebrew Literature Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Arnold Band, (Chair), Prof. Dan Ben-Amos, Prof. Yehuda Friedlander, Prof. Nili Gold, Prof. David Roskies, Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos, Prof. Yosef Yahalom.

Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati 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 chair 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. Michal Neumann, The Quality Assessment Division  
Ms. Tamar Maagan-Efrati, Committee Coordinator

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