



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

**The Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**The Faculty of Humanities**

**The Department of Hebrew Literature**

**Evaluation 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, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 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 holds a position at Ben-Gurion University.

## **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.

The Committee held the site visits to all of the five departments in May 2012.

During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including the senior management, faculty, staff, and students.

In view of the fact that Professor Yosef Yahalom is an emeritus faculty member at Hebrew University, and in order to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest, Professor Yahalom did not participate in the evaluation of Hebrew Literature at the Hebrew University.

**This report deals with Hebrew Literature studies in the Department of Hebrew Literature at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.**

The Committee's visit to the Hebrew University took place on May 23-24, 2012. The Committee thanks the management of Hebrew University, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Hebrew Literature Studies for the self-evaluation report (SER) and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit at the institution.

This report was prepared following the guidelines of the Council for Higher Education. It is a synthesis of the analysis of the SER, the interviews conducted with faculty members, the administration and students, and it summarizes observations and makes recommendations intended to strengthen the Department.

The schedule of the visit, including the list of participants from the institution, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

### **Chapter 3: Evaluation of Hebrew Literature Studies in the Department of Hebrew Literature at 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.*

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In spite of the high quality of its faculty and the notable research of its members, the Department of Hebrew Literature of the Hebrew University, universally recognized as unique and excellent when the great masters that built it were alive, the Committee finds that it is today in a serious critical state and demands immediate intervention. As some interviewed members of the Department said, it is a wonderful building whose foundations are crumbling. In our meetings with the senior administration of the Faculty we heard that they are planning towards 2020. Although we do not know all the details of their specific plans, we are convinced that if one projects what the condition of this once great department will be in five years, if concerted action is not taken in the near future, the situation will have deteriorate even more, perhaps irreparably, by 2020.

The administration of the Hebrew University should not be allowed to forget that the Department of Hebrew Literature in the Hebrew University, perhaps more than any other university in Israel, must fill a national mission: the study and fostering of the national Hebrew culture.

## **Background**

We found the SER itself an impressive document in which the department as a whole participated. The presentation was clear and stressed both the significant history of the department and the rich array of the faculty activities and publications. This sense of history shapes the keenly felt pedagogical mission of the department: it is, after all the Hebrew Literature Department of The Hebrew University situated in Jerusalem. This sense of unique mission seemed to be echoed in our meetings with the University authorities, and we hope it will be translated into concrete efforts to restore the fabled virtues of this prime department.

The need for the restoration of the virtues and strengths of this department is connected with three major problems that came to our attention and probably affect a variety of issues that will be raised:

1. The disastrous diminution of the strength of the Humanities at the Hebrew University (and other Israeli universities) between 2000 and 2010.
2. The retirement or decease of many of the great masters of the past generation and the failure to replace them with younger scholars. The recent retirement of two very significant senior faculty has been dispiriting. To replace them is far: only one junior appointment has been made, effective this coming academic year. The department now has only three professors and six senior lecturers or lecturers, by no means enough to run a coherent program.
3. The sharp decline in the number of students in the Humanities in general and in Hebrew Literature, in particular.

## **Mission, Goals and Aims**

The Committee admires the clear presentation of the mission of the Hebrew University and the Department of Literature, and the impressive history of the studies of Hebrew literature in the HU. Highest excellence and pluralism have been a traditional stamp of the HU, and the basis of its great prestige among the best Universities in the world. The HU has been the model imitated by all Israeli

universities, a paradigm for all the universities of the world. Of course, the danger should be avoided, to depend too much from past history.

As part of the Hebrew University, this Department of Hebrew Literature has assumed the mission of developing research at the highest level, and to educate the next generations of experts in Hebrew Literature. They measure themselves at international standards and try to be counted among the best research departments of Hebrew Literature of the world.

Although all the faculty members of the Department are working hard and doing their best, the committee sees some serious points of weakness in the present situation that need the urgent attention of the administration and also of the faculty members in order to restore the high prestige of the Department and the fulfillment of its mission. These weak points include:

- Several unattended periods and areas.
- Insufficient attention to the cultural and linguistic background of Hebrew Literature through the ages.
- Absence of the excellence and pluralism that were characteristic of the previous generations.
- Insufficient attraction of good students

### **Recommendations**

1. To invite above all academic authorities, faculty members and administrators to strive to recover the unique character of this Department in the previous years, caring in particular.
2. To pay attention to several unattended periods and areas.
3. To pay attention to the cultural and linguistic background of Hebrew Literature through the ages.
4. To try to return to the levels of excellence and pluralism that were characteristic of the previous generations.
5. To search for ways of attracting again the best students.

## **The Study Program**

- The "Study program" is well thought out, with many options, important text courses (targilim), and solid monographic courses on key authors. It services both majors in Hebrew Literature and students from other departments.
- While the attraction of students of other Departments to the introductory courses is seen as very positive by the committee, our opinion is that this should be done without lowering the level of the courses. If it is possible, it would be better to offer separate courses for the students of the Department.
- Probably due to the imposed reduction of experts in the different areas of study, the committee finds that entire areas of historical importance are not adequately covered at present. While medieval sacred (kodesh) poetry is well covered, there seem to be few possibilities for advanced students in mediaeval secular poetry and narrative. Italian Hebrew poetry is not in the curriculum. Hassidic literature and Haskalah literature are only marginally taught. Post-Haskalah modern Hebrew literature, including the rich literature of the pre-state and state periods, is covered by only three persons, by no means enough for this rich area. All these lacunae affect the historical range of Hebrew Literature, the unique literature of the Jewish people.
- The integration of the historical, theoretical and comparative perspectives on Hebrew literature seems to be very positive. The Committee considers that these perspectives are very important for the study of Hebrew literature.
- There are no introductory methodology courses for beginning graduate students. A course of this sort was already recommended in the Gager report.<sup>2</sup>

## **Recommendations:**

1. If it is possible, the faculty should offer separate introductory courses for the students of the Department of Hebrew literature. The Committee

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<sup>2</sup> "The Gager committee for the future of the humanities" was appointed by Prof. Menachem Magidor who was at the time the president of the Hebrew university, in order to view a wide range of issues regarding to the future of the Humanities at the Hebrew University. The committee submitted its report to the university on June 2006.



believes that crucial introductory courses should be taught by the more experienced and accomplished senior staff.

2. The department should offer courses on Hebrew Poetry in Italy, on Hassidic and Haskalah literature and Post-Haskalah Modern Hebrew literature, including the literature of the pre-state and state periods.
3. The department should offer a more balanced presentation in the courses of medieval Hebrew literature, with a deeper study of secular poetry and narrative, opening these studies to a greater number of students.
4. The department should integrate the historical, theoretical and comparative perspectives on Hebrew literature, making them the object of deep reflection for faculty members and students. The Committee encourages the study of the languages, history, literature and culture of the areas in which Hebrew Literature was written through the centuries.
5. The Committee considers that introductory methodology courses for beginning graduate students are essential for the development of the intellectual coherence of the graduate program.

### **Faculty**

- In opinion of the Committee, despite the severe losses of retired and deceased faculty, the department still has today highly qualified faculty that offers excellent courses and attains a very high level of research and publications.

- The senior staff, however, is responsible for far too many doctoral and master's students, far beyond the norms designated by the faculty guidelines. While we appreciate the eagerness of these colleagues to train the next generation of scholars, there is a limit to the capacity of one to afford proper direction. In addition, with the recent retirement of two of the senior directors of graduate students, we are concerned for the continued direction of these students. One need note the fact that below the three senior Professors, is a mixed group of lecturers, some significantly younger than the professors, most of whom are in their late fifties.

- Many of the introductory courses are thus taught by Adjunct Teaching Staff or Junior Academic Staff.

- The Committee has a high opinion of the attitude of the great masters of the HUJI in the previous generations that showed a plural open mind in relation to all literary genres used by Jewish writers and the surrounding languages and cultures, not

depending on their ideology or religious attitude. It is an important aspect of HUJI's tradition that should be maintained or recovered.

- For years now, there has been no central figure teaching Haskalah Literature though some senior faculty teach individual courses in this crucial area. There is not on the staff an expert in Hassidic literature. Finally, there are only three instructors assigned to teach post-Haskalah Modern Hebrew literature including the rich literature of the pre-state and state periods.

- The distance and differences between senior and junior faculty are too large, especially due to the fact that positions of retired or deceased Professors are not filled. Although most of the junior and adjunct Faculty were very satisfied with this University and would like to stay here if possible, they would like to receive better conditions from the University. They do not know the actual courses that they have to teach until the very last moment; the actual teaching of some courses depends on the number of students that take them. In general, we have found that this group, especially the junior faculty and adjunct faculty, work many hours often in several different institutions, for relatively low pay. These young scholars are the ones most disturbed by the diminution of the standing of the department caused by the recent retiring of two senior, prestigious instructors.

- Though much of the administration of the department is handled ably by the chairman of the School of Literature, it is obvious that the department cannot operate well without additional funds for positions to replace the significant lost. The assignment of so many introductory courses to low –paid faculty is obvious sign of financial straits affecting the quality of the teaching.

- There seems to be much confusion in the minds of junior faculty, adjunct faculty and advanced graduate students regarding what is necessary for their advancement to tenure position in university, be it at the Hebrew University or elsewhere. They wonder what sort of publications are necessary, in what language, whether they should seek a post doctoral appointment abroad, etc. One should not forget that precisely these young scholars who can see little professional future, are the ones who teach many of the introductory courses—and are the future of the department or of the profession seen nationally, or internationally.

## **Recommendations**

1. To limit the number of doctoral and master's students under the responsibility of senior staff.
2. Key introductory courses should not be left under the sole responsibility of young lecturers.
3. The medieval literature is characterized as multi-face literature (religious poetry, secular poetry, love poetry) In consonance with the tradition of the HUJI, a more pluralistic tendency would be desirable, in particular in Medieval Literature, covering more diverse areas, and open to members of the faculty regardless their cultural background.
4. It would be of primary importance to create positions for all the abandoned fields of Hebrew literature.
5. It seems necessary to improve the precarious situation of most young faculty.
6. It is obvious that a concerted effort must be initiated now to prepare for the future. The norms for promotion should be clarified. The present lecturers must be inspired to advance as rapidly as possible to the professorial rank. They should be encouraged to participate fully in the intellectual life of their disciplines through publications, spending time in other Universities and participating in scholarly conferences in Israel and abroad.
7. When new positions are made available, the best possible candidates should be engaged, and not necessarily those who have been trained in the Hebrew University. In general, given the likelihood that the Humanities in general will not be as well supported as they should be, cooperation with the other universities in the country should be encouraged.

## **Students**

- The faculty is keenly aware of the decline in the number of undergraduate students and seeks methods to improve this situation, including reach out to the general public in the city. It is generally recognized that the present curriculum of the high schools has lowered the level of knowledge of the main works and authors of the national literature.

- Students seem to be in general very satisfied with the instruction they receive in the department, are extremely proud of their status as students at the Hebrew University. They complain that many young faculty who do not have a clear future 'disappear'.
- MA and PhD students need more methodological introduction, help for elaborating their curriculum, for becoming researchers, going to conferences, speaking in public, academic writing, etc. They cannot find enough grants.
- PhD students miss more personal instruction: the number of PhD candidates under the tutorship of Senior Faculty is too large. There is no reason for not asking help of retired Professors for this kind of tutorship.
- Some graduate students dream of a future at the university, though it is increasingly obvious that there is no possibility of realizing these dreams.

### **Recommendations**

1. To try to increase the number of good undergraduate and graduate students without diminishing the exigencies of the Department.
2. To make public the need of meeting the critical challenges that confront the system of higher education in Israel today and the lack of familiarity of the students with the literary and cultural richness of the Jewish people.
3. To pay special attention to MA and PhD students, offering them a methodological guide and an adequate personal tutorship, and providing them grants and tools for becoming researchers, with the hope that some of them will assure the future of the Department.

### **Alumni**

High quality alumni love the institution where they studied. Many of them are teachers in different institutions or writers, etc.

Many, however, see the HUJI as a bit too traditional, and would have preferred to work on living writers.

Some of them regret not to have received enough grants and not to have been offered the possibility of continuing in the institution.

But summing up, all of them were very satisfied.

### **Recommendations**

1. To foster the good relations between the alumni and the university.
2. To take into consideration their experiences and opinions.

### **Research**

The Committee finds the level of research of the faculty members among the very best in the world.

### **Recommendations**

1. To continue the same lines of high quality research in the best tradition of this university.

### **Broader Organizational Structure**

- After a period of new divisions and renaming of the Departments, the inclusion of the Department of Hebrew Literature inside the School of Literatures seems to have been a wise decision and has been executed successfully. It means to foster a healthy merging of theory of literature, comparative literature and historical Hebrew literature that is a benefit for all the members of the School.

- The separation of Hebrew literature as a separate Department (independent from Yiddish or Folklore) helped to increase the number of students of literature.

### **Recommendations**

1. To maintain this organizational structure that has proved to be successful.

## **Infrastructure**

It is well known that the present building does not offer the best conditions for the work of the faculty members or the administrative staff. There is no convenient place for numerous classes.

The simple fact that the department cannot even afford full-time secretary shows how precarious is the situation.

## **Recommendations**

1. To try to improve the infrastructure of the Department with larger rooms for Faculty, staff and classes.
2. Improving the situation of the secretariat should be a priority.

## **Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations**

1. To enhance the importance of Hebrew Literature as an expression of Hebrew Culture, giving it the central position that it deserves. The Committee thinks that the present and future of Hebrew literary studies are at a very difficult moment and that urgent solutions are needed. The Hebrew University and the Faculty of Humanities should demonstrate more concretely the importance they say that they attribute to Hebrew Literature.
2. To take particular care to cover the areas where consecrated Professors are retiring now or in the next few years, assuring the continuation of their academic efforts.
3. To increase the possibilities of promotion of young Faculty, covering the gap between the two generations, in order to ensure the future of the Department. It should, however, not foster inbreeding, since it should be attracting the best professionals from other Universities.
4. To foster the best preparation of the coming generation of Faculty from an open and pluralistic perspective, making easy the learning of languages and other cultures (the background of Hebrew Literature), favoring residence in other universities and the participation in conferences.
5. To assure that important general courses are taught by Senior Faculty.
6. To avoid the fact that Senior Faculty have to be tutors of too many PhD students.
7. To accept for the promotion of young Faculty publications in Hebrew, recommending at the same time to try to be recognized in the academic world with publications in other languages.
8. To improve the collaboration with other Universities in Israel and abroad, sending students to other recognized centers and accepting the credits from those institutions.
9. Some unattended areas of Hebrew Literature should be urgently covered in the Department. Among them, especially, literature in Italy during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Hassidic literature and the literature of the time of the Haskalah. In the area of medieval literature, more attention should be paid to non-liturgical forms of literature, with a more pluralistic perspective. If it is necessary to bring new specialists for these areas, the University should take care of it.

10. Not to let decline the level of general courses due to the need of attracting more students, leaving aside the students of Hebrew Literature.
11. To pay special attention to MA and PhD students, offering them a methodological guide and an adequate personal tutorship, and providing them grants and tools for becoming researchers, with the hope that some of them will assure the future of the Department.
12. To try to improve the infrastructure of the Department with larger rooms for Faculty, staff and classes. Improving the situation of the secretariat should be a priority.

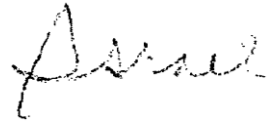


**Signed by:**



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**Prof. Arnold Band  
Committee Chair**



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**Prof. Dan Ben-Amos**



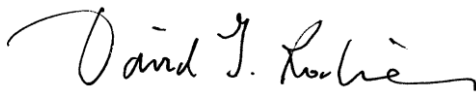
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**Prof. Yehuda Friedlander**



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**Prof. Nili Gold**



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**Prof. David Roskies**



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**prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos**

# 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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**Appendix 2- Site Visit Schedule**

**Hebrew literature - Schedule of site visit – Hebrew university of Jerusalem**

**Wednesday, May 23, 2012**

Time	Subject	Participants	Location
09:30-10:00	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Menahem Ben Sasson- President Sarah Stroumsa- Rector Yaacov Schul- Vice rector	President Office
10:00 -10:45	Meeting with the Dean of the faculty	Prof. Reuven Amitai	Humanities Building-room 5411
10:45-11:30	Meeting with the academic and administrative heads of the Department of Hebrew Literature	ד"ר אריאל הירשפלד	Humanities Building-room 5411
11:30-12:15	Meeting with senior faculty and representatives of relevant committees*	פרופ' חנן חבר, פרופ' שולמית אליצור, ד"ר אסתר חזון, ד"ר עמינדב דיקמן, ד"ר תמר הס	Humanities Building-room 5411
12:15-13:00	Lunch (in the same room)		Humanities Building-room 5411
13:00-13:45	Tour of campus	ד"ר אריאל הירשפלד	Humanities Building-room 5411
13:45-14:30	Meeting with Junior academic faculty and Adjunct faculty *	ד"ר טלי ארטמן- פרטוק, ד"ר יהושע גרנט, ד"ר רפי צירקין- סדן, אריאל לוינסון, ד"ר שמרית פלד, ד"ר גילה וכמן, אורן פרי-הר, ד"ר מיכל הלד, נעמה צאל	Humanities Building-room 5411

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

**Thursday, May 24, 2012**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participants</b>	
10:00-10:45	Meeting with BA students**	Up to 10 students	Humanities Building-room 5411
10:45-11:30	Meeting with MA students**	Up to 10 students	Humanities Building-room 5411
11:30-12:15	Meeting with PhD students**	Up to 10 students	Humanities Building-room 5411
12:15-13:45	Lunch (in the same room)+ Closed-door meeting of the committee		Humanities Building-room 5411
13:45-14:15	Meeting with Alumni**	ד"ר תמר קדרי, ד"ר מאירה (מימי) חסקין, שרון כץ	Humanities Building-room 5411
14:15-14:45	Summation meeting with the head of the Department of Hebrew Literature	ד"ר אריאל הירשפלד	Humanities Building-room 5411
14:45-15:30	Summation meeting with Dean of Faculty of Humanities and	Prof. Reuven Amitai	Humanities Building-room 5411
15:30-16:00	Summation meeting with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Sarah Stroumsa- Rector Yaacov Schul- Vice rector Rector's Office	Rector's Office

\*\* 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.