



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

## **Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies**

**Evaluation 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).

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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-Committee Procedures**

The Committee held its first formal meetings on April 23, 2010. At this meeting committee members were given an overview of higher education in Israel and a description of the Israeli CHE. They also discussed Middle Eastern Studies programs in Israel and fundamental issues concerning the committee's quality assessment activity. Committee members had received copies of the departmental reports before this date.

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.

*This report deals with the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.*

The Committee's visit to Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUI) took place on May 5-6, 2010.

The committee spent one day in intensive meetings with senior administrators, tenure and tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, and BA, MA and PhD students. Time constraints prevented a visit to the library and other facilities. In every case we wish to thank the appropriate individuals for their involvement in our proceedings as their input allowed us to explore in significantly greater depth many of the issues raised in the self-study reports.

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

### **Chapter 3: Evaluation of Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

*\* 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. Background*

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem was an early world leader in teaching and publishing research about the Middle East. Its program, established in 1926, continued at the highest level the European Orientalist tradition best exemplified by scholars working in German universities. Within that tradition, the disciplines of philology, mostly Arabic, and history held pride of place, and the medieval period was the preferred era of study. In Israel, this tradition branched out to some degree to include economic and social history and increasingly a concern for political developments in the modern Arab states. This department came into being as the locus of these new studies. Scholars from this department later founded the Middle East programs at Tel Aviv University (TAU) and the University of Haifa.

One aspect of the Hebrew University model that continues at TAU and Haifa is the existence of a Department of Arabic language alongside the Middle East Studies department. Mitigating this separation of subjects at HJU was the inclusion of both departments within an Institute of Asian and African Studies that also housed departments of East Asian Studies and Indian, Iranian and Armenian Studies. For better or worse, in 2009 HJU implemented a reform that relocated the Department of Arabic Language and Literature to the newly organized School of Literature and the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies to the newly organized School of History, creating a challenging organizational divide between the two units.

This Committee therefore had to assess the viability and effectiveness of the two-department format. As detailed in the recommendations section of this report, the Committee has concluded that an integration of the two departments would be in the best interests of both units and of the university as a whole.

#### *1. Teaching staff and research*

Over the past decade the department has experienced a one-third decline in tenured and tenure-track positions along with a two-thirds cut in the budget available to hire adjunct teachers. Deplorable as this shrinkage has been, it is not out of line with what most other universities in Israel have experienced in comparable fields. However, certain other departments that have been stricken have also experienced significant declines in enrollment over the same period while enrollment in this department has remained solid at all degree levels. Currently, 13 senior faculty members, 6 tenured language teachers, 19 adjunct teachers, and 4 retired faculty members (unpaid volunteers) teach in the department. Most of the members of the Department have a strong record of publication and research and integrate this research into their teaching and

syllabi. The themes of research span a wide range of interests, including the Mongol and Mamluk empires, Inner Asia, pre-1948 Palestinian collaboration with Zionism, the Deobandi movement of India, Islamic men of learning past and present, among other themes. A significant number of the senior and middle-range faculty publish with major university and commercial presses (University of Chicago Press, University of California Press, Cambridge University Press, Brill, and I. B. Tauris). Many of the faculty are engaged in international collaboration and have accepted visitorships elsewhere, and many have successfully applied for local (Israel Science Foundation) and international grant support.

This Department also enjoys the advantage of a very healthy age distribution among the faculty. It has lost several of its most distinguished senior members through retirement in recent years, but it is not facing the wholesale generational transition that some other departments in Israel face. HUI's Islamic and Middle East Studies Department continues to build on its long tradition of scholarly excellence, and the research interests of the faculty are broad-ranging and methodologically diverse. In short, this is a healthy department that merits strengthening as resources come available.

For reasons that we provide in a separate report, the Department of Arabic Language and Literature is in a more precarious position, and we strongly recommend the integration of the two departments under the aegis of the Department of Islamic and Middle East Studies. There is a precedent for such integration. According to the self-assessment of the Department of Islamic and Middle East Studies, the emphasis in the early years of the Institute of Oriental Studies (which later became the Institute of Oriental and African Studies) was on the study of classical Arabic and the medieval Islamic world. Over the decades, however, the scope of research and teaching was expanded both within the world of Islam and beyond. The teaching program grew to include other Middle Eastern languages, especially Persian and Turkish, and the history and cultures of those who spoke these tongues. In addition, modern Middle Eastern history became an important part of the curriculum.

The expansion of the Institute's mandate did not mark a separation between the Institute's Orientalist foundation and the newer activities. This is clear by the Department's inclusion of specialists on the pre-modern Middle East. The Committee suggests that adding faculty skills in philology and linguistics while maintaining a specific graduate degree track in these fields would enhance the image and reputation of the Department, renamed perhaps as the Department of Islamic, Arabic, and Middle Eastern Studies. This integration can facilitate additional faculty appointments that would enhance both departmental divisions.

## *2. Teaching program and Students*

Departmental curricula and syllabi provide persuasive evidence that the internationally recognized excellence of the faculty is deployed to the advantage of students at all degree levels. Confirmation of this impression comes from the statistics relating to students. Unlike the trend toward shrinkage in humanities enrollments seen at certain other universities, student interest in this Department, as in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, has held steady over the past five years. During 2008-2009, 294 BA students, 94 MA students and 23 PhD students

were enrolled in the Department. Students spoke glowingly of study groups that they organize and that meet regularly, as well as regular self-organized lectures, field trips, and other activities.

Mitigating this evidence of strong student appeal is a three-year BA dropout rate that averages 27.55% over a period of six years. The self-assessment asserts that the high rate of first-year dropouts is due to the Department's rigorous grading procedures, and that students usually transfer to a less-demanding program. The Committee feels that the Department would be wise to begin regular surveys of students who drop out to find out whether the assumed rationales are accurate or whether more students can be retained through changes that do not dilute the quality of the program. Based on the self-study, we note in this regard that staffing and fiscal limitations have stripped large lecture courses of accompanying small-group tutorials for discussing and analyzing readings. In our view, this false economy deprives advanced students of the opportunity to enhance their teaching skills and introductory students of the skills and support needed to proceed to advanced courses.

The Department's graduate students represented a wide range of interests, reflecting the changing nature of both Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. The statement by one of the faculty that the Department's goal was not to reproduce themselves in their graduate students was reflected in both the diversity of topics being researched for MA and PhDs as well as in the abstracts in English of MA and PhD theses completed in 2008-2009 and made available to the Committee. The quality of the latter ranged from excellent to solid, and is an indication that the high standards associated with Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Hebrew University are being maintained. The students with whom the Committee met praised the quality of their advisors and the openness of faculty to include appropriate faculty from other institutions on student thesis committees.

While holders of Humanities Fellowships had to participate in appropriate seminars, we recommend more opportunities for peer input that can benefit all students. For example, a writing seminar for MA and PhD students in the recommended combined Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and the Department of Arabic Language and Literature would be an excellent setting for peer input and the building of broader networks among Hebrew University graduate students interested in Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. Such a seminar would also create a better appreciation of current trends in more aspects of scholarship than is currently available and an ability to incorporate these trends into current thesis and dissertation research.

### *3. Library and Facilities*

The need to review two departments in two days, as opposed to the usual practice of giving two days to each department, prevented the Committee from visiting the library and learning about its needs and plans. For the same reason—insufficient time—the Committee cannot comment on the Department's physical facilities or those of the Institute of Asian and African Studies.

## **Chapter 4: Recommendations and timetable**

### **1. Immediate**

The Committee recommends the creation of a department, possibly named the Department of Arabic, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies, that will integrate the existing Department of Middle East History and Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies to enhance the international and Israel-wide standing of both units. Faculty members in both departments have already indicated how the two programs are complementary in many respects. Moreover, integration can preserve the strong distinctive features of the two existing departments while encouraging faculty members to reach wider academic audiences. A properly conceived integration will contribute to enhancing Hebrew University's international prestige in studying the Middle East that everyone agrees has waned in recent years. The alternative of adding enough professorial lines to both departments to bring each of them back to the high level they once enjoyed does not seem realistic under current funding assumptions. If integration can successfully be achieved, each current department should be assured that it will receive some new faculty lines.

In recognition of the illustrious founders of the Hebrew University program and of the Orientalist tradition that they established, a specific track or major in Arabic philology and textual studies should be identified within the program of the amalgamated department. This track, reserved for students of the highest linguistic qualifications and interest, would guarantee preservation of the philological tradition. Indeed, the expectation of the Committee is that the philological tradition will prosper under this new arrangement.

### **2. Intermediate**

Pursuant to the above recommendation, there will be a need to be some means of monitoring, and where necessary fine-tuning, the coordination of programs resulting from the combining of the two departments. A committee consisting of equal numbers of senior faculty from both departments would seem to be the best model.

### **3. Long Term**

Our short-term recommendation for the integration of the two departments is also our long-term recommendation.



**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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**Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule**

**3 May 2010**

**THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM**  
Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies/Arabic Language & Literature

**Schedule of Site Visit**  
**May 5-6, 2010**

**Wednesday May 5, 2010**  
**Faculty meeting room - 5411**

08:30-09:15	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Sarah Stroumsa, Rector Prof. Yaacov Schul, Vice rector (Rector's office, Minhala Bldg. room 408)
<b>Department of Arabic Language and Literature</b>		
09:15-10:00	Closed door meeting	
10:00-10:45	Meeting with the heads (academic and administrative) of the department	- Prof. Meir Bar-Asher - Prof. Simon Hopkins
10:45-11:45	Meeting with Senior Academic Faculty + with representatives of relevant departmental committees	- Prof. Simon Hopkins - Prof. Michael Lecker; - Dr. Ori Shachmon
11:45-12:15	Meeting with Junior academic faculty	- Mr. Roy Vilozny - Ms. Sagit Butbul
12:15-13:15	Lunch (closed door working session in the same room)	
13:15-13:45	Meeting with adjunct faculty	- Dr. Michal Levi - Dr. Sagi Polka
13:45-14:30	Meeting with B.A. students	- Ms. Moran Tal (1 <sup>st</sup> year) - Ms. Maram Jarayisi (2 <sup>nd</sup> year) - Mr. Tomer Antebi (2 <sup>nd</sup> year) - Mr. Elad Artsi (2 <sup>nd</sup> year) - Ms. Thamina Ighbariyya (3 <sup>rd</sup> year) - Ms. Navit Moshe (3 <sup>rd</sup> year) - Mr. Daniel Behar (3 <sup>rd</sup> year) - Mr. Gilad Weiss (3 <sup>rd</sup> year)
14:30-15:15	Meeting with M.A. students	- Mr. Guy Ron-Gilboa - Ms. Livnat Barkan - Ms. Amina Sayyad

		- Mr. Elon Harvey
15:15-16:00	Meeting with Ph.D. students	- Mr. Michael Ebstein - Mr. Amir Gaash - Mr. Yona Sheffer
16:00-16:30	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee	

**Thursday, May 6, 2010:**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Room/Location</b>
<b>Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies</b>			
09:00-09:45	Meeting with the heads of the Department	Prof. Elie Podeh , Chair (2004-09) Dr. Eyal Ginio, Chair (since February 2010)	
09:45-10:45	Meeting with Senior Academic Faculty + with representatives of relevant departmental committees*	Prof. Reuven Amitai Prof. Amikam Elad Prof. Michal Biran Prof. Steven Kaplan Prof. Ella Landau-Tasseron Prof. Elie Podeh Prof. Ruth Roded Dr. Liat Kozma Dr. Julia Rubanovich Dr. Ron Shaham Mr. Ofer Efrati	
10:45-11:15	Meeting with adjunct faculty*	Dr. Hillel Cohen Dr. Miriam Frenkel Dr. Bosmat Yefet-Avshalom Mr. Elie Stern	
11:15-11:45	Meeting with the Dean of the Humanities Faculty	Prof. Israel Bartal	
11:45-12:30	Meeting with B.A. students**	Ms. Tamar Halevi (1 <sup>st</sup> year student) Mr. Ori Mizrahi Mr. Guy Papo Mr. Yoav Katz (2 <sup>nd</sup> year student) Ms. Ayelet Hanfling (3 <sup>rd</sup> year student) Ms. Yael Gidanian	

		(3 <sup>rd</sup> year student)	
12:30-13:15	Lunch (closed door session in the same room)		
13:15-14:00	Meeting with M.A. students**	Mr. Eyal Berelovich Mr. Yevgeni Frumin Mr. Elad Giladi Ms. Rachel Goldberg Mr. Yoni Graff Ms. Inbal Negbi Ms. Yael Segev Mr. Nadav Solomonovich	
14:00-14:45	Meeting with PhD students**	Ms. Na'ama Arnon Mr. Taufik Dea'dle Mr. David Guvrin Mr. Amir Mazor Mr. Guy Rak Mr. Ronni Shaked	
14:45-15:45	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee		
15:45-16:30	Summation meeting with heads of the institution	Prof. Sarah Stroumsa, Rector Prof. Yaacov Schul, Vice rector (Rector's office, Minhala Bldg. room 408)	

\* 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.