

RECOMMENDATION TO CLOSE THE DEPARTMENT OF HEBREW AND SEMITIC STUDIES

Background

This process began with a self-study completed in April of 2013 by the executive committee of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies, with the assistance of faculty from Philosophy, Slavic, and History. Among the conclusions reached in that report were that the undergraduate major in Biblical Hebrew and the graduate program in Modern Hebrew needed to be closed for lack of students. The report also concluded that the major in Modern Hebrew had become unsustainable, owing to the loss of faculty, and that it would benefit from merging with the undergraduate major in Jewish Studies. The committee further concluded that the graduate program in Biblical Hebrew would benefit from incorporation into either Classics or Jewish Studies. The department itself would be closed as part of these mergers.

Both Jewish Studies and Classics were amenable to the proposed mergers, and the negotiations over transfer of faculty and staff lines, division of the assets of Hebrew and Semitic Studies (especially Foundation money), and relocation of the offices for the graduate program began in the fall of 2013. In September 2013, the faculty of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies requested and received permission for the department to restructure and in December 2013, the executive committee approved a motion to dissolve the department. Also in December 2013, continuing commitments to faculty members and indefinite appointments of lecturers were transferred to the Center for Jewish Studies and the Department of Classics.

The department contacted alumni, friends, and donors, apprising them of the impending changes. There were a number of requests for further information, as well as some distressed communications about the department's dissolution, in particular from one donor seeking reassurance that the programs in Hebrew will continue to thrive. The College of Letters & Science has also invested in constructing a publication to be distributed to all stakeholders that will highlight the history of the department's programs and the opportunities gained by reorganization.

Academic programs

When the L&S APC approved the request to restructure, it also approved formal closure of admission to the biblical Hebrew track of the department's undergraduate major. At the time it was assumed that the Modern Hebrew track would persist, since the Center for Jewish Studies graciously agreed to assume responsibility for the Modern Hebrew language program. CJS faculty and staff worked with Hebrew and Semitic Studies faculty to develop a plan to accommodate the currently declared HSS majors; in the course of those discussions, they noted that overlap between the undergraduate major in Jewish Studies and the Hebrew major can be better managed by developing a track in Jewish Studies to focus on "Modern Hebrew Language and Culture." Since having only one major would ease the advising burden on CJS, while also creating a desirable focus in the JS major, the Hebrew faculty agreed to close the undergraduate major in Hebrew, including the BS-Education, effective Fall 2014. As part of the "teach-out" plan, the currently enrolled Hebrew students will be allowed to complete the Hebrew major if they wish to do so. Future students who wish to study Hebrew will be directed to the new program in the Jewish Studies Major. Since the Jewish Studies Major is a program within L&S, all dean's office and student services responsibilities will continue to be met by L&S.

On February 11, 2014, the executive committee of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies voted unanimously to request that its graduate program be closed, effective fall semester, 2015. Students matriculating into the program through the spring of 2015 will have the right to receive their degree under the name of Hebrew and Semitic Studies and will be taught out under that program's requirements.

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-2-

Subsequently, the Department of Classics voted to merge the graduate program in Biblical Hebrew with the graduate programs in Classics. Biblical Hebrew will constitute one of the options for graduate students matriculating into Classics, beginning in the fall of 2015. The department's graduate students have expressed enthusiasm about the merger and are already finding benefits via expanded opportunities for TA positions. Continuing graduate students in Biblical Hebrew will follow their major professors to the Department of Classics, and the impact of this change on those students will be minimal. In fact, the addition of the Biblical Hebrew faculty and students to the Department of Classics has stimulated discussions in Classics, which is preparing proposals to revise its course and program array to reflect new opportunities to study Ancient Near East Studies.

The subject listing for Hebrew will be replaced by two new subject listings: Hebrew, Biblical and Hebrew, Modern. These listings, although housed in separate units, will maintain prominence for the college's curriculum in Hebrew and permit students to locate its offerings readily. Many of the courses listed in the current Hebrew subject listing at the undergraduate level are already cross-listed with Classics and/or Jewish Studies. At the graduate level, Classics will also acquire many of the courses, and similarly, the faculty regard it as important and consistent with the current Classics subject listing structure to create a listing for the ancient or biblical Hebrew language courses. Implementation of the replacement of the Hebrew subject listing with the new "Hebrew-Modern" and "Hebrew-Biblical" listings is under way. The Hebrew listing will persist through the Summer 2015 session, under the joint responsibility of the Department of Classics and the Center for Jewish Studies, both of which have been granted Curricular Services access to that listing, for purposes of managing courses needed for the "teach out" plans for the Hebrew programs. Students will enroll through the new listing in the fall of 2015.

The closure of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies was approved unanimously by a vote of the department's executive committee on December 05, 2013. The proposal was subsequently approved by the Letters & Science Academic Planning Council on May 06, 2014, and the University Academic Planning Council on June 23, 2014.