

Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies – Program Assessment 2009

Modern Hebrew Major

Language Program

A major goal of our program is the ability to comprehend and speak oral Hebrew on the same level as written Hebrew. We introduced a comprehension/speaking module in our first and second year classes. For first year students we have created a cumulative interactive program. This module enables the students to listen and speak Hebrew for an hour every week and to review grammar and vocabulary. In the second year we have added an “open ended” component. The students listen to pre-recorded dialogues, write their own dialogues, practice with their partners, and present skits. We have assessed a meaningful and significant improvement in the students’ ability to communicate orally with Israelis as well as to understand Hebrew songs, movies, and news items.

Literature program

The fact that a great majority of my students have enrolled in the spring semester for the second part of “Survey of Modern Hebrew Literature,” speaks to the success of the program. The two-pronged approach of intensive writing and frequent oral presentations brought forth the good results. The students write for each class and have the opportunity to correct their mistakes and thus improve the grading. Constant writing has also improved the ability to communicate clearly. The requirement of class presentations has helped to develop both oral skills and self-confidence as they present complex ideas and facts in a foreign language. While many of the students have been realizing their potential, the amount of learning that has been taking place has taught me that consistency and high intellectual demands ensure successful and satisfying learning.

Biblical Hebrew Program

Undergraduate major

In the undergraduate Biblical Hebrew program, we have worked hard to improve the language pedagogy through introduction of modern methods of language acquisition (active learning and language games) into the study of an ancient, written language. We have also modified the major requirements to allow for more individualized programs of learning.

Graduate programs

The graduate program in Biblical Hebrew (M.A., Ph.D) has been evaluated by the faculty and we have modified our primary instruments of assessment, the MA prelims and PhD exams. One recent change we made is to divide the Semitics exam into two components: (1) Basic Semitics: Semitic languages and linguistics (other than Hebrew). All PhD candidates are required to take this. (2) Advanced Semitics: A more technical knowledge of Semitic linguistics and more difficult texts are required. Instead of the advanced Semitics exams, students can choose to take an individualized Exam. This is based on a reading list worked out by the student and his or her advisor, which are related to the student’s dissertation topic.

Moreover, we constantly fine-tune the exams to strengthen the assessment and the students’ performance as the exams indicate. For example, we found that some students are inadequate in oral reading and sight translation, so we add these components to the oral exam taken as part of the PhD prelims.