

Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies

Plan of Assessment of the Undergraduate Major and Graduate Program

The Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies consists of two programs: Undergraduate Modern Hebrew Program and Graduate Program. While the overall mission of the Department is to advance the knowledge of Hebrew language and literature and of Jewish culture generally, the different aspects and levels of each of the programs posit different goals and objectives and therefore require different approach to the assessment plan.

A brief recapitulation of the mission of each program will demonstrate the need for separate assessment strategies for undergraduate majors and for graduate students.

THE GRADUATE PROGRAM in Biblical Hebrew (BH) educates students in the academic study of ancient Hebrew literature. The program offers a Master of Arts Degree in Hebrew and Semitic Studies. The MA in Hebrew and Semitic Studies may also be earned with a secondary concentration in Greek, in cooperation with the Department of classics.

The component of preparation for professional career or for further studies to advance academic careers constitutes an integral part of the graduate program and therefore plays a crucial part in curriculum construction and assessment planning.

THE MODERN HEBREW PROGRAM combines advanced language proficiency with strong knowledge of modern Hebrew literature. The first four semesters constitute a language program which provides the students with a functional proficiency in modern Hebrew. The remaining six semesters comprise a sequence of increasingly advanced courses in modern Hebrew literature, culminating in a capstone seminar.

MODERN HEBREW majors program fall into two distinct categories. The majority of students are double majors for whom the Hebrew major is not motivated by career choice but rather by a desire to make the study of Hebrew literature and culture an important part of their liberal arts education. Only a small segment of students intends to pursue programs of graduate study or employment opportunities in which the knowledge of Hebrew is either required or useful. The assessment planning in this program will focus therefore on often difficult to evaluate aspects which are nonetheless firmly rooted in the very essence of liberal education, such as, cultural enhancement, sense of ethnic identity, understanding and tolerance toward other ethnic groups, communal and social contributions etc.

The above descriptions demonstrate the wide scope of Hebrew language and literature offered by the Department of Hebrew and Semitic studies and, at the same time, indicate the diversity of goals and objectives that underline the philosophy of each program. The difference which determines, to a large extent, the goals as well as assessment strategies of the programs relates to the objectives and expectations of the students in the respective programs.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GRADUATE PROGRAM

MA Studies

An MA student should develop the following skills:

1. The ability to read the biblical text with good comprehension and fair fluency.
2. The ability to parse all standard forms in BH.
3. The knowledge of a cognate Semitic language, both for the purpose of enhancing the understanding of BH and for the ability to read documents from the ancient Near East.
4. An understanding of critical scholarly methodology in Bible studies.
5. An introductory understanding of the history and culture of ancient Israel.

PH.D Studies

A PhD student should develop the following skills, *in addition to the above*:

6. The ability to criticize and evaluate modern scholarship.
7. The ability to read the biblical text with a high degree of comprehension and fluency. The comprehension should be on a higher *analytical* level.
8. The ability to parse all form of BH and to explain complex syntactic constructions in terms of modern linguistic methods.
9. The knowledge of three cognate Semitic languages (including the one studied for the MA).
10. The ability to read the ancient translations, especially the Greek, and to use them in a sophisticated manner in text criticism and the study of the history of interpretation.
11. An acquaintance with current methodologies and perspectives in Bible Studies.
12. An ability to read non-biblical classical Hebrew texts, esp. the Dead Sea Scrolls.
13. An understanding of ancient post-Biblical Jewish literature, particularly Hellenistic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls, including an idea of their contents and problematics.
14. The ability to plan and execute an independent research project and write it in clear form and persuasive argumentation in a dissertation.

A. Professional goals

1. MA program

The MA program aims at bringing the student to a level of knowledge adequate for teaching BH and Bible studies on an undergraduate level, as, for example, in a small college.

2. PhD program

The PhD program aims at bringing the student to a level of knowledge and understanding necessary for (1) teaching BH and Bible studies on the undergraduate and graduate level, and (2) undertaking creative scholarship in ancient Hebrew studies.

These professional goals do not mean that all our students end up in teaching careers, although most intend to. Most PhD students do find work in higher education and have proven successful in it. Other MA and PhD students have gone into academic librarianship, the ministry (some proceed to seminary after an MA here), religious education, and even college administration. In all cases, the *definition* of the goal in terms of academics fits the students' desires and leaves open the most options for alternative career paths.

HEBREW UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS PROGRAM

The objectives of the Hebrew Studies undergraduate major can best be articulated in terms of three interrelated types of goals: skill goals, knowledge goals and critical thinking goals.

The skill goals that we expect our undergraduate majors to attain are:

1. The ability to read and comprehend modern Hebrew literary texts at the Advanced-High level (according to the 1991 Hebrew Proficiency Guidelines) ;
2. The ability to write Hebrew essays involving abstract concepts and sophisticated thinking at the Advanced-High level (according to the 1991 Hebrew Proficiency Guidelines) ;
3. The ability to engage in a discussion of literary and cultural issues in Hebrew at the Advanced level (according to the 1991 Hebrew Proficiency Guidelines);
4. The ability to use modern information technology as it relates to Hebrew Studies, primarily the ability to conduct bibliographical searches.

The knowledge goals that we expect our undergraduate majors to attain are:

1. Advanced knowledge of Hebrew grammar and syntax;
2. Basic knowledge of cultural and intellectual history relevant to modern Hebrew literature;
3. Basic knowledge of the main developments and themes in modern Hebrew literature;
4. Knowledge of representative works by major modern Hebrew writers;
5. Basic knowledge of tools and methods of literary analysis.

The critical thinking goals we expect our undergraduate students to attain are:

1. The ability to contextualize works of modern Hebrew literature;

2. The ability to read works of modern Hebrew literature critically and independently;
3. The ability to identify valuable issues for literary study and research;
4. The ability to write critically, cogently, and accurately about literary issues.

We expect that undergraduates will acquire the specific skills and knowledge necessary for a Hebrew Studies major by taking, or testing out of, the introductory Hebrew language sequence, Hebrew 101-102, 201-202, and then completing the requirements for the major as described in the Hebrew Major Requirements sheet that is attached to this report.

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

GRADUATE PROGRAM

A. Instruments of evaluation

3. MA and PhD Exams

The most important instruments of evaluation are built into the program: the battery of exams at the end of each degree program. Essentially the same types of questions are asked each year, and we can tell quickly how things are going. These exams are:

MA Exams

1. Hebrew language (translation, grammar.)
2. General exam (based on reading list, together with course work.)
3. Oral exam (reading and exegesis of prepared and sight passages.)

PhD exams:

1. Texts exam (translation of passages, together with textual and philological notes, and consultation of the Septuagint and Peshitta.
2. Semitic languages exam
3. General exam, based on reading list and course work. Areas: Biblical literature; Israelite history and archaeology; Hebrew language; post-biblical Judaism.

4. Postgraduation questionnaires.

Every 3-5 years (depending on the number of graduates during that period), we will mail a questionnaire to MA and PhD recipients asking about their reactions to the program and their ideas on improving it. We have done that in the past with valuable results. An example of the questionnaire is attached. A considerable portion of the questionnaire will be devoted to students' career plans and the implementation of such plans. This includes further graduate studies, obtaining gainful employment, and service to the community on part time or voluntary basis.

MODERN HEBREW MAJORS

The objective of the assessment plan is to verify the extent of success of the modern Hebrew major to implement an integrated curriculum of Hebrew language and literature in accordance with the Department's mission statement as specified above.

There are, on average, 25 undergraduate modern Hebrew majors every year. The Department proposes a number of instruments for measuring the achievements of these majors.

1. *Capstone Evaluation*

We offer three courses that serve as capstone courses for majors. They are Hebrew 402 (second part of "Survey of Modern Hebrew Literature"), Hebrew 534 and 535 ("Readings in Contemporary Hebrew Literature"). Performing well in these courses requires mastery of the three types of educational objectives listed above. The Department will require periodic reports from faculty who teach these courses, indicating their assessment of the level of previous preparation of the enrolled majors.

2. *Portfolio Evaluation*

The Department will maintain an anonymous portfolio of papers and exams of all graduating majors. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will conduct periodic reviews of these portfolios in order to assess the achievements they reflect in relation to the educational goals of the major.

3. *Exit Questionnaires*

The department will develop a questionnaire for graduating majors. The questionnaire will contain questions designed to assess the effectiveness of the modern Hebrew major from the students' point of view. All graduating majors will be requested to respond to the questionnaire. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will conduct periodic reviews of the questionnaires in order to compare the Department's assessment of the effectiveness of the modern Hebrew major curriculum with the assessments of the students who have completed this curriculum.

4. *Post-Graduation Questionnaires*

The department will develop a questionnaire to be mailed three years after completion of the program. The questions will be designed to assess the ways and manner in which Hebrew major studies have assisted the graduates in their post-graduation pursuits, their choices in both professional and personal life, and social interaction.

The Departmental Curriculum Committee will assess the assessment tools at an annual meeting. The assessment process will be based on

1. evaluation of the returned questionnaires in both programs
2. student evaluations of the courses taught in this particular year
3. personal and/or group interviews with a number majors and graduate students at a selected

level of study. For instance, MA candidates will be invited to speak about the program, or students studying at 402 level will be asked to express their view on the program. The summary of the main points raised at a meeting will constitute the basis for the following year assessment meeting. Both written and oral assessments of the programs and their evaluations will provide the basis for an ongoing assessment process.

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QUESTIONNAIRE TO RECENT PHD AND MA RECIPIENTS

The Hebrew Department would appreciate your taking the time to answer these questions, in order to help us improve our graduate program. Given your experience of the program and your present distance from it, you should be well able to assess the program objectively and suggest changes. A copy of the most recent graduate program information is enclosed. We would also like to hear about your current work, achievements, and publications.

With best wishes,

Michael V. Fox
Graduate Advisor

name (optional):

address:

email:

date:

1. What course requirements should be removed from the MA.
2. Given the constraints of our staffing, what courses should be substituted for current offerings, regularly or on occasion?
3. Was the program overall too demanding? Too easy?
4. What requirements should be reduced? Increased?

5. Were the reading lists of appropriate size? Do you have any specific suggestions for changes?

6. What lacks in your own knowledge did you discover since graduation that you feel could be supplied by changes in the curriculum?

7. How well did your graduate studies equip you for your present employment, insofar as it is in a relevant field?

8. How well did your graduate studies educate you as a scholar of Bible and Biblical Hebrew, apart from their practical application?

Further comments appreciated:

Information on your current employment, publications, etc.