

## Judaic and Near Eastern Studies

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the B.A. in Judaic Studies and the B.A. in Middle Eastern Studies.

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Allan Arkush (Binghamton University)  
Jamal Elias (University of Pennsylvania)

### ■ Main Issues

The reviewers concurred with the 2002 visiting team's positive findings, praising the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies for upholding "the highest academic standards," particularly in terms of faculty scholarship and the quality of the undergraduate programs. However, they also noted the existence of significant interpersonal tensions that have developed in the context of the standstill in departmental growth and lack of attainment of disciplinary balance.

The reviewers remarked on the prolific scholarship of the faculty, noting that they have not rested on their laurels since the last review, instead producing books and articles for esteemed presses and journals, and exerting a significant scholarly impact in their field. The visiting team also concurred with the findings of the 2002 reviewers about the department's undergraduate programs in Judaic Studies and Middle Eastern Studies, noting that both the programs' strengths and weaknesses persist. The department's "far too presentist" orientation remains to be balanced by expertise in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature. The fact that the department continues to have only one full-time faculty appointment in Middle Eastern Studies presents a persistent and "very great imbalance" between the two departmental components; over time, this has created an "untenable" situation characterized by "lack of civility in interpersonal relations." The team noted that while the last reviewers' hiring recommendations were strongly endorsed by the Dean, those recommendations remain unachieved.

The visiting team also commented on the pattern of weaker proficiency in Hebrew language amongst those students who learned Hebrew within the department in comparison with those who have studied it elsewhere. The team suggested "a more thorough process of assessment of student learning outcomes" for elementary Hebrew, along with other measures to ensure adherence to appropriate standards.

The team offered several specific recommendations:

- Expand and reorganize Middle Eastern Studies through the hiring of a senior Islamist, which could open the door to restructuring Middle Eastern Studies as a semi-autonomous unit.
- Hire a faculty member in classical Jewish texts (Bible and rabbinics), to attain more of a balance in emphasis.

- Generally, hire more faculty in both Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. One possibility to be considered would be appointing a distinguished visiting scholar in Islamic Studies.

## ■ **Response to the Review**

The department expressed appreciation for the visiting team's positive observations concerning faculty members' ongoing scholarly accomplishments and record of public outreach, as well as for the strength of its undergraduate programs. The department also emphasized that it concurs with the team's conclusion that departmental tensions have grown in the wake of the disproportionate emphasis on modern Jewish studies and lack of faculty in Middle Eastern Studies, and that the faculty are nearly unanimous in the opinion that the single greatest need of the department is the hiring of an Islamist (i.e., an historian of Islamic Studies). The Chair expressed his agreement with the idea of conducting a search for a visiting distinguished scholar in Islamic Studies. The Dean added his own endorsement of this hiring plan, suggesting that recruiting be conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of CHFA faculty.

## ■ **Student Outcomes Assessment**

The department has defined student learning outcomes for both Judaic Studies and Middle Eastern Studies in the following areas: substantive knowledge acquisition in the region's cultures, societies, and history; skill development in critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, and outreach/application; and language proficiency in the areas of Modern Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew, and Arabic.

The department uses a number of direct and indirect assessment tools:

- Direct methods: ACTFL-like proficiency tests for Modern Hebrew program.
- Indirect methods: curriculum committee meetings; student focus groups; students' end of program reports; alumni tracking; discussions at faculty retreats.
- The department also makes use of institutional instructional benchmarking data (course evaluations, graduating senior exit surveys, departmental NSSE results). Improvements resulting from these assessments include external training of faculty in student advising; assignment of all majors to specific faculty advisors; and improved communication with students.