

# IMPACT



AMERICAN ASSOCIATES  
Ben-Gurion University  
*of the Negev*

SPRING 2016



## UNDERSTANDING THE “OTHER”

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EXPLORING HOW  
WE LEARN

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USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE  
TO ENHANCE LEARNING

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HIGHER EDUCATION  
FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS ADULTS

# LEARNING AND THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

BY LLOYD GOLDMAN AABGU PRESIDENT



Probably like most readers, I take for granted that fields like artificial intelligence or biomedical engineering are based on scientific investigation. But I was surprised to realize how integral research is to subjects that are not “hard science.” For example, the Department of Education and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, featured in this issue, are engaged in cutting-edge research that could improve teaching and enhance cultural tolerance.

It led me to think about the connection between research and student learning. Here are a few things I’ve come to understand better. First, at research institutions like BGU, students have front row seats to the pursuit of new knowledge. What could be more inspiring? Moreover, especially in the graduate programs, students actively participate in this work. They are depended upon to conduct the lab and fieldwork, monitor experiments, collect and analyze data, and even collaborate on publishing results.

What also strikes me is how beautifully research and learning integrate at BGU. Top researchers are drawn to the University and thrive there, thanks to its collaborative and supportive spirit. They publish articles, write books, speak on international circuits, obtain patents, and sometimes bring their inventions to market. This enables them to connect their students with industry, other leaders in the field and top-notch universities around the globe. All this—plus the competitive fellowships BGU provides—helps attract the best students, which makes the researchers happy and successful.

And, of course, so much research at BGU has a practical application. As you read this issue’s stories, notice as always how driven BGU faculty members are to help people and make the world a better place, each by dedication to his or her own specialization.

This is a lesson so many BGU students take to heart, and perhaps the most important one they can learn.

## IN THIS ISSUE

### News Briefs

BGU Helps California Farm Reduce Water Use..... 3  
 Tax-Advantaged Gifts of Real Estate ..... 4  
 We Stand With Israel! by Doron Krakow ..... 5

### Donor Impact

Bob Cohen: A Scholarship Fund to Honor Hannah ..... 6  
 David and Janet Polak Foundation ..... 7

### Alumna Profile

Shira Eting: Widening Horizons ..... 8

### Education and Research

Understanding the “Other” ..... 9  
 Exploring How We Learn—and How We Can Learn Better ..... 15  
 Using Artificial Intelligence to Improve Learning..... 20

### Helping the Community

Path of Knowledge for Special-Needs Adults..... 22

### Regional News

Matching Gift Opportunities ..... 34

**ON THE COVER:** Reflecting the multi-cultural and religious draw of Israel, Spanish monks pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. See story on page 9. Photo courtesy of Dr. Jackie Feldman

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# BGU'S ZUCKERBERG INSTITUTE HELPS CALIFORNIA FARM REDUCE WATER USE

**FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS**, Ben-Gurion University's water experts, Profs. Eilon Adar, Jack Gilron and others, have been visiting California to meet with state legislators and water resource officials. They are sharing how Israel, an arid country, created a surplus of water through innovation, technology and effective water-management policies.

Now, the first sustainable farming initiative leveraging Israel's unparalleled research and innovation in drip irrigation will be used to reduce the amount of water needed to grow rice at Conaway Ranch in Woodland, California.

"We believe this initiative represents the first use of drip irrigation in the U.S. for a rice crop," explains Kyriakos Tsakopoulos, president, principal and chief executive officer of Conaway Preservation Group, which owns the 17,000-acre ranch near Sacramento. "We fully believe that Conaway Ranch and farmers have a responsibility to conserve water.

"And we couldn't ask for better partners: BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research and Netafim, the world's leading drip irrigation manufacturer, both of which have experience growing rice in arid

regions. This effort could serve as a model for other farms and potentially save hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water in California if widely adopted."

Drought is a continued concern for growers in California, and this project seeks to better understand

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**"This effort could serve as a model for other farms and potentially save hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water in California if widely adopted."**

— KYRIAKOS TSAKOPOULOS

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if rice can be grown effectively with subsurface drip irrigation. The method consists of a series of pipes that deliver water directly to the root zone of the plant and has the potential to reduce rice-crop water usage, as well as save on application of fertilizers and improve weed control.

"After evaluating a number of options to enhance water use efficiency, Conaway Ranch decided to move forward with a subsurface drip

irrigation pilot project on a 50- to 100-acre area for rice," explains Prof. Adar of BGU's Zuckerberg Institute. "We've outlined the testing procedures necessary to maximize success, based on experience growing a variety of crops in arid climates using subsurface drip irrigation.

"The Zuckerberg Institute is pleased to be playing a leading role, providing knowledge and expertise to help California farmers reduce their water consumption."

Netafim agronomists have conducted a few similar rice crop trials in other parts of the world. Based on results from previous projects, this trial is expected to produce an improvement in yield, while reducing water use.

Lundberg Family Farms, one of the world's largest producers of organic rice and whole grain products, is another project partner. "We are hopeful that this concept could provide farmers with a revolutionary form of rice production not only in California, but wherever rice is grown worldwide," says Bryce Lundberg, vice president of agriculture. ■

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**Photo:** Prof. Eilon Adar, second from the right, at Conaway Ranch

# TAX-ADVANTAGED GIFTS OF REAL ESTATE

NEAL MYERBERG, PHILANTHROPIC ADVISOR

Real estate may subject owners to substantial tax consequences when sold at a profit. While property exchanges under the law may delay the imposition of tax, there are still estate and gift taxes to consider.

## HOW CAN YOU AVOID HIGH TAXES AND CAPITAL GAINS?

In addition to making outright charitable gifts of real estate to AABGU to avoid taxable capital gains, you can benefit by establishing charitable trusts. The trusts most used are a charitable remainder unitrust (CRUT) and a charitable lead annuity trust (CLAT).

## CHARITABLE REMAINDER UNITRUST (CRUT)

A CRUT allows for the contribution of appreciated real estate to be credited in the trust at its appraised value with no initial tax on any long-term capital gain. The donor's deduction is based upon the appraised value reduced by the calculation of the present value of the payments expected to be paid to the donor during his or her lifetime. The assets in the trust at the end of the donor's life are not taxed since what remains in the trust is paid over to AABGU as the beneficiary named in the trust.

For example, an individual (the donor) who owned a small income-producing property received an offer to purchase it for \$300,000. He conferred with a charity about transferring the property to a CRUT. Once the property was owned by the trust, the trustee sold it for \$300,000 to a third party.

The donor was not required to pay tax on the long-term capital gain. Since the CRUT is tax-exempt, there was no capital gains tax due when the trustee sold the property. The donor receives eight percent (the fixed rate set by the CRUT) of the annual value

of the trust for life. A combination of his income tax charitable deduction, his capital gains tax savings and his lifetime fixed-rate payments provided him with substantial economic benefits. The remaining amount in the trust at the end of his lifetime will be paid to the charity to carry on its work.

To qualify as a tax-exempt trust, the property contributed must not be subject to a mortgage that the donor is personally responsible to pay. The rate fixed in the trust cannot be less than five percent. Higher rates may be set as long as they pass IRS tests when the trust is established and funded.

To replace all or a portion of the value of what is contributed to the trust, some planners suggest that the donor make tax-free gifts of some of the annual income to heirs. For example, children may use the annual gifts to purchase ownership in a life insurance policy on the donor's life. They would own the policy outright or it may be owned by a trustee of an irrevocable life insurance trust. It is possible that the life insurance policy would provide tax-free death benefits for the children sufficient enough to replace the value of the property contributed to the CRUT. In such a situation, the tax advantages to the donor will be coupled with both charitable payments and a tax-free inheritance for the children.

## CHARITABLE LEAD ANNUITY TRUST (CLAT)

A philanthropic family interested both in continuing to make annual charitable gifts to AABGU and in succession



planning for their children might consider transferring income-producing real estate to a CLAT. If the property

produces reasonably predictable annual net income (as with a triple net lease), the trust may be structured to run for a term of years at a fixed rate. During that time, the income from the property would be paid to the trustee of the CLAT.

Under the terms of the trust, the trustee would pay a fixed amount each year to AABGU, to a donor advised fund or to the donor's private foundation. The fixed amount and the number of years the trust would run would be calculated when the trust is established to substantially reduce or eliminate any gift taxes that might otherwise be due for the transfer of the property to the children in the future from the trust.

While the trust will make annual charitable payments to AABGU, the property may appreciate in value. If, in fact, the property has grown in value when the trust ends and the property is transferred outright to the children, there will be no additional gift or estate taxes due. Any such taxes would have been paid, if at all, when the CLAT was initially set up and funded. Using a CLAT, donors would eliminate the property and its appreciation from their estates and pass it on to their children at no tax cost, while continuing with family philanthropy to AABGU as paid annually from the trust. ■

To learn more about charitable trusts or other tax-advantaged estate planning opportunities, contact your AABGU regional office or call Melissa Katz, Esq., AABGU's director of donor affairs, at 1-800-962-2228, ext. 1400.

# “WHEREVER WE STAND, WE STAND WITH ISRAEL”

BY DORON KRAKOW EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



**NOT LONG AGO** I was part of a program at a New York-area synagogue dedicated to “talking about Israel.” We debated the importance of finding ways to talk about Israel without allowing the things over which we may disagree to inhibit constructive deliberations about this vitally important subject. It seems as if our strong feelings about certain imperfections in Israeli society, imperfections that have collected around several ideological fault lines, have compromised our ability to come together in thoughtful engagement about the unfolding evolution of the modern Jewish State.

I suppose our often incredibly strong feelings about geopolitics, social policy and the religious-secular divide are in and of themselves an indication of our passion and emotional involvement. But the often reflexive inclination to advance a particular agenda and criticize aspects of Israeli society or politics finds us devoting a disproportionate amount of the time we spend talking about Israel vilifying either the State or one another. This results in gradually making the topic itself increasingly toxic. So much so that in altogether too many places on the American Jewish landscape, it is simply easier not to talk about it at all.

At what cost? First and foremost, we are failing to see in Israel a chance to establish a common center of gravity around which to build community here at home. The absence of constructive conversation and engagement, of dialogue and thoughtful debate, results in the passive hardening of our own positions, thereby making it all the more difficult

to recognize the breadth of our common ground. And the act of opting out in community settings is like a pebble in a pond; the ripples find their impact in similar absences of engagement on the topic in our schools, on college campuses and even around the dinner table. Unexercised, we—and our children—are increasingly ill-equipped to take on Israel’s critics from beyond our community.

In point of fact, most American Jews take great pride in Israel’s achievements. We understand our innate connection to the land and its people. We proudly acknowledge the only Western-style democracy in a region in chaos. We mourn her losses. And we revel in her success. And in the quiet comfort of our lives here in America, we can reflect on the fact that the Jewish world of today is like nothing our forebears could have possibly imagined during the 2,000 years of exile: century upon century of helplessness, persecution and perpetual strife. And we must understand the extraordinary significance of living at a time in which an independent Jewish State is both a beacon of hope and a guarantor of our self-determination.

AABGU proudly embraces our role as a vehicle for education and engagement about Israel throughout our community. Ben-Gurion University is the engine driving the development of the Negev, the fulfillment of the vision of our namesake. The region is the scene of thousands of years of biblical history, dotted with majestic landscapes, and has become the wellspring of pioneering science and

research that is transforming lives not only in Israel, but across the Middle East and around the world. Drawn to BGU’s extraordinary research prowess, a parade of high-tech giants have planted their flags in Beer-Sheva: IBM, Lockheed-Martin, PayPal, Oracle, Deutsche Telekom, EMC—to name just a few. In just seven years, it is estimated that there will be 10,000 new jobs in the high-tech industry in Beer-Sheva.

This is a time of great opportunity in the Negev: a time in which we can play a vital role in perhaps Israel’s foremost pioneering endeavor. And there is a place for all in our community who understand the vital importance of a strong, vibrant, democratic Jewish State of Israel—no matter where we may stand on the major issues about which we care so deeply.

We are strengthened by our diversity. We draw wisdom and insight from greater debate. We are stronger when we band together, standing toe-to-toe with Israel’s detractors and adversaries, and shoulder to shoulder with her teachers, her soldiers, her students, and her rising stars. We may stand on different sides of the range of issues that ignite our passions and fire our imaginations, but our common cause and our common interests compel us to say with unbridled conviction that wherever we stand, we stand with Israel! ■

**HANNAH LITVIN COHEN** believed passionately in philanthropy. “My wife remembered from the first grade growing up in Israel that every Friday there was a *pushka* [charity box] to give to the United Jewish Fund,” recalls Robert (Bob) Cohen. “It didn’t matter how much—you gave whatever you could.

“And she was so interested in the development of Israel. From the time she was small, her dad took her to see every square inch of the country.”

Bob shared Hannah’s intense feeling for her native country. “We both love Israel.” They also shared a deep admiration of David Ben-Gurion.

Before Hannah’s passing she and Bob talked about a giving plan. “Hannah loved Ben-Gurion University and believed that BGU has and will contribute to Israel’s and the world’s prosperity.

“She loved the idea of a scholarship fund. Of course that’s what I did.”

In her honor, Bob established the Hannah Litvin Cohen Undergraduate Scholarship Endowment Fund. It will provide 16 full tuition scholarships every year in perpetuity. Bob hopes to keep building the fund and anticipates supporting hundreds of scholarships over time. He is gratified at the immediate response of people who knew Hannah.

“As soon as I mention that she wanted this, they ask to buy in and provide scholarships. I tell people that for anyone interested in seeing Israel flourish, this is an amazing philanthropy—a chance to help Israeli students, forever, get a college education.”

Bob appreciates the flexibility BGU showed in setting the guidelines to his satisfaction so students are guaranteed to receive the maximum benefit, despite any fluctuations in the endowment earnings year to year.

Hannah was born in Haifa in 1949. Her parents, Yitzchak and Rachel Litvin, came from Eastern Europe.



**ROBERT COHEN**  
TAMPA, FLORIDA

## A SCHOLARSHIP FUND TO HONOR HANNAH

“Hannah loved Ben-Gurion University and believed that BGU has and will contribute to Israel’s and the world’s prosperity.”

— BOB COHEN

and drug and alcohol treatment centers. It is Florida based and now employs more than 1,200 people and has facilities in four states.

Hannah, too, worked in the health field. She served as the chief executive officer of psychiatric hospitals and was the founder and head of Whitemarsh House, a head injury treatment center in Flourtown, Pennsylvania, for 25 years.

Like Hannah, Bob says, he was brought up to give.

“It’s a natural and human desire. I give as much as I can every year. I just take it for granted that everybody, if they have a little extra money, will help our fellow human beings live satisfying and fulfilling lives.” ■

Separately, they had immigrated to Israel with friends in the early 1930s and worked on *kibbutzim*. Both were very involved in Zionist youth movements. They met during that time, married and settled in Haifa.

Yitzchak became a successful representative for Adidas in Israel, and was a member of *Haganah*, where he helped smuggle weapons into Israel prior to the War of Independence. Rachel worked to resettle new immigrants and teach them Hebrew.

After completing her military service, Hannah went to the United States to earn a bachelor’s degree from Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. A mutual friend introduced her to Bob. Bob grew up in Philadelphia, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard graduate school.

Bob and Hannah lived in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania and in Tampa, Florida. His career as an entrepreneur in the behavioral health field developed “by chance,” he says. Today, the company he founded and runs, Oglethorpe, manages psychiatric hospitals

**THE POLAK FAMILY** has actively supported Israel for more than two decades. Since 2014, the family has done so through the David and Janet Polak Foundation based in Beverly Hills, California.

“We want to help Israel become more economically independent and secure,” says Jeff Polak (left), David and Janet’s son, the foundation’s president and executive director, as well as managing director of the family investment business.

“We’ve been excited to watch how Israel’s agrarian economy has developed into a high-tech superpower.”

The Polaks have “always known about BGU,” Jeff says, but took a closer look after learning about how the Negev is developing and about BGU’s relationship to the Israel Defense Forces, soon to locate their high-tech units next door.

“We also asked someone we trust what would be an important area of interest in the years to come, and he pointed out the strategic importance of malware. And there was a timely *Wall Street Journal* article about that.

“So, when we explored some possibilities and saw a video of what was happening at BGU, it all came together.”

The result is the Polaks’ first donation to AABGU:

a \$1.5 million gift to underwrite BGU’s Cyber Security Malware Analysis Laboratory, which will significantly expand the University’s advanced capabilities to deter and identify the malicious computer viruses, worms, spyware, and other programs that are such a huge threat to homeland security today. The new lab will be housed in the Carole and Marcus Weinstein Information Systems Engineering and Cyber Security Building, now under construction and expected to open this summer.

David and Janet have been married for 50 years. An MIT engineering graduate, David also holds an M.S. from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and an M.B.A. from UCLA’s Graduate School of Management, where he is one of the founders of the Entrepreneurs Center. He was the



## DAVID AND JANET POLAK FOUNDATION BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

# SAFEGUARDING ISRAEL’S FUTURE

### THE DAVID AND JANET POLAK FOUNDATION

Inspired by our Jewish heritage, we believe in making strategic investments to maximize social good. Our emphasis is on value: achieving tangible results by funding organizations focused on strengthening communities and improving people’s lives. Through a focus on venture philanthropy, we are committed to confronting global problems with sustainable solutions—leveraging critical resources to plant seeds that will take root and grow.

founder and chief investment officer of NWQ Investment Management Company.

Janet taught elementary school after graduating from UCLA. She and David raised their children, Jeff and his brother Robert (right), in a home where great significance was placed on giving back to the community.

“We taught our sons to understand that good fortune puts us in a position to make a difference,” Janet says.

Israel and the Jewish community have benefited from the Polaks’ philanthropy and their particular interests in education and medical research. David held several leadership positions for the American Technion Society and established the David and Janet Polak Center for Cancer Research and Vascular Biology at Technion. He was awarded an honorary doctorate at Technion in 2007.

The Polaks also funded a new building in their name at the Jewish Home in Reseda, California, where Janet is a past chair of its board of governors. In 2006, she was honored for her ongoing support of the Jewish Home with the Associates-IMC Zelda White Achievement Award. Janet additionally has served as the Women’s Campaign

chair for both Greater Los Angeles and the Valley Alliance of the Jewish Federation, as well as on the Federation board and campaign cabinet.

The Polaks recently became actively involved with the Cedars-Sinai Board of Governors Regenerative Medicine Institute, which presented them with the Philanthropic Leadership award in 2014 for their outstanding generosity.

Jeff Polak has clearly adopted his parents’ commitment to philanthropic leadership. This spring he joins the newest cohort of Zin Fellows, AABGU’s innovative program to give potential Jewish community leaders an inside, in-depth look at the University and the Negev region.

“I’m curious to see what’s taking place in the Negev—it will be exciting to be there,” Jeff says. ■

# SHIRA ETING

## WIDENING HER HORIZONS WITH A RIVKA CARMİ SCHOLARSHIP

**AS THE 2014** recipient of the Rivka Carmi Scholarship that funds outstanding students to earn a graduate degree at Oxford University, Shira Eting values BGU on more than one level.

While serving in the military, she was part of a special program that enabled her to earn her B.Sc. degree in mathematics and computer science at BGU in less than two years. After leaving the service, she was ready to broaden her perspective. “I’d been in Israel my whole life. I decided to get a master’s degree and wanted the global perspective I could get by going abroad.”

Shira set her sights on Britain, aiming also to improve her English. The challenge: “There aren’t a lot of opportunities for master’s degree scholarships. Then I discovered the Rivka Carmi Scholarship. It made everything possible and was really life-changing!”

The scholarship sent her to Oxford University, where she studied environmental science. She studied with 25 students from 15 countries and loved the experience. “Oxford is like a dream. The traditions of an 800-year-old university—it makes you feel like you’re part of something bigger than yourself; you feel privileged.”

The work was always challenging and Shira appreciated the opportunity to focus on it, thanks to her full scholarship. “I was lucky that I could invest all my time in studying. I didn’t have to work, and had no family obligations.”

Yet over the course of the year, Shira found herself missing her family, friends and home base. “BGU gave me the opportunity to go abroad and now I could bring that experience back to Israel. This is really significant for me.”

She had long imagined a career that involved the environment. At 16, Shira joined the Society for the Protection of Nature, which guides young people in nature travel and increases awareness of environmental sustainability.

“I developed my love of nature and aspired to become involved in preserving it,” she says. She soon became an instructor and also joined LEAD, a young leadership development organization that prepares the next generation of Israeli leaders.

“These two activities made me want to do a year of national service.” She accomplished this at the Kannot Agricultural Boarding School, where she guided 25 underprivileged students who were immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

“It was really challenging. I saw the socio-economic gap. I realized how much work we have to do, but also how much impact one person can have.”

Next, at 19, Shira joined the Israeli Air Force. She held increasingly responsible positions, stayed five years and emerged with her B.Sc. and a well-earned confidence in her leadership abilities.

Her M.Sc. from Oxford in environmental change and management was awarded with high merit, and her dissertation on wastewater treatment in the Gaza Strip received an award of distinction.

Since last year, Shira has worked for the Milken Innovation Center, part of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel



Studies, as a fellow at the Ministry of the Economy.

“It’s a nonpolitical think tank that suggests financial innovation to the government,” she explains. “The idea is that while many things are possible, they’re not happening because the right incentives aren’t set in place. They can

be mobilized with the right conditions, like loans, tax extensions, guarantees, and more. Government policy can be changed to support social, economic and environmental efforts.”

Her specific project is to promote the collaboration between Israel and California around water issues. “We want to suggest incentives to adopt Israeli water technologies in California to combat the drought and increase sustainability.”

This is good for Israel as well as California, she points out. She works with government entities, companies and the entire water sector in Israel.

When the program ends in August, Shira expects once again to look for new horizons. But she feels sure her different experiences thus far will connect. The lesson she shares with younger people: “Everything you do in life in some way or another affects your development. I believe that if you recognize your areas of interest and challenge yourself to stick to your values, you keep progressing and eventually can make a significant impact.

“The opportunities are there. You just have to go and explore and take a risk.” ■

# UNDERSTANDING THE “OTHER”

Photo courtesy of Dr. Jackie Feldman

**NOT MANY JOBS** specifically require a degree in sociology and anthropology, agrees Prof. Daniel Maman, who heads BGU’s department of that name. But this doesn’t lessen the subject’s appeal for young people—or its value in preparing them for life in today’s complex world.

“The study of different cultures and societies is a way to think about the world and understand things,” he says. “You learn to see better, think, understand your own society and situation. It’s good for the soul!”

Although Maman points out that “we try to explain phenomena, not fix the world,” the subject matter often relates to deep issues facing Israel and much of the globe: relations between ethnic groups, minority and dominant populations, men and women, and the generations; issues of justice and inequality; and the impact of war, political upheaval and changing societies.

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology drew 120 new students this year and currently 400 are studying for a B.A., 64 for an M.A. and 29 for a Ph.D. In a time when the

humanities and social sciences are becoming sidelined in many universities, the program holds its own and competes very well for good students, Maman says.

“One of our main strengths is that we combine the two disciplines, unlike most other universities.

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**“The study of different cultures and societies is a way to think about the world and understand things.”**

— PROF. DANIEL MAMAN

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Another is that we have become experts in qualitative research—storytelling analysis, ethnography, observation of people—as opposed to quantitative research that centers on numbers.”

With its campus life, melting pot population and college-town atmosphere unlike any other in Israel, BGU

itself is an attractive magnet for young people who by nature value contact with diverse people and community involvement.

Most important of all, “We decided to put a lot of effort into research, so we’re able to recruit excellent graduate students,” Maman says. The 14 faculty members, split almost evenly between anthropology and sociology, produce an impressive number of books and articles and assume leadership roles in professional associations.

## BRIDGING CULTURAL GAPS

Before Prof. Aviad Raz settled on anthropology and sociology, he earned a B.A. in biology. At BGU he quickly saw in Soroka University Medical Center “an immense field of study” for combining his interests in societies, organizational culture and genetics. In one project, he is investigating the cultural adaptation of the

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**Photo:** Dr. Jackie Feldman explains a model of first century Jerusalem (as it was during the time of Jesus) to a Christian tour group.



Panel from a conference on *Haredi* women in the high-tech industry, “Between Segregation and Assimilation.” From right: *Rabanut* Adina Bar-Shalom, president of the *Haredi* college in Jerusalem; Prof. David Leiser, BGU coordinator of *Haredi* programs; Rav Yehezkel Fogel, chairperson of the *Haredi* campus in Kiryat Ono

Bedouin to genetic testing offered by the hospital and spearheaded by BGU researchers, including BGU’s President Prof. Rivka Carmi, a renowned geneticist.

As a Muslim population, the Bedouin have a high rate of marriage between cousins, and as a result, a high degree of recessive diseases. The conventional test during pregnancy, amniocentesis, is popular in Israel generally, but like the Orthodox Jews, the Muslims ban abortion.

“So the idea was to offer genetic testing before marriage and pregnancy to consider genetic compatibility. If both people are carriers of a disease, they can decide whether to proceed with the marriage.”

While this approach was very successful in the Orthodox commu-

nity, it was not among the Bedouin. “Sometimes the anthropologist’s job is figuring out why something doesn’t work,” Raz says. “We look at the broader implications of modernization, in context of the



Prof. Daniel Maman



Prof. Aviad Raz

immense change this community is undergoing.”

Several factors were identified. The Bedouin community was less centralized, lacking authority figures equiva-

lent to the Orthodox rabbis, who actively guide their congregations. Also, while many of the genetic diseases common to the Bedouin are severe, the disease chosen for the pilot—congenital deafness—was relatively mild. And some Bedouins believed genetic testing was intended to lower their fertility rates.

“The lesson was that education in genetic literacy needs to start in high school,” Raz says, “and that community outreach is necessary.” It has taken a few years for the idea to take hold in the Bedouin community.

Currently, Raz is studying the progress of *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) women in the software industry—an example of successful adaptation to modern technology.

The challenge of assimilating the *Haredi* into the labor market is unique to Israel, Raz observes. In the U.S., ultra-Orthodox men typically combine religious study and work. In Israel, however, the founding government committed to supporting the men who choose to study.

“As a result of this situation, women have become the major breadwinners, the financial supporters of the family,” Raz says. “When they couldn’t find enough traditional jobs such as education, they looked at other fields—and high-tech software programming was one.”

After earning a college degree, most begin work in segregated hubs: programming centers attuned to their specific schedules and needs. Some are paid only 50 percent of what others are paid for the same work. But Raz’s team, the first to interview the women, found that some of the

*Haredi* women accept the trade-off with their lifestyle needs, and although they do not see the work as a career, intend to continue it long term.

But other *Haredi* women hope to improve their economic and social status by using the hubs as a stepping-stone to jobs in the industry. A third small group moves to the secular high-tech industry, sometimes with major firms, and does very well financially as senior engineers and team leaders. “They remain part of the *Haredi* community and are becoming agents of change there.”

A practical implication of this study, Raz finds, is the desirability of supporting special frameworks of diversity within an industry that can accommodate young *Haredi* women, and need them.

Premised on maintaining an inequality in pay, it’s not an ideal solution, Raz says, “but it’s a step in the right direction. Without segregated programs of study and

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**“Sometimes the anthropologist’s job is figuring out why something doesn’t work.”**

— PROF. AVIAD RAZ

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campuses, *Haredi* women won’t acquire a higher education and venture out into computer science. We need these segregated programs if we want to make a change.”

Such research is living proof, Raz believes, of the benefits sociology and anthropology research can bring.

## BREAKING BARRIERS WITH FOOD

Dr. Nir Avieli is often referred to as Israel’s foremost food anthropologist. “In fact, I’m the only one,” he says.



Dr. Nir Avieli in a food market, one of his favorite sites for anthropological research

His specialization evolved because he had become fascinated with a beautiful town in Vietnam and wanted to work on his Ph.D. there. Casting about for a topic, he came to a realization.

“In guiding tourists you find that food is an incentive when they plan trips and think about what they’ll eat. But once on the tour, they’re scared of the food! And the more remote the place, the more conservative tourists become. It’s a huge problem, especially in culturally remote destinations.”

A solution he tried himself: “Take them to a grocery store surrounded by locals; buy a few things there and at a street market; eat them yourself. Give it to them and there’s a moment of enlightenment. The barriers collapse; you’ve broken it with food.”

Dr. Avieli decided that studying food on a serious level would be his professional focus. He was happy to discover that unlike some universities, BGU found the idea appealing.

“People think about food all the time—‘I’m hungry!’ or ‘I shouldn’t eat that!’—without seeing it in cultural or social or political terms. That’s

camouflaged. But it’s easier to see in the culinary sphere reflections of the other spheres, the cultural arrangements.”

In a book he is currently finishing, *Food and Power: A Culinary Ethnography of Israel*, Avieli looks at cuisines from an anthropological viewpoint. The Israeli cuisine, he says, is usually described as combining cheap, kosher versions of dishes from peoples’ previous homelands, new products of Israeli agriculture and Palestinian food.

“Saying it is a melting pot of cuisines is accurate but meaningless,” Avieli says. “One aspect that is clearly Israeli and unique is portion size: quantity, not quality. It’s partly the diaspora hunger. You don’t know about the future so eat as much as you can when you can. Added to this is the Muslim tradition of lavish feasts, and the Holocaust trauma. It adds to the feeling of unsatisfiable hunger. When will Israelis be satisfied? It’s a culinary metaphor, a central attribute of who Israelis are.”

Avieli finds ambivalence in Israel’s connection to its Middle East



The “Jesus Boat” gift shop at the Sea of Galilee specializes in Judaica for Christian customers touring Israel. Its store, website and learning center are dedicated to providing them with a “plethora of information about Israel, Judaic tradition, holidays, and [their] Jewish roots.”

environment. “The interest in the outer world is diminishing; Israelis feel they’re on an island surrounded by hostile enemies. But they like Palestinian food. It’s easier to consume culture in the form of food than ‘high’ forms of culture like music, theater and art.”

He also finds that the extended family has become Israel’s strongest social institution, in contrast to the nuclear family focus of the West. “Generally, I see Israel becoming a Middle Eastern country...maybe kicking and screaming, for good or for bad.”

## TAKING PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONES

“Anthropology is being there, not just reading texts,” says Dr. Jackie Feldman.

Before opting for an academic life, he spent years working as a tour guide, introducing academics and Christian tour groups to Israeli sites and life. He still leads several tours each year, and in his classes, focuses on tourism and pilgrimage.

“I can bring the kind of guide work I’ve done to class, and at the same time, bring the perspectives I learned and teach to the tours,” he says. “When they look at Israel, the Christians see their time here as walking in the footsteps of Jesus, and Jewish people see their homeland. You come to understand that the country belongs to different people with different religious understandings. How do we learn to live together?”

Feldman sees a special value in the lessons of anthropology for Israel. “People live alongside each other here and never meet. Israelis learn little about other religions and cultures in schools—so our future leaders need to get it in the universities.”

Just as with tourists he leads, Feldman aims to bring his students out of their “bubbles:” their insular isolated perspectives. “So much of tourism is creating bubbles,” he says. “People come with groups, stay inside them, and only end up confirming what they already know. I want my students to question what we believe through encounters with

other people—not just reading.”

He brings students to various local synagogues, and recently he and fellow anthropologist Dr. Julia Lerner took a first-year class to a Catholic church in Tel Aviv that serves Filipinos. Many of them are laborers who would ordinarily be invisible to the young people. Attending mass and talking with the congregation’s priest and bishop, the students were surprised to find themselves welcomed warmly.

“It was an eye opener for many,” Feldman says. “We saw the people praying together with their families, in chorus, in clubs—the church gives them dignity and identity. I hope when these students walk through Tel Aviv and see a Filipino cleaning the street they’ll wonder if he goes to that church. Or stop and say Merry Christmas.”

Photo courtesy of Dr. Jackie Feldman



Spanish nuns from the order *El Hogar de la Madre* by a statue of St. Anne and the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem’s Church of St. Anne. Dr. Feldman was studying Catholic priest-guides in Israel.

Photo courtesy of Dr. Jackie Feldman

“It doesn’t change the world, but these little things are important when people are so polarized. In Israel, people often live in their bubbles: the Israeli-Arab dispute, the religious, the ethnic, the borders, the rich and poor. We need to learn about who’s on the other side of the road—see ‘the other’ and give him value. Whatever we can do in the academy to bring people out of their bubbles and lead them to



Prof. Fran Markowitz (right) with Khasida, a member of the Hebrew Israelite community in Dimona, the topic of her fieldwork.

think differently is to me almost a sacred commandment.”

## EXPLORING HOW PEOPLE RESPOND TO DESTABILIZING EVENTS

Prof. Fran Markowitz explores the interactions between the individual, society and cultures. In the mid-1990s, she began studying Russian teenagers in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse. “This was the reverse of migration. The Soviet Union got up and left them!”

She has come to some unexpected conclusions. “Theories of human development say that a stable environment is necessary for moving into adulthood. But all over the world cultures are undergoing change and are not terribly stable, nor are the families.

“I found that as we see with immigrants, children are reversing roles with parents. They’re a lot more flexible and adaptable than the theories say. I heard the same repeating narrative in 1995-96 from 16-year-olds: ‘What changes are you talking about?’ Fragmentation of the USSR affected the adults more than the young people,” Markowitz discovered. “They’re optimistic, get their identity

from school and neighborhood ties. They’re pragmatic and see opportunities. In a larger context of social transformation, this hints at how Russian society may be reshaped by its younger generations.”

This past year, with Dafna Shir-Vertesh, then her Ph.D. student and now a colleague teaching in the department, Markowitz studied how people in Beer-Sheva are affected by the periodic tensions of war. “I wanted to show how everyday Israelis go about their lives in a situation that is almost peace, but are frequently disrupted by exploding missiles and destruction, and have to run to shelters.

“People altered their rhythms in terms of time and space,” she found. “They were always calculating how to stay within a minute from a shelter. This changes the way you navigate your life.” Even after conflicts end, Markowitz says, people avoid going to certain places and tend to misinterpret sounds, such as a backfiring motorcycle. The state of tension becomes constant and permanent.

Ethnographic fieldwork—in which “you get to hang out with people a lot”—is to Markowitz the heart of anthropology. “I can be on the street and hear people talk to each other. I can exchange words, ideas, go to the store or theater with them, their ceremonies of joy and funerals.

“We’re part and parcel of the flow of everyday life and it’s a tremendous privilege.”

## EXAMINING THE DETAILS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

“What matters is the trivial details of everyday life,” says Dr. André Levy. “In their happening, their context, you can understand people through their behavior, speech, gestures, deeds.”

Levy was born in Casablanca, Morocco, but immigrated to Israel with his parents at age five and grew up in Ashdod. In the 1980s, when it suddenly became possible

to revisit Morocco, he went back to conduct research on tourism for his master’s thesis. He was intrigued by a very small Jewish community. “I wondered how it survived, and remained energetic and lively despite its dwindling numbers.”

He returned for his Ph.D. dissertation and discovered phenomena that continue to engage him.

One element is how the Moroccan Jews understand their relationship to the larger Muslim world as the community contracts. He found that solutions are influenced by the way people understand the culture around them. There is a strong inward tendency; the smaller the group, the more introverted the energy becomes.

“You build a community that tries to minimize contact with the Muslims. The people develop all kinds of small mechanisms to do this, more and more services. You can get a passport and pay your electric bill through go-betweens, for example.

“This creates a situation whereby the less you know about your surroundings, the less you know how to deal with them. It’s a vicious circle.”



Dr. André Levy



Levy also investigates the “idea” of Israel to the Moroccan Jews, which is far from the reality, given that they are uninterested in visiting and distinguish sharply between Zionism and Israel. They believe their Hebrew is the authentic version, closer to the Bible than the “Israeli” spoken in Israel. When young Moroccans leave the community—as most do at college age and beyond—they prefer to go to France or Canada.

In turn, Israelis are puzzled by Jews who choose to live as a tiny minority in a Muslim world rather than immigrating to Israel.

## EMPOWERING FINANCIAL LITERACY AND MORALITY

Prof. Daniel Maman researches an evolving connection between financial literacy and morality.

In Israel, like elsewhere, the government aims to cut benefits by giving individuals more and more responsibility for handling their finances, as well as their family’s education, health and housing. Pensions, for example, used to be managed by the state or employer. Now people are asked to think like investors, plan for their own future and act as “risk managers” able to react to unexpected events.

“In less than 10 years, Israel has been transforming into less and less a welfare state. It’s a global

phenomenon,” Maman says.

He notes that the international community has concluded that the financial crisis of 2008 could have been prevented had people been more financially literate. According to this view, “the people are the problem, not the banks,” Maman says.

**“In less than 10 years, Israel has been transforming into less and less a welfare state. It’s a global phenomenon.”**

— PROF. DANIEL MAMAN

In Israel, the “empowering state” increasingly imparts information, knowledge and skills necessary for informed choices, and teaches young people who are years away from the workforce to think like entrepreneurs.

Formerly, for example, the government decided

to cut support money for children. The new government decided to bring this back but in a different form. “A savings account is opened for all young people so they’ll have money when they get old. This is part of talking to them about their budgeting, savings, borrowing, insurance, investments, and how to think about their future.”

Maman’s team investigates the moral concerns and themes implicit in such programs. “A moral vocabulary is mobilized,” he says. Concepts like responsibility, self-discipline, self-reliance, prudence, accountability, and rationality are imbued in financial education.

“You must be not only a responsible financial person, but a morally virtuous agent.” Maman’s research indicates this is essential. “It enables individuals to find a meaning in the financialization of everyday life.” ■



This April, the Esther and Sidney Rabb Center for Holocaust Studies hosted a photo exhibition, “Objects in Transition” as part of its annual conference on societies of migration.

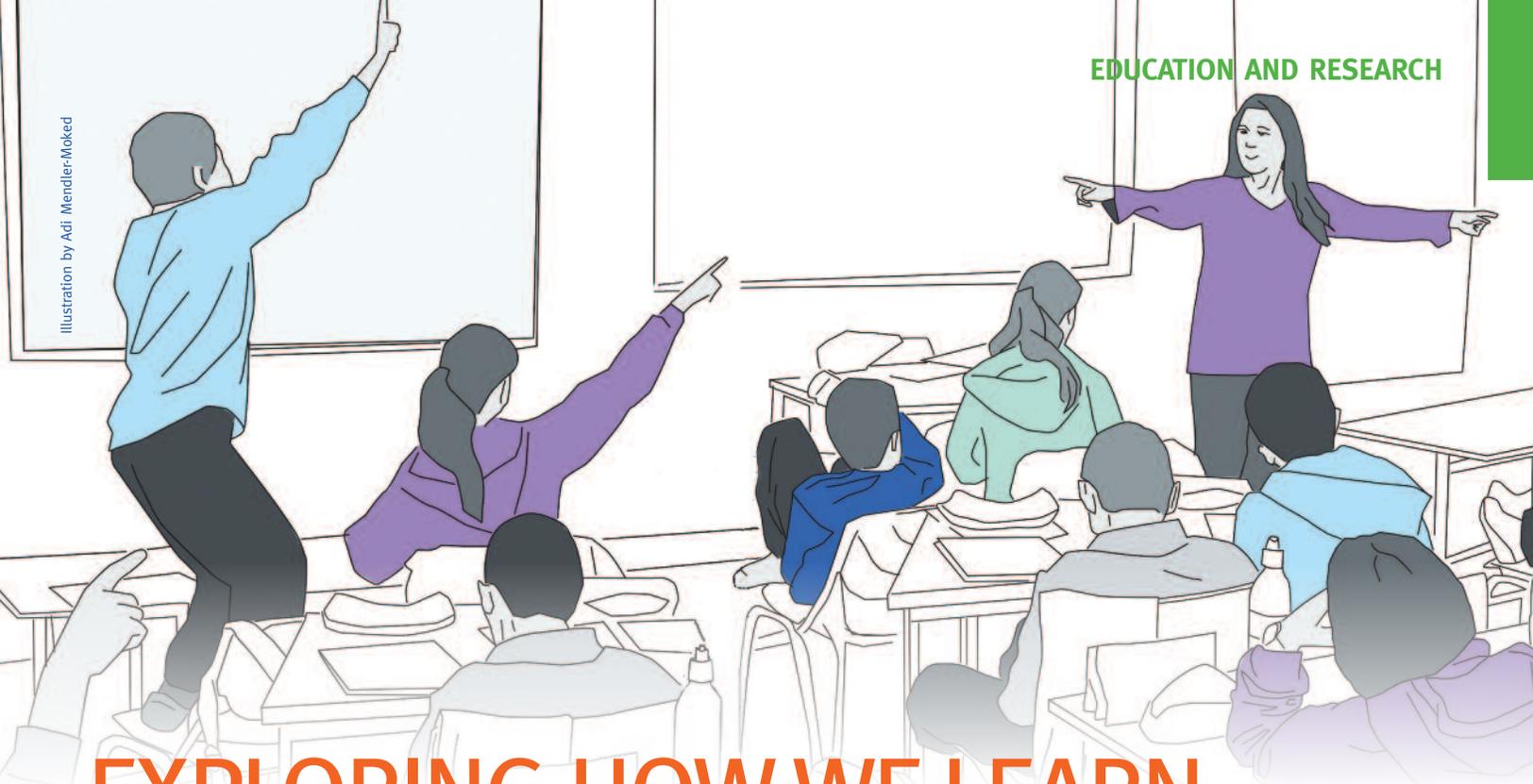


**The Esther and Sidney Rabb Center for Holocaust Studies**, chaired by Dr. Jackie Feldman, is housed in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

The Center sponsors an annual lecture, events for Holocaust Memorial Day and international conferences on the Holocaust

and Jewish life in Europe preceding the Shoah.

It also provides scholarships for students working on related themes, and plans a daylong conference on Holocaust Representation in Societies of Migration with the University of Tübingen in Germany.



# EXPLORING HOW WE LEARN — AND HOW WE CAN LEARN BETTER

**THE NEED TO** “reform education” is a call heard around the world, in both highly developed and emerging nations. The energetic faculty of BGU’s Department of Education is becoming known as a research powerhouse in the effort to support knowledgeable, evidence-based change.

Department members investigate the most basic questions:

- How do human beings learn, and how can they learn better?
- What role does culture play in learning?
- How can parents and teachers foster motivation and instill values?
- How can schools introduce innovation? Equalize opportunity?
- How can education systems help people of all ages navigate a complex connected world?

The research focus is a valued benefit for the 700 students who are studying for B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in education. The undergraduates, who make up about half that number, can access a multidisciplinary perspective that includes philosophy,

the learning sciences, educational leadership, critical sociology, educational counseling, and psychology.

To teach, aspiring educators need also to earn a teaching certificate. The department offers the certificate

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**“Teaching is an acquired skill, not something you can do well just because you’re smart.”**

— PROF. ADAM LEFSTEIN

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program as well, plus professional development for practitioners.

Typically, the M.A. students are practicing full-time teachers who find attractive opportunity for professional growth at BGU. “We can put them into contact with our research and other state-of-the-art work. As seasoned professionals, they can

challenge us, express skepticism and present the reality,” explains Dr. Iris Tabak, chair of the graduate program in learning and instruction.

“A lot of translation needs to be done for products of the research to be adopted across many classrooms. The master’s program gives us an arena in which we can do some of this translation work.”

The 21 department members also work toward closing the academia/classroom gap through an impressive roster of publishing credits, and in some cases, direct contact with school systems and policymakers.

## COMING TO TERMS WITH ISRAEL’S RAMBUNCTIOUS CLASSROOMS

Prof. Adam Lefstein, with a background in anthropology and sociolinguistics, aims to improve teaching and school systems. Returning from an extended stay in London, where he completed his Ph.D. and taught, he thought



Prof. Adam Lefstein

about the negative opinions many people hold about education.

“No one knows what’s really going on in the classroom—just anecdotes, stereotypes, what we hear from our own kids—but that’s not evidence-based.

So we developed a big project to figure out what’s happening in the classroom so we could establish baseline data to share with policy and decision makers.”

One hundred and twenty lessons were recorded and systematically analyzed in terms of activities, use of time, questions posed, and student participation. This was complemented by a dozen focus groups of teachers reacting to the video-recorded lessons.

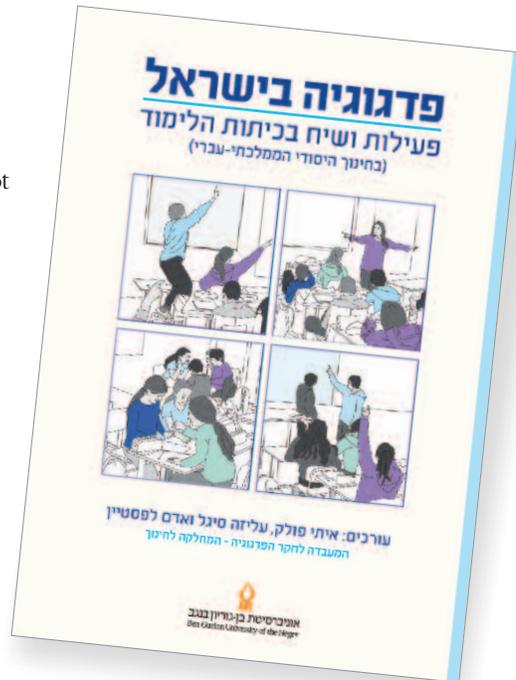
One finding: Israeli classrooms are characterized by a very high level of student participation. “The kids have a lot to say, want to get involved, vie to speak out, interrupt the teacher and each other—there’s an exuberant, even boisterous atmosphere. Kids here are more apt to disagree with teachers than elsewhere.”

This probably reflects the anti-authoritarian nature of Israelis in general, he thinks. “We’re a make-it-up-as-you-go society. This is good in high-tech; lack of respect for central authority is a greenhouse for innovation.”

But the downside is when you need to manage a class of 35 kids. The chaos in primary school becomes problematic in middle school. “We found that the teachers are really committed to dealing with this difficult situation, even while struggling with conflicting goals set by education policy.”

An Israeli teacher’s magazine devoted 50 pages to the report, stimulating a lot of conversation. Lefstein and his team have also presented the findings to more than 20 groups of teachers,

principals, supervisors, and senior education officials. He continues to work with one district. Change will be slow, he acknowledges, but he takes satisfaction from “changing the discourse.”



A special report on Prof. Lefstein’s research of Israeli classrooms has been widely circulated and discussed by teachers, administrators and policymakers.

“I want people to have more respect for how difficult it is to be a teacher,” he says, “and to change the way we talk about teaching. Teaching is an acquired skill, not something you can do well just because you’re smart.”

## IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

“Before we make any changes there’s a lot to understand,” says Dr. Yariv Feniger. Examining education from a sociological perspective, he is particularly concerned with social gaps in higher education.



Dr. Yariv Feniger

“The main line of inequality between Jews and Arabs,” he says, “is part of the broader problem of economic inequality. Education isn’t isolated from society; it’s part of it, and a reflection of it.”

Several of his recent studies illuminate the multiple obstacles Arab students face, one example being language. Spoken Arabic is different from literary Arabic, Feniger explains, so when Arab children start school they must learn the literary language.

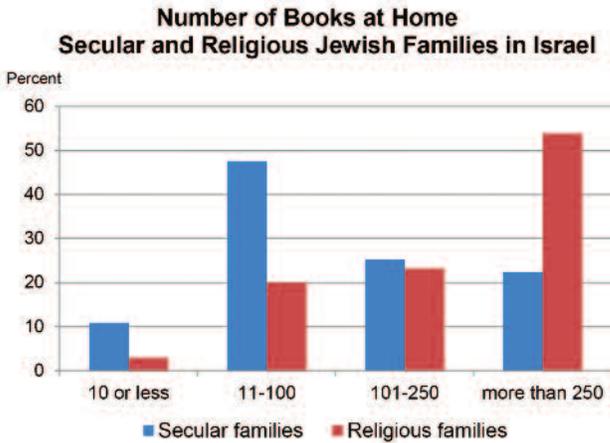
Then from the second or third grade on, they study Hebrew. English is often their fourth language. Most Israeli universities teach in Hebrew and the reading materials are usually in English, so limited skills with the languages make it doubly hard to succeed.

“Investment in language programs would do a lot for the students and for economic development of Arabs,” he believes. Even the relatively few who do go on to college rarely pursue programs that lead to higher income, Feniger finds. He suspects young Arabs believe these fields will present hiring barriers, and intends to research this.

One cause for optimism is the change he observes in Arab girls, including Bedouins. While girls are not yet visible in universities, “their progress is amazing,” Feniger says. “Their achievement in math and science is higher than the boys’, and unlike the boys, very few drop out. At home or in the public sphere they are very limited, but in school, if they are motivated, they can excel.”

The girls’ high motivation is remarkable because their mothers’ generation enjoyed little or no schooling. “We’ll see very important changes when these girls go on to higher education and the labor market,” he predicts.

Feniger has also studied differences between



The figures are based on a representative sample of 15-year-old students in state public and state religious schools in Israel. Data were collected in the PISA 2000 study.

Israel’s two Jewish state school sectors—the secular and religious, both financed and supervised by the state (the ultra-Orthodox schools are autonomous). He wanted to know why achievement levels in the state religious schools are higher. “We know that reading helps develop cognitive skills at a young age, and sociology studies from many countries show that the number of books in the home is a good indicator of achievement. So that was my hypothesis.”

In many parts of the world reading and book ownership relate to social class. In Israel, the research showed, the religious culture was more significant. “Reading is very important to the culture of Judaism,” Feniger points out, “and the religion in general is based on reading. Plus religious families don’t travel or watch TV during the Sabbath. We found that there were in fact more books in these homes, but not necessarily religious books. The teenagers read more secular fiction, for example.”

## STUDYING HOW PEOPLE “KNOW”

Teaching history in New York City, Dr. Michael Weinstock became interested in different ways of “knowing.” BGU’s diverse environment gives him many opportunities to investigate this.

He has researched the Arabs in Northern Israel and the Bedouins of the South for four years, and now collects data on Ethiopians. He aims to answer: As a community’s material life and work changes over generations, does its psychology also change?

“We found this to be true of the Arab communities and, so far, the Bedouin as well. With more higher education and technology their thinking becomes more individualistic. In the past, adolescents were

“The idea that adolescents are naturally different from their parents and grandparents is a very Western idea.”

— DR. MICHAEL WEINSTOCK

very like their grandparents, but today’s young Arabs put ‘me’ rather than ‘we’ at the center.

“Basically we found that younger Arabs are becoming much more like young Israelis, and have increasingly similar values.” However, Weinstock sees little sign that the three generations of Arabs fail to communicate or understand each other. “The idea that adolescents are naturally different from their parents and grandparents is a very Western idea.”

Through interviews, Weinstock learned that the Bedouin grandparents, settled by the government after generations of nomadic life, kept their traditions. “The interesting people were the parents, the ones in the middle who had to do the negotiating. They didn’t simply adopt Western values, but struggled to maintain tradition, as well.”

Weinstock hopes his research will contribute to a better understanding of the cultural change process, and also a more empathetic attitude. “Rather than forcing people to become Western, we should be sensitive to the changes they’ve gone through and appreciate what it means to their lives. And understand what sort of price is paid.”

Another change whose speed surprises him is birthrate decline. It is expected that this occurs as people become more educated and wealthy.



Dr. Michael Weinstock

When Weinstock’s team asked interviewees how many siblings they have, they discovered that this decline has already happened in Arab communities.

Another phenomenon is that assumptions about the nature of knowledge are changing. Young children initially believe that knowledge is objective—that is, that answers are right or wrong, Weinstock says. “As they grow into adolescence they understand that people actively interpret information and might construct different knowledge from one another.”



Prof. Avi Assor

But in recent years the researchers are finding that more and more schoolchildren, in Western cultures at least, believe at an earlier age that “everyone has a right to their own opinion” and no one opinion is better than another. “Today’s kids are encouraged to express their opinions and in the name of tolerance don’t judge. It’s good to push them to think for themselves. But we need to help them develop further so they understand that opinions must be judged against credentials and evidence.”

## FOSTERING MORAL VALUES AND BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN

Finding the best way to nurture children’s “inner compass” is the focus of Prof. Avi Assor’s work. “The development of authentic self-directing values, interests, goals, and commitments provides the backbone of an autonomous identity, psychological growth and the capacity to resist negative peer pressures,” he says.

With his doctoral students, he is engaged in a cross-generational study of “conditional regard” the practice of awarding favor when a child complies

with expectations and withholding it when a child does not. “I wanted to see if this approach to child-rearing would have a negative effect, as opposed to supporting the development of autonomy.”

Data collection for the latest study began with asking 300 expectant parents about their experience with their own parents’ practices. Follow-up assessments were done when the children were 8 months old, 18 months, 2 years old, 3 ½, and 4 ½. At each stage the team observed the mother’s degree of supporting versus controlling behavior, and how the child responded.

“We found that mothers who experienced conditional love themselves tend to behave in a controlling way. By three, the kids tend to comply but become quite distressed when they don’t meet

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**“The development of authentic self-directing values, interests, goals, and commitments provides the backbone of an autonomous identity, psychological growth and the capacity to resist negative peer pressures.”**

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— PROF. AVI ASSOR

expectations. Conditional regard may get your children to do what you want—but may also cause them to internalize your expectations in a very stressful, anxious way.

“These effects are found even in children with fairly ‘easy’ temperaments. So very early on, conditional



regard is very powerful. It has an emotional price.”

There is also a gender difference. While boys sometimes act in a resistant way, girls are more apt to internalize the pressures to comply, and feel more anxious and depressed when they don’t.

Assor’s team also investigates how parents of older children can best respond to “emerging risk behavior:” drinking, missing school, smoking, vandalism. Tight monitoring is not the answer, their research shows, nor are tactics like warnings and removing material resources. This was also found to be true in Bedouin families, where there is more respect for parental authority.

The data indicates that when a youngster does not observe set limits, the parent should show concern, Assor says. “Take the adolescent’s perspective and try to understand his feelings. Explain that you are concerned, try to provide some new information on the

consequences of the risk involved. Then plan with the child concrete ways of coping with peer pressures and other pressures that produce risky or antisocial behavior.”

The parents’ own behavior at times of stress also matters.

“We have evidence that when parents behave in ways that show that they fully identify with the values they try to instill in their children, and orient their children to examine their inner values when facing external pressures, kids develop a firm and authentic sense of identity, understand their emotions better, and are better able to resist peer pressure.”

The team also works with education systems and has carried out a number of school-change programs. Teachers are shown how to act in less controlling ways while limiting violent child behavior. A network in Beer-Sheva, led by Assor’s former doctoral student, Hava Kaplan, is further developing practices that promote autonomous student functioning.

Prof. Assor hopes that further dissemination of the research will widen the circles. “The premise is that parents and teachers can learn to do better, and want to.”



Dr. Iris Tabak

Tabak aims to develop learning systems that support students in the classroom and people in everyday life. “How can we design tools and learning environments, and patterns of social interaction to help novices in a field move more smoothly and efficiently toward expertise?”

Tabak bases her approach on “scaffolding.”

This is a different instructional design than the more typical one, which divides a skillset into simpler components to master one at a time and eventually integrate. In this model, riding a bike, for example, involves learning to pedal, then to steer, then balance, and finally, doing it all together.

“But this gives a learner no clear goal and she doesn’t know how the subsets fit the whole, so it’s hard to pull the skills together,” Tabak says. In contrast, a “whole task” approach is more motivating and effective.

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**“It’s not enough for the information to be out there—you need knowledge and skills to navigate it well.”**

— DR. IRIS TABAK

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But the experience needs support: training wheels to help practice balance; interaction with an adult who asks strategic questions; a teacher who models the strategies.

This is scaffolding—“a carefully calibrated support system that helps learners learn a whole-task activity otherwise outside their reach. With the right support adults as well as children can have access to the different disciplines and skills.”

Overcoming science phobia through scaffolding is one area that

interests Tabak. “People think, ‘I can’t do it!’ They access online resources, but need to use them in a more evidence-based way. Otherwise they may look at comparisons between two drugs and think one is stronger, but may be wrong if they don’t know how things are measured and operationalized. Or they look at a graph and make assumptions instead of deconstructing it and looking at hidden layers of information, as an expert would.

“We need to create those experiences in the classroom and scaffold the processes so mature people can make use of these resources and have command of all this information.”

In one study, Tabak partnered with a Chicago inner-city teacher on an evolution project. They developed scaffolding to help the high school class function like an expert would in retrieving and analyzing information from the database. Beyond a high level of achievement, the teacher reported that although she had thought the project would suit only her honor students, “kids who had never talked in class became very engaged.”

“It’s a matter of being introduced to a different way of seeing things—in this case the ways of science,” Tabak explains. “It’s an important lesson about knowledge. If we learn the unwritten rules and conventions of a field, we can navigate strange waters that specialists have developed over time.

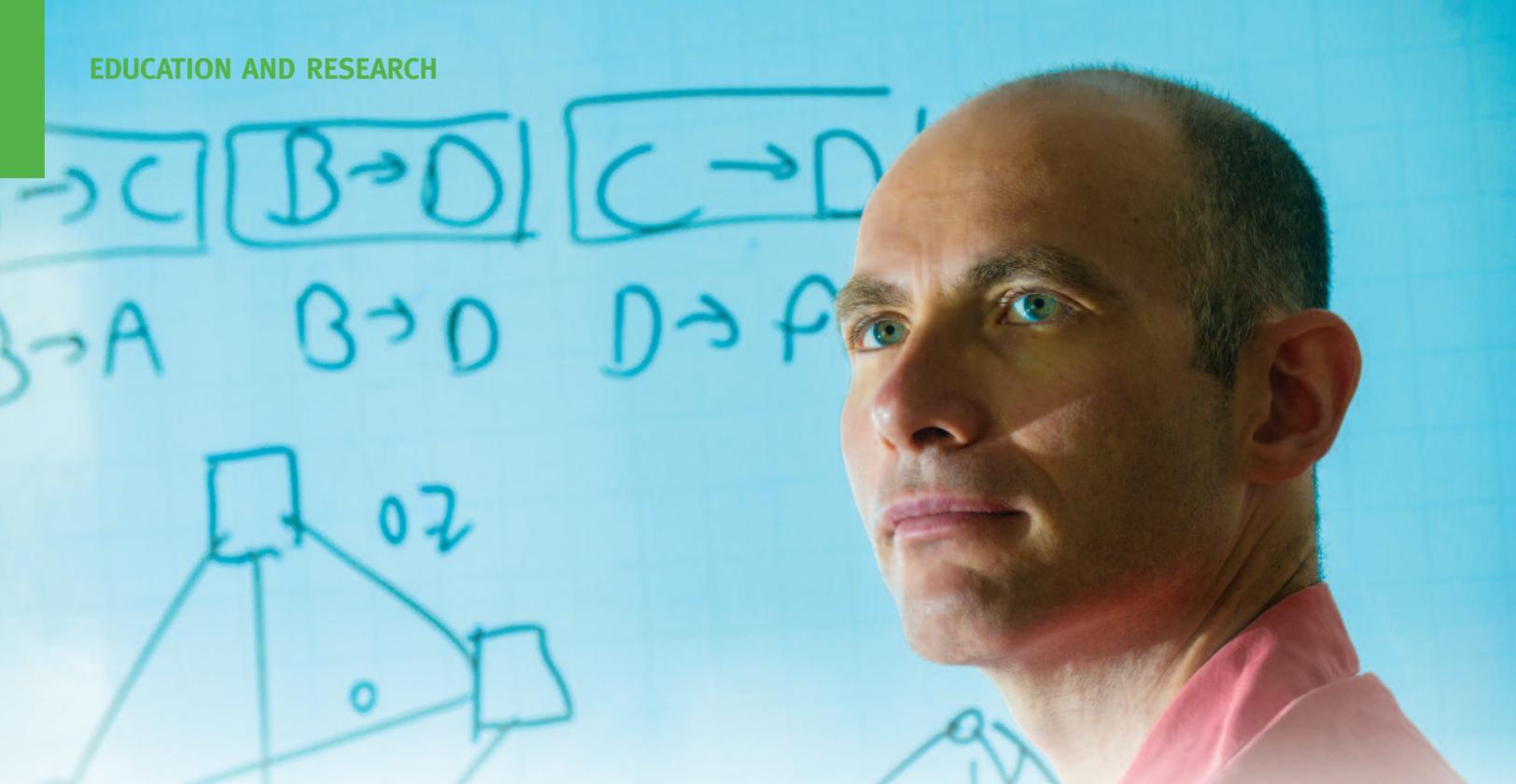
“Whether it’s science or history, we need to know what special lens an expert brings to new information. Can we make that explicit and support novices to adopt the same lens?”

To really understand how people learn and how to design instruction across the lifespan, a multi-dimensional perspective is essential, Tabak says. “In our department we’re each educated within a particular discipline or approach. But we’re very integrated. So each researcher can take a focused stance and collaborate to really examine educational issues through these multiple lenses.” ■

## CREATING HELPFUL LEARNING TOOLS

Dr. Iris Tabak is interested in artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology and learning sciences. She combines it all in pursuit of a mission: to support complex reasoning and increase access to challenging information.

“In a networked society we have an illusion of access to information,” Tabak says. “But it’s not enough for the information to be out there—you need knowledge and skills to navigate it well.”



# USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEARNING AND RESEARCH

**DR. YA'AKOV (KOBI) GAL** acknowledges there is a lot in the news these days about the dangers of artificial intelligence and computers capable of learning.

“I think we’re safe indefinitely. The future is in building machines that can cooperate with humans and share the problem-solving. We’re not trying to build computers that replace or harm people. The future lies not in trying to outwit each other, but in understanding what people can do better and what computers can do better.”

Dr. Gal is uniquely positioned to address this issue. From his undergraduate years onward he combined the studies of psychology, computer sciences and statistics. Before joining BGU’s Department of Information Systems Engineering in 2010, he spent 10 years at Harvard and MIT, studying artificial intelligence (AI) and integrating it with methods from the learning sciences. He continues to spend his

summers at Harvard, collaborating on AI learning research, and heads the Human-Computer Decision-Making Lab at BGU.

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**“My dream is to use computer science to help bring the power of technology to promote education in minority communities.”**

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— DR. KOBI GAL

“The first part of my work is finding good problems, which every scientist looks for,” he says. ‘Good’ means ‘difficult,’ because otherwise it would have already been solved. But I’m not a mathematician solving problems for the sheer joy of it. Solving one also has to make the world a better place.

I look for problems that will do this in the space of how people interact with machines.”

Israel is an ideal place for this work, Gal says. “We’re a small country with many ‘good’ problems, so it’s easy to find a goal and try to make an impact.”

Reflecting his multiple interests, Gal aims to augment existing education technology and facilitate learning. One example is building computer tutors that monitor and support collaborative learning.

“We know group learning works much better than individual learning because students help each other identify mistakes and collaborate on problems rather than compete. The future of education is to make it less of a lecture hall and more a marketplace of ideas.”

One project, worked on with several colleagues, is to support group learning in Bedouin classrooms. “Minority communities don’t have

access to private tutors and expensive accessories,” he points out. “And in a class of 40, if you have 10 groups working simultaneously, how can a teacher give feedback to all the groups?”

“We try to build computers that act like a friendly parrot sitting on the shoulder. They don’t interrupt the learning, but try to identify critical moments, such as when a student has made an important argument, or when the group is off topic. If they’re experimenting with a geometry problem, for example, the algorithm may decide to nudge the group forward by inserting an argument or pointing out someone’s claim that was overlooked.”

The tools are currently used in Jerusalem and Nazareth classrooms, but it’s too early to evaluate results, Gal says. With funds from the Treasury Office the team is working on an off-the-shelf product to advance group learning in different countries. “My dream is to use computer science to help bring the power of technology to promote education in minority communities.”

The approach can be applied virtually, so students need not be in the same place. An experiment bringing together students in East and West Jerusalem is in the works. “A single street can separate two kids with different lives,” Gal observes. “A big problem is to address this lack of integration. If we get Arab and Israeli students to work together—every bit helps.”

In his own classrooms, where he teaches AI, probability theory and computer science, Gal centers learning on group interaction and creates environments where “students can think like scientists, create models, run trials, and make mistakes.” To actively engage students he uses the “flipped classroom principle,” where students study the basic subject matter at home, using online lectures or material, and then experiment together in the classroom.

## SUPPORTING CITIZEN SCIENCE

Dr. Gal is also putting his unusual skillset to work in a new sphere that thrills him: citizen science. “Some scientific problems cannot be solved by researchers alone, and require a mass of people to find answers. The idea is that scientists can outsource such problems to motivated volunteers.” Thanks to the Internet, this phenomenon has developed on a mass scale. There are at least 40 such projects on today’s Worldwide Web.

One compelling example is Galaxy Zoo (galaxyzoo.org). Thousands of images of celestial bodies have been taken by the Hubble space telescope and other means, and continue to be taken. However, they can’t be computer-classified because the picture quality is too low for computers to discern features automatically, Gal explains. So the images are put online, volunteers see a quick tutorial on how different galaxies look, and proceed to classify the images.

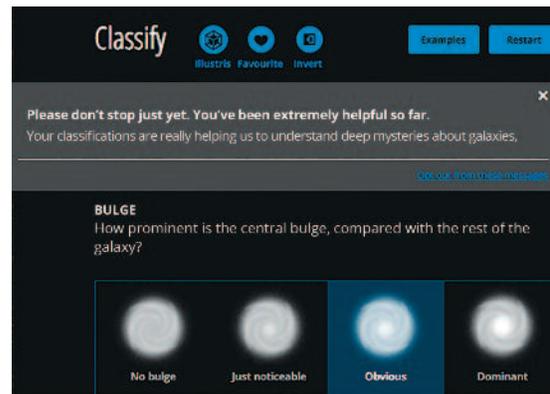
“The big problem is that there is huge dropout,” Gal says. “People do three or four classifications, lose motivation, leave, and never come back. Imagine if you could move that distribution to the right a little and keep people for three or four more classifications. A small increase in the classifying done by the average volunteer would have a significant impact on the performance of the overall project.”

Gal’s team, in collaboration with Microsoft Research in Redmond, Washington, collaborated with Galaxy Zoo to enhance user engagement in the project by combining intervention methods with machine learning. To predict when someone is about to leave a project, the computer looks at the person’s history and “dwell time” to make an accurate prediction.

Volunteers were interviewed to help the group understand why they leave. It was found that some stop because they’re afraid of making mistakes. Such people get a pop-up message

saying in effect, “we use statistical techniques to get the most from every answer so don’t worry about being right—just tell us what you see.”

The message to a group with a different pattern reinforces how helpful the work is: “You’re doing a great job, please stay and help us discover the mysteries of the galaxies.” Another stresses community: “You’re a part of work that’s solving the mysteries of the galaxy!”



Screen shot of Galaxy Zoo message to keep citizen scientists on site longer

A volunteer’s work is disrupted only when the computer judges it necessary. Gal found that using the messages randomly does not work. To make a difference, the timing of a message pop-up must be intelligent, appearing at the moment in which the model predicts the user will disengage with the system.

Doing this work at BGU and in Beer-Sheva suits him very well. “I especially like how the campus intertwines with the city itself and is an important component of it. Beer-Sheva’s college-town atmosphere is unique in Israel,” he says.

Dr. Gal looks forward to BGU’s forthcoming connection with the Israeli military units soon to be based near campus, as well as to the adjacent industrial park. As the Negev develops, the region offers more job opportunities, serving as another magnet that draws the best students to the University.

“BGU is a lifeline for the city—the place to be a pioneer.” ■

# PAVING THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS ADULTS



**THE IDEA** that inspired Path of Knowledge (*B'sbil HaDa'at* in Hebrew), explains Vered Sarousi, director of BGU's Department of Community Action, is to give special-needs adults “the chance to taste student life—an opportunity for enrichment, a feeling of pride in going to a university—a student identity card!”

Last year, 13 special-needs individuals came to the Marcus Family Campus weekly for a course on introductory medicine. The result was so successful that this current year, in addition to medicine, a course on economics and management was introduced. Thirty-three pupils currently participate in the program.

“When I found out I was accepted, I thought someone was pulling my leg.

**Photo:** Their own student ID cards are a special source of pride for Path of Knowledge pupils.

Studying here is a dream come true,” says Eldad Cohen, who took the medicine course.

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**“This program lets me spend one day a week meeting amazing people who get to experience success and capability.”**

— TEDDY PRIMERMAN, STUDENT TEACHER

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Path of Knowledge was born a few years ago when the mother of a special-needs adult remarked to BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi that while many U.S. colleges offer programs for the special-needs

population, Israel had none. A number of programs exist that help people with autism, as well as the physically and intellectually impaired, function well so they can work and accomplish everyday living tasks. But no opportunities were available to make education accessible.

President Carmi wanted to fill this gap, and asked Sarousi to make it happen.

Sarousi approached the Ministry of Welfare, the Beer-Sheva Municipality and the Yachdav Association, which develops community-based social welfare programs for the southern periphery.

“Together we established Path of Knowledge,” Sarousi says, and “thought about a subject. We wanted it to be attractive and interesting, and something that we could teach.

We also wanted it not to be too hard for people to understand, that we could modify to pupil needs. We thought about medicine—and Ofir.”

Ofir Lipshitz, a BGU medical student, was already equipped with teaching experience and was very familiar with special-needs individuals. For more than six years he had worked with them in programs focused on job-finding, housing and practical living skills. “But I never tried to teach them academic material until this program, so it was a big challenge for me.”

Pupil ages range from 20 to 50, and though all must be able to read and write, they come every week to the three-hour sessions with a wide range of capabilities. This demands flexibility, Lipshitz observes.



Ofir Lipshitz

recounts. “We tried to teach too much in one lesson and it was hard for them to understand. So we learned to bring less information, less material to each lesson and approach the same subject three different ways with different activities. Then it was wonderful!”

Participants learn about the human body, practice first aid and CPR, and learn about diseases they heard about. They tour Soroka University Medical Center, learn how the hospital functions and meet doctors.

At year’s end, 11 graduates received course diplomas at a very moving ceremony. This year, nine participants returned for the management course.

“I never actually thought I could attend university; I’m so proud of myself!” says Arthur Binyaminov.

this population you have to go back 30 years to drawing on the board and making games during the lesson. You have to be interactive. I found it’s much easier to grasp information that way.”

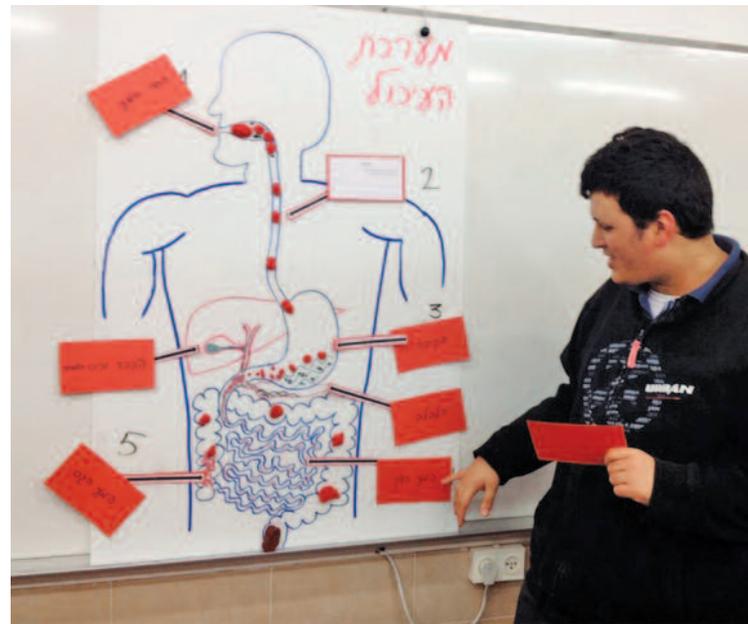
Lipshitz is now coordinator of Path of Knowledge. Four additional teachers—another two medical students and two management students—were selected based on motivation, teaching ability and openness to learning how to work with the population.

Teddy Primerman, student-teacher of medicine, says, “This program lets me spend one day a week meeting amazing people who get to experience success and capability. I love seeing their enthusiasm; I love seeing people who’ve always had trouble studying suddenly enjoy learning!”

Sarousi anticipates adding more courses so those who benefit from the program can continue coming, and more pupils can be served.



Finding friendship is a treasured perk for Path pupils, who often lead isolated lives.



Learning about the digestive system in the medical program

“We try to make the lessons so the strongest will be challenged, but the ones who are a little weaker can still enjoy them.” This takes some trial and error. “At first we aimed higher than we could teach,” he

Lipshitz observes that the experience benefits him, as well. He is becoming a better teacher. Today’s classroom typically employs PowerPoint presentations and the teacher talks against this background, he notes. “But with

“They feel very proud of going to the university,” says Sarousi. “What surprised me very much was not just how successful the program is for the participants, but also for their families, the social workers, the housing staffs.



A graduation ceremony for the first Path of Knowledge group was a special occasion for pupils, family and friends. Many of the graduates returned for another course.

They tell us being BGU students has a magnificent effect on the people.”

Lipshitz, too, is surprised at the extent of the program’s impact. “For me, the most important thing is that it means so much to them. Even those who don’t understand some of what we’re teaching feel what it’s like to be a student. And sometimes this experience means even more for the families.”

Pupils have told him they always dreamed of studying but it seemed impossible. Now they are not only doing so, but have hopes of being able to do even more in the future. One woman shared that she had been basically isolated from people like herself. “The program enabled her to meet new friends and believe in herself much more than before,” says Lipshitz.



A pupil practices CPR.

Pupil Eldad Cohen adds, “It’s a brand new experience for me: getting a new book bag, shaking the president’s hand at the opening

ceremony! I had always thought I was a poor student, but now I feel like I can succeed!”

The Department of Community Action supports the program’s operational expenses and awards scholarships. The partner organizations share in planning, help interview candidates, and support recruitment and marketing.

Everyone hopes to see the program expand at BGU. More courses will enable Path of Knowledge to give more and more of these highly appreciative learners their taste of the college experience.

“It has made me more capable of accepting others and making friends with people who are different from me—and this is a huge gift,” says Primerman.

Indeed it is. ■

# GREAT LAKES

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## ETGAR KERET WOWS IN CHICAGO

BGU lecturer Etgar Keret, the acclaimed Israeli author and film director, was the focus of a symposium at the University of Chicago with the imposing title “Etgar Keret and the Fate of Israeli Culture in the World Today.”

The two-day program was co-sponsored by BGU’s *Heksberim* Institute for Jewish and Israeli Literature and Culture, and attracted panelists and participants from Israel and across the United States. Speakers at the symposium’s opening session included BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi, University of Chicago President Robert Zimmer and *Heksberim* Director Prof. Yigal Schwartz.

The evening before the symposium, Etgar Keret met with a group of AABGU contributors and friends at the high-rise Chicago home of Ann and Walter Nathan. Keret read from his most recent collection of stories, *The Seven Good Years*, and fielded questions from the rapt audience.

## PROF. NOAM WEISBROD VISITS

Prof. Noam Weisbrod, director of BGU’s Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research, delivered an insightful presentation on “Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Global Warming and the Water Cycle” at the beautiful home of Shlomo and Dina Danieli to 30 supporters and guests.

## REMEMBERING RUTH SIMON

The AABGU and the BGU community mourn the passing of Ruth Simon ז”ל. Ruth was a native Chicagoan and astute businesswoman. With her late husband Leonard ז”ל, she was a generous supporter of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Ruth was the beloved mother of AABGU and BGU board member Ernie (Judith) Simon and Ernie’s brother Michael (Linda), and grandmother of Craig (Cheryl) Simon and Eric (Karen) Simon, members of the inaugural cohort of AABGU’s Zin Fellows Leadership Program. May her memory be a blessing.

## REMEMBERING LEONARD SAVITT

The AABGU and the BGU community mourn the passing of Leonard Savitt ז”ל of Northbrook, Illinois. Lenny was an entrepreneur, adventurer and sportsman. With his beloved wife, Sheila, and their children, Andrew, Arlen (Sima), Carey (Amber), and Julie, Lenny endowed BGU’s Maurice and Sylvia Young Memorial Scholarship in memory of Sheila’s dear parents. In 2013, Lenny and Sheila proudly brought their children and grandchildren to Israel and BGU’s Board of Governors to celebrate their recognition as Founders. May his memory be a blessing.



1. Prof. Yigal Schwartz, Na’ama Rokem of the University of Chicago, BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi, and Etgar Keret 2. Etgar Keret, Walter Nathan, Great Lakes Regional Director Steven Franklin, and Susan Scholl 3. BGU visitors Ruth Ophir, Michael Baskin, David Baskin, and Felicia Baskin on the “double helix” footbridge from Beer-Sheva’s Advanced Technologies Park to the Goodman (Beer-Sheva North) Train Station 4. Steven Franklin, Shlomo and Dina Danieli, Prof. Noam Weisbrod, and Yefet Ozery

# GREATER FLORIDA

## GREATER FLORIDA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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 Reva Feldman, *Director*  
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1

## BLOOMING WITH INNOVATION IN DELRAY BEACH

The Greater Florida Region was the local host of AABGU's "Blooming With Innovation" Mid-Winter Meeting in February, welcoming national board members, local contributors and new friends to a variety of events in Delray Beach.

The documentary *Ben-Gurion Remembers* was screened followed by a Q&A session with Michael Bar-Zohar, the film's producer and David Ben-Gurion's biographer. Bar-Zohar also spoke at the dinner reception about his most recent book, *No Mission Is Impossible: The Israeli Special Forces*. Attendees had the opportunity to learn from three BGU faculty members at the AABGU University lecture series: Prof. Michael (Mick) Alkan of BGU's Medical School for International Health; Dr. Adi Portugies, director of the Ben-Gurion Archives; and Prof. Noam Weisbrod, director of the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research.



2



3

1. Carol Robinson and Jeffrey Markel with BGU President Prof. Rikva Carmi (left)
2. Prof. Mick Alkan with AABGU National Board Member Jan Liff
3. Greater Florida Region's newest BGU Founders: Stanley and Sylvia Graber; Beverly and Jack Fox

## BGU FACULTY IN FLORIDA

The Greater Florida Region and the Mid-Atlantic Region hosted Prof. Emeritus Fred Lazin who gave a Middle East update at the 17th Annual Snowbird Reception at Indian

Spring Country Club. The event was co-chaired by Mervin Hartman, Ann Waldman and Dorothy Wasserman.

Prof. Dan Blumberg, BGU's vice president and dean for research and development and director of the Homeland Security Institute, returned to South Florida for two events in March. Co-sponsored with the Greater New York Region, Prof. Blumberg spoke at the home of Karen and Gene Kroner. The following evening, Prof. Blumberg presented at a private dinner hosted by Palm Beach County AABGU National Board Members Rich Bernstein, Rob Colton, Max Javit, Ed Kaplan, Al Newman, Joel Reinstein, and Marty Weinberg.

Prof. Mick Alkan spoke at Temple Beth Am in Jupiter and Temple Emanu-El of Palm Beach. A parlor

meeting was held at the home of contributor Dorothy Polayes. National Board Member Robert Colton hosted a brunch for prospective donors.

Robert Colton and Al Newman hosted private meetings with Prof. Eilon Adar, who was in Florida to participate in BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research Scientific Advisory Board Meeting.

## VISITING BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY

Special appreciation to Carol Robinson and Jeffrey Markel who recently visited BGU on behalf of the Donald and Sylvia Robinson Family Foundation, a new Founder of the University.

## GREATER NEW YORK

Lite Sabin, *Chair*  
Kevin M. Leopold  
*Executive Director – Northeast*  
Diane Romirowsky  
*Associate Director*  
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### MEETING A TRUE HERO OF ISRAEL'S FIRST AID NATION

The Greater New York Region enjoyed a visit from a very special member of the BGU family. Prof. Michael (Mick) Alkan, M.D., professor emeritus of medicine at BGU, is known for being a first responder during the world's most significant disasters, and has played a major role in developing the curriculum for BGU's Medical School for International Health (MSIH).

A unique English-language program with a global health curriculum, MSIH prepares physicians to address the complexity of health concerns throughout the world and to practice medicine across cultural, geographic and technological boundaries.

MSIH students from around the world spend three years studying in Beer-Sheva, then participate in fourth-year clinical electives at prestigious medical institutions in the United States and Canada. They also complete an eight-week global health clerkship in underserved clinical settings in India, Africa, Asia, North America, or South America.

Neda Melamed, Esq., who first met Prof. Alkan during AABGU's 2009 Young Professional Mission to Israel and the Negev, chaired a program featuring the professor at Colbeh, a Persian restaurant in New York City. Following a sumptuous meal, guests

listened to Prof. Alkan discuss his role in helping found BGU's medical school in the 1970s, his involvement in developing the MSIH curriculum, BGU's philosophy on global health and medicine, and Israel's role in worldwide disaster relief.

Prof. Alkan was one of the world's first responders to the devastating Nepal earthquake in 2015. He shared how he gathered a team of his most trusted students to provide medical relief to those in need.

This is not the first time Prof. Alkan has been the first on the scene during a global crisis. He also led a team to New Orleans during 2005's Hurricane Katrina and to the Far East following the 2004 tsunami. He was also the head of the internal medicine clinic at an Israeli field hospital for Kosovo refugees in Macedonia in 1999.

The general consensus in the room was that Prof. Alkan is a true hero and a shining example of a humanitarian. Guests were overheard saying "he's an inspiration" and "a remarkable

individual providing hope and kindness in a world of chaos."

Event attendees were reminded that they can make an impact and assist these humanitarian efforts by contributing to scholarships for MSIH students. Having more scholarships available will help BGU recruit the best and brightest to this one-of-a-kind program, while reducing the burden of debt carried by young physicians dedicating themselves to underserved communities around the world.

**Contributions to MSIH scholarships will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation through September 30, 2016.**



1. Richard and Deborah Tolchin at the Colbeh event  
2. Marsha and Michael Wasserman enjoying the evening featuring Prof. Mick Alkan at Colbeh in New York City  
3. BGU students (Lior Goldstein, Alon Nissan, Dana Kalishov, Liza Shabbat, and Daniel Adda) led the Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony via Skype during the region's second annual holiday lunch.

# GREATER TEXAS

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 Ellen Marcus, *Austin Chair*  
 Deborah Bergeron, *Regional Director*  
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## THE LARGEST-EVER GOURMET KOSHER EXTRAVAGANZA RAISES FUNDS FOR WATER RESEARCH

More than 425 guests turned out February 22 for the 15th Gourmet Kosher Extravaganza to support Ben-Gurion University and water research. It was the region's largest Extravaganza to date.

Attendees enjoyed a five-course kosher meal prepared by Houston's most celebrated chefs at the Westin Galleria Hotel. This year's chefs included Mark Cox of Mark's, Carmelo Mauro of Carmelo's, John Sheely of Mockingbird Bistro, Mark Holley of Holley's, Richard Kaplan of Weights + Measures, Jason Goldstein of Genesis Steakhouse, and Steve Caruana of the Westin Galleria Hotel.

The special guest speaker was Seth M. Siegel, author of *Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World*. Siegel told the inspiring story of how, through bold thinking, Israel has transformed its water issues from a burden into an opportunity. He shared how the Jewish State has been jumping ahead of the water innovation curve for decades in areas such as irrigation, smart agriculture, desalination, and wastewater reuse.

Doron Krakow, AABGU's executive vice president, delivered an inspiring speech about Ben-Gurion University's role in the development of the Negev and the future of Israel. He also served as the event's master of ceremonies.



1. Extravaganza Vice Chair Robin Stein; Guest Speaker Seth Siegel; Extravaganza Chair and Greater Texas Regional/Houston Chair Elizabeth Grzebinski; Greater Texas Regional Director Deborah Bergeron  
 2. Leslie Strug, Allison Levine and Sara Bloome enjoying the 15th Gourmet Kosher Extravaganza  
 3. Deborah Bergeron (center) recognizes Houston's finest chefs who volunteered their time and talent to this year's event: Steve Caruana, Mark Holley, Richard Kaplan, Jason Goldstein, John Sheely, Mark Cox, and Carmelo Mauro.

"We were so pleased with the amount of support our local community showed this year," said Extravaganza Chair Elizabeth Grzebinski and Vice Chair Robin Stein. "Water conservation is a global issue and Ben-Gurion University's research is a critical part of the solution."

In celebration of the Extravaganza's 15th anniversary, each chef received a beautiful hand-made, flame-shaped award created by local glass artist Bill Meek.

All proceeds from the 2016 Gourmet Kosher Extravaganza went to graduate student fellowships at Ben-Gurion University's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research.

## MENDING BROKEN HEARTS AT AUSTIN'S TAPESTRY OF JEWISH LEARNING

BGU Ph.D. candidate Yulia Sapir presented "Mending Broken Hearts: Breakthroughs in Biomaterials" at Austin's Tapestry of Jewish Learning event in January. Her presentation provided a special look into the future of medicine in Israel.

Sapir spoke of a new groundbreaking heart "patch" under development in BGU's Avram and Stella Goldstein-Goren Department of Biotechnology Engineering. After a heart attack, the patch covers the damaged tissue, helping normal blood-flow continue so patients can recover faster and more fully.

## MID-ATLANTIC

Jack R Bershad  
*Regional Chair*  
 Marla and Dr. Robert Zipkin  
*Philadelphia Chapter Chairs*  
 Jeffrey Letwin  
*Pittsburgh Chapter Chair*  
 Dr. Barry Kayne  
*Delaware Chapter Chair*  
 Claire Winick, *Director*  
 Seth Bloom  
*Associate Director*  
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### DELAWARE LEADERSHIP

*Mazal tov* to Dr. Barry S. Kayne, founding chair of the Mid-Atlantic Region's new Delaware Chapter.

A periodontal and implant specialist and community leader, Dr. Kayne is active in AIPAC and has served as president of the Delaware Jewish Federation and Hillel at the University of Delaware. He and his wife, Reiko, are new BGU Founders and they co-chaired AABGU's 2015 "Powerful Voices for Israel" event in Philadelphia.

### EVENTS AROUND THE REGION

Prof. Ilan Troen spoke about "Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Past Real and Imagined," at several venues. These included Tifereth Israel of Lower Bucks County, hosted by Lana Pinkenson, a Philadelphia Chapter officer; Beth Shalom in Delaware; and The Watermark, a Philadelphia retirement community. Regional Chair Jack R Bershad hosted a Chanukah luncheon board meeting, featuring Prof. Troen, at the offices of Blank Rome LLP.

"First Aid Nation: Israel's Commitment to Global Health and Medicine" was the topic when Prof. Emeritus Mick

Alkan, M.D. addressed students and community members at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy. The event was organized by Michele Levin, the school's president and AABGU national board member. Prof. Alkan also spoke at the Consulate General of Israel, a Rotary Club luncheon, and a dessert reception in the home of Philadelphia Chapter Chairs Marla and Dr. Robert Zipkin.

### THE ART OF GIVING

In 1976, Dr. Alton Sutnick received the Dr. William Beaumont Award in Medicine from the American Medical Association for his research on the hepatitis virus and on pulmonary surfactant. His wife Mona, of blessed

memory, suggested they purchase an Alexander Calder gouache painting with the award's proceeds. In the ensuing years, the painting's value grew over 25-fold. Just before Mona's passing in late 2015, she and Al decided to donate the artwork to AABGU, the organization they have supported for 30 years.

This work, by the noted Philadelphia artist, now graces the office of BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi, M.D., until it eventually finds a permanent home in a planned campus art gallery. Al hopes that this gift will be identified as a lasting symbol of the longstanding academic relationship between BGU and Philadelphia.



1. Dr. Barry Kayne, founding chair of AABGU's Delaware Chapter 2. Dr. Robert Zipkin, Prof. Ilan Troen, Lisa Scheller, Jack R Bershad 3. Jackie Needleman, Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) co-president; Prof. Mick Alkan of BGU's Medical School for International Health; Michele Levin, president, Barrack Hebrew Academy and AABGU national board member; and Jen Willner, Barrack Hebrew Academy PTO co-president 4. Dr. Al Sutnick with the Calder gouache donated in memory of Dr. Mona Sutnick z"l

# NEW ENGLAND

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## BGU STUDENT TEAM WINS FOR CANCER THERAPY

During a recent visit to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Executive Director Kevin Leopold and Associate Director Diane Romirowsky had the opportunity to meet with members of the BGU student team that participated in the 12th Annual International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition in Boston.

They were warmly welcomed by the team’s faculty supervisors, Dr. Efrat Forti and Dr. Emil Ruvinov, along with Shoham Rigbi, one of the team’s eight students from the Avram and Stella Goldstein-Goren Department of Biotechnology Engineering.

The talented and driven group reflected on their experience at the international competition where nearly 4,600 students from all over the world competed. BGU’s iGEM team won the grand prize in the Best Health and Medicine Project category among “overgraduates” (graduate level), and was the first runner up in the overall competition. They also won a third award for Best New Basic Part.

The winning BGU project, called “Boomerang,” is based on advanced methods of genetic engineering and synthetic biology. Boomerang recognizes cancer cells and causes disruption of the genes that are essential for cancer survival, or activates suicide genes so that the cancer or tumor kills itself. It can also produce color

proteins for cancer cell detection so that the edges of a tumor become visible to ensure complete surgical removal.

The name Boomerang mirrors the actions in which the synthetic system uses cancer cells’ own genetic alterations against them.

Dr. Ruvinov explained that the student-developed modular system identifies the cancer cells and treats them on an individual basis. Since such changes vary from person to person and between different types of tumors, this cancer therapy could lead to personalized care for each patient.

“The team’s goal was to contribute to the advancement of the State of Israel, and Ben-Gurion University in particular, and help to establish Israel and BGU at the forefront of development and innovation in the field of synthetic biology,” added Shoham Rigbi.

Still basking in the glow of the team’s epic win, Dr. Forti and Dr. Ruvinov are already looking ahead to next year’s competition. They are assembling a strong group of students with a variety of academic backgrounds, including biotechnology engineering, medicine, economics, politics, biology, and brain and cognition science.

“We can’t wait to see you in Boston this coming September and cheer on BGU’s brilliant students to another victory,” said Leopold and Romirowsky.



1. iGEM team faculty advisors Dr. Efrat Forti and Dr. Emil Ruvinov with Kevin Leopold, Northeast executive director, and student team members Shoham Rigbi and Shalev Goldfarb  
 2. BGU iGEM team members with BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi (back row center) and team leader Prof. Smadar Cohen (back row to right of Prof. Carmi)  
 3. Judi Krupp (center) and her husband Douglas (not pictured) hosted an intimate dinner for the students who participated in the 2015 iGEM competition in Boston.

## NORTHWEST

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### REVEALING THE BIOLOGY OF AUTISM

Hundreds of Sacramento community members welcomed BGU neuroscientist Dr. Ilan Dinstein for a scholar-in-residence weekend focused on innovations in autism research. Dr. Dinstein described how his neurophysiological autism lab—the only one of its kind in Israel—uses neuroimaging techniques, such as MRI and EEG, to study brain structure and function in children with autism.

His goal is to identify objective biological measures for diagnosing autism in children as young as one year-old, rather than relying on behavioral assessments of pre-school-aged children, which is the current standard. Dr. Dinstein also aims to distinguish between different sub-types of autism, using a new comprehensive regional autism database.

The three-day event, held at the KOH Library and Cultural Center and Mosaic Law Congregation, was hosted by the Michael Boussina Inclusion Program, which provides programs and resources for the entire community supporting the inclusion of children and adults with special needs. Named in honor of Michael Boussina, a nine-year-old boy with special needs, the program is dedicated to providing a voice for him and others who cannot speak for themselves.

### ISRAELI KNOW-HOW INSPIRES WATER-SAVING AGRICULTURAL PILOT PROJECT

Every year, Sacramento Valley farmers flood approximately 500,000 acres of rice fields under five inches of water.

Even during California's historic drought, 2.8 million acre-feet of water, or about six percent of the state's total consumption, is used annually to grow rice.

Thanks to Israeli innovations in water technology and soil engineering, an experimental plot of rice was planted this spring, using subsurface drip irrigation, on Conaway Ranch in Woodland, California (see page 3). In partnership with Prof. Eilon Adar and BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research, Lundberg Family Farms and the drip irrigation company Netafim,

the ranch hopes this pilot project will not only save enormous amounts of water, but can become a model for growing rice wherever water is scarce.

A film crew from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) spent a day on the ranch interviewing Prof. Adar and the other project partners. The film illustrates how Israel is helping California overcome its water crisis, and was featured at AIPAC's 2016 Policy Conference in March in Washington, D.C. See the film online at [www.aabgu.org/watervideo](http://www.aabgu.org/watervideo)



1. Nine-year-old Michael Boussina with his grandfather, Baryohay Davidoff (left), his parents Eileen and Nersi Boussina (right) and BGU neuroscientist Dr. Ilan Dinstein (center) 2. Dr. Ilan Dinstein presents his autism research at the KOH Library and Cultural Center in Sacramento. 3. AIPAC filming at Conaway Ranch (left to right): Scott Warr, regional sales director of Netafim USA; Prof. Eilon Adar, BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research; Bryce Lundberg, vice president of agriculture, Lundberg Family Farms; Kyriakos Tsakopoulos, president and chief executive officer of AKT Development/Conaway Ranch 4. Prof. Eilon Adar with Kyriakos Tsakopoulos at Conaway Ranch

# SOUTHWEST

Ruth Flinkman-Marandy  
*Campaign Chair*  
 Philip Gomperts, *Director*  
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## REMEMBERING A WOMAN OF VALOR

The Southwest Region, along with the board and staff of AABGU, mourn the loss of our dear friend, Lottie Blumlein Marcus, an energetic, kind-hearted woman of valor.

Together with her beloved late husband of 72 years, Dr. Howard Marcus, Lottie made a significant impact on Israel's Negev region through her magnanimous support of BGU.

The Marcus Family Campus in Beer-Sheva, named for the family in 2005, reflects their commitment to the University and their longstanding support of BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research. Their generosity will make a dramatic impact on the development and growth of BGU and the Negev for many years to come.

"She was a loving wife and a caring mother, and even though she lost her family in the horrors of the Holocaust, Lottie always maintained her zest for life and her keen sense of humor," says Philip Gomperts, regional director of AABGU's Southwest Region.

Lottie will be deeply missed, but her legacy will be felt in every BGU hallway and courtyard, in each classroom and laboratory, and by the faculty, students and researchers who will be touched by her generosity for generations to come.

## REVEALING THE BIOLOGY BEHIND AUTISM

Dr. Ilan Dinstein, of BGU's Department of Psychology and Zlotowski Center for Neuroscience, spoke at an event at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills.



1. Lottie Marcus 2/1 2. Top Row: Ben Marandy; Dodi Fromson and Judge Leon Kaplan, national board member; Seated: AABGU National Board Member Ruth Flinkman-Marandy; Dr. Ilan Dinstein 3. Paula Sherman, Prof. Dan Blumberg, Arlie Sherman, Dr. Zuli Steremberg, Lawrence Green, David Adler, Israel Hanin, and Don Ohsman

Dr. Dinstein established Israel's first neurophysiological autism lab and presented on the biology behind autism. AABGU supporters and new friends were intrigued by his approach to this research, staying late to ask questions often related to familial experiences with autism.

Special friends of AABGU in attendance included Yair Vardi, director of academic affairs at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dr. Ben Drillings, director of the Israeli Medical Association; and Jacob Segal, executive director of the Southern California Israel Chamber of Commerce.

## BGU VICE PRESIDENT VISITS PHOENIX

A series of meetings were held in the Phoenix area with Prof. Dan Blumberg, BGU's vice president and dean of research and development and director of the Homeland Security Institute.

Prof. Blumberg discussed new developments at BGU, including Beer-Sheva's Advanced Technologies Park, the IDF's move south, cyber security research, and plans for the North Campus.

# WASHINGTON/ BALTIMORE

Edie and Art Hessel  
*Washington D.C. Chapter Chairs*  
 Keren M. Waranch, *Director*  
 David K. Speer, *Development Associate*  
 wash-balt@aabgu.org

## A SPOTLIGHT ON BGU AT THE AIPAC POLICY CONFERENCE

This year's AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington D.C. prominently featured the achievements of Ben-Gurion University, including the University's role in Negev development, the field of cyber security research, and helping California solve its water crisis.

AABGU held a reception for conference participants at the Mediterranean restaurant Zaytinya, hosted by National Board Vice President Joel Reinstein of Florida and coordinated by the Washington/Baltimore Region. Special thanks to BGU Board of Governors Member Peter Schechter and his wife, Rosa Puech, co-owners of Zaytinya, for welcoming the group to their restaurant.

The reception featured special guests and AIPAC presenters BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi and Prof. Eilon Adar, deputy dean of the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research.

## A DAY OF JEWISH LEARNING IN WASHINGTON

ROUTES, the Greater Washington Jewish community's annual day of adult Jewish learning, featured BGU Ph.D. candidate Yulia Sapir who presented "Mending Broken Hearts: Breakthroughs in Biomaterials." She described a breakthrough in medical research that resulted in a functional cardiac muscle patch that can replace damaged and/or missing myocardial tissue with algae-based biomaterials.

## HOW ACADEMIC RESEARCH IMPACTS POLITICAL POLICY

The region partnered with the Baltimore Hebrew Institute (BHI) at Towson University for a community-wide event, "The Complex Geographies of Waste: How Academic Research Impacts Political Policy." Dr. Yaakov Garb of BGU's Bona Terra Department of Man in the Desert at the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research was the featured speaker.

The event was part of BHI's "Visions of Place: Complex

Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art," an exhibition of contemporary art and related programming that explores the complexities of Israel through a wide variety of lenses.

## VISITING BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY

Special thanks to recent visitors to Ben-Gurion University, including Marcus and Carole Weinstein of Richmond, Virginia; new supporters Michael Krauss and Cynthia Conner of Gaithersburg, Maryland; and Matt and Joanne London and their two daughters of Silver Spring, Maryland.



1. Yulia Sapir at ROUTES: A Day of Jewish Learning in Greater Washington 2. Michael Krauss and Cynthia Connor met students from BGRacing, the first ever Israeli team to place in the top 10 at the Formula SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers) competition in Italy. 3. Washington/Baltimore staff Keren Waranch and David Speer at Hazerim Air Force Base in the Negev

# MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT ON BGU WITH MATCHING GIFTS



Many matching gift opportunities are available to help you make a significant difference for Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

## ▶ AABGU'S MATCHING GIFT FUNDS

Thanks to the leadership and generosity of some members of the AABGU family, if you make a contribution to one of the following programs, your gift will be matched.

### **Woodman-Scheller Graduate Fellowships in Israel Studies**

All gifts made in support of BGU's Israel Studies International Program will be matched dollar-for-dollar. This program draws graduate students from around the world to learn about the establishment and development of the Jewish state from historical and contemporary perspectives.  
[www.aabgu.org/donate-israel-studies](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-israel-studies)

### **Medical School for International Health Scholarship Fund**

BGU's Medical School for International Health (MSIH) is a unique English-language program that prepares physicians to address the complexity of health concerns across cultures and around the world. Contributions will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation up to \$200,000 through September 30, 2016.  
[www.aabgu.org/donate-msih](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-msih)

### **Bedouin Scholarships**

Scholarships for Bedouin students help end the cycle of poverty and foster their integration within Israeli society. Your contribution to Bedouin scholarships will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Arnow family of New York up to \$225,000 through September 30, 2016.  
[www.aabgu.org/donate-bedouin](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-bedouin)

### **Sephardic Heritage Studies**

The Colonel J.R. Elyachar Center for Studies in Sephardic Heritage researches the history and culture of various Diasporas of Sephardic Jewry. Its "Zohar and the Arts" project promotes interdisciplinary Kabbalah scholarship through the arts, literature and psychoanalysis. For each \$35,000 donated per year toward Zohar and the Arts, the Matanel Foundation will contribute \$65,000 as part of a nine-year match commitment.  
[www.aabgu.org/donate-zohar](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-zohar)

### **Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program**

This program provides free housing to more than 100 highly motivated undergraduate students each year who live in five distressed neighborhoods of Beer-Sheva in exchange for serving these communities. Donations will be matched by the Goodman Supporting Foundations.

[www.aabgu.org/donate-apartments](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-apartments)



## **▶ ISRAELI GOVERNMENT MATCHING RESEARCH FUNDS**

### **Cyber Security**

BGU's Cyber Security Research Initiative allocates grants for innovative cyber research at BGU and builds needed infrastructure. Funds have been provided by Israel's National Cyber Bureau on the condition that the University provides \$1.5 million in matching funds each year. This will enable BGU to create a national research center for the protection of cyber space that is surpassed by none in the world.

[www.aabgu.org/donate-cyber](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-cyber)

### **Nanotechnology**

The Israel National Nanotechnology Initiative provided millions of dollars to BGU for its research efforts in developing night vision goggles that are as lightweight as eyeglasses. They also provided significant funds for researchers to develop nano-carriers to target drug delivery in the body. These grants require BGU to supply substantial matching funds.

[www.aabgu.org/donate-nano](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-nano)

## **▶ COMPANY MATCHES**

**Millions of people throughout the United States work for companies that have matching gift programs, supporting the charities their employees care about.**

Most companies offer a 1:1 match. If an employee gives \$100 to AABGU, they will give \$100. But some companies offer a 2:1 match or more. And, while each company has a limit on how much they will match, some will match as much as a \$50,000 contribution. Research shows that billions of dollars budgeted by corporations for matching gifts go unused each year.

Ask your human resources department if your company will match your gift to AABGU, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. And, maximize your impact for BGU students, researchers and Israel's Negev region.

**Donate online at [www.aabgu.org/donate-now](http://www.aabgu.org/donate-now) or contact your regional AABGU office.**



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## Fact:

Israel has an *abundance* of water and the answers to help the rest of the planet with its growing water crises.

## And you can help, too.

By establishing an AABGU Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA), you are supporting Israel's experts at the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev who are working in China, India and across Africa, and even in drought-stricken California.

### Sample Annuity Rates

Age	Rate	Tax Free*
65	6%	72.4%
70	6.5%	75.2%
75	7.1%	77.5%
80	8%	79.7%
85	9.5%	83.3%
90	11.3%	85.2%

\*In the month you use cash to establish a gift annuity, a final calculation is made determining the portion that will be paid to you tax-free.

For more information or to request a CGA rate illustration, call 800-962-2248 ext.1400, e-mail [plannedgiving@aabgu.org](mailto:plannedgiving@aabgu.org) or visit [www.aabgu.org/cga-request](http://www.aabgu.org/cga-request)