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BIU Women Academics Take the National Lead

Statistics published recently revealed that women still represent only about a quarter of Israel’s academic faculty: 26% in 2006 compared with 23% in 2000. Female professors say the academic “glass ceiling” remains in place because only superficial, easy-to-handle issues have been addressed, not advancement mechanisms and acceptance procedures.

While all the other Israeli universities have stagnated with regards to improving female faculty membership, only Bar-Ilan has enjoyed a constantly increasing trend in its hiring of female academics. Indeed, at BIU the rate of female researchers to begin their work during the coming academic year is higher than that of any other university in the country.

Bar-Ilan Jurists at the Pinnacle

Recently, the Israeli financial daily Globes reviewed some of the top Israeli “brains” in the judicial field, among them the following BIU stars:

Prof. Gideon Parchomovsky is a professor at BIU, the University of Pennsylvania, and is a visiting lecturer at Yale University. Globes singled him out as the number one outstanding legal researcher in the under-40 category. Specializing in economics and law, Prof. Parchomovsky’s research is acquisition, intellectual property, internet law, and contract law. “Intellectual property is especially important in Israel, where there are so many high-tech industries,” he says. Prof. Parchomovsky zigzags between the USA and Israel. For seven weeks of the academic semester, he lives on a plane. “I fly from class to class, and from lesson to lesson.” Parchomovsky explains. “This way I am connected to both Israeli and American academic studies and research at the highest level.”

Dr. Shachar Lipschitz, a senior lecturer at BIU’s Faculty of Law is an expert in family law. He is considered to be a genius in his field. Dr. Lipschitz returned to Israel after a two-year stint at Yeshiva University’s Cardozo Law School. Dr. Lipschitz has been awarded more than ten prizes and stipends, among them the Rothschild Post-doctoral Stipend, the Fulbright Scholarship, and the Bahat Prize for a young researcher for his book on cohabitation law in Israel.
Bar-Ilan Scientist Creates Unique Counterterror Computer Program

Dr. Gal Kaminka of BIU’s Gonda (Goldschmied) Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center has designed the ultimate virtual terrorist for a simulation program that will help train security forces around the world in their war against terrorism. Dr. Kaminka’s team based the unique program on Artificial Intelligence (AI) software by Soar Technology of Ann Arbor, Mich. Dr. Kaminka, whose specialty is AI, created synthetic red forces he calls “Smart Entities” – unique virtual fighters that think and behave like human beings – as part of a computer simulation program designed by Israel’s Elbit Systems. In addition to their cognitive capacity, these virtual fighters possess the operational knowledge and clandestine survival skills of real terrorists whose experiences and feelings have been recorded in thousands of hours of interrogations and debriefings by Israel’s security services.

“What makes this project one of the most advanced of its kind is the way it integrates extraordinary scientific achievements with knowledge gleaned from the real world,” says Dr. Kaminka. “The unpredictability of the Smart Entities – along with their ability to internalize an authentic, street-smart terrorist mind-set – is unique in the world of Artificial Intelligence.”

British Academics Visit Bar-Ilan

Less than a month after the British University and College Union announced that the proposed boycott of Israeli universities is illegal and therefore cannot be implemented, a delegation of British University Vice-Chancellors arrived in Israel to advance scientific cooperation between Israel, the UK and the Palestinian Authority.

As the earliest victim of the infamous British-initiated cry for an academic boycott of Israeli universities and lecturers, BIU has been at the vanguard of an international movement of academic institutions created to fight such academic boycotts.

“This visit serves as a counter to the defunct academic boycott. Instead of threatening academic freedom, it represents a practical effort to generate academic cooperation for the benefit of all,” said Prof. Yosef Yeshurun, chair and founder of the International Advisory Board for Academic freedom (IAB) and former BIU Rector. “These Vice Chancellors are interested in promoting and encouraging research, not in boycotting or silencing those whose work contributes to the alleviation of human poverty and the improvement of welfare,” added Ofir Frankel, IAB executive director.

BIU Diamond Researchers Shatter a Hard Problem

BIU chemists Prof. Shmaryahu Hoz, Prof. Harold Basch and Dr. Lior Itzhak (and Prof. Eli Altus from the Technion) have solved a mystery which has puzzled scientists for decades, revealing the secret behind the extreme natural hardness of diamonds, The Jerusalem Post reported. In a paper due to be published in The Journal of Physical Chemistry, the researchers explain that substance’s super-strength is caused by chemical interactions on a quantum level, linking atoms which are not directly attracted to each other through sub-atomic, “hybrid” bonds. The team has predicted that the discovery will allow the engineering of new hard substances in the laboratory, some of which may prove even harder than diamonds and more suited to use in industrial applications.
BIU Sponsors First-Time Aliyah Conference that Reveals Most Olim Would Do it Again

BIU sponsored the first annual “Ashdod Aliyah and Absorption Conference” recently under the patronage of the Ministry of Absorption. The conference brought together more than two hundred public figures along with the key organizations which work with olim (new immigrants) for an intensive discussion on aliyah and absorption from strategic, cultural, economic, and interpersonal perspectives.

Among the findings:
- 75% of olim would repeat their choice of immigrating to Israel, despite the existential problems they have in their day-to-day lives.
- Only 10% were certain that they would not make the choice again, knowing what they do today.

The survey is very encouraging because of the high spirited nationalistic mood of the immigrants even after the Second Lebanon War and because most of them are not considering leaving the country. In sponsoring such a conference, Bar-Ilan is doing its part to ensure that aliyah and the concerns of olim are high on the national agenda.

Bar-Ilan Social Work Program Helps Ethiopians Adjust

Israel’s Ethiopian community comes from a society where male-female roles are specifically assigned. In Ethiopia, the men rule the household while their wives and children are subservient. The cultural shock of moving to a country where women are given the same standing as men can be very difficult to absorb and has, indeed, led to a level of domestic abuse and violence within Ethiopian families that was unheard of in their country of origin.

At a joint session of the Knesset committees on the Status of Women and Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs, Welfare and Social Services Minister Isaac Herzog, acknowledged the difficulties of integrating these new immigrants. “We are doing many things,” stated Herzog, mentioning specifically a new BIU program to train Israeli social workers with special understanding of the needs of the Ethiopian community. Mr. Herzog was referring to the new program established in the Louis and Gabi Weisfeld School of Social Work, run by Dr. Edna Bustin. This unique program is the only of its kind to specifically educate future social workers about the Ethiopian cultural background and values and to train them to meet the special needs of Ethiopian immigrants.

BIU Study of IDF Treatment of Special-Needs Soldiers

Military service is an important socializing force in Israeli society. Just like in any society, some of the young citizens who want to be part of this normative Israeli experience have emotional, behavioral and cognitive problems. These problems have not always received the attention they deserve, resulting in higher rates of depression and suicide among such soldiers.

Thanks, in part, to researchers like Dr. Ehud Bodner of BIU’s Interdisciplinary Dept. of Social Sciences, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has been shown to be fully justified in its attempts to identify, treat and support such soldiers. Dr. Bodner (together with Iulian Iancu, M.D., Amiram Sarel, M.D. and Dr. Haim Einat) found that the IDF’s efforts to provide support and treatment for soldiers with “special needs” throughout their service resulted in a definite decrease in psychopathology and suicide rates. The researchers’ findings were recently published in the journal of the American Psychiatrist Association. The publication of such BIU research will no doubt strengthen the Army’s resolve to continue to invest in such support programs.

BIU Psychologist Discovers Hormone that Leads to Mother and Baby Bonding

BIU Psychology Prof. Ruth Feldman has just published her research showing that the important bonding between mother and baby is linked to the level of the hormone oxytocin present in pregnancy and the early postpartum phase. It has been well noted in other mammalian species that levels of the hormone oxytocin correlate with a mother’s affiliation behaviors, commonly called bonding behaviors. Prof. Feldman’s unique study, published in Psychological Science, is the first to test the activity of oxytocin in the bonding that occurs between human mothers and their babies.

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Prof. Feldman’s study shows that women display bonding behaviors in direct correlation to the levels of oxytocin during early pregnancy, throughout pregnancy, and in the early postpartum phase. Low levels of this hormone in a mother during these times predict low bonding behaviors. Further, her study revealed that oxytocin determines both the behavioral and the emotional aspects of bonding between mother and infant. Such research may assist in understanding pathological conditions related to childbirth, such as postpartum depression.

### Bar-Ilan’s Youngest Students

Fourteen-year-old twins Or and Guy Landsman’s connection with Bar-Ilan began when they were in the sixth grade – through the University’s special program for youth in the Israel Center for the Advancement of Mathematics. After matriculating in mathematics last year, the brothers continued at Bar-Ilan for BSc studies in applied mathematics, making them the youngest students in their class – and at Bar-Ilan!

Or and Guy travel to Bar-Ilan twice a week from their school in the northern-situated town of Hadera, where they are completing the rest of their high-school studies. Their days at the University are very long, sometimes ending after 10 pm! The boys’ mother, Yael, doesn’t object to the long journeys to and from Bar-Ilan, as she is happy that her sons are fulfilling their passion and drive to study.

For Or and Guy the future seems very clear, including ambitious plans of becoming high-tech leaders and software inventors. They share the same preferences in their courses, supporting each other through exams and homework. Although their university studies are time consuming, they are still involved in activities typical to their age, such as sports, computers (for fun), and television. Indeed, their favorite show, “Mesudarim,” ("Set for Life") is about a group of young super-achievers – just like themselves!

### BIU Study Finds Israeli Youngsters Addicted to Dieting

Unnecessary dieting among Western youth is now being seen as a worrying and increasing trend among Israeli youngsters as well. New research conducted by Dr. Yossi Harel of BIU’s Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology shows that the percentage of Israeli girls who are not overweight but are on a diet is one of the highest in the West, with young boys not too far behind. The study included 106,119 fourteen-year-olds from 33 countries, among them 1,500 Israeli boys and 2,000 Israeli girls.

The results of the study were reported recently by the Israeli daily newspaper Yedioth Aharanot. Dr. Harel found that even though Israeli girls are not heavier than their peers in other Western countries, 26% of them diet unnecessarily. The only country with a higher percentage of normal weight girls on a diet is Denmark (28%). The United States was ranked fourth. A surprising finding of Dr. Harel’s research is that 8% of normal weight Israeli boys are trying to lose weight (compared to 9% of American boys). These high figures are of concern and point to the wrong messages Israeli adolescents receive about the importance of physical appearance.

### BIU Research Proves Public Libraries are “In”

Despite reports that book-reading is at an all-time low, research by Dr. Israele Yavlonka, of BIU’s Department of Information Science, reveals that there are numerous, new, large and fully equipped libraries worldwide. In Israel alone, over the last decade, new libraries report on growing numbers of visitors and readers. This evidence stands in contrast to gloomy predictions concerning the general disappearance of libraries.

Dr. Yavlonka’s research, under the guidance of Dr. Snunit Shoham, dates the history of public libraries and investigates the role of public libraries in the modern “information highway.” Her findings show that as long as libraries provide increasing services and offer a social get-away, they will never go out of style!