Bar-Ilan’s Program for Honors Scholars, launched in 2008, targets the most promising young scholars – those scoring in the top one percentile in their psychometric and matriculation exams. Currently, more than 90 handpicked students studying in diverse academic fields are being nurtured with free tuition, a monthly stipend, a personal mentor, and attendance at high-level seminars. The Program aims to cultivate cadres of top-notch scientists and academicians who will contribute to Israel’s advancement.

Keren Fait: Probing the Inner Psyche

“As an IDF ‘Conditions of Service’ Officer, I encountered so many soldiers with different life stories that it made me wonder how the human mind works – how is it that one person who grew up in a dysfunctional family (e.g., whose parents are drug addicts or in prison) wants to be close to home to help his family, while another just wants to get away and make it on his own? Where do people get the mental resources that help them cope?” So explains 27-year-old Keren Fait about her decision to major in Psychology. Enrolled in her third and final year of undergraduate studies, within the framework of BIU’s prestigious Program for Honors Scholars, which targets the most outstanding students on campus, Fait recounts how her work as an officer “made me wonder what is going on inside those soldiers.”

Next year, she hopes to continue toward her MA in Psychology at BIU, quite possibly in the University’s noted clinical-rehabilitation study track. “I feel drawn to this field because of its focus on people suffering from physical, mental or emotional disabilities, and their families – those who need help right now,” says Fait, who sees great potential for expanding the field in Israel. Last year, in fact, she volunteered with people suffering from schizophrenia and other mental disorders, offering classes, activities, and a compassionate ear.

Fait, who is minoring in Criminology, is a research assistant in a multi-stage BIU investigation on negotiation directed by Social Psychologist Prof. Rachel Ben-Ari. She works closely with PhD candidate Rotem Shacham, exploring whether personality characteristics are related to success in negotiations. Stressing that Fait is an integral part of the research team, Shacham says, “Keren is one of the most brilliant young students that I know. She demonstrates very original and creative thinking, complementing it with enthusiasm and hard work, which has greatly contributed to our research. Keren is on her way to becoming a leading researcher in a top university.”

Pleased to be attending one of Israel’s foremost Psychology departments, Fait, who may opt to obtain a PhD, makes mention of the high academic standards and the diverse academic staff incorporating both clinicians and researchers. “BIU not only gives you a theoretical base of knowledge but also equips you with skills and tools that will help you in the future,” she says. Attesting to the “value-added” bonus that a Bar-Ilan education uniquely affords, she relates to the “amazing courses in Basic Jewish Studies” (required of every BIU student). During her freshman year, in anticipation of her impending marriage, she enrolled in “Jewish Family Law.” She recounts “learning about the meaning of the chupa (marriage canopy) and the blessings recited at the ceremony. As a secular woman, it was especially important and as a result of this course, I felt more connected to the ceremony.” She says the “Jewish Home” course has enabled her “to look at things from different angles,” and the Jewish Philosophy class has helped her better understand religious leadership and the basis for key religious issues.

“The Program for Honors Scholars enables us to focus and prove ourselves,” relates Fait, who is grateful that “BIU gives you the freedom to study whatever you want, so you can excel in the areas you love.”