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.

Oriya Ben-Yosef: Striving to Improve Ethics in Economics

When the global financial crisis hit in 2008, many people began to wonder how the world got to this point. Where were the principled, moral leaders in the financial world who should have steered clear of shady business dealings and greedy deals? Oriya Ben-Yosef plans to stand at the forefront of his generation’s leaders who will strive to improve ethical standards in the field of economics.

Ben-Yosef, a student in the Program for Honors Scholars, is studying for a double degree in economics and accounting at Bar-Ilan and, at the same time, is pursuing rabbinical ordination. The ambitious 25-year-old from Ra’anana hasn’t settled on a specialization just yet but says that, “ethics and economics really fascinate me.”

One subject he’s considering pursuing, and one that is particularly relevant to the continuing worldwide recession, is how to apply the Jewish laws concerning the giving of interest. “Jewish law forbids it in many, though not all, cases,” he explains, “yet macro-economics cannot exist without it.” He adds that, while there are always solutions, he hasn’t seen one yet that takes full advantage of Jewish law to create a highly ethical approach.

That said, Ben-Yosef is nothing if not practical. The reason his degree is not in pure economics but includes a strong component of accounting is because, he says, “it’s the only way to find a job in Israel. All the work involving mergers and acquisitions, trade, and taxes are all located within an accounting firm. If you want to be an economist, you start as an accountant and work your way up.”

Prior to Bar-Ilan, Ben-Yosef was in the hesder program at the Har Etzion yeshiva, where he combined Torah study with his army service. He began his studies towards smicha (rabbinic ordination) there, and plans to complete his exams to become a rabbi within three years.

Born in Israel, Ben-Yosef is fluent in English, the result of five years spent in Australia where his parents were Jewish Agency emissaries. “I learned a lot about the partnership between Israel and Diaspora Jewry,” he says. “The Australian Jewish community sees Israel as a home that they intend to go to one day.”

The Program for Honors Scholars has helped Ben-Yosef make it through a challenging schedule. While the financial support has been critical – and was one of the main reasons he chose to study at BIU – he is equally enthusiastic about the opportunity to receive a personal mentor through the program when he begins studying for his Master’s degree next year.

Moreover, there is an intangible benefit to being part of the Honors Scholars program. “If you believe in yourself, you will succeed more,” he says. “So, in a sense, just being in the program inspires you to be your best. Having been chosen has affected my attitude and given me a greater incentive to succeed.”