



## Implementing the Strategic Plan Diversity and Inclusion

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev is deeply committed to excellence at all levels. One of the most important ways of leveraging our potential for excellence is by adopting diversity as a criterion in recruiting students and staff, and by embracing the ideas of inclusion and collaboration between the various groups that make up our community. More than 40 years ago, I was admitted to Columbia University thanks to what was then called 'geographical diversity', since I came from a small town with low graduation levels. My entry scores placed me in the bottom 10% of my class, and I even had to complete a remedial class in English (of all things!) as part of my freshman requirements. Scientific leadership is expressed through the university's ability to promote models of excellence for communities with low representation in academia, thereby promoting the integration of students who have significant potential to succeed academically.

The university's efforts in this realm are led by Prof. Sarab Abu Rabia-Queder, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion. Below are a few examples of our activities in this area:

### Diversity: Expanding access and representation of underrepresented communities:

- To maximize the potential for excellence in communities that are underrepresented in the student body, BGU has adopted an alternative admissions path for candidates from the Ethiopian community that is carried out by the Feuerstein Institute. This program was recently recognized at a ceremony held at the residence of the President of the State of Israel. Undoubtedly, we will need to further expand alternative admission paths that are based not only on psychometric exam achievements.
- Fostering scientific leadership: we established in collaboration with the Office for Gender Equity a program for female doctoral students, 'first in academia,' with the aim of preparing women who are the first generation of their families to attend university for academic careers and increasing their chances of obtaining a faculty position, by providing them with an academic and personal toolkit.
- Identifying recent PhDs and postdocs from groups that are underrepresented among academic faculty, to increase the chances of recruiting them to BGU.

### Creating an inclusive academic environment through action and training:

- Mentors in different departments were trained to help reduce drop-out rates.
- A series of lectures on diversity and workshops on 'inclusive classrooms' were held for academic faculty members.
- Marking holidays and cultural events of the diverse populations that make up the University community.

### Dialogue: Laying the foundations for meeting and getting to know the other on campus

- A special advisory committee on dealing with discrimination and racism was established to develop training programs and information for BGU staff.
- The Security Department underwent training on culturally sensitive handling of crisis situations, and this will henceforth be included in the routine training of its staff.
- We are launching a program to encourage "shared life", which aims to increase dialogue and rapprochement among the diverse groups that make up our campus.
- We are developing courseware to counter racism.

The University sometimes faces complex political situations which impact the academic space on campus. To deal with this:

- We have launched the 'Let's Talk' meeting series, which aims to create a Jewish-Arab dialogue group.
- We are working on an inter-faculty course that will introduce the diverse groups that make up Israeli society. We are creating a series of podcasts in collaboration with BGU Radio, likewise aimed at fostering understanding and dialogue among the diverse groups on campus.

Assimilating the values of diversity and inclusion into our organizational culture is a complex task. I call on the university community to join this important effort and to assimilate the values of diversity, inclusion, and partnership. Finally, I wish to thank Prof. Sarab Abu Rabia-Queder for leading the University's efforts on diversion and inclusion with great dedication and professionalism. For the Office of the Vice President's website: <https://in.bgu.ac.il/diversity>

