



## Shared Life in Times of Conflict

### Ben Gurion University 2024



#### The V.P words

Prof. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queeder

**Dear members of the Ben-Gurion University community,**

Diversity and inclusion become crucial topics in times of emergency and conflict. The ongoing war has created distance and fear between conflicting groups. Numerous reports and studies have pointed to the fear, mistrust, and perceived need to entrench each group's own "tribal" identity, as well as the feeling that each side threatens the other. Many of our responses in times of emergency stem from the separation walls that characterize our daily routines.

The rifts we have witnessed between different groups within Israeli society, before and during the war, raise questions regarding our role, as an academic institution, in establishing the future leadership of Israeli society. How can young academic leadership foster a democratic society based on equality, equity, and diversity? Failing to harness the potential of encounters within academic spaces risks squandering the opportunity to create a better future for Israeli society.

The academic arena offers Jews and Arabs a first significant opportunity to interact in a shared space and get to know one another and, consequently, may also serve as a basis for creating friendships and collaborations outside academia. The academic sphere holds the potential to promote Arab-Jewish relations, in the broad sense of intergroup relations, and may also facilitate the successful integration of Arab citizens into the workforce and other spheres. Intergroup encounters can establish positive stereotypes, cultivate friendship and closeness between groups, raise awareness of discrimination, promote positive relationships, and improve attitudes toward the other group.

Given the ongoing war and current fractious state of Israeli society, it is imperative for all academic institutions to prioritize the creation of shared spaces and partnerships among different groups. Here at BGU, we are committed to fostering such relationships as a basis for a better future for the Negev.



#### Diversity Delegation Visits University of Rochester

In September 2023, a delegation focusing on diversity from BGU, led by VP for Diversity and Inclusion, Prof. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queeder, visited the University of Rochester. The delegation included her team and three students representing different communities. They were hosted by Prof. Adrienne Morgan, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer at the University. Their visit was designed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and tools related to diverse populations in each context, as well as policies and practices to promote equality and justice, and combat racism.



#### Visit to the Residence of Israel's President

The Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion was invited to the President's Residence, to participate in an event addressing Jewish-Arab relation in academia. The event aimed to provide an opportunity for institutions to present their efforts to safeguard the fabric of shared life on campus. At this event, Prof. Abu-Rabia-Queeder presented Ben-Gurion University's initiatives in the field of diversity, inclusion, and shared society, to prepare for the reopening of the academic year.

The event, initiated by the President's Residence in partnership with the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation (Israel) and led by GISHA – The Program to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academia, was attended by presidents of academic institutions, representatives of philanthropic foundations, and representatives of the Council for Higher Education.



#### Visit to the Arab-Jewish Emergency Center in the City of Rahat

The Office of the Vice-President for Diversity and Inclusion, in partnership with the Department of Social Action, initiated a solidarity visit with the Bedouin population that has been negatively impacted by the ongoing war. Arab and Jewish staff members visited the Arab-Jewish Emergency Center in Rahat, where they met with the mayor and social activists who described how the war has affected the Bedouin community, and also helped to prepare food packages to be distributed in Arab and Jewish communities in the south of the country. The group also visited the home of one of the hostages from Rahat, met with the former hostage, and heard about challenges faced by his family.



#### Shared Life Ambassadors

This year, we launched a new leadership program aimed at promoting relationships between students from different communities on campus. The first cohort of the program comprises 20 students, Jews and Arabs, from all faculties. Group members will receive tools and resources to help develop a fair and beneficial fabric of relations among students. Through their training, they will address topics such as campus belonging, the common good, and understanding the needs of students from different groups. These ambassadors will promote initiatives at the faculty level. Each group member will receive a scholarship to support their participation in the program, enabling them to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to become ambassadors for shared life.

This program is made possible with the support of The Edmond de Rothschild Partnerships and the Yad Hanadiv Foundation.



#### Faculty Forum for Shared Space

The Faculty Forum for Shared Space has been established as a framework for 20 faculty members at BGU who are interested in promoting equality and justice, combating racism, and promoting relations between Jewish and Arab students. This framework will allow those faculty members to initiate related activities and influence daily life on campus and will also provide them with the knowledge and tools needed to collaborate and nurture these budding communities of knowledge and entrepreneurship. This forum will allow the University to multiply its influence and promote meaningful action.

#### Gvanim Annual Program for Senior Staff

This year, we welcomed the 5th cohort of this program, which aims to equip senior faculty members with tools to adapt their work methods to meet the unique needs of BGU's diverse populations, create an academic inclusive environment, and identify and address existing barriers. The program includes meeting with diverse students from BGU and leading role models from different communities in the Negev.

#### Bubble-Shattering Academic Course

During this time of war, two students from BGU, Chaya-Mushka Grossman and Adi Rosenstock, developed a course that aims to provide students with tools and skills to create connections between disparate groups on campus. Using tools from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, conflict resolution, and storytelling, students will learn strategies to overcome social barriers and resistance between different groups and to burst social bubbles. The course will be offered in the Spring 2024 semester.

This initiative is generously supported by The Rothschild Foundation.



#### Office Team



Sharon Azura  
First Assistant, The Office for  
Diversity and Inclusion  
shazura@bgu.ac.il



Dr. Yael Maayan  
Leading Shared Space  
Programs  
yaelmaa@bgu.ac.il



Dr. Malka Shacham  
DEI Officer, Office for Diversity  
and Inclusion  
shacham@bgu.ac.il