

March 31, 2020

To: Prof. Zilberstein – Chair of Planning and Budget Committee
Prof. Ido Perlman – Deputy Chair Council for Higher Education
Michal Neuman – Acting Director of Council for Higher Education/Planning and Budget Committee

Re: Concern Regarding Increased Dropout Rate of Arab Students due to Freezing of Designated Services during Corona Crisis

Madam & Sirs,

Due to the Corona crisis, a large number of accessibility programs have been frozen. The purpose of this communication is to sound a warning regarding potential consequences of this situation.

The accessibility program for Arab students was designed to meet the needs of Arab students, with the aim of increasing the number of enrolled students, preventing them from dropping out, and improving their academic achievement in the institutions in which they are enrolled. The program aids Arab students by providing help in areas of language improvement, study skills, academic course support, social and emotional support, tutoring, and more. The effectivity of the program has been shown through various studies conducted by the Brookdale Institute, and it was extended for an additional five-year period.

For the period of the Corona crisis, institutions of higher learning are continuing course offerings and instruction on-line. We saw that they organized quickly and efficiently to continue teaching and the second semester has begun in these institutions. At the same time, 75% of the administrative staff has been put on leave without pay. Included among them, are some of the professional coordinators responsible for providing services to Arab students, employees working as administrators, who were appointed by the Planning and Budget Committee under the five-year plan for Accessibility to Higher Education for Arab Society.

The accessibility program coordinators in these institutions are professional administrative workers who operate a broad array of services whose goal is to aid Arab students in overcoming the obstacles they face as determined by an appointed commission and whose findings were presented to the Ministry in 2013. (See attached document)

The coordinators of the accessibility program operate as a unit under the Forum of Fellows which is managed by The Abraham Initiatives. From a mapping process conducted during the last two weeks, we have uncovered the following problems:

1. Many of the coordinators who had a designated role, the majority from Arab society, were put on leave without pay, or are working in a very limited position.
2. Most of the services intended for academic aid—designated programs to help Arab students with specific challenges they face, particularly concerning language—have been drastically reduced. During this period, when many students are challenged by their ability to learn remotely, Arab students are challenged two-fold. Many of the first-year students have not yet completed their exams. The danger is not only

concerning immediate dropout rates, but the possibility of entering a destructive cycle in which academic standards are not met because of the absence of appropriate advice in time. The situation is particularly problematic in the colleges and a few of the universities.

3. Many of the services for emotional support; services especially designed to help Arab students deal with unique challenges they face routinely and now in this period of crisis—dealing with remote learning in Hebrew, lack of a private room in which to study, economic burdens due to unemployment of families who live on the border or under the poverty line—have been cancelled or severely restricted. There is an urgent need to reactivate these services.
4. Many students in Arab society are left without a solution to the following issues: tuition payments, housing payments, academic problems; scholarships, remote learning challenges from homes which are not adequately set up, language difficulties (particularly for first-year students) access to information in Arabic, and more.
5. Especially struggling are the Bedouin students in the south, who are in need of computers, modems, and special consideration because of the built-in gaps they face when starting their higher education, issues known to the Planning and Budget Committee, who have budgeted special programs for Bedouin students.

We wish to bring to the attention of the Planning and Budget Committee, that there is a reasonable fear that many Arab students will drop out or will complete the year without meeting minimal academic standing and will be forced to give up their studies.

In light of these concerns, it is imperative that academic institutions return all support staff for Arab students to their full status, and to renew the activities and the full range of aid to Arab students.

Sincerely,

Yael Ma'ayan

Director of Academia as a Shared Space, The Abraham Initiatives

Chair of the Forum for Accessibility to Higher Education for Arab Society

Cc:

Council of Higher Education and Planning and Budget Committee – Deputy Budget Director
– Yaniv Cohen-Shabtai

Council of High Education and Planning and Budget Committee – Senior Supervisor for
Society, Community, and Pre-academic Academies – Yael Simantov

Council of High Education and Planning and Budget Committee – Budget Coordinator for
Society, Community, and Pre-academic Academies – Du'a Kaabi'a

Chair, Steering Committee for Accessibility to Higher Education for Arab Society of the
Council of Higher Education – Prof. Muna Maron