



Promoting Israeli Academic Degrees for Diaspora Students: Program Proposal

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This paper outlines a proposal for creating and promoting a program in which Jewish students from abroad will obtain undergraduate degrees in Israeli academic institutions, on the backdrop of the current conditions of Jewish students on campuses around the world, marked by a rise in antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment, particularly in the wake of the October 7 massacre, and a weakened connection of younger generations of Jews to Israel and Zionism.

The **first chapter** introduces the issue of Jewish students' experience at institutions of higher learning outside Israel, taking the US as a test case, first outlining the general background, continuing with the history of Jewish integration in the US; the shift in integration and the rise of antisemitism; and the growing distance between the Jewish community and Israel, ending with a review of American universities.

The **second chapter** examines the conditions of Jewish students, specifically the degree of antisemitism on campus, in other parts of the world: Britain, Europe, Australia, South Africa and South America.

The **third chapter** looks at how Israeli students are faring in European and American campuses.

The **fourth chapter** details the proposal: the promotion of Israeli undergraduate academic studies for Jewish students from overseas, forging a connection to Israel and Zionism. The chapter discusses who the target audience is and what the most relevant institutions and degrees are and goes on to detail the advantages of the proposed framework.

The **fifth chapter** outlines recommendations for undergraduate studies programs in the English and French languages in Israel, reviewing the current situation of international students in Israel, examining the primary barriers to the expansion of their number, profiling institutions that are suitable for the proposed program, and detailing specific recommendations for each.

Summary:

The terror attack that Israel experienced on October 7, 2023, was a severe blow to the Jewish world, including American Jewry. The anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, and anti-Jewish trend, which has intensified in recent years, was drastically exacerbated with the outbreak of the war.

Since the beginning of 'Operation Iron Swords', there has been a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents at various sites and communities worldwide, some of them unprecedented. Calls for physical attacks on Jewish communities and disturbing discourse on social media were added to the notable increase in modern antisemitism and calls for Israel's destruction.

This general atmosphere is reflected in academia as well, even, at times, reinforced by it. A report published by the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs reveals that antisemitic incidents occurred on campuses in the United States, Latin America, Australia, and South Africa, and the majority of Jewish students report feeling fear (56%) and sadness (67%) due to the situation in Israel. Nearly 25% of students reported hate incidents and violence on campuses since the outbreak of the war, and approximately 58% claim they do not receive support from their college or university. Only 45% of students reported feeling "very or completely safe" as opposed to 67% in a previous survey, and the percentage of students who felt emotionally safe dropped from 66% to only 32%. The European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) reported a rise in antisemitism after the massacre, receiving 113 complaints from 66 universities in 14 European countries from the outbreak of the war until mid-January 2024, 33% of them involving verbal harassment, defamation, and physical violence.

The December congressional hearing of the Presidents of the Universities of Pennsylvania, MIT, and Harvard – in which they struggled to condemn calls to massacre Jews - was the clearest expression of how low American academia has sunk, as well as the broken reality American Jewry faces regarding its ability to integrate into American spaces, a particularly acute situation considering American Jewry's growing distance from Israel. Similar trends are playing out in Jewish communities across the globe.

The proposed program can deepen and fortify the important connection between Diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel, a rationale more valid than ever today, when a large portion of international academia is turning its back on the rights of Jewish

students, tolerating antisemitism, and taking an active part in the BDS movement to promote the boycott of the State of Israel.

The program is meant to be similar to and an extension of the Taglit (Birthright Israel) and Masa Israel Journey programs, the initiatives that bring Jewish youth from around the world to Israel for short- and medium-term periods. According to the proposed framework, young Jewish students eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return will spend 3-4 years in Israel to obtain an undergraduate degree in Israeli academic institutions, paying tuition equal to that of Israeli students. Thus, they will stay in Israel for a long and meaningful period while earning a high-quality academic degree, optimal for integration into the job market. Program graduates will grow closer to Judaism, significantly reducing the risk of assimilation, and perhaps one day make *aliyah* (immigrate) and settle in Israel, thereby strengthening it and contributing to its prosperity.

According to the Council for Higher Education of Israel, the number of international students in Israel studying full-time for bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees is estimated at around 5,500. The main barriers to raising that number are: (i) few available courses in non-Hebrew languages; (ii) high tuition (at Reichman University, for instance, the total annual costs are estimated at \$30,000-\$36,000 per year, including tuition, housing, living expenses, and trips home); (iii) the lack of any designated support programs for overseas students and (iv) deficiencies in marketing the studies programs, recruiting international students and alleviating security concerns.

This proposal has several significant advantages to all parties:

The state of Israel will strengthen ties with world Jewry, especially as graduates become ambassadors for Israel in their countries of origin, boosting economic and academic development. More international students also add substantial funds to Israeli universities and the State. **The students** will obtain degrees of higher learning at affordable prices in a safe and supportive learning environment where they can embrace their Jewish identity and have the chance to experience Israel as a resident rather than a visitor or tourist. **Israeli academia** will be able to increase the number of international students, which is a significant factor in global ranking systems. Students who go on to become academics and professionals abroad will increase Israeli universities' prestige and global connections.

Recommendations:

1. Israeli academic institutions will craft and publicize undergraduate degree programs of three years duration (four for engineering degrees) in the English and French languages, with the option of adding a year of internship (since most degrees in Israel require three years of academic studies rather than the four years common in the United States, students who study for their degree in Israel will gain a year). The programs will be designed for Jewish students from around the world (eligible under the Law of Return) who have not made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel).
2. The government will invest in the promotion of these undergraduate degree programs at academic institutions in Israel. The government should increase student growth targets and provide budgetary assistance in bringing in additional students by helping to fund student recruitment abroad, providing student scholarships, subsidizing the student support programs, and more.
3. The institutions suitable for this project should be those with proven experience at working with Jewish students from abroad and offering studies in English or French, as well as possessing social, Zionist support programs for international students. The recommended institutions are: Reichman University, the French Campus at the Netanya Academic College, The Yeshiva University Israel campus, the Jerusalem College of Technology (*Machon Lev*), and the Technion International's BSc program in Engineering or Science in English (contingent on the establishment of a support program).
4. The degrees offered should be in STEM and other fields attractive to both students and the state. The recommended degrees for the first phase of the proposed program are those related to engineering, computer science, economics, business administration, and Jewish studies. It is not recommended to include humanities. Degrees in computer science, mathematics, engineering, physics, chemistry, earth sciences, health sciences, and economics and business administration allow graduates to integrate into cutting-edge research and development within pharmaceutical, software, food, information, high-tech, and other industries. Academic degrees in these fields guarantee secure employment prospects, high earning potential, and a significant contribution to the economy. Additionally, jobs in these fields are generally not dependent on location and can even support a digital nomad lifestyle.

This policy paper has already inspired the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, in collaboration with United Mosaic, to issue a call in August 2024 to Israeli higher

education institutions for proposals of programs for international undergraduate studies in Israel for students from abroad.

[For the full Hebrew paper](#)