אוניברסיטת חיפה
University of Haifa
جامعة حيفا

Supporting the

Returning Scientists Program
Reversing the "Brain Drain" at Israeli Universities

A National Priority to Advance Research in the Sciences
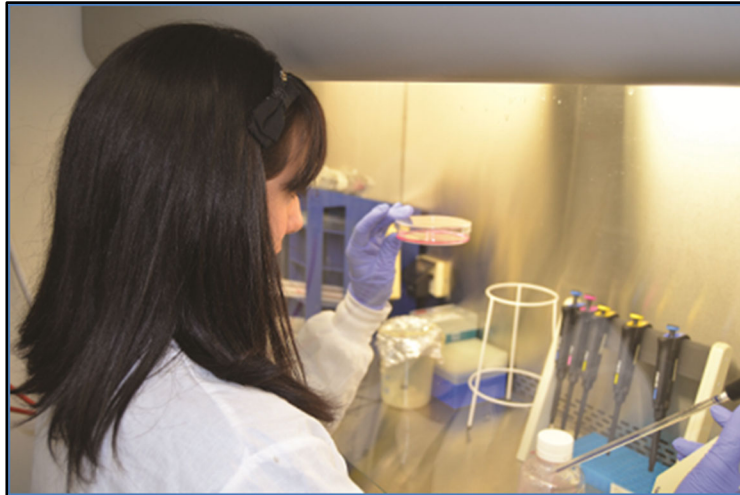*and Power Economic Growth*

Today, nearly 25% of Israeli scientists work abroad. This figure, revealed in a report commissioned by Israel's Council for Higher Education, was the highest rate among OECD members. Compared to Canada (12.2%), Netherlands (4%) and Spain (1.3%), the percentage was particularly high. Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, Head of the Budget and Planning Committee for Higher Education, has expressed concern over these troubling figures: "This is the highest percentage in the world. There is no other country where a quarter of its scientists have left to work elsewhere." In addition, the report identified a looming crisis with respect to the aging of the workforce at Israeli universities, where 48.3% of the leading scientists are above the age of 55.

Investing in People, Investing in Israel

As the largest research university in the country's northern region and academic home to a community of students that most accurately mirrors Israeli society, the University of Haifa is of unique strategic importance to the State of Israel. It enrolls the largest number of military and security personnel acquiring their academic education, who study alongside civilians from all walks of life - Haredi and secular Jews, new immigrants, Arabs, and Druze. The University's distinctive mission is to cultivate academic excellence, create a shared Israeli experience, and promote democratic civilian identity, in an environment of tolerance and multiculturalism. The presence of a strong research university in the north is an essential and important condition for the continued existence and prosperity of the region and its population.

Over the past seven years, the University of Haifa has been actively recruiting talented Israeli scientists residing abroad and successfully "brought them home" to the University. These Returning Scientists have made a significant contribution to research and teaching in northern Israel and internationally. When Israeli researchers from world-class institutions join our academic ranks, they impart the best knowledge to our students who, in the future, will go on to become Israel's leading researchers and further strengthen the northern region.

The Returning Scientists Program aims to build a new Israel, recognized as the world leader in scientific research, by identifying Israeli scholars with superior talent living abroad and offering them a recruitment package to return to their homeland.

To support this important strategic goal and provide optimal conditions for our talented researchers, the University plans to construct additional state-of-the-art laboratories and research facilities.

Setting up wet and dry laboratories for these researchers includes purchase of specialized equipment, retrofitting facilities to meet individualized research needs, and providing research staff, including graduate and doctoral students, and post-doctoral fellows. This professional work environment will enable our scientists to secure research funding and assist them in further developing and expanding their scientific work.

The University is especially focused on supporting innovative science research in areas where we hold a distinct advantage. From advances in the fields of cancer and brain research to development of alternative energy sources and fighting world hunger through genetic wheat engineering, science research at the University of Haifa aims to advance the frontier of human knowledge for the betterment of humanity.

Personal Story – A Successful Returning Scientist

Professor David Roe returned to Israel following an extended period in the US, where he earned his PhD in Clinical Psychology from Columbia University, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at Rutgers University. The fellowship eventually led to a tenure-tracked position at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Despite his many years in the US, David (whose family immigrated to Israel at a young age) missed Israel and began to feel like an outsider. "Although living in the US broadened my professional opportunities, I was sad that my contributions through teaching and training were not happening in the community which was most important to me: Israel," he said.

Since his return, Professor Roe has worked extensively to combine research in psychiatric rehabilitation with hands-on practice in the field. He established the Center for Mental Health Research, Practice and Policy to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and train mental healthcare practitioners. Under Roe's leadership, the department has trained hundreds of students who will become future community mental health leaders and specialists. Roe also directs the "National Psychiatric Rehabilitation Outcomes Project", an ambitious initiative designed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to develop a system for monitoring the impact, effectiveness and efficacy of mental health practices.

Prof. Roe's decision to return to Israel was a win-win-win opportunity for Israel, the University of Haifa, the professor and his family. "I was lucky to be able to return to Israel and raise my family here and to find an exciting professional challenge at the University of Haifa," said Prof. Roe.

Personal Story – A Newly Returned Scientist

Dr. Smadar Ben-Tabou de-Leon studies the regulatory control of animal development from a multidisciplinary perspective. Ben-Tabou de-Leon's interest in developmental gene regulation was sparked during her Ph.D. studies when she became pregnant with her first child. "The pregnancy made me wonder about the miracle of life. The more I learned about biology the more fascinated I became," she recalls.

Initially trained in theoretical physics during her doctoral studies at the Hebrew University, Ben-Tabou de-Leon studied developmental biology and gene regulation during her post-doctoral fellowship at the Eric Davidson Laboratory at Caltech. She published extensively, presented at numerous international scientific meetings, and was awarded the Human Frontiers Science Foundation cross disciplinary fellowship and the Rothschild Post-Doctoral fellowship. She returned to Israel as the part of the Returning Scientists Initiative in 2012 and joined the University of Haifa faculty.

"My years at Caltech were extremely rewarding and educating. I collaborated with leading scientists in my field and developed as a scientist. Eventually I felt the need to return home and build my own independent scientific home. I wanted to raise my children here so they will experience the warmth of our families and grow their own attachment to this difficult but wonderful place," she explains. "I also wanted to contribute to scientific excellence in my home country. After many inspiring discussions with faculty members at the Leon H. Charney School of Marine Sciences, I knew that the University would be an ideal place to establish a lab. I am happy to say that this was an excellent decision."

Supporting the Returning Scientists Program

A gift of $1,000,000 will support one returning scientist and assist in building an "academic and research ecosystem" – including laboratories, doctoral and masters students, and lab technicians. This investment will have a tenfold impact on the Israeli scientific landscape and economic development.

Your generous support will be acknowledged in University media publications wherever possible.