



Ben-Gurion University  
of the Negev

# SOS

## SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS

### CORONAVIRUS STUDENT ASSISTANCE FUND

## IMPACT REPORT



NOVEMBER 2020  
CHESHVAN 5781



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Ben-Gurion University of the Negev  
Division for Public Affairs and Resource Development

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Dear Friends,

Thanks to your help, the 2020-21 academic year at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev got off to a great start. Our students are back in full force, albeit virtually, but moving forward and fulfilling their academic aspirations in spite of COVID-19. By providing them with the means to continue their studies, you have kept their hopes and dreams alive in these challenging times. **Thanks to you, no BGU student was left behind as a result of the pandemic.**

To gain an understanding of the significance of your donation, I encourage you to read through this Impact Report – an uplifting account that includes remarks from some of the many students benefitting from your support. **I am certain that it will bring a smile to your face and make you proud.**

I invite you to join me for the dedication of the SOS Cactus Garden on the Marcus Family Campus, at the link below, in honor of all those who supported our students in their time of need.

Until then, please accept our heartfelt thanks. By lending a hand and extending your support, you have helped save BGU's class of COVID-19.

**Prof. Daniel Chamovitz**



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## OUR MISSION TO SAVE THE CLASS OF COVID-19

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On October 19, 2020, one day after the start of Israel's academic year, the [Times of Israel \(ToI\) reported on the findings of Israel's National Association of Students](#), presenting a dismal picture of student life in Israel today, in the wake of COVID-19.

The forecast for students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) is much brighter due to the overwhelming response to the "Support Our Students" (SOS) campaign. This concerted, all-out effort to save BGU's class of COVID-19 was led by President Professor Daniel Chamovitz, who issued a rallying cry, mobilizing all members of the BGU community to ensure that [no student was left behind](#) because of the pandemic.

*alumni, and even the Student Union* – came to the rescue to prevent our students' higher education plans from being derailed and keep their hopes and dreams for the future alive.

The SOS campaign was fueled by our worldwide associates. **Dedicated to BGU students and the University's advancement, our partners enlisted their donors' assistance and promoted the campaign wholeheartedly, and we thank them for their commitment to this global effort:** American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (AABGU); Canadian Associates of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (CABGU); Ben-Gurion University Foundation of the United Kingdom; Amis de Suisse de l'Université Ben Gourion



In an outstanding and heartwarming demonstration of dedication and support, donors – *longstanding and first-time donors* ♦ *members of the Board of Governors and those new to the BGU community* ♦ *from around the globe and within Israel* ♦ *including BGU faculty members and staff,*

*du Neguév; Les Amis Français de l'Université Ben Gourion du Neguév; Israeli Friends of BGU; Asociación Argentina De Amigos de la Universidad Ben Gurión del Neguev; and our associates organizations in Mexico, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium.*

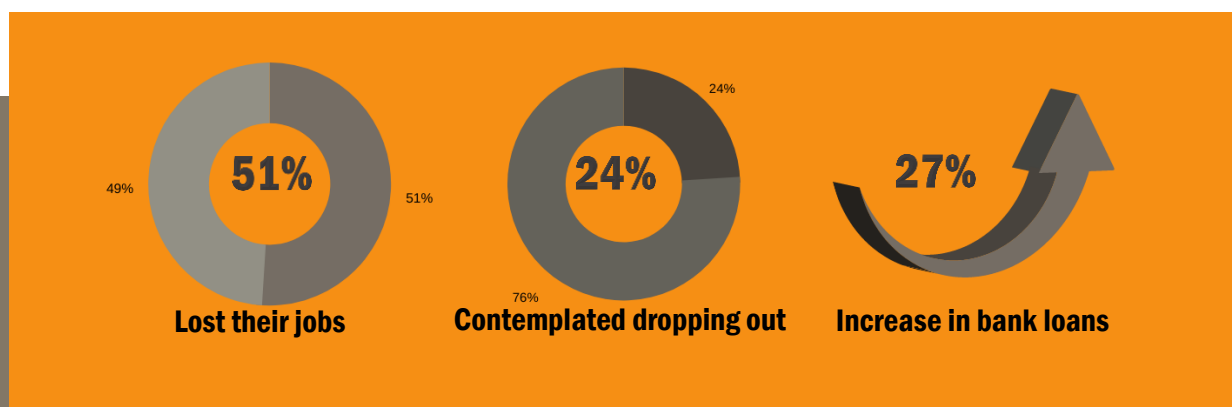
The *ToI* article confirmed our worst fears about COVID-19's devastating effect on Israeli students, reporting the following:

- Dropout: Financial considerations have led 24% of all students to contemplate dropping out. Among Arab students the figure more than doubles, with 52% of Arab students considering abandoning their studies.
- Employment: Since the start of the outbreak, 51% of students have lost their jobs (of these 37% went on unpaid leave and 14% were fired outright). Of those that retained their jobs, the average monthly salary has decreased compared to last year.
- Residence: 13% of the students reported having to vacate their apartments due to economic difficulties.
- Loans: There was a significant increase of 27% in the size of the bank loans taken out by students before the academic year.

them to brush themselves off and emerge from a place of worry and fear imposed by COVID-19 and start the new academic year full of confidence and hope.

We know this to be true since there has actually been a 12% increase in the number of new students at BGU and a 5% increase in the size of the overall student body!

No other university in Israel embarked on such a campaign. BGU's leadership and donors are unique, committed to building a top-notch research and educational institution *one student at a time*. So, when it became clear that our students were hurting, struggling financially, and uncertain about their future, Prof. Chamovitz embarked on a mission to support our students, and the BGU community pitched in to save the class of COVID-19. The aim was to keep our students' academic and professional dreams alive and avert a potential blow to access to higher education and social mobility within Israel that could have grave long-term consequences and impact generations to come.



Thanks to you, however, the future for BGU students is much more promising. You have transformed despair, uncertainty, and insecurity into hope and possibility – creating a path forward for our students and enabling

To quote the chairman of the National Association of Students, “In higher education in Israel, a severe social epidemic is beginning to spread in which only the strong survive.” He added that students financially

struggling as a result of the crisis are “left behind and are now being replaced” by those receiving financial assistance from their parents.

BGU’s student population is diverse, with many students from poor peripheral communities who have no one to turn to for financial support. BGU is one of Israel’s leading social mobility engines, and it is critical that our students weather the coronavirus storm, remain on an academic path toward increased economic opportunities and professional growth, and don’t fall victim to such a social epidemic on top of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The wonderful response to the SOS appeal has ensured that the reported findings do not reflect the reality at Ben-Gurion University today. Although the year kicked off with

lectures delivered by Zoom, classes are full, and there have been some specific significant increases in registration, as it appears that the coronavirus is shaping our students’ degree choices. At BGU, emergency medicine has seen a 60% increase in registration in its undergraduate program and a 25% increase in its graduate program, and nursing registration is up 50%!

We are proud of the spirit of partnership and generosity that has made this possible. In the years to come, as our students look back on their university days, they will remember the hardship of the coronavirus era, the way it affected their career path, and the way the BGU community pulled together, with Prof. Chamovitz at the helm, supporting them, rooting for them, and doing whatever it took to ensure that they were not left behind.



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## SOS FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN RESULTS

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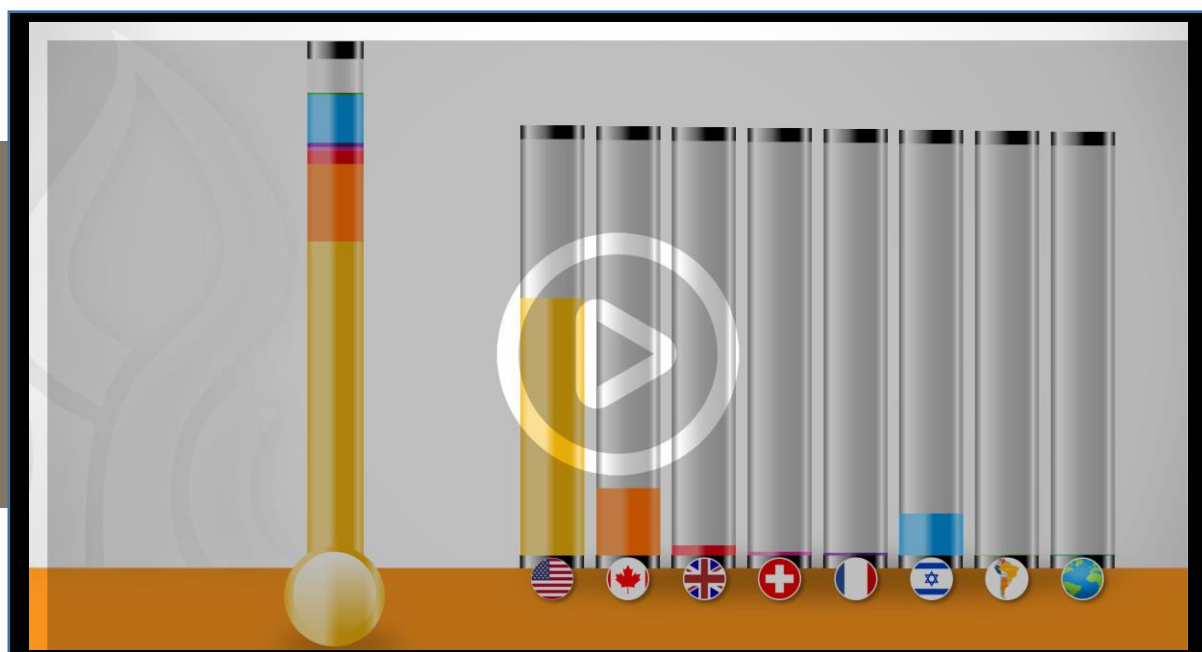
### Together we raised over \$5.7 million!

The University's unprecedented campaign to help our students initiated by President Chamovitz was matched by the extraordinary show of support by donors who enabled us to **surpass our ambitious \$5 million fundraising goal by \$740,000 and ensure that no BGU student is left behind.**

Driven by a commitment to our students ♦ dedication to the University ♦ a belief in the value of education ♦ a sense of shared responsibility ♦ a desire to contribute to *tikun olam* and build when the world seems to be falling apart ♦ an interest in fostering Israel's development ♦ a wish to inspire hope and optimism in the future – for these reasons and more – **over 1,000 members of the BGU community came through**, extending their support to our students when they needed it most, and together we have raised over \$5.7 million, for which we are deeply grateful.

Each of the gifts, which ranged from \$18 to \$1 million, is meaningful and will help make a difference in the lives of BGU students. In the turbulent COVID-19 storm, this support serves as a lifeboat, allowing students from all backgrounds to stay afloat, pursue their academic dreams, and continue their BGU education.

Financial assistance packages were distributed to thousands of students from diverse backgrounds studying in all of BGU's academic faculties. Thus, neither the statistics nor the stories shared in this report convey the true impact of the support. It will be felt personally by the recipients and their families, and more widely at the University and within Israeli society as a whole, as these students pursue their degrees and research, and advance in their fields, achieving their personal and professional goals and making their mark in departments and labs across the University and in positions throughout Israel.



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## FACTS AND FIGURES

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### The application process

Immediately after the fundraising campaign was launched, the Dean of Students Office reached out to BGU students (both current students and new students registered for the 2020-21 academic year), informing them of Prof. Chamovitz's plan to establish the fund and encouraging them to turn to the University for assistance. Students were notified by email, and the availability of financial assistance was publicized on social media in an effort to reach all BGU students.

The application process was streamlined so that students that received need-based scholarships from the Dean of Students Office in 2019-20 did not need to reapply. New applicants simply had to submit an online application describing their financial circumstances and need for assistance, along with limited forms of documentation. Decisions were made by the Dean of Students Office quickly, and students were notified within a matter of weeks, removing a great weight from their shoulders.

### Eligibility

Israeli residents enrolled (40-100% time) in undergraduate, master's, or doctoral degree programs (as well as some specific teaching certificate and accounting programs) for the 2020-21 academic year whose tuition fees are not covered by an institution or employer were eligible. Students who completed their IDF service were eligible for support, even if they already received a grant from the IDF.



**Of applicants were found eligible to receive aid**

Eligibility for the scholarship was determined based on the financial situation of the student's family (relative to all applicants), with the following factors considered: the student's, parents', and spouse's income, number and age of siblings supported by the parents and/or children, and home and car ownership. Sixty-six percent of the applicants were deemed eligible to receive financial assistance.



## Grant information

With an aim of leaving no student behind, the University sought to enhance students' current level of scholarship support while addressing the needs of incoming students and others financially hurt by the pandemic.

The value of the grants and tuition scholarships awarded to students ranged from \$850 to nearly \$10,000.

2019-20 undergraduate recipients of need-based Dean's scholarships were automatically awarded a tuition scholarship of the same amount in 2020-21, *plus* an additional grant.

New and continuing undergraduate students who qualify for a need-based Dean's scholarship in the 2020-21 year will be awarded a scholarship toward their tuition, *plus* an additional grant.

Other students (including undergraduate, master's degree, and doctoral degree students, as well as those enrolled in specific programs, including the teaching certificate program) whose financial situation merits were awarded tuition scholarships.



**3,671** students awarded grants



**59.2%** Women  
**40.8%** Men



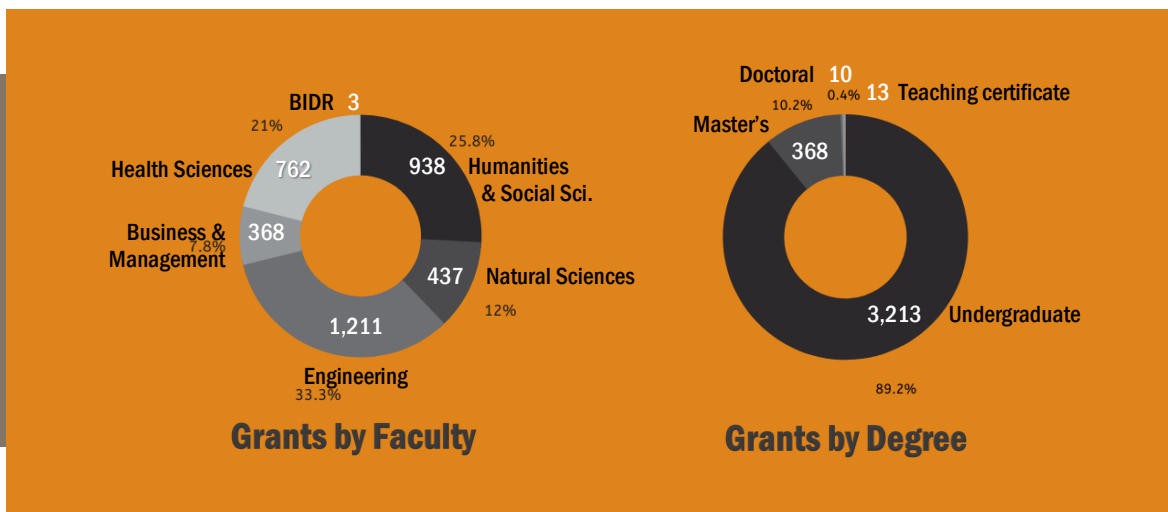
**716 (20%)** Arab students  
**235 (6.5%)** Bedouin students



**925 (26%)**  
First-time aid recipients



**256 (7%)**  
Students with families



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## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: OUR STUDENTS' STORIES

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### **Matan Bar-Tov, 36, married, lives in Jerusalem**



*"I began medical school at a relatively late stage in life: I'm already married, and my wife and I are expecting a baby. We live in Jerusalem because most of our income comes from my wife, who has a good stable job as a programmer. The financial and emotional burden of my studies is very big – both the intense schoolwork and the commute to the University and Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon where some of my clinical training takes place. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic this financial and emotional burden simply got even greater.*

*When I received the approval for a coronavirus scholarship from the University a great weight was lifted from my shoulders and my wife and I were really, really happy. The scholarship is a real help for us. I dream of specializing in internal medicine, and we were debating whether I should put my studies on hold and find a full-time job. Thanks to the University's coronavirus grant my chances of successfully completing my*

*studies have increased. I really love studying at Ben-Gurion University and am very grateful to the University and its benefactors for the assistance we have received."*

### **Rachel, 21, lives with her family near the Gaza Strip**

*"I am the second daughter in a religious family of 11. It was always clear to me that I would pursue academic studies, even if the means of financing them was not clear. The ongoing economic challenges of studying were compounded for me by the coronavirus, but I didn't want this prevent me from realizing myself through my degree in biomedical engineering.*

*The difficulty of finding a job nowadays is complicated by the fact that I chose a very intensive course of studies. I study five days a week and work on Fridays. If I have to take on additional work, it will certainly impact my studies. My goal is to continue to a research master's degree and develop a career in*



research & development of life-saving medical solutions.

*Beyond the financial challenges, I come from an Orthodox background and attending a secular academic institution is a kind of boundary-crossing that requires emotional strength from me. The announcement about the coronavirus scholarship really lifted a weight from my shoulders. It removed a burden, since it was also important to me to repay the loan I took from my parents for the registration fees. The University's coronavirus grant gives me room to breathe economically, but also gives me peace of mind, so I can focus on my studies."*

### **Yonatan Larkin, lives with his parents (temporarily) in Moshav Ora, came to Israel from England at age 8**



*"My mother is a writer and my father is a publicist in the automotive field. Over the*

*past few years, the digital revolution has impacted my parents' income, but now, with the coronavirus, it has become a true crisis. We were brought up to help others, and even now, my father continues to volunteer delivering food to the needy on Fridays. This is why I chose to do something with impact for my military service – I served in an IDF commando brigade, and after I was discharged, I was a guide at a summer camp in the USA and worked at the Shalva Center for people with disabilities.*

*I chose to study at Ben-Gurion University because it is the most socially engaged university in my view and it aligns with the values I grew up on. I am studying industrial engineering and management because I like planning and leading projects. My dream is to take the field of food aid and improve it with digital tools and national-level management and logistics. My situation, which was made worse by the coronavirus, made it doubtful that I could begin studying this year. Thanks to the coronavirus assistance I know for certain that I can begin classes. When I receive the notification about the scholarship I immediately called my parents, so we could celebrate together. The entire family, including my sister, was really happy.*

*I will continue to live with my parents for now, because of the coronavirus, but as soon as face-to-face classes resume, I plan to move to Beer-Sheva to be close to campus. This is also something that the grant undoubtedly helps with – otherwise I couldn't imagine being able to afford living close to campus."*

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*Imagine...*

## **FAST FORWARD TO THE YEAR 2050**

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### **A future BGU student contemplates the impact of COVID-19 on this generation**

The class of COVID-19's experience of living through a modern-day plague and being given a lifeboat during that turbulent time will not be forgotten. It will likely be passed on from generation to generation, becoming a part of family legend, revisited, on holidays like Passover, as can be seen in a special personal account from a future BGU student in *the class of 2050* that shows how meaningful the SOS funding was to our students.

*parallels were obvious, with the plagues; death; fear; a loss of a sense of control, predictability, and hope, accompanied by uncertainty and despair; and darkness – it was bleak in the spring of 2020. People were unable to travel, even for the holiday. It was the first Passover that my parents didn't spend with their families.*

*Although I wasn't even born yet, their stories, are very real to me – even more so now, as I pursue my undergraduate degree at Ben-Gurion University. My parents and their siblings were college students in 2020. None of them had much money, and they juggled*



*“My entire extended family gets together for the holidays. At the Passover seder we tell the story of the exodus from Egypt, and catch up with each other, have a lot of laughs, and create new memories. Without fail, the conversation moves on to Passovers long passed, and before you know it, my parents and their siblings are back in Passover 2020, and the story of the exodus becomes intertwined with the story of the COVID-19 pandemic. You see, the first wave of the virus struck Israel around Passover. For many, the*

*part-time jobs along with their classes. They were financially independent and one was already married with two kids.*

*And boom, their lives were upended when COVID-19 hit. I think they are still stunned by the sheer magnitude of the force of the virus. Of the seven of them, two dropped out and never earned a college degree; to this day, they blame corona and are bitter that they missed out on college life and the job opportunities they might have had. Two*

others put their studies on hold and finally earned their undergraduate degrees at the ages of 31 and 32. The greatest loss of all, academically, was felt by my aunt. She was juggling a young family, a part-time job, and her doctoral studies. When her kids' daycare closed during the first shutdown she lost her focus, along with her job, and she never got back on track.



My parents were the lucky ones. My mom was studying at BGU and my dad had just been accepted when the virus struck. Like their siblings, they were rocked by the pandemic, but amazingly they stayed on course. My mom lost her job and she spent a huge amount of time searching for another job, to no avail; apparently, her grades really suffered that semester, and she thought for sure she'd have to drop out. My dad, on the other hand, was busy working, trying to save as much money as possible. He was planning to start studying engineering in the fall, but he lost his job when the virus struck. He thought he would have to put his studies on hold, since he hadn't saved as much money as he planned.

They still get tears in their eyes, 30 years later, when they tell the story of how the BGU community pulled together to save their class, the class of COVID-19, and share the relief they felt when they received the announcement that a fund was established to provide assistance to students (even new

students like my dad) facing financial hardship because of the pandemic. The funding they received lifted a huge weight from their shoulders and allowed them to continue on their academic paths. Unlike their siblings, my parents started the new school year knowing that BGU was behind them – that an entire community of donors had their back – and that they, and their hopes and dreams, would not be left behind.

My parents were able to study in the fall of 2020 solely because of the support they received. It literally changed the course of their lives; even their career paths changed as a result of the pandemic. My mom, who was studying medicine, became an infectious disease specialist, and in his first semester my dad joined a lab that was applying machine learning techniques to corona-related challenges; since then, his work has always had a public health focus. Their personal lives also changed – my parents met on campus – believe it or not, but they met in the crush to get a doughnut during the candle lighting ceremony at the Zlotowski Student Center that Chanukah. They still joke about the fact that were it not for the support they received, they may never have met.

***It's no wonder then, is it, that my siblings and I all studied at BGU?"***

**Can you imagine that?**



**“THANKS TO YOU, NO BGU  
STUDENT WAS LEFT BEHIND!”**



Ben-Gurion University of the Negev