

## From Idea to Reality

### Implementing the Strategic Plan: Sustainability and Climate Change

#### Dear friends and colleagues,

David Ben-Gurion said, "Only scientists and researchers who have sat at the gates of the Negev and dedicated their lives to its wide expanses; only those who engage in constant observation and experiments in our country's southern territory—only they will succeed in revealing the secrets of this land and its Dead Sea. They will see in the sun, the sky, and the air of the desert boundless treasure: in energy, dew, wind, and rays of light. They will reap the bounty that today is lost to us, as we do not yet know how to use our seawater and our arid vegetation. We do not yet know how to make the desert bloom."

For more than fifty years, researchers at Ben-Gurion University have worked to unravel the mysteries of the desert and to make it a place where people can thrive. Our unique location in the Negev, our problem-centric approach, and the wide range of subjects we have studied — water, energy, agriculture, as well as health, wellbeing and economics—has granted us both standing and enormous responsibility. It is now up to us to pioneer groundbreaking scientific inquiry and applications in the field of sustainability, and to develop innovative technologies for addressing global climate change.

#### The School for Sustainability and Climate Change

In light of our unique strengths, the University's strategic plan called for the establishment of a new School for Sustainability and Climate Change (SSCC). Following the approval of the University Senate, more than 150 senior faculty members spanning all faculties rose to the occasion and joined the SSCC council. As I write these words, the school has begun advancing along several parallel paths:

##### Teaching

**Bachelor's Degree:** We offer an environmental studies minor in one of five tracks: Natural Sciences, Sustainability, Nature Conservation, Environmental Policy and Management, and Renewable Natural Resources. In addition, we are working to open a number of new degrees including an English-language B.Sc. degree on the Sde Boker campus.

**Master's Degree:** Our innovative model allows for students to build a degree based on their personal and professional interests. In addition, we are working to open an M.Sc and an M.A. in Sustainability.

##### Research

- The SSCC received a donation to award Scholarships for Excellence to new research students. Scholarships were granted to four doctoral students and eight master's students, who together conduct research in nine different departments among five different faculties.
- The SSCC issued **a call** for collaborative interdisciplinary research on sustainability and the environment with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A joint conference will be held on Tu B'Shvat (January 17, 2022).
- **A call** for the Strage-BGU Award for Excellence in Environmental and Sustainability Sciences.
- In October, an cooperation agreement was signed with the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Morocco, with the support of the OCP group and ICL. The agreement will enable joint research in the fields of water, ecological rehabilitation, agriculture, and energy.

##### Community Outreach

- Next semester, the SSCC will offer a series of public seminars on the environment and sustainability.
- We are recording episodes for a **podcast** on the environment and sustainability accessible to a general audience.
- The head of the SSCC represented BGU in the Israeli delegation to the Glasgow Climate Change Conference.
- Representatives of the SSCC met with the Minister of Environmental Protection, MKs from the environmental lobby, the Israeli Ambassador and the Foreign Ministry's special envoy for climate change, and the chief scientist of the Ministry of Environmental Protection to update them on SSCC activities and encourage cooperation with government agencies.
- The first-ever conference on the effects of extreme weather conditions on public health was held at the University, and organized by Prof. Nadav Davidovitch, director of the School of Public Health, in collaboration with Electra Consumer Products.

##### Green Campus

- For more than a decade, BGU has been a "Green Campus," defined as engaging in actions and activities that aim to reduce the University's environmental impact. With the establishment of the SSCC, members of the Green Campus project are working closely with University management to ensure that the campus operationalizes plans for the better use of sustainable resources.
- Student representatives met with University administration to discuss environmental issues. Along with explaining their positions on environmental subjects, students presented suggested courses of action and ideas for future student-University collaboration.
- Special emphasis will be placed on increasing environmental awareness among the public and providing tools for a more sustainable lifestyle. We will continue to promote both student and employee initiatives as well as collaborations with a variety of organizations and public bodies.
- **The Green Campus' expert portal** includes nearly 150 University researchers working in the fields of environment studies and sustainability. The portal—a key means of exposure for the University in the sustainability space—allows researchers in Israel and around the world to network with similar-minded colleagues, and to connect to expose our impact to a wider audience.

#### Sustainable University

- **Reduced carbon footprint:** The University aims to achieve a significant reduction in its greenhouse gas emissions in seven different areas of activity. We will announce our reduction targets in the coming months.
- **Zero waste:** The University is working to change the way it consumes resources and produces waste. Our new waste-management plan strives to increase awareness, improve infrastructure, and create less waste and more reuse and recycling.
- **Sustainable investments:** Several months ago, the University Investment Committee began to invest in ESG funds to align the University's investment policy with its commitment to sustainability.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the founding team of the School of Sustainability and Climate Change, who worked tirelessly to turn this incredible idea into a reality. I would also like to thank the University Senate, which served as a critical partner in the establishment of the school; Prof. Yaron Ziv, head of the SSCC; Prof. Meidad Kissinger, head of Green Campus; and all those dedicated individuals at BGU who are helping to promoting sustainability.

Warmly,  
Prof. Daniel Chamovitz, President

