

July 22, 2020

Dear Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Community,

The next academic year will begin as scheduled on October 18, 2020. Since it is already clear that the coronavirus pandemic will still be with us during the academic year, the University administration is evaluating several scenarios, given the continued spread of the virus and the guidelines of the Ministry of Health.

We believe it is extremely important to invest resources that will enable students to return to the city and to campus, while adhering to procedures and doing everything in our power to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on the University community. We also acknowledge the importance of physically being on campus for academic life, the learning process, the student experience and the creation of a vibrant and fruitful academic atmosphere. We believe that if we conduct ourselves responsibly while caring for the health of all who come to the University, it will be possible to have a hybrid academic year.

In the hope that life under corona will become clearer and more stable by October, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev aims to hold the 2020-21 academic year according to the following overall guidelines:

Teaching and research

The number of students per classroom attending a lecture will be determined in accordance with Ministry of Health and “Purple Label” guidelines, so as to maintain social distancing. We hope that the University will be permitted to hold lectures with a limit of up to 20 students in the classroom, and are preparing the schedules for next year’s classes accordingly. It is important to keep in mind that, until the start of the academic year, there might be further changes, depending on the national coronavirus situation and on the guidelines from the Ministry of Health.

Studies for bachelor’s and master’s degrees will be held as following:

- *Lectures*: we plan to allow courses with up to 20 registered students to be held fully on campus.
- *Hybrid teaching*: in courses with more than 20 enrolled students, the lecturer will teach in a classroom, with up to 20 students in attendance. The remaining students will join the class via the internet. Students who wish to be physically present in the classroom will be asked to register in advance via a dedicated app. Instructions regarding the app and its use will be sent out closer to the beginning of the school year. Hybrid teaching will be made possible by connecting dozens of classrooms to cameras with internet connectivity.
- *Online teaching*: classes that cannot be taught in a hybrid format will be taught online. Since online teaching is inherently different from face-to-face teaching, the University is offering training and forums on the subject of teaching, learning and online learning in

collaboration with the teaching faculty, in order to improve the online learning experience.

- *Labs, workshops and practicums* will be conducted face-to-face while adhering to social distancing and safety guidelines.
- In the event that the spread of the coronavirus does not allow physical attendance on campus, we will hold classes in a fully online format, similar to last semester (2nd semester of 2020).
- Spaces for *independent online learning* that comply with social distancing regulations will be created, so as to better facilitate access to online classes, especially for students who cannot study from home.

It is important to emphasize that research will continue as planned, including graduate student research.

We urge our students to settle in Beer-Sheva, be it in dormitories or other accommodations across town. We also emphasize that the dormitories are part of the University and therefore all “Purple Label” guidelines apply to them.

Coronavirus testing and campus life

The University is considering the feasibility of conducting anonymous and voluntary coronavirus testing on campus, based on BGU's innovative research. The purpose of the testing would be to have an epidemiological overview and alert us about spikes in infection within the campus environment. We hope that this will help guard the health of everyone in the BGU community and allow us to hold regular activities on campus, within the limitations imposed by COVID-19.

The testing will be conducted in addition to the requirement that anyone entering campus submit a Health Declaration. It certainly does not replace our personal and mutual responsibility. Anyone who should be isolated or displays symptoms characteristic of the virus, is requested to refrain from coming to BGU campuses.

Furthermore, in order to protect everyone's health, only students enrolled at BGU and staff will be permitted to enter its campuses. You are requested to coordinate all guest visits to campus with the Security Department and Naftali Preysler, the University's coronavirus supervisor (for further details go to <https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/Pages/coronavirus-updates.aspx>).

- Libraries will be open for research and study, within the limits set by the Purple Label.
- Cafeterias across campus will operate in accordance with the Purple Label.
- The Student Union is working on a plan for social activities on campus in collaboration with the University and in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines. All events will take place outdoors.
- Conferences, departmental seminars, and meetings will be allowed to take place if they comply with the relevant guidelines at the time.

Solutions for students in high-risk groups

As we have done thus far, students in high-risk groups who are apprehensive about coming to campus will be provided individually with solutions that will allow them to continue their studies as optimally as possible. We ask that students in high-risk groups contact the Office of the Dean of Students for further details and to create the best possible plan for them.

The University is investing a great deal of effort and resources in order to ensure that studies and research, along with a social life, continue next year. Ultimately, we will be able to protect our health and maintain advanced academic and scientific activity only if we work together while upholding our personal and communal responsibilities.

We hope everyone stays healthy and look forward to seeing you all on campus at the start of the new academic year.

Prof. Chaim Hames
Rector

Prof. Daniel Chamovitz
President

David Bareket
VP and Director-General