

BIDR

CONNECT





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Dear Reader,

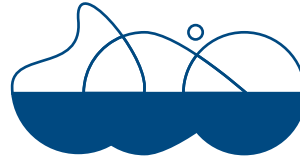
The Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR) is a special place for many reasons. In addition to our uniquely diverse multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research carried out to address the most pressing concerns of the modern world (providing food, water, and energy in increasingly resource-scarce areas), the BIDR is special because of the people who work and study here. Our faculty, staff, and students come from Israel and all over the globe and bring with them a mission to make the world a better place. This mission is facilitated by the BIDR's uniquely collaborative culture. Professional connections and partnerships, particularly across disciplines, are strongly encouraged. Faculty, staff, and students all work closely together to produce innovative research.

In some instances, these networks and connections also extend to life partnerships. The BIDR hosts many couples—both of whom work here and often make their home in Midreshet Ben-Gurion. In this brochure, we would like to introduce you to six such couples, comprising faculty, staff, and graduate students. You can see for yourself how these partnerships enrich both the individual relationships and the mission of the BIDR; for them, this is clearly more than just a workplace.

The BIDR would not be the cutting-edge research institution it is today without the people who work here. Together, we are tackling the challenges involved in the sustainable development of drylands to provide a better future for our shared planet. I hope that this brochure will give you a sense of our special atmosphere.

Noam Weisbrod

Sincerely,
Prof. Noam Weisbrod



The Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR)

The Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR) of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) have become a global leader in research on desertification and sustainable development of the drylands. Through the hard work and expertise of our faculty, the BIDR brings innovative science and cutting-edge technology to bear in addressing some of the most significant crises our world faces.

Located in the Negev Desert, which covers some 60 percent of the land of Israel and represents the country's last open frontier for sustainable development, the BIDR continues a multi-millennium-long struggle to harness the arid zone ecosystem for human habitation and survival.

Scientists at the BIDR dwell in the desert—in physical and intellectual interaction with their living laboratory. They are part of the delicate web of life that seeks harmony in the midst of the desert's harsh conditions, an interconnection that provides them with a unique multidisciplinary approach to attain their research goals. Largely thanks to the research being done here, Israel is one of the few countries in which the desert is receding. The knowledge gained at the BIDR is being

shared with the world, where the rapid expansion of desert lands, called desertification, is affecting the lives of a billion people living in more than 100 countries.

David Ben-Gurion understood the importance of developing the Negev and the value of scientific research in advancing this goal. On January 21, 1973, the government of Israel commissioned Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) to establish a desert research and educational institution in the heart of the Negev Highlands.

Located near Kibbutz Sede Boqer, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) south of Beer-Sheva, the facility overlooks the spectacular Zin Canyon. In 1980, thanks to the generous contribution of the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation, the institution was named the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research.

With on-going efforts and intensive development over the past two decades, the BIDR has today become a vibrant intellectual center that attracts scientists and students from around the world. The BIDR hosts approximately 70 faculty members from various disciplines, as well as numerous technicians and other

scientists. The research carried out in the state-of-the-art BIDR laboratories is unique and addresses some of the most pressing concerns of the modern world, including water availability and quality, food security, alternative energy sources, ecological degradation and, of course, desertification. Approximately 230 graduate students, annually, from nearly 20 different countries, carry out their research under the umbrella of the Albert Katz International School at the BIDR. Many of them intend to implement the lessons of their studies in their home countries, which often suffer from a lack of fresh water, food, and energy. The Israeli students constitute the country's future scientists and policy-makers, keeping Israel at the forefront of desert research.

The BIDR comprises three internationally recognized research institutes: the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research; the French Associates Institute for Agriculture and Biotechnology of Drylands; and the Swiss Institute for Dryland Environmental Research. As basic necessities dwindle in many parts of the world, the scientists in these three institutes research ways to provide food, water, and energy in resource-scarce areas, the knowledge of which is shared worldwide.

Emily Tran and Shaked Stein are both doctoral students in the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research

Career

Emily: "I was always interested in environmental science and water resources. While volunteering in the Peace Corps for two years in Senegal, I saw first-hand how crucial groundwater and sanitation are, and I decided to make a career of studying hydrology.

Shaked: "I think that it is important to develop our water resources in this dry area. Israel's late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said that before he decided to be a politician, he wanted to be a water engineer because of the needs of our young and dry country."

Courtship

Emily: "We were master's students together and assigned to sit in the same office during our first year. We had to spend a lot of time together, so eventually, we became a couple."

Coworkers

Emily: "He knows the ins and outs of my research, for better and worse. While he has many good suggestions, he also has many helpful criticisms that someone outside the field wouldn't notice. Also, it's very convenient that he works in the same building if one of us needs help in the lab in the middle of the day."

Shaked: "We get to eat lunch together and talk about our day and also consult with one another about professional issues."

BIDR

Emily: "What's not to like about this place? We have the shortest commute in the world and live in the dorms right next to all of our friends. The BIDR provides a supportive and non-competitive work environment, which is really unique to academia in general."

Shaked: "There is a great community of students at the BIDR who support one another. The proximity to the labs and the offices is one of the main advantages of living here."



"We were master's students together and assigned to sit in the same office. We had to spend a lot of time together, so eventually, we became a couple."

Eliana Ben-Sheleg is the Student Services Coordinator in the Albert Katz International School for Desert Studies (AKIS), and **Boomie Ben-Sheleg** is a doctoral student in the French Associates Institute for Agriculture and Biotechnology of Drylands

Career

Eliana: "After several years of working from home as an English editor, I recently made the move to work in AKIS so I could interact with live human beings. I love the international aspect of the school and helping students from various countries navigate the intricacies of university bureaucracy."

Boomie: "I initially pursued a degree in desert agriculture because I wanted a career that combined my love for nature and the opportunity to make a better world for the next generation. While I've moved beyond my juvenile delusions that I can singlehandedly solve the world's problems, I still retain my awe at being part of a group of people who are fighting for ways to create a more sustainable reality."

Courtship

Eliana: "We met as all legendary partners do: on a hike in the middle of a forest, over a shared bag of sliced vegetables. The hills around Beit Shemesh hold a special place in our hearts."

Boomie: "As do sliced vegetables."

Coworkers

Eliana: "I appreciate getting the occasional office visit from Boomie, especially when he comes bearing freshly ground coffee. I also appreciate having a go-to student volunteer to call on for all AKIS events."

Boomie: "It is harder to ignore a call for volunteers when it comes from your wife!"

BIDR

Eliana: "While there is nothing as nice as having your work, home, and children's preschool within walking distance of each other, the thing we most love about the BIDR and Midreshet Ben-Gurion is the people!"

Boomie: "We are blown away by our neighbors' warmth, devotion to their families, and dedication to their community. We are lucky to live and work in a town with people so kind, committed and passionate about everything they do."



"We are blown away by our neighbors' warmth, devotion to their families, and dedication to their community..."



“...We also love the cosmopolitan atmosphere thanks to the large number of international students and residents.”

Dina Zilberg is an Associate Professor in the French Associates Institute for Agriculture and Biotechnology of Drylands, and **Amit Gross** is a Professor in and the Director of the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research

Career

Dina: "My research focuses on developing fish disease treatments using algae and plants. I also investigate fish growth from systems that utilize reclaimed water. I initially planned to study veterinary medicine, and since I love diving, I focused on the aquatic environment. The two subjects, the world of water and veterinary medicine, along with the need to develop aquaculture to meet the demand for fish while preserving the aquatic wildlife, led me to focus on fish health."

Amit: "My research interests involve decentralized water/wastewater treatment and sanitation, particularly in arid rural regions. I try to identify traditional waste streams as resources (rather than waste). Initially, I actually planned to be a car mechanic. However, I began to realize the effects of water scarcity, pollution and sanitation on human life and the environment. My current research interests are driven by my desire to help minimize these negative effects in Israel and around the world."

Courtship

Dina: "We met during our B.Sc. studies in the Faculty of Agriculture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

During one of the exam periods, we planned to study together."

Amit: "We didn't quite manage to study, but Dina did test her barber abilities with me. She has cut my hair ever since."

Coworkers

Dina: "Collaborative work with Amit is very natural since our scientific research is complementary. Often work 'drifts' home, which is very convenient and usually enjoyable, since work is also our hobby."

Amit: "We are careful to give each other professional 'space' as well. For example, we make sure not to co-supervise graduate students."

BIDR

Dina: "It is a beautiful place, small and intimate, combining the ideals we believe in for Israeli society and the legacy of Ben-Gurion. We also love the cosmopolitan atmosphere thanks to the large number of international students and residents."

Amit: "This environment provides the opportunity to perform high quality research with unique collaborations between researchers from various disciplines."

Nofar Asa is the Coordinator of the Root of the Matter Knowledge Center in the French Associates Institute for Agriculture and Biotechnology of Drylands, and **Eli Asa** is a Project Manager in the Building and Maintenance Department

Career

Nofar: "I like the variety of 'hats' I wear in this job, including coordinating the activities of 25 plant scientists, organizing conferences, preparing budgets, building websites, and working as the administrator for the non-profit organization, the Israeli Society of Plant Sciences."

Eli: "Having worked previously as a logistic maintenance manager for the Ayalim Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to developing the Negev Desert, I enjoy the challenge of supervising interesting projects from start to finish."

Courtship

Nofar: "We met by chance. I was visiting a friend who was living in an Ayalim Association student village in the south. I had been there for a week, and she convinced me to stay one more day. That evening, her boyfriend came to visit, and Eli came with him. We played chess as couples, and Eli and I won. We have been together ever since, with a ten-year marriage, three daughters, and two dogs."

Coworkers

Nofar: "We help each other with our work, discussing issues and working on solutions. We also get to spend more quality time together, such as eating lunch and taking coffee breaks together."

BIDR

Nofar: "I really like the people in this community. It's also great to be able to bike or walk to work, instead of being stuck in a car."

Eli: "I enjoy the people and the environment of the BIDR and Midreshet Ben-Gurion and, of course, the desert. It's also great to be so close to both home and work, and be available at either place when needed."



"I like the variety of 'hats' I wear in this job, including coordinating the activities of 25 plant scientists..."



"After Zehava came to work at the BIDR, we built a cooperative working relationship. But we were also young and single, and so it went."

Zehava Afriat is the BIDR's Operations Coordinator, and **David Afriat** is the Infrastructure Officer and Deputy Logistics Manager

Career

Zehava: "In my early years at the BIDR, I served as a secretary in the Procurement Department. Over the years, the nature of the work and the definition of the job have changed according to the research needs of the institutes."

David: "I came here as a locksmith, and over time, I took it upon myself to deal with everything in order to provide a quick response to any malfunctions at the institutes."

Courtship

Zehava: "I met David on the first day I went to work in the institutes. Our offices were close to each other. Naturally, we built an interaction in work matters, and over time, we formed a relationship that developed into a romance."

David: "After Zehava came to work at the BIDR, we built a cooperative working relationship. But we were also young and single, and so it went."

Coworkers

Zehava: "My working life has always been accompanied by my relationship with David. I have no basis of comparison in terms of the advantages or disadvantage of working with your partner. This is the situation I know."

David: "One benefit of working with my wife is the fact that we don't need to plan our vacations since we always have them at the same time. Another great thing is that my lunch partner (Zehava) always brings the food!"

BIDR

Zehava: "I am very excited to answer this question! Beyond the varied and challenging daily work, I treasure my long acquaintance with the "family of the institutes"—the amazing people who work here who have become like family members for me."

David: "Every day at work at the BIDR, I deal with many different topics, which is tremendously satisfying. I like my job here very much."

Michal Barak is an Architectural Technician at the Swiss Institute for Dryland Environmental and Energy Research, and **Simon Barak** is an Associate Professor of Plant Molecular Biology at the French Associates Institute for Agriculture and Biotechnology of Drylands

Career

Michal: "I was always interested in the connection between art and engineering, and architecture links these two fields."

Simon: "After reading about genetic engineering in Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*, I thought that this technology combined with agriculture could allow me to pursue my interest in plant biology, and be useful to Israel at the same time."

Courtship

Michal: "Simon had just made aliyah from the UK and was an M.Sc. student. He came to my office with his roommate, a student I knew. My white knight tells me that I said hello and then completely ignored him. Fortunately, we met again and quickly fell in love."

Simon: "After recovering from being ignored, we began dating. Early on, Michal decided to give her aunt money from her small savings to buy a new washing machine. I was so impressed with her kindness and generosity that I told my roommate, this is the woman I am going to marry!"

Coworkers

Michal: "We get to have lunch together most days, and we are very familiar with each other's work and colleagues."

Simon: "We get to share knowledge of each other's work, and the other amazing research that is being pursued at the BIDR. We also enjoy the different campus events and activities together, such as SB Campus Radio."

BIDR

Michal: "One of my favorite things about working at the BIDR is the close relationships between the workers: many of them are our neighbors, and our children are also friends. I also love the academic atmosphere at the BIDR that exposes me to so much innovative research that I believe can help save the world."

Simon: "For me, the best thing about working at the BIDR is the opportunity to combine cutting-edge research with the pioneering Zionist spirit of David Ben-Gurion's vision for the Negev. Midreshet Ben-Gurion is a wonderful place to live and raise a family."

"We also enjoy the different campus events and activities together, such as SB Campus Radio."







Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) is the fastest growing research university in Israel. With 20,000 students, 4,000 staff and faculty members, and three campuses in Beer-Sheva, Sede Boqer and Eilat, BGU is an agent of change, fulfilling the vision of David Ben-Gurion, who envisaged the future of Israel emerging from the Negev.

Today, BGU's mission continues to effect change, locally, regionally and internationally. With five faculties and several world-renowned research institutes, BGU is a recognized national and global leader in many fields, actively encouraging multidisciplinary collaborations with government and industry, and nurturing entrepreneurship and innovation in all its forms.



The Jacob Blaustein
Institutes for Desert
Research

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