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Our Knowledge
Your Growth

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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE DEAN FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

Dear Friends,

We are happy to present to you the 2019-2020 annual report of the International School of Agricultural Sciences of the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The past few months have been challenging for all of us, with the Covid-19 pandemic bringing the whole world to a standstill. Nevertheless, new opportunities sometimes emerge even in the most troubling of times.

We believe that our programs are responsible for improving not only the lives of our students and alumni but also of those residing in their surrounding communities and their countries. We strongly feel that the impact of Israeli science is far-reaching and that our students serve both as influencers and as ambassadors.

In this report, we would like to share with you our students’ stories, accomplishments and highlights. One of these is that some of our students who lived on campus during the March-May 2020 lockdown came to the aid of their colleagues who were not authorized to enter the Faculty due to health regulations; they carried out important experiments and advanced their peers’ research in addition to their own.

Another highlight was the closing ceremony we were able to hold physically in spite of Covid-19 regulations, which was streamed live to the student’s families, colleagues and friends throughout the globe via Zoom. Ironically, Covid-19 connected us to more people around the world than ever before.

Sincerely yours,

Professor Aliza Fleischer
OUR VISION

The Robert H. Smith Faculty’s teaching and research activities have always played a central role in advancing agriculture to strengthen Israel’s economy while training tomorrow’s scientists and agriculturists. The Smith Faculty’s mission is to protect and rehabilitate the environment while increasing food production and reducing world hunger; mobilize agriculture to meet human health needs; improve the quality and purity of agricultural products; and share the benefits of Israeli research and innovation with other nations.

The International School is dedicated to disseminating the Smith Faculty’s knowledge and expertise throughout the international community by providing opportunities to acquire advanced academic knowledge and observe up-to-date practical applications. The educational programs encourage students to explore new fields and cultures, exchange ideas and experiences, contribute to capacity building and problem solving, and create partnerships for future cooperation.
THE INTERNATIONAL MSc PROGRAMS

The International Master of Science programs are 12-month, accelerated, non-thesis degrees in one of four fields of study: Plant Sciences or Environmental Quality Sciences, held biennially in even years, and Animal Sciences or Nutritional Sciences, held biennially in odd years. To earn the degree, students are required to complete 40 course credits. Excelling students may apply to transfer to a thesis track at the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment. In addition, the International School offers an 18-month Master of Science in Viticulture & Enology.

2019-2020 PROGRAMS

MSc in Nutritional Sciences and MSc in Animal Sciences

The class of 2019-20 consisted of 26 students: 13 Nutritional Sciences students, 12 Animal Sciences students and one external student, hailing from 16 different countries. The students completed the year with an impressive class average of ~90, with over 60 percent of them accepted to a thesis track and now continuing their studies at the Faculty.

Nutritional Sciences Program

The International Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences prepares students to become leading professionals in the field of Nutritional Sciences and apply the knowledge acquired at the Smith Faculty to modern nutritional challenges in their home countries. Students in the program learn the fundamentals of nutrition based on the most recent scientific findings, research and diagnostic approaches. The program is academically headed by Prof. Betty Schwartz and Dr. Aliza Stark.

Animal Sciences Program

The International Master of Science in Animal Sciences prepares students to become leading professionals in modern animal husbandry and contribute the skills and knowledge gained at the Smith Faculty to improve agriculture in their home countries. Students acquire the fundamentals of Animal Sciences based on the most recent scientific findings, as well as comprehensive knowledge on animal physiology, farm animal production and the environmental impact of animal husbandry. The program is academically headed by Prof. Sameer J. Mabjeesh.

MSc in Viticulture & Enology

The international Master of Science in Viticulture & Enology, academically headed by Prof. Zohar Kerem, is the first MSc degree of its kind to be approved by the National Council for Higher Education of Israel. The biennial, 18-month program spans four consecutive semesters and is comprised of theoretical studies on campus and practical hands-on learning in the vineyard and winery. Students also participate in a professional workshop overseas and are offered the opportunity to intern at a commercial winery in Israel or abroad. We are proud that all 14 graduates of the class of 2017-2018 are currently working in the viticulture and enology sector.

The second cohort of this unique program opened in February 2019 with ten Israeli and three international students. Studies will conclude in December 2020 (delayed due to the Covid-19 crisis). The third intake will begin in March 2021.
Orientation Days and Breaking the Ice

Shortly after the new students arrived on campus, we held two days of orientation, ending with “breaking the ice” activities, led by a company with expertise in organizational management.

Bonding Activity

In the beginning of November, the students got together with our social coordinator to get to know each other better. They played games, shared feelings and enjoyed each other’s company. At the end of this fun get-together, everyone discreetly wrote their hopes for the year on a piece of paper and put it in a bottle. The bottle was broken at the end of the year and they discovered if their wishes had come true.

Tour of Jerusalem

We began the year with our traditional trip to the Old City of Jerusalem, led by a professional tour guide. A food-tasting tour of the Machane Yehuda market added flavor to the educational, fun-filled day.

Hava & Adam Eco-Educational Farm

This year, our students visited a fascinating new location: the Hava & Adam Eco-Educational Farm in Modiin. They learned about permaculture systems and ecological and sustainable farming. The visit included a hands-on activity: preparing herb-infused oil and extracting aloe-vera gel, which they got to take home. They also enjoyed organic tea and fruit grown on the farm.
Annual Joint Event with IMPH and Glocal

The Joint Event is an annual networking and learning event that brings together students from three Hebrew University international master programs: Glocal, Agriculture and IMPH. This year’s event was hosted by the International School of Agricultural Sciences and focused on the hot topic of cannabis research. The students heard a fascinating lecture by Dr. Nirit Bernstein, a senior researcher at Agricultural Research Organization, Volcani Center, and a world-renowned expert on cannabis research, and discussed legalization, medicalization and regulation in a group activity.

Hanukah on Campus

International students joined Israeli students and faculty members on the main lawn of the campus for Hanukah candle-lighting ceremonies led by a Chabad rabbi.

Christmas in Nazareth

This year, we expanded this excursion to a full day trip. In addition to Nazareth, the students visited many other important Christian sights in the Galilee area, led by a professional tour guide. They sang Christmas carols under the Christmas tree, tasted delicious local food and pastries, and joined other visitors in celebrating the spirit of the holiday season.

Tu B’Shvat

To celebrate Tu B’Shvat, the “new year for trees”, our students joined the annual tree-planting ceremony on campus.

Purim

Our students had a great time at a Purim party with our social coordinator; they beautifully decorated their own masks and enjoyed sweets galore.
Covid-19 and Isolation

In March 2020, Covid-19 hit Israel hard. Our students suddenly had to deal with a new reality no one could have foreseen: a month-long general lockdown was declared; frontal classes were replaced by online Zoom sessions and all activities and trips were abruptly cancelled.

The International School staff quickly took control of the situation to enable our students to continue their studies under the new limitations. Laptops were distributed for distance learning, and the students were constantly informed of the ever-changing regulations via emails, our WhatsApp group and group Zoom meetings.

Some of our students helped their colleagues, who were not authorized to enter the Faculty because of Covid-19 restrictions, by volunteering to care for the goats in the Faculty’s experimental goat pen. This activity also greatly helped them deal with the stressful situation.

Although distance learning was not easy at first, our students rose to the challenge. They learned new computer skills and even presented their oral seminars via Zoom.

We are proud to say that every single one of our students graduated with high marks and more than 60% chose to stay for a second year thesis track despite the pandemic and all its difficulties.

“Thankful to be with such amazing students and faculty during this crazy time!
Feeding these baby goats is always the highlight of my day!
So glad I have something to keep me busy on campus during quarantine and can’t wait to help deliver the new kids next week.”

Hannah Goldstein, USA, Nutritional Sciences program
International MSc Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of the 2019-2020 cohort was definitely one of a kind. Even though many academic programs made do with a Zoom ceremony, we decided we would do everything possible to give our students the chance to celebrate their achievements together. Thus was born an intimate Covid-19-adapted ceremony, complete with social distancing, International School masks and personally packaged refreshments.

The ceremony was broadcasted via Zoom and more than 100 family members and friends participated, sending over 75 chat messages of congratulations from around the world. The chat was broadcasted live and our students were delighted to watch the messages from their loved ones appear on the large screen.

The ceremony ended with the students performing a traditional African dance called Jerusalema, much to the delight of the Zoom audience. It was an unforgettable evening and a perfect ending to a challenging yet rewarding year.
Due to Covid-19 limitations, we sadly had to cancel our trip to Bordeaux, France. Nonetheless, we did everything possible to enable our students to benefit from the hands-on activities, which are an intrinsic part of the viticulture program: tours, wine tastings and workshops were held after the lockdown period, while some of the academic courses were taught via Zoom.

**Winery Tours**

Tours of wineries and vineyards enable our students to observe firsthand the practical application of course material. The wineries visited included Roglit, Nevo, Agur, Mettler and Hadar in the Judean Hills, and Golan, Pelter and Har Odem in the north of Israel.

**Grape Harvesting at Tel Gezer Vineyard**

The MSc program covers all aspects of winemaking, from the vineyard to the bottle, including theoretical studies, experiential work at Tel Gezer Vineyard and winemaking at its winery, in cooperation with Soreq Vineyard. During the summer, the students harvested the grapes they helped grow and produced their own wine.
Wine Microbiology Course
We had the pleasure of hosting Prof. Isabelle Masneuf-Pomerade, a guest lecturer from the Viticulture and Enology Department, Bordeaux Sciences Agro, France, who taught the Wine Microbiology course. Her research focuses on the microbial community from grape to wine and on wine yeast genetics and phenotypes. The concentrated course included 20 hours of lectures and experimental wine tasting.

Grapevine Morphology and Physiology Course
We had the pleasure of hosting Prof. Justine Vandel Heuvel from Cornell University, who taught the Grapevine, Morphology and Physiology course. This course included 20 hours of lectures and a seminar held at the Tulip winery. Prof. Vandel Heuvel's research focuses on advancing the science of horticulture using both traditional and novel approaches to optimizing crop performance.

Grape Man Tasting Workshops
Students visited the Grape Man Education Center in Jaffa four times and participated in workshops taught by the center's experts, including CEO Haim Gan. The topics covered included Italian, Australian, Spanish and Rioja wines, and Israel's best wines.

Workshops
The Sensory Evaluation of Wines course included three workshops taught by Ido Lewinson, a winemaker in the Barkan and Lewinson wineries, Yair Haidu, one of the leading professionals in the Israeli wine industry, and Itay Lahat, wine consultant and winemaker. These workshops gave our students better knowledge of how to judge, analyze and critique wines.
The International School’s activities and accomplishments are made possible by the generous support and continuing commitment of our donors and collaborators.

The International School thanks the following sponsors and organizations for their invaluable partnership.

Pears Foundation (UK)

Sir Mick and Lady Davis (UK)

Mrs. Isabell Adler (USA)

Mrs. Evelene Wechsler (USA)

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Claude Salomon Scholarship Fund (Mexico)

MASHAV- Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation

ELLS – Euro League for Life Sciences

The Council for Higher Education of Israel
The International School of Agricultural Sciences of the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been providing English-language programs in the agricultural, food and environmental sciences since 1988. As the only faculty of agriculture in Israel, the Smith Faculty is the source for most of Israel’s agricultural achievements.

More than 3,000 participants from around the globe have attended graduate degree programs and short training courses and workshops at the International School.