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**Educating in Adversity:  
Fostering Unity and Resilience in a Diverse Campus amid War**

The Division for Diversity, Inclusion and Community was established at the University of Haifa at the beginning of September 2023. Its mission is to foster and sustain an inclusive, accessible, and safe environment for all students, faculty, and staff through the collective efforts of all university units. The Division is dedicated to expanding opportunities, nurturing the potential of all members, promoting social mobility through higher education, and leveraging diversity to fuel innovation, creativity, and excellence in research and teaching.

A month following its inauguration, the Division and the University found themselves in the midst of an unprecedented crisis due to the outbreak of the “Swords of Iron” War against Hamas. The shock and grief over the significant loss of lives were palpable. Concurrently, tensions escalated on social media between Jewish and Arab students, posing a threat to the harmony of our otherwise peaceful campus.

**Two months into the war and three weeks before the campus reopens, we are confronted with three critical and pressing challenges:**

1. **Strained Relations between Jewish and Arab Students:** The war has eroded trust between Jewish and Arab students, leading to hesitation in collaborating academically and engaging socially.
2. **Heightened Security Concerns:** The conflict has instilled a sense of vulnerability among students and staff on campus.
3. **Challenges for Blended Staff and Faculty:** The war has created tensions between Jewish and Arab staff and faculty, posing difficulties in maintaining a cohesive and productive work environment.

**Emergency Efforts During the First Month of War**

During this time of emergency, the Division is focused on fostering both individual and collective resilience among students, faculty, and staff. This involves identifying and mapping their varied needs and developing training programs tailored for teaching and research in a multicultural campus environment, particularly during times of severe crisis.

**Our Students:** Since the beginning of the war, for the last month and a half, over 450 students participated in facilitated Support Groups which provided safe spaces in which they shared their thoughts and concerns in their own languages. We learned of our students’ difficulty in concentrating on their studies and in finding the motivation to continue their academic journey; about the challenge of balancing their studies with their responsibilities at home, work and army service in a time of war. The Arab students shared their fears of backlash from Jewish students, anxieties at being discriminated against on campus and while looking for jobs; The Druze students who serve in the army and fight side by side with Jewish students on the frontlines, talked about their conflicting identities as Arabs and as loyal citizens of Israel and their fears of reprisals from Muslim students. **All students – Jews, Arabs and Druze – talked about their concern for our beautiful campus, for the future of its unity and our ability to overcome this crisis and rebuilt a thriving and prospering shared space for learning and researching.**

**Our Faculty:** Over 400 faculty members and staff participated in a series of workshops we designed, equipping them with practical tools to navigate the complexities of teaching in a diverse classroom during times of conflict. These workshops focused on strategies for addressing emotional outbursts, managing discussions on complex and sensitive topics, fostering empathy for all student groups, and establishing clear guidelines for class discussions.

**Recreating a Sense of Security on Campus**

The academic year is slated to commence on December 31st, two months after its initial schedule. Our paramount and immediate concern lies in fostering a sense of security for all for everyone who comes to our campus, including students who have bravely served on the frontlines with the IDF over the past two months; young mothers who have selflessly cared for their children while their husbands fought on the front; students displaced from conflict zones in the north and south; and Arab students who face challenges expressing themselves openly on campus and harbor apprehensions about openly visiting the campus Mosque. **We are committed to creating a peaceful and welcoming environment where all students can immerse themselves in continuous learning and professional growth, engage in meaningful interactions with their peers, and embark on a fulfilling and ultimately successful academic journey.**

**In light of these unprecedented challenges, we are implementing three transformative initiatives to foster resilience, strengthen inclusivity, and safeguard our campus community:**

1. **Establishing a Team of "Shared Society Trustees"**

A crucial factor in re-establishing a sense of safety on campus is the availability and accessibility of security personnel. Students and staff require immediate access to protective agents in any situation that poses a potential for conflict or in instances where they feel unsafe. **The solution lies not in increasing the number of professional security guards, which may escalate conflict situations, but rather in utilizing students as security ambassadors.** By deploying student security personnel, we send a clear message that our campus is a peaceful, shared space that honors and respects all members of society. With the goal of fostering a truly inclusive campus environment, we are launching the "Shared Society Trustees" initiative. This group of highly visible students, composed of both Arab and Jewish individuals, will wear easily identifiable yellow vests and caps bearing slogans that promote shared society values. Comprising 150 members, this student body will maintain a constant presence on campus during breaks, patrolling and monitoring social activities. Additionally, they will receive training in non-violent communication techniques and conflict resolution methods, enabling them to serve as immediate responders for any student who feels threatened or unsafe.

To equip students with easy access to essential support services, the trustees will distribute eye-catching rubber bracelets during the first weeks of the semester. These bracelets will feature scannable barcodes that, when scanned, will direct users to a comprehensive list of contact information for all university units providing security, medical, and mental health services. This initiative encompasses training the trustees in non-violent communication and conflict resolution techniques, acquiring and printing the bracelets, purchasing vests and hats for the trustees, and offering modest scholarships to the students serving as trustees.

1. **Fostering Arab-Jewish Student Leadership**

While the University of Haifa boasts a diverse student body, with equal numbers of Arab and Jewish students in most of its 65 academic departments, research indicates that mere physical proximity in classrooms is insufficient to foster genuine camaraderie and a sense of belonging. To bridge these divides, we must adopt a proactive approach, creating opportunities for shared experiences and meaningful dialogue. These efforts should be driven by the students themselves, emerging from the grassroots, while we provide the necessary support to empower them to guide their fellow students through these challenging times. At this juncture, we believe that these efforts should be nurtured within the intimate setting of individual departments. Here, students have established connections and meet regularly, united by shared academic pursuits and interests, providing a solid foundation for cultivating shared experiences.

To foster a truly inclusive and harmonious campus environment, we aim to establish a network of Arab and Jewish student leaders **within each academic department**. By collaborating closely with these student groups, we will identify the unique characteristics and potential of each department. We will then facilitate brainstorming sessions to generate innovative initiatives that embody the values of shared society. These initiatives, led by the students themselves, will promote a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect within each academic unit. We will provide ongoing support to the students as they transform their ideas into tangible actions, empowering them to become active agents of change within their respective departments. This student-led approach will effectively integrate the principles of shared living and shared society into the very fabric of our academic community.

This initiative involves professional facilitators who will guide each group of students through several sessions of creative brainstorming.

1. **Designing Tailor-Made Support Programs for Faculty Members**

Building upon three intensive weeks of workshops that equipped faculty with general tools for teaching in a diverse campus, we now plan to embark on the second phase. This phase focuses on the specific needs of each department, considering their unique student composition, subject matter, and faculty resources. As a result, we will create tailor-made trainings for the faculty and staff of each department.

The challenges faced by different departments vary significantly. For instance, the Computer Science Department's student body comprises over 80% Arab students, leaving Jewish students feeling like a small minority and expressing apprehension about returning to campus. In contrast, the Arab Literature Department presents a different challenge. A Jewish professor there teaches a class composed entirely of Arab students and is unsure how to approach her first lesson in the wake of the war. Similarly, professors in other departments, such as Political Science, Jewish History, and Sociology, are hesitant to address topics integral to their curriculum, such as the Arab-Jewish conflict, for fear of escalating tensions and outbursts in class.

To effectively address these diverse challenges, we propose customized training sessions and workshops specifically designed for each department. These sessions will provide a platform for faculty members to identify and articulate their unique challenges, brainstorm innovative solutions, and collaboratively divide tasks among themselves. This approach will foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, empowering each department to develop a tailored plan that harnesses their collective strengths and bolsters their shared motivation. As a result, our university will emerge with a comprehensive and department-specific preparedness strategy that effectively addresses the complexities of teaching and learning in a diverse and dynamic environment.

**Budget***in USD*

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Initiative** | **Details** | **Expenses** |
| "Shared Society Trustees" | 150 students x $2,000 = $300,000 + $20,000 for training and materials | 320,000 |
| Arab-Jewish Student Leadership | training | 90,000 |
| Designing Tailor-Made Support Programs for Faculty Members | facilitation and workshops expenses  65 departments x $2,000 | 130,000 |
| **Total** |  | **$540,000** |

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***Supporting our* *Student-Reservists in the IDF:***

**Rebuilding Lives and Restoring Academic Dreams**

As the University of Haifa opens its doors for the 2023/24 academic year on December 31, a critical challenge emerges: ensuring the seamless reintegration of our student reservists following their courageous service in the recent Swords of Iron War. Nearly 500 student reservists answered the call to duty on October 7th, bravely defending our nation on the front lines. Their dedication and sacrifice demand our unyielding support. To ease their transition and lighten their burden, the University of Haifa is committed to providing a comprehensive support package as they return to campus life.

As they reintegrate into civilian life, our student reservists face unique challenges. Many are grappling with significant financial burdens compounded by the war's economic impact. Juggling tuition fees and living expenses is difficult enough, but a significant number have also lost part-time jobs that supported themselves and their families during their studies. This financial strain adds a layer of complexity to their transition, demanding our dedicated support.

For many student reservists, the switch from battlefield to classroom can be jarring and requires significant emotional and psychological adaptation. Beyond the demands of academic rigor, these students require emotional resilience and psychological support. Many bear the weight of their wartime experiences, processing the profound psychological impact of service. Stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are all too common, threatening their academic success and overall well-being. Timely intervention is crucial to prevent the escalation of these issues and ensure their mental health.

Responding to the urgent need for mental health support, the Dean of Students Counseling Center has undergone a significant expansion, increasing its staff by almost 50% from 30 to 47 dedicated professionals. This influx of expertise ensures the Center can effectively address the increased demand from students, particularly those struggling with the aftermath of the war. To provide immediate access to assistance and resources, the Center has also launched a 24/7 emotional assistance hotline, offering a lifeline for reserve students grappling with the emotional and psychological challenges of reintegration.

To ease the significant financial and emotional burden faced by our student reservists, the University of Haifa is proposing a comprehensive package of support. This initiative will address their ongoing financial needs, enabling them to focus on their education without additional stress. This package includes expanded mental health services at the Dean of Students Counseling Center, where a dedicated team of therapists provides counseling, therapy, and other essential support to help student reservists overcome the emotional and psychological challenges they face.

The support package includes two critical areas:

1. **Financial Assistance**

* **Immediate Relief:**  The University of Haifa swiftly responded to the war's outbreak by providing each student reservist with a modest emergency grant. Two months into the war, we recognize that their ongoing needs are far greater. We seek to provide each student reservist with an additional grant of $2,000. This financial assistance will help alleviate the burden of rent, utilities, meals, and other essential expenses, allowing them to focus on their academic recovery and well-being.
* **Focus on academic success**: This financial assistance will allow students to focus on their studies without the added stress of financial worries.

1. **Comprehensive Psychological Support**

* **Addressing trauma**: Many student soldiers witnessed harrowing scenes and urgently require access to mental health resources.
* **Specialized care**: A grant of $1,000 per student will enable them to receive counseling, therapy, and support services to address the emotional and psychological effects of military service.
* **Promoting resilience**: Timely intervention is crucial to prevent the escalation of mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and PTSD. By supporting our student reservists now, we invest in their future and the well-being of Israeli society.

By investing in our student veterans, we invest in their future and the future of our nation. With your generous support, we can empower these young heroes to rebuild their lives, help them heal from their experiences, and pursue their dreams with renewed hope and strength.

**Budget (US$)**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Initiative** | **Details** | **Expenses** |
| Support for Living Expenses | 500 students x $2,000 | $1,000,000 |
| Support for Mental Health Assistance | 500 Students x $1,000 | $500,000 |
| **Total** |  | **$1,500,000** |

* **A gift of $1.5 million** will provide **500 student reservists with a comprehensive support package**. Your generosity will be a beacon of hope and empower these brave students to heal, rebuild their lives, and contribute to a brighter future for Israel.

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**University of Haifa Delivers Emergency War Assistance**

On October 7th, Israel faced a devastating attack that ignited the Swords of Iron War. In the face of this crisis, the University of Haifa mobilized its resources and rallied its community to provide immediate and vital aid to those affected.

**Through three impactful initiatives, the University of Haifa has already distributed a total of $990,000 in emergency assistance:**

1. **Providing Essential Equipment to the IDF**

We partnered with Ahinoam, a leading Israeli social services association, to purchase and deliver critical tactical gear directly to soldiers on the frontlines including Golani, Givati, Paratroopers, and Reconnaissance Units. Already, 200 bullet-proof ceramic vests have been provided, directly protecting the lives of brave soldiers for a total of $240,000.

1. **Healing the Wounds: Emergency Mental Health Support for Survivors of the Music Festival in Southern Israel**

Recognizing the profound impact of the War and its survivors, we committed $500,000 to support the vital work of SafeHeart, an emergency mental health initiative. This emergency mental health project, led by experienced professionals including many faculty members from the University of Haifa Department of Psychology, provides critical therapy and treatment to survivors, helping them heal and rebuild their lives. Safeheart was founded by Prof. Roy Salomon, of the University of Haifa Department of Psychology.

Since the outbreak of the War, SafeHeart has received approximately 2,000 requests for help from survivors and their families. SafeHeart works in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Bituach Leumi and the Israel Trauma Coalition.

1. **Enhancing Medical Care: Saving Lives with Advanced Technology**

We partnered with Philips Israel to equip medical professionals on the frontline with **20 portable handheld ultrasounds**, valued at $290,000. This vital equipment allows faster and more accurate diagnosis in critical situations, saving lives and improving patient outcomes.

**Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.**