



April 2, 2019

To Whom It May Concern

We are writing on a matter concerning an attack on the principle of academic freedom in Israel. Israeli academia's institutional collusion and complicity with the Israeli Defense Forces is a well-known and well-documented fact. For decades Israeli academia has been hosting special programs of the IDF and the state security apparatuses enjoy immense influence, dictating the terms of their contracts with academia, demanding preference and better conditions of study for soldiers, and intervening in academic content in clear violation of the principle of academic autonomy and equality in access to higher education.

We are a members' organization dedicated to the democratizations of Israeli academia and society, and one of our projects consists of documenting and monitoring through our "Complicit Academy" [database](#), inter alia, such instances of militarization of the academic space, and similar disruptions of normal academic life.

In recent weeks we learned that the Hebrew University of Jerusalem won a tender to host the IDF Havatzalot training program for intelligence officers, due to start in October 2019. Based on information from [public sources](#), it appears that the terms of this contract go beyond any "normal" level of complicity.

The implications are severe:

- The IDF plans to establish a highly secured military installation on campus with a standby armed force deploying surveillance technologies that potentially can indiscriminately affect everyone on campus.
- The IDF demands the personal details of all university employees related to the program.
- The IDF demands preferential treatment to hundreds of uniformed and armed soldiers that will flood regular departments of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science, Philosophy, and others. The preferential treatment includes a commitment from the university that only the most high-ranking tenured lecturers will be allocated to its program, effectively discriminating against civilian students.
- IDF demands authority for commanders of the programs to intervene in matters concerning the academic performance of its soldiers. From experience at Haifa University, we know of cases in which a high-ranking officer managing this program regularly attended classes, informally monitoring and thus severely affecting the content being discussed there.

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- It goes without saying that such a militarized environment will deeply affect the already marginalized and oppressed population of Palestinian students in campus.

All the demands of the IDF are evidently accepted by The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who seems to downplay in its communications the way the plan permanently damages the most basic principles of autonomy of an academic institution and its functioning as a civilian institution. Yet, Academia for Equality believes that if the plan is executed and becomes a normalized reality this should have severe implication on The Hebrew University of Jerusalem's international standing and on the entire higher education system in Israel.

We therefore urge any intervention you may wish to consider in this case including:

- Sending an official letter to the Hebrew University authorities:
Prof. Asher Cohen, President, hupres@savion.huji.ac.il
Prof. Barak Medina, Rector, rector@savion.huji.ac.il
- Putting on hold any "business as usual" communications with Hebrew University authorities.
- Considering the standing of current as well as planned professional cooperation and exchange in light of this development.

We are hopeful that raising public concern for the principle of academic freedom in Israel could aid in convincing The Hebrew University of Jerusalem to drop a plan that endangers academic life, harms the relationship between lecturers and students, compromises their privacy and last but not least sabotages the delicate social fabric on campus.

Sincerely,

Academia for Equality

Executive Board