

Honors Program Opens Doors to the World of Science



School of Psychology launches unique honors program for outstanding students – the first of its kind in Israel

Outstanding IDC psychology students looking to broaden their minds and study in an informal environment where they have the opportunity to “become the lecturer” are lining up for IDC Herzliya’s School of Psychology Honors Program – the first of its kind in Israel.

The Honors Program, which ran its pilot year in 2012-2013, has been designed especially for outstanding second and third year BA students who are planning careers in psychology. The aim of the program is to give them a unique opportunity to engage in original research by requiring them to complete an original research project, resulting in an honors thesis.

Fourteen students are chosen each year from the Hebrew and English tracks. Dr. **Boaz Ben-David** directs the program, while Prof. **Mario Mikulincer**, dean of the School of Psychology, supervises the process during the students’ third and final year of studies.

According to Ben-David, the program runs on a different teacher-student dynamic than the norm. The classes are held around a roundtable, with the guest professor serving as moderator rather than lecturer. At each session, a different student is given the opportunity to “be the professor,” and begin the day’s discussion. Following that, the students engage in a lively debate on the topic of the day.

At the end of the first year, each student chooses a mentor and submits a proposal for research based on a topic discussed during the year. During their final year of study, they work on writing an honors thesis, similar to those done at major world universities. “The beauty of this is that by the time they have completed their undergraduate degrees, they will have submitted papers to peer-reviewed journals, with their names on them,” says Ben-David.



For her thesis, British-born **Ella Walker** of the RRIS is enjoying the rare opportunity of being mentored by Ben-David and Prof. **Yaakov Trope**, an internationally acclaimed social psychologist from New York University.

Walker says that while at the moment she is “very focused on managing the present,” her general goals for the future are to successfully finish her BA and apply for graduate studies that will lead toward her future career as a clinical psychologist.

Eyal Salomon, another RRIS student, originally from Beachwood, Ohio, USA, says, “By reviewing many different types of works by many great professors, I have learned how to read and carefully evaluate a psychological paper. Giving presentations twice a semester has given me the confidence that I need to give poignant and powerful addresses. I have already used the analytical skills acquired in the honors program in many different classes and assignments.”

“Giving presentations twice a semester has given me the confidence that I need to give poignant and powerful addresses.”

- Eyal Salomon, third year Psychology student and School of Psychology Honors Program participant



Eran Margalith from the Hebrew track has an interesting story to tell. A former combat soldier who served in Lebanon during the Second Lebanon War, Margalith’s time in the army triggered his interest in psychology. He is now studying Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the School of Psychology Honors Program, and spent this past summer as an intern at Columbia University, under the mentorship of Prof. **Yuval Neria**, director of the Trauma and PTSD Program at the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

At the end of the first year, Ben-David was “filled with pride.” He says that it is simply “incredible” to think back to the first meeting, and then to see how far the students have come: “The level of discussion is something one usually gets with graduate students – not those studying for their undergraduate degrees.”



“By the time they have completed

their undergraduate degrees, they will have submitted papers to peer reviewed journals.”

- Dr. Boaz Ben-David, director of the School of Psychology Honors Program

Honors Student Shares his Harvard Experience



Daniel Rubin, an RRIS student from the US, talks about his summer as a research assistant at Harvard University

Does a glass of water look closer to us when we are thirsty? How often do we cheat? Is our parietal lobe involved in mnemonic processes? In every field of science, and specifically psychology, research allows us to progress. It validates a new approach for psychologists to connect with clients and helps marketers advertise to their consumers. The School of Psychology Honors Program has exposed me to the esteemed world of psychological research, and has given me the practical and valuable tools I need for my future.

The highlight of the Honors Program is the shared passion and genuine interest of the students in their research topics. From ADHD and attachment to risk-taking paradigms, each student feels connected to their subject on a personal level. While being introduced in an intimate classroom setting to the faculty of researchers, each student personally chooses a mentor to work with toward publishing an undergraduate thesis in a scientific journal. This thesis is not just an essay - it is science that contributes to the world of academia and beyond.

“

I was accepted to work as a summer research assistant for one of the top social psychologists in the world, Dr. Daniel Gilbert, at Harvard University.”

I began working on my thesis under the auspices of Prof. **Orit Tykocinski**, studying human behavior and decision-making. As I began my personal research, I applied and was accepted to work as a summer research assistant for one of the top social psychologists in the world, Dr. **Daniel Gilbert**, at Harvard University. The experience was incredible. Every day consisted of brainstorming sessions, running participants in a study, acting as an accomplice to trick the participants, and ultimately befriending and bonding with my brilliant and dedicated co-research assistants. We worked personally in Dr. Gilbert's lab and had access to almost any resource or recruiting material we

could have possibly needed. I was able to learn the research process, step-by-step, from the inception of an idea through the final stages of data analysis.

“

The highlight of the honors program is the shared passion and genuine interest of the students in their research topics.”

While at Harvard, I was exposed to PhD students who spend their days contributing to the world of science through research. My honors experience at IDC has allowed me to engage in intellectual and thought-provoking discussions with these researchers, and at times to help them with their statistical analyses. With a fresh outlook on a life of research and academia, I look forward to one day studying toward a PhD. At IDC Herzliya, I am able to partake in many different research opportunities around campus with a multitude of talented professors who properly train and prepare me for the working world of my post-graduation life. It is this personal connection that I find unique to IDC Herzliya in general, and the honors program in specific.

“

Each student chooses a mentor to work with toward publishing an undergraduate thesis in a scientific journal.”

Overall, the honors program allows me to stand out, in the eyes of the faculty here and worldwide. Publishing a paper is only possible with the personal mentorship that I am privileged to receive every week on campus. To be able to discuss research methodology with Prof. **Mario Mikulincer**, the renowned dean of the School of Psychology, every week, is a privilege unique to this program. Ralph Waldo Emerson taught us: “Be an opener of doors.” In my personal experience, the many advantages and opportunities that the honors program offers, does just that. ★

