



Academic Engagement NETWORK

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October 2018 Newsletter

Latest Updates

AEN currently has **625 members on 218 campuses**. Six members joined the organization in October.

AEN is still accepting applications for the Executive Director position. You can read a detailed description of the position's **on our website**. Interested applicants should send a cover letter, C.V., and two writing samples to Deputy Director Mike Atkins at mike@academicengagement.org, by November 1, 2018.

Recent Events

Mark Yudof led a Dallas-area faculty convening October 14-16. The visit included meetings with the President and Provost at the University of North Texas; meetings with AEN faculty and the Hillel director for UNT and Texas Women's University; and public talks at UNT and Anshai Torah synagogue in Plano. Many thanks to AEN member Richard Golden for coordinating the visit. Photo credit: Brad Isakson.



Alums for Campus Fairness, which seeks to mobilize alumni to combat BDS and anti-Israel sentiment on campus, recently inaugurated a webinar series. Its first webinar, on October 4, featured Mark Yudof and Ken Waltzer of AEN. It is available for viewing [here](#).

On September 25, AEN member Shahar Sadeh hosted "Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: The Case of Palestinian Citizens of Israel" at Columbia Teachers' College. The event featured discussions on how Israeli academic institutions are working to integrate and increase accessibility for Arab students.

Left to Right: Dr. Mona Khoury-Kassabri, Dean of School of Social Work at Hebrew University; Dr. Shahar Sadeh, Director of the Faculty Engagement Program at the JCRC-NY.; Dr. Sarah Ozacky Lazar, Director of the Forum for the Promotion of Arab Society in Israeli Academia, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute; Melissa Landa, Senior Associate for Membership and Diversity at AEN; Janice S. Robinson, Esq. Vice President for Diversity and Community Affairs, Associate Professor in Higher Education, Teachers College Title IX Coordinator. Photo credit: Melissa Landa.



Upcoming Programs

Faculty Mentoring Program

AEN is pleased to announce support for a new Faculty Mentoring Program designed for AEN members to help empower students in the face of on-campus intimidation by the BDS movement. By establishing networks linking faculty and students, AEN members who participate will be in positions to assist in broadening or deepening student knowledge; to advise students on how to be constructively active and engaged; and to extend and supplement student links with administrators.

interacting at student events; accompanying students to Israel-related events; serving as faculty advisor to a student club focused on relevant topics; and acquainting students with the codes of conduct and strategizing ways to deal with anticipated protest or disruption. Faculty members may choose to work with students whom they know or request that AEN introduce them to students seeking faculty support.

Faculty mentors will receive a stipend of \$200 each year to support snacks or meals for meetings, books, or other items the faculty desires. **Applications** for the program should be sent to Senior Associate for Membership and Diversity **Melissa Landa**, who is also available to answer any questions about the program.

Faculty Convening in Miami

On November 7, Melissa Landa and Mark Yudof of AEN will be leading a convening of AEN faculty members in Miami, FL. The goals of the meeting are to connect area AEN faculty members with one another, to hear and learn from AEN faculty about how BDS, anti-Israel activity, and antisemitism are affecting their campuses, and to discuss strategies for responding. Please contact **Melissa Landa** for more information (if you are an AEN member in Florida and already RSVP'd, you will be hearing from us soon).

"Israel: Innovation Nation" in Chicago

On November 26, AEN will be hosting a new kind of event: "Israel: Innovation Nation," a one-day conference in Chicago, IL, geared specifically toward faculty in STEM and business fields. The event will feature keynote talks and discussions about partnerships between Israeli and US academic institutions, particularly those in Illinois and Chicago linked to the newly formed **Discovery Partners Institute**. Other presentations will explore innovations in science, technology, and business being developed in Israel. Details about this exciting event will be communicated soon. Senior Communications Associate **Raeefa Shams** is available to answer questions in the meantime.

Regional Short Course in Boca Raton

AEN members are invited to apply for our third Regional Short Course, to be held January 6-9, 2019 in Boca Raton, FL. Participants in this 3 ½ day residentially based education course will increase their knowledge and understanding about contemporary 21st century Israel, learn and further develop strategies to respond to BDS and antisemitism on campus, and network with other motivated AEN faculty. Conceived and run jointly in partnership with the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, the Regional Short Courses are academically immersive and interactive and are limited to 15-20 participants per course. All reasonable travel and stay costs for participants will be paid. You can **read more**

Conversations with Amir Khnifess and Amnon Reichman

Amir Khnifess, one of AEN's newer members, is the founder of the Israeli-Druze Centre and currently a post-doctoral scholar at Georgetown University. He has been a prominent voice against the Nation-State law passed by the Knesset this summer. Raeefa Shams spoke to Dr. Khnifess about his work, Israeli-Druze relations, and how learning about the role of the Druze community in Israel can help to counter BDS on campus.



Could you describe the work of the Israeli-Druze Centre?

The Israeli-Druze Centre (IDC) was established in 2016 in Isfyia on the Carmel, near Haifa. The IDC aims to improve the status of the Druze community in Israel; fortify community relationships within Israel; empower all Israelis by giving underprivileged communities a voice; and strengthen relationships between the State of Israel and friendly ethnic and religious minorities in the region.

What has been the reasoning behind your activism - and that of many Israeli Druze - against the recent nation-state law passed by the Knesset?

Many Israelis believe that the Nation-State law is bad for Israel and its society and that, ultimately, it will damage Israel's democratic and equal rights principles in the long term. This explains the mass opposition to the law, particularly among the center and left camps on the Israeli political map. I began my campaign against the law a long time ago because I believe that it injures all who consider themselves part of the Israeli society and Israel is their State. Indeed, there is growing frustration about the law amongst the Druze community, frustration that came to the fore during the large demonstration on Rabin Square that took place on August 4th of this year.

What is the role of the Druze community within Israeli academia, and how has that shifted over time?

The Druze community in Israel is going through an "educational revolution", which has translated into positive socio-economic changes for Druze villages. A community that, in 1948, had but one University graduate now sees hundreds of its girls and boys graduate from the best advanced academic institutions in the State

women in the Middle East still struggle for their basic human rights, 60% of Druze graduates are women.

Could you describe the focus of your current academic research, including at Georgetown University?

In May 2017, I took up my Post-Doctorate fellowship at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, where I continued to explore the political action of the Druze community in Israel and the Middle East. My current research focuses on Druze political action in the period before the State of Israel was established in 1948. This work unearths the very significant roles that the British Mandate and the **Yishuv** played in preserving the politics of loyalty among the Druze during the conflict.

What are ways in which the story of the Druze community in Israel can impact discussions about Israel on US campuses?

Over recent years, the State of Israel has come under aggressive attack by left-wing organizations and movements in Europe and the U.S, known more commonly as BDS. One aim of the IDC is to oppose BDS by disseminating facts about the Druze community in Israel, by giving this community a voice, and by recounting its integration in the society and the State throughout the U.S. and in particular on campuses. Indeed, exposing Americans to Druze life in Israel is, with no doubt, a successful way to show how Israel is a wonderful place to live.

Amnon Reichman is a Visiting Associate Professor of Comparative Civil Law at the University of California, Berkeley. He has served on law faculty at the University of Haifa since 2001. His main areas of interest include constitutional theory, comparative constitutional law and human rights, and law and cyber. Raeefa Shams spoke to Professor Reichman about his analyses of the Nation-State Law and its implications for Israeli democracy, minority communities in Israel, and Diaspora Jewish communities



Why did the State of Israel feel the need to enact the Nation State law?

There is disagreement on whether it was needed. Many on the political right thought that previous basic laws protected liberal-democratic rights (such as

there was a potential threat to the Jewish character of the state. The left believed that there was no real danger to the well-established "constitutional facts," according to which Israel was founded as a Jewish democracy. Moreover, the left views rights-related basic laws as geared towards the protection of individuals and minorities against the (hegemonic) majority, precisely because the majority is secure enough. The left also emphasized that the Israeli courts were always careful to balance rights and national values (Shabbat, the Hebrew language, etc.) in a manner that guaranteed the Jewish characteristics of the state, and thus there was no need to further constitutionalize these characteristics.

From your perspective, what are some of the most significant aspects of the law?

Section A refers to the "The Land of Israel" as the historic homeland of the Jewish people, thereby referring to all of the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. In so doing the Knesset in its constitutional hat legislated with respect to all that land. Does this have future implications regarding annexation? It also refers to Jerusalem as "complete and united." Does this mean any compromise on the boundaries of Jerusalem or similar compromises will require amending this Basic Law? The law also refers to the right of the Jewish people to found a state as a "religious" right. This is peculiar, as it does not fit recognized theories of self-determination.

Furthermore, sections of the law were offensive to the Druze and Arab communities, because they refer to Israel as the national home of the Jewish people, without explicitly mentioning any other groups (and their rights as minorities), or the concept of equality (as explicitly mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, the UN resolution or the British mandate). Supporters of the law responded that equality for individuals is already protected through judicial interpretation of human dignity (protected under Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty), and that this law is about the Jewish character of the State of Israel, not its multicultural or egalitarian nature (and therefore no mention should be made to minority rights at the collective level). However, since judicial interpretation recognized both equality and the national character of the Jewish state without explicit basis, the recent enactment of the national character without explicit reference to equality arguably disrupts a previous balance. Whether this will lead to a departure from Israel's liberal democratic values is up to judicial interpretation. How will the judiciary view the law in conjunction with the currently existing interpretations of human dignity? The drafters suggest that it will have no implications, but others worry about shifting the balance, at the symbolic level and beyond.

Lastly, the Arabic language was demoted from an official language to one with a

[Basic] law came into effect" will not be harmed. Courts will have to interpret what that requirement means. While there has always been a tension with the de-facto elevated status of Hebrew as the language of the Jewish majority and the de-jure commitment to two official languages, the courts were sensitive to recognize the official status of Arabic while stressing the centrality of Hebrew, thereby implying that two official languages need not be treated identically, but both deserve the status of official languages. Therefore it has been argued that there was no need to demote Arabic, as this move sends a negative message to the Arab community as if its members are of inferior status.

Does the Nation State Law in Israel signify a shift from liberal Zionism to national Zionism? Why would this shift be important?

Zionism in Israel was never monolithic, with four strains informing the debate: progressive Zionism (committed to versions of social democracy, or even socialism), Liberal Zionism (committed to individual rights) and National Zionism (including, as of the 1970, religious nationalism), committed to national (or even nationalistic) values. Other versions of religious Zionism saw the state as committed to basic religious principles (and some even sought to promote a religious state). The recent basic law is part of a grander legislative agenda - about restricting who can enter the country, about impeachment of Knesset members who are not acting in alignment with Israeli "basic values", about family reunification between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank, about withdrawing state funding from expressive activities that note the Palestinian "Naqba", and about enacting tort liability for those calling for a boycott -- segments of the the latter statute were found unconstitutional by the Court as being over-broad. It is too early to say what role the Basic Law will play as part of this trend, but we can see from examples in Europe that excessive nationalism tends to undermine individual rights and the values underpinning liberal democracy.

Some say that the Nation State law is more of a declaration that a self-executing statute. Explain why this may be important. Does the new law itself change anything immediately? If not, is the argument essentially over symbolism?

First, symbolism is important, because it addresses identity and offers platforms for living together as citizens of Israel as a Jewish Democracy. Moreover, consider perhaps the most problematic section of the basic law, according to which the Basic Law "declares" that the promotion of Jewish settlement is a national value. What does this mean? Is the state just declaring that settling the land by Jews has value (which sends a symbolic message that the state is less committed to the needs of other communities, contrary to the symbolic statement in the declaration of independence)? Or does it give actual power to the state to prefer the promotion of Jewish settlements? If it is the former, then it is symbolic. If it is the latter, then it

the "Land of Israel" - does this open the door to providing a legal basis for settling all the Land of Israel? And then future annexation of territory?

What is the impact of the new law on Jews in the Diaspora?

The law is careful to specify the duty of the State of Israel to protect the Jews of the Diaspora, and to enhance the connection between the State and the Diaspora. But who would define who is a Jew? And when Jews -- or citizens of Israel on account of their citizens -- need protection? Would the state be prioritizing one denomination of Judaism over others? Some Jews in the Diaspora feel that they might not have an adequate voice in such decisions, considering the power of the Orthodox in Israel. On the other hand, if there were more inclusive processes that represented all segments of the Jewish community, that could be a real move toward strengthening the affinity. Again, the Court may have to decide this aspect as well.

AEN Writings

The situation at the University of Michigan, where a professor refused to write a letter of recommendation for a student to study in Israel, continued to provoke comment and controversy. The professor, John Cheney-Lippold, was **penalized** by the University for his action - he will not get a merit raise during the 2018-19 academic year and will be prevented from taking any sabbatical for the next two years. AEN is currently working with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to produce a model policy on letters of recommendation, which will be publicized further in upcoming weeks.

In **Slate**, Steve Lubet **discussed** the inappropriate nature of Cheney-Lippold's actions. "In over four decades of law school teaching, I have written countless reference letters. Never once have I considered a student's politics, or a potential employer's. It's not that I don't care about my students' careers; I freely give advice when requested. It's just that they are entitled to references based on class performance, and their ultimate choices are none of my business."

A further cause of controversy was the decision of the Israeli government to detain Lara Alqasem, a former student supporter of BDS seeking to study at Hebrew University, and prevent her entry into Israel. Leaders at Hebrew University and other Israeli academic institutions **publicly supported** Alqasem's right to study in Israel, as did the **Association for Israel Studies**, whose current president is AEN member Donna Divine. The Israeli Supreme Court ultimately **ruled** in Alqasem's favor, and she has begun her studies at the university.

Ken Waltzer and Mark Yudof of AEN **addressed** both issues in **Inside Higher**

government to allow Alqasem into the country. "We believe in international exchange and robust conversation about difficult issues. We oppose efforts to challenge the legitimacy of the State of Israel, including the boycott movement, because they hold Israel to a double standard not applied to other nations, they stand emphatically against academic freedom, and they often shun Jewish organizations and sponsor actions on campuses disrupting the speech of those they perceive as pro-Israel...And we believe the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, contrary to its early assurances, is engaged in an exclusionary policy that simply makes more difficult the work we do toward mobilizing American faculty to reject the views of those who seek to delegitimize the Jewish and democratic Israeli state."

In **Haaretz**, David Schraub **compared** the actions of the Israeli government to that of pro-BDS activists. "True opponents of BDS welcome, indeed cheer, the prospect that people like Lara Alqasem want to study in Israel, for we have every confidence that the free encounter with Israeli society - with its people, with its ideas, with its arguments - will change people for the better. The BDS movement never believed in that ideal. And now, it seems, the Israeli government has joined them."

Separately, in **Tablet**, David Mikics **described** how the BDS movement has given prominence to poor scholarship based on hateful ideologies. "The BDS cult is succeeding where it counts, in propagandizing students who come to universities to learn and who walk away as carriers of a grotesque ideological virus. It is unlikely that the movement will disappear anytime soon, especially with so many of its promoters enjoying state-funded tenure for life and occupying departmental positions that enable them to handpick their successors."

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