



ISRAEL'S 'NEW CAMPUS' VISION

• BY ALAN ROSENBAUM

“On the one hand,” says Prof. Yaffa Zilbershats, “life is changing due to the Internet revolution. There is a huge amount of knowledge and information that is available online that can be easily accessed.” On the other hand, she notes, “Teachers on college campuses still stand in front of the class teaching the students, like in the old days.” How does one reconcile these two educational extremes?

Zilbershats, head of the Council for Higher Education's Planning and Budget Committee, says “The New Campus,” the flagship program of the CHE's six-year plan, is designed to address and adapt to these changes in the world of higher education. The New Campus initiative creates a vision of the modern 21st-century campus, which encourages digital learning, a more diverse student body, openness and entrepreneurship, and greater internationalization.

Digital learning on the Internet allows one to learn and benefit from lectures without the need to be physically present in a classroom. “For example,” she explains, “before the Internet, if Aaron Ciechanover, the Israeli Nobel Prize-winning biologist, was giving a lecture, we could fill a large hall with space for 100 or 200 students, or perhaps even 500 students. Today, if the same lecture is delivered online, everyone throughout Israel can watch it, from soldiers on base, to haredi [ultra-Orthodox] students who don't visit university campuses, to residents of Sderot, who can't get to Haifa. We can take the potential of the Internet and can expose it to the entire world.”

State-of-the-art online courses are being produced that offer lecturers a wide array of tools, such as interactive presentations and videos which can improve and enhance the overall learning experience. Zilbershats notes that Israel has joined the international



YAFFA ZILBERSHATS, chair of Council of Higher Education. (Courtesy)

“edX” platform that was established by Harvard and MIT to allow local academic institutions to offer courses via the platform.

This new world of digital learning, says Zilbershats, does not negate the role of the teacher as a communicator. “Human contact has a strong impact far beyond knowledge. Regular contact is needed between the student and teacher, especially during the student's formative years. We don't believe that the campus has to disappear and that everything has to be exclusively on the Internet. Rather, by using the Internet platform, we can be more flexible.” Digital learning need not swallow up today's college campus, she says. “We have to redesign it for efficiency and for using the benefits of the Internet, but also for keeping human contact so that the campus does not become irrelevant.”

Zilbershats explains that the digital learning platform enables students to expand their professional opportunities. “If someone graduated with a degree in computer science from the

Technion [Israel Institute of Technology] years ago and needs to update his qualifications for the new computer languages that are in vogue today, he doesn't have to return to study at the Technion. There are many excellent courses that are available on the Internet.”

The CHE New Campus initiative, says Zilbershats, will also change the age and demographic profiles of college students. “We think that the ‘New Campus’ should not be only for young people in their twenties. It can be used by older adults in their 40s, 60s and even older. It is the place where everyone can acquire knowledge.”

In addition, the Council for Higher Education wants to double the number of foreign students studying in Israeli institutions of higher education. “We are working hard to offer more courses and programs in English. We are creating offices in the universities for foreign students because they need accommodations and healthcare. We need to assist them to overcome governmental obstacles like visas, and arranging work permits for members of their families.” Zilbershats is aiming to more than double the number of foreign students in Israel from 11,000 to 24,000 by 2022.

Zilbershats says the New Campus will bring a spirit of entrepreneurship to physical campuses, to help transform academic institutions into places that encourage groundbreaking innovation and enable students to share their creative ideas with professors and professionals. Students will work together with lecturers, researchers and mentors to create meaningful, practical projects. “We can change the entity of what a campus is,” she says.

Summarizing the New Campus initiative, Zilbershats says, “Digital learning for the entire world, together with life-long learning and internationalization of the population of the campus – this is the New Campus for digital learning.” ▲