



אוניברסיטת  
בן-גוריון  
בנגב

BEN-GURION  
UNIVERSITY  
OF THE NEGEV





## Erasmus Report, Claire Hunault Fall Semester 2018

I studied in Ben Gurion University of the Negev as a second year Master student from Sciences Po Bordeaux, majoring in International Politics, Peace and Security Studies/"Politique Internationale, Paix et Sécurité".

### *Courses*

To a student from Sciences Po Bordeaux, BGU offers courses from a program dedicated to international students only, the OSP program, as well as courses from the Israel studies Department, which are taught to Israeli students mainly. It can be easier to take courses from the OSP program on-ly, as those courses are always taught in English and located on the main campus. Whereas regarding the Israel studies Department, not all of the courses are automatically taught in english; it is decided at the beginning of each semester by the international office or the teacher giving the course. Most of Israel Studies courses are taught on another campus which is located about one hour from Beer Sheva (Sde Boker campus). It is a very nice campus located in the desert and there is a shuttle to get there, but you should be careful about conflict schedule with OSP courses. Students should keep in mind to take enough courses to get 30 credits a semester as required by Sciences Po Bordeaux with 3 ECTS credit = 2 BGU credit. It is also possible to take Hebrew courses for credits, three times a week. In my opinion, the courses are great but require a lot of work. It might be worth if you plan to continue He-brew after your exchange as the level of difficulty does not allow you to speak much in only a few months. The courses are focused on reading and speaking more than speaking only, which takes time. I would recommend it to someone aiming to pursue an interest in Israel studies, the Israeli Palestinian conflict or the Middle East region in general, as it can be a real plus in that case, probably combined with the study of Arabic.

OSP courses include a various range of topics and are offered to students from Bachelor to Master level. The two courses particularly related to my major were Time and Space in the Israeli Pal-estinian conflict by Dr Ariel Handel, and The impact of security factors in Israel international relations by Dr Natan Aridan.

The first one is a spatial, temporal, sociological approach to the conflit focused on the domes-tic level. It allows to understand how the Israeli system is intertwined with the military rule in the terri-tories, as well as the short and long term effects of the occupation on the spatial and temporal Palestin-ian framework. The reading material is highly selected research papers and books.

Dr Aridan's course is centered on the international relations of Israel from the Zionist project taking place in the 1930s until the Israeli government's policy today. The material used in class and for the assigned readings includes declassified diplomatic documents and research papers. The focus is on the relations

entertained by Israel with Western and regional powers since the 1930s and their influence on the existence of Israel. It contributes to the student's understanding of the Zionist project, the Israeli perception of international rules, and the permanent threat the country faces mainly in its regional context.

Other courses from the OSP program are very enriching as well as, especially Dr Kabalek's course aiming to adopt an original analysis of the Holocaust by looking at German reactions from the common range of the German population, and discuss the question of the responsibility of 'normal' people who did not take high rank positions in the Nazi administration but still supported it in some way.

BGU is a great choice as the university is known for its progressive and critical approach of politics. It enables the student to get a non-western approach of the Israel Palestine situation, but also to understand that there are critics towards mainstream national ideas within the Israeli society.

### ***Life in Beer Sheva and Israel***

**Life and travel in Israel** The main thing to be concerned about is the Shabbat: from mid day or end of afternoon on Fridays until around 6pm on Saturdays there are no public transportation in all the country, shops and everything else is closed. Tel Aviv is an exception regarding the shops.

So the week-end in Israel occurs during Shabbat time; Sunday is the first day of the week.

It is very easy to travel in Israel but Shabbat hours should be taken into consideration. The easiest and cheapest way to travel is by bus and living in Beer Sheva is convenient to travel as the city is located in the middle of the country. The country offers great landscapes and very different ones in the same territory (desert, mountains, beach). The climate is way warmer than Europe all year long. Mainly, traveling in Israel and the West Bank is the possibility to discover some of the oldest places on earth stepped in history (Jerusalem, Nazareth, Jericho, Bethlehem...).

Living in Beer Sheva is centered on BGU student life as it is the biggest campus town of the country. There are students events happening every week, and the international office organises every week or every two weeks events or trips only for internationals. At your arrival and upon your departure a week end trip is organised for 90\$, I recommend it as it is a great way to know other international students and get familiar with Israeli culture. The huge and modern campus with various facilities including a sports center (around 120€ a semester to access the fitness machines, other activities are free such as swimming pool, pilates or krav maga).

Semester dates are from around the 10th of September until around the 20th of December, exam period included. However note that September is Rosh Hashanah (Israeli New Year) and Sukkot Holidays Time so you have only a few courses



for some days, then about two weeks of holidays, and work will really start from the beginning of October.

Regarding housing, it is highly recommended to book a dorm room arranged by the university as landlords in Beer Sheva do not accept short term contracts. It might be possible to find a shared flat with Israelis but you should book it in advance without visiting using Facebook housing groups. Above all, the university dorms allow you to be integrated with other international students but still have your privacy and quiet space. The dorms are sets of 4 rooms apartments with a shared living room, kitchen and bathroom, modern, for around 450\$ a month. BGU international office takes care very efficiently of any issue you may have regarding the dorms, the courses or any personal issue, through their student counsellor usually of a similar or close age than students'.

As a whole, studying at BGU offers a great student life, and living Israel is truly inspiring regarding the uniqueness of this State. The Israeli system, the Jewish culture and the history of Judaism is very in-teresting to discover. Also, it is the occasion to deepen our understanding of the Israeli Palestinian situation and to get a first approach to the dynamics at stake in the Middle East region. Personally, I traveled in both Israel and the West Bank. As a student in conflict studies and politics, I believe my stay would have been less meaningful without traveling in both areas and trying to understand "both sides".

The most important In my opinion, the student aiming to study in BGU should take into account the particularity of the State of Israel and of the political situation. The State's organization is based on the principles of the Jewish religion, and the rules are not the same between the Jewish majority and the non-Jewish minorities. Thus, Israel should not be approached only with a 'Western' point of view of what is democracy. Regarding the conflict, one should also be ready to hear opinions he may have never heard before and may disagree with, from experts as from more 'random' Israeli persons. It is also important to keep in mind that the Israeli population is not homogeneous in its views and all can-not be associated as an unwavering support of the government's policy. Also, the student should be aware that he will be studying in a zone prone to conflict and to exterior threats; rockets attacks from the Palestinian side can occur. In that case, safety is ensured by the university and the government's measures and recommendations to stay close to a shelter area (in every building or every apartment there is one), which cannot be damaged in case of an attack. As well, as the military service is compulsory in Israel and for various reasons, arms and people carrying weapons is very common in all the country, so one should get used to that. To conclude, living in Israel and studying in BGU is a great experience for someone open minded and willing to approach a complex political situation, in an agreeable environment and culturally very enriching to discover.





**Erasmus+**