



Universität Haifa
Deutscher Fördererkreis

הנציבות למגוון, הוגנות והכללה
Commission for Diversity,
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مفوضية التنوع، الإنصاف والشُّمول
אוניברסיטת חיפה UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA



Werner Otto Arab Israeli Women Graduate Scholarship Program Report 2024/2025



Thorsten AhlFUNKER Foto Services

This academic year has once again shown us how powerful education, dialogue, and human connection can be — even in times that test hope and resilience.

The University of Haifa continues to stand as a place where diversity is not just a principle, but a lived reality. In an environment shaped by complexity and challenge, the university remains a space where especially Arab Israeli women have a real opportunity to pursue higher education.

For me personally, this year held a particularly meaningful moment. In October 2025, we, the German Friends, had the privilege of meeting all of you — the WO scholarship recipients — at our German Coexistence Event.

Seeing the determination, intelligence, and inner strength with which these women students pursue their academic paths deeply touched me and filled me with pride to be part of their journey—and of many more journeys to come. To date, we have supported around 300 Arab Israeli women through this program.

Our scholarship holders embody everything our program stands for: education as a path to self-empowerment, social participation, and long-term change. Many of them overcome not only academic challenges, but also social and family barriers. It is therefore all the more impressive to witness the clarity with which they pursue their goals and take responsibility for their futures — and for the futures of their communities.

A special highlight of this academic year was the full workshop series. These workshops were a great success. The participants presented their personal and academic progress with remarkable openness and professionalism. It was evident how much they had grown over the course of the year — in knowledge, in confidence, and in mutual understanding. The atmosphere was filled with respect, curiosity, and genuine dialogue, and perhaps most importantly, the strengthening of a supportive network among the women.

As German Friends of the University of Haifa, we see it as our responsibility to stand reliably by the university and its remarkable students. Our scholarship program for Arab Israeli women remains a powerful instrument of empowerment, and every success story reaffirms how vital this support is.

What we experienced during our visits gives us confidence in a future in which women naturally take on leadership roles in academia and society.

Our scholarship recipients carry this courage forward every day — and we are grateful to accompany them on their academic journeys.

Dr. h.c. Sonja Lahnstein-Kandel
Chairwoman, German Friends of the University of Haifa

The Werner Otto Scholarship



The Werner Otto Scholarships are awarded annually by the Association of German Friends of the University of Haifa to outstanding female Arab students engaged in graduate studies, as part of the effort to empower women and promote their social mobility. Over the years, the scholarships were awarded to around 300 young women, all of which are outstanding students, dedicated to excellent research and personal, professional and academic growth.

The Werner Otto Network and Empowerment Program aims at creating a vibrant, supporting and engaging framework, in which young Arab female research students meet on a regular basis, learn from the experience of role models, prominent women in academia and social organizations, and share experience, dilemmas and creative solutions with each other.

Our aims are:

- ✓ Maintaining high motivation levels for participants that will enable them to work through challenges and complete their research successfully.
- ✓ Providing possible solutions to real time problems that arise for research students from minority background.
- ✓ Creating opportunities for exposure to role models for inspiration and valuable network connections for these young researchers to explore.
- ✓ Providing a support system through the power of the group and meaningful connections of its members.

A handwritten signature in white ink, located in the bottom right corner of the slide. The signature is stylized and appears to be a name.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Zeinab Usman, Majd al-Krum

Ph.D. Student, Psychology



Her research focuses on improving response inhibition through cognitive training and neurofeedback (NF) using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS). Response inhibition is crucial for adaptive behavior, and deficits are seen in various neurodevelopmental and psychiatric conditions. The study includes two experiments: one examining the effect of training variability on response inhibition, and the other

exploring how NF can enhance learning consolidation. The aim is to understand response inhibition and contribute to cognitive rehabilitation strategies.

Things to know about Zeinab

Zeinab is from Majd al-Krum, Israel, pursuing a PhD while being a wife and mother to two children studying computer science. Her research interests lie in cognitive processes and brain plasticity, aiming to improve clinical interventions. She is also training as a medical psychologist, bridging clinical practice and neuroscience. Zeinab believes in lifelong learning and the power of knowledge to drive social improvement.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Amal Hibner, Nazareth

M.A. Student, Archaeology



Her thesis explores the morphology and technology of Levallois points from the Middle Paleolithic sites of Tabun and Skhul, focusing on diachronic and synchronic patterns. Using 3D geometric morphometrics and statistical analysis. She investigates trends in standardization, symmetry, and refinement in Levallois point production. The study also examines technological attributes like faceted striking platforms and Y-arête scar patterns to explore shifts in lithic production techniques and potential cultural transmission between Neanderthals and modern humans.

Amal's findings aim to shed light on evolving technological strategies and interactions between hominin groups in the Levant.

Things to know about Amal

Amal was born and raised in Nazareth, in a family of four. Her father is a dentist, and her mother is a therapist, both fostering in her a deep appreciation for education. As a Palestinian-Israeli Arab woman, her identity shapes her views on history, heritage, and cultural dialogue. Amal's passion for archaeology began in undergraduate studies, and she loves spending time in nature, connecting with landscapes that hold traces of the past. She is committed to education, cultural heritage, and advocating for greater representation of Arab women in archaeology.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Jenan Azaiza, Daburiyya

M.A. Student, Sagol Department of Neurobiology



Jenan's research investigates motor learning and chunking behavior, comparing how musicians and non-musicians learn and retain a motor sequence. Participants learn a six-tab sequence on the kalimba, with performance assessed before and after training, as well as at 4 hours, 24 hours, and two weeks. She measures performance through audio recordings, converting them into quantitative data for analysis of speed and accuracy. This approach aims to identify factors that support motor learning, ultimately informing strategies for improving motor skill acquisition in adult learners.

Things to know about Jenan

Jenan is 23, and she is a second-year master's student in Applied Neurobiology. She grew up in Dabburiya, northern Israel, in a family of five. She has always been curious, with interests ranging from art to music and solving Rubik's cubes. Initially, she aimed to become a psychologist, but during her bachelor's degree in Psychology and English, she became fascinated by neuroscience after researching the molecular basis of psychiatric disorders in mouse models of schizophrenia.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Jinan Shalata Khalaila, Sakhnin

M.A. Student, Communication Disorders



Hearing loss can cause difficulties in speech perception, and while hearing aids (HAs) are the primary solution, many first-time users struggle with consistent use. Studies show that experienced HA users tend to use their devices more consistently, but first-time users often need better acclimatization. This study aims to explore how the time spent using HAs in the initial months impacts speech perception and long-term adoption. This study will examine 40 participants, aged 40-80, who are first-time HA users over three months, measuring factors such as companion support,

academic level, and hearing loss severity to identify factors influencing successful HA use.

Things to know about Jinan

Jinan holds a B.A. in Communication Disorders from the University of Haifa and currently completing her M.A. in the same department. She works as a clinical audiologist at Sonova Israel Ltd. and has been employed there for over 5 years. Additionally, she mentors students in hearing assessments and aid fittings. Her professional goal is to pursue a PhD and contribute to both academic research and clinical practice in audiology. In her free time, she enjoys reading, working out, and practicing yoga.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Mayssa Hayeen-Halloun, Haifa

Ph.D. Student, Mathematics Education



Mayssa is a Ph.D. Student in Mathematics Education at the University of Haifa, focusing on "noticing" – the ability to identify, interpret, and respond to mathematical and pedagogical thinking. Her research explores how pre-service teachers notice students' mathematical thinking, the differences in noticing between pre-service and experienced teachers, and how novice mathematics teacher educators notice pre-service teachers' thinking. Her latest study investigates how novice teacher educators' noticing develops over time,

aiming to design training programs that support this growth. Her work has been published in leading academic journals and contributes to improving mathematics education.

Things to know about Mayssa

Mayssa is a PhD candidate in Mathematics Education at the University of Haifa, supervised by Dr. Michal Ayalon. She began her academic journey with a bachelor's in Pure Mathematics and Computer Science and later earned a teaching certificate in Mathematics. Her passion for understanding teaching and learning processes led her to pursue a master's degree in Mathematics Education. For the past nine years, she has been part of a research group, enhancing her analytical skills and fostering collaboration with early-career researchers. Mayssa believes that innovative research and collaboration are essential for advancing mathematics education.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Sara Badran, Baqa Al-Gharbya

M.A. Student, English Language and Literature



Sara's research focuses on the representation of trauma in twentieth-century American literature, specifically in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1978), and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977). These authors use trauma narratives to forge interpersonal connections and generational ties, transforming trauma into a potential site for interconnectedness. She argues that trauma, while disrupting conventional ways of knowing, becomes a mode of knowledge through interpersonal relationships.

Her project explores how trauma creates new pathways for communication and connects individuals beyond personal pain, offering forms of remedy through these connections.

Things to know about Sara

Sara is 23 years old, living in Baqa Al-Gharbya with her family. She began her academic journey in Hebrew Literature at the Open University of Israel, continuing to Haifa University for her MA in English Language and Literature, where she is currently completing her thesis. She is passionate about literature and writing poetry, and aspires to publish her first collection. In addition to literature, Sara enjoys drawing and embroidery, and plans to pursue a PhD in the same field to further her academic career.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Maha Saade, Umm al-Fahm

M.A. Student, Sagol Department of Neurobiology



Maha's research focuses on the connection between autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and psychotic spectrum disorders (PSD), using Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) as a genetic model. PWS, a rare neurodevelopmental disorder, offers a unique opportunity to explore how these conditions interact. By using advanced techniques like induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and electrophysiological recordings, she aims to uncover the neural and genetic mechanisms behind these disorders.

Her goal is to contribute to precision psychiatry, offering treatments tailored to individual genetic and neurobiological profiles to improve mental health care.

Things to know about Maha

Maha is from Umm al-Fahm, where pursuing a scientific career as a woman is uncommon. Inspired by her parents' sacrifices, she earned her B.Sc. in Neuroscience from Tel Aviv University and is currently completing her M.Sc. in Neurobiology at the University of Haifa. In addition to her academic work, she finds joy in simple moments, like reading and listening to music. She mentors young students, helping them develop a passion for science. Her ultimate goal is to improve mental health care by driving research that leads to better understanding and treatment of disorders like suicide, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. This scholarship helps her pursue this mission with less financial burden, and she is deeply grateful for the support it provides.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Mahira Ghadban, Nahariyya

Ph.D. Student, Social Work



Her study examines the relationship between school climate, parental involvement, and school resilience in a multicultural context. It explores how school climate influences parental engagement, which contributes to students' academic success. Her research will focus on the differences in parental involvement among Jewish and Arab communities in Israel and its effect on school resilience. The study will be conducted in two phases: qualitative interviews with 38 participants from both

communities and quantitative surveys among 160 teachers and 320 parents. The aim is to understand how these factors contribute to the resilience of schools during crises.

Things to know about Mahira

Mahira is 44 years old, married and a mother of three. She started her career as a software engineer, then transitioned to teaching and later to social work, where she earned her master's degree with honors. After completing her thesis, Mahira realized her passion for research and decided to pursue a doctorate. Her research interests focus on the intersection of education, social work, and multicultural dynamics, aiming to contribute to the understanding of school resilience and parental involvement in diverse communities.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Ranya Rayan, Kabul

Ph.D. Student, Mathematics



Her research aims to develop interactive, practical tools to make mathematics more accessible and relevant to everyday challenges. Additionally, she plans to launch a community outreach initiative to raise awareness of mathematics' importance among young girls, and create a digital platform for experiential learning. Her work also includes contributing to national educational strategies as a consultant for the National Teachers' Center for Mathematics in Elementary Education.

Things to know about Ranya

Ranya is 30 years old, hails from Kabul in northern Israel, where she was raised in a family that values education and social contribution. She holds both a bachelor's and master's degree in mathematics with honors and has been active in academia as a teaching assistant, high school teacher, and consultant for the National Teachers' Center for Mathematics. She is passionate about supporting underrepresented students, especially young girls, and hopes to impact both academic and community outreach through innovative education.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Anob Monder, Isfiya

M.A. Student, Community Mental Health



Anob's research focuses on examining differences between Arab and Jewish populations in Israel regarding expectations from psychotherapy. The study investigates both outcome expectations (beliefs about the effectiveness of therapy) and process expectations (what individuals expect to happen during therapy). By exploring these expectations, the research aims to understand their impact on the willingness to seek therapy, particularly among the Arab population, which faces unique cultural challenges and

higher rates of psychological distress compared to the Jewish population. This study contributes to bridging gaps in mental health understanding within diverse cultural groups.

Things to know about Anob

Anob is a mother of two and a graduate of the University of Haifa, with a background in Special Education, Human Services, and Group Facilitation. Currently, she is pursuing a second master's degree in Community Mental Health, and she plans to continue toward a PhD. Alongside her studies, she works as a freelance group facilitator, leading various groups across Israel, including women from marginalized communities and educators. She also volunteers with SAHAR, offering online emotional support to people in distress. In her free time, she engages in reading, family activities, and spending time in nature.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Janette Azzam, Hurfeish

M.A. Student, Occupational Therapy - accelerated



Janette's thesis focuses on functional cognition assessment, particularly in stroke survivors and healthy individuals. Functional cognition refers to how people use cognitive abilities in daily tasks, influenced by emotions and environment. Occupational therapists assess it using neuropsychological tests, performance-based assessments, and self-report questionnaires. Research suggests functional cognition measures better predict real-world performance than neuropsychological tests, yet standardized diagnostic tools are lacking.

Her study includes secondary data analysis of stroke patients and validation of the DLQ-ML questionnaire in healthy adults.

Things to know about Janette

Janette Azzam is from Shefa-Amr and grew up in a supportive family valuing education and community service. She is an occupational therapy student at the University of Haifa, driven by a passion for learning and helping others. Outside of academics, she enjoys music and swimming, believing in a balanced lifestyle. Her goal is to use her education to make a meaningful impact in her field. The scholarship enables her to fully dedicate herself to academic and personal growth.

MEET OUR 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Suha Brakeh Zoabi, Sulam

M.A. Student, Arabic language and literature



Suha's master's research focuses on children's literature by local female authors, specifically analyzing the narrative structure in the works of Aida Khateeb, Mayson Asadi, and Hadeel Nashef. Her study examines key narrative components such as characters, setting, description, dialogue, and language, exploring how they interact. Given the lack of academic studies on local Arabic children's literature, her research aims to fill this gap. By analyzing these works, she hopes to contribute to the development of Arabic children's literature and promote a deeper understanding of its unique characteristics.

Things to know about Suha

Suha was born in Nazareth and now lives in Sulam with her husband and young daughter. She grew up in a family that instilled in her the values of perseverance, determination, and excellence. From a young age, she developed a passion for the Arabic language, which led her to pursue a bachelor's and master's degree in the field. She currently works as an Arabic teacher in an elementary school, nurturing children's love for the language. In addition to teaching, she is an author of three children's books and a poetry collection, striving to enrich Arabic literature, particularly for young readers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR WERNER OTTO SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS – OUTSTANDING ARAB WOMEN STUDENTS IN M.A. AND PH.D. PROGRAMS 2025

MEETING 1

Self-Presentation for Young Researchers – How to Impress in Every Academic Setting

Date: 23.3.25

Facilitator: Dr. Valery Isak, Head of Master's Programs, School of Political Science

Added Value:

- ✓ Innovative self-presentation tools to enhance research visibility
- ✓ Practical branding techniques to strengthen academic identity
- ✓ Skills for effective research communication and networking
- ✓ Building confidence in professional and academic settings

During the workshop, the scholarship recipients practiced presenting themselves in front of the group, refining their choice of words, intonation, and body language.

They also explored strategies for creating collaborations and effectively communicating their research.



MEETING 2

The New World of AI – Cutting-Edge Tools for Research

Date: 21.4.25

Facilitator: Ben Rotenberg, AI & Innovation Expert

Added Value:

- ✓ Hands-on experience with AI tools for academic research
- ✓ Insights into AI's evolving role in academia and the job market
- ✓ Practical applications for enhancing research efficiency
- ✓ Exposure to real-world AI-driven case studies

The workshop focused on introducing participants to the latest developments in generative AI and its implications for academic research. Through an engaging and thought-provoking session led by Ben Rotenberg, the participants explored how generative models like ChatGPT and other LLMs are already transforming the research landscape — from automating writing processes to enhancing data analysis and generating novel academic insights.

Importantly, the workshop included hands-on practice, allowing participants to experiment with prompt engineering techniques tailored to their academic needs.

These practical exercises were designed to empower researchers to use AI effectively while maintaining academic integrity, originality, and critical thinking.



MEETING 3

Advanced Research Presentation Skills

Date: 19.5.25

Facilitator: Prof. Arin Salamah-Qudsi, Commissioner for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

Added Value:

- ✓ Guidance on academic career progression
- ✓ Strategies for overcoming barriers in academia
- ✓ Practical insights into postdoctoral applications and publications
- ✓ Strengthening skills for conference participation and networking

The session, focusing on the importance of participating in academic conferences.

Prof. Arin Salamah-Qudsi spoke about how to distinguish between reputable scientific conferences and predatory or scam ones, and shared effective strategies for delivering impressive and engaging presentations—especially in a language that is not one's mother tongue.

She also provided practical examples and discussed how to build visually appealing presentations that capture the audience's attention.



MEETING 4

Motherhood & Career – Achieving Balance

Date: 16.7.25

Facilitator: Prof. Michal Biron, Dr. Haneen Karawani-Khoury, Dr. Tal Luzzatto-Knaan, and Dr. Maayan Sodai & Dr. Efrat Cohen-Tuati.

Added Value;

- ✓ Strategies for balancing academic and family responsibilities
- ✓ Practical tools for managing stress and prioritizing tasks
- ✓ Insights into resilience and well-being in academia

The event opened with a lecture by Dr. Efrat Cohen-Tuati, titled “Visibility through Strength – Self-Presentation and Self-Promotion for M.A. & Doctoral Students.”

Following the lecture, participants attended a fascinating panel discussion on “Researchers in Full-Time Positions and Full-Time Motherhood,” featuring Prof. Michal Biron, Dr. Haneen Karawani-Khoury, Dr. Tal Luzzatto-Knaan, and Dr. Maayan Sodai.

Throughout the event, the students received meaningful encouragement and practical tools to enhance their confidence, strengthen their professional presence, and navigate the challenges of combining academic ambition with personal life.



MEETING 5

Public Speaking & Self-Presentation

Date: 12.8.25

Facilitator: Man and Mind Company

Added Value:

- ✓ Strengthens public speaking skills for academic and professional success
- ✓ Hands-on exercises to improve presentation delivery
- ✓ Constructive feedback to refine individual speaking styles
- ✓ Enhances confidence in engaging diverse audiences

The session focused on enhancing participants' confidence and effectiveness when speaking in front of an audience, with an emphasis on practical tools for presenting research clearly, persuasively, and engagingly.

Through hands-on activities and experiential learning, the participants practiced key elements such as voice, body language, structure, and storytelling in academic presentations.

The feedback we received from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Participants shared that the workshop provided them with valuable techniques, a supportive atmosphere, and renewed confidence in their ability to present their research in an inspiring and professional way.

Many expressed that the opportunity for real-time practice and feedback helped them translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills and feel more empowered to present in academic settings.



MEETING 6

German Friends Visit on October 27th

In this special session, scholarship recipients met with Dr. h.c. Sonja Lahnstein, Chair of the University's Friends Association in Germany and a primary donor to the program.

This meeting provided students with an opportunity to express their gratitude to a key supporter of their academic journey.

Dr. h.c. Lahnstein shared inspiring reflections on the value of philanthropy and encouraged the scholars to remain committed to their academic aspirations.



SUMMARY AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PROGRAM

The Werner Otto Scholarship Program for exceptional Arab women in M.A. and Ph.D. studies proved to be much more than a series of professional development workshops — it became a meaningful academic and personal journey.

Throughout the six meetings, the participants not only acquired valuable academic, professional, and personal skills, but also formed a strong, supportive community of women researchers who share similar aspirations and challenges.

The workshops enhanced participants' self-presentation, communication, and leadership abilities, while introducing them to innovative AI tools, career advancement strategies, and techniques for balancing motherhood and academic life. Each session provided a safe and inspiring environment that encouraged open dialogue, mutual learning, and collaboration.

Beyond the formal learning outcomes, the program fostered a genuine network of peer support and empowerment. The group that emerged from these encounters continues to exchange ideas, feedback, and encouragement — creating an academic sisterhood that extends well beyond the program itself.

By the program's conclusion, the scholarship recipients expressed a renewed sense of confidence, motivation, and belonging within the academic community. They gained practical tools, inspiring role models, and lasting personal connections that will accompany them as they continue their academic and professional journeys.

