



AMIT Pre-Military Technological Junior College in Rehovot

Coronavirus Update

A Report for the MATANEL FOUNDATION

The coronavirus pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all educational programs in Israel, as in much of the world. It also struck very close to home, as Rabbi Zuri Levy, director of the Junior College, was called up to reserve duty early on in the crisis period, where he was responsible for the IDF Home Front's efforts in B'nei Barak. Rav Zuri contracted corona, upon which he and his family were quarantined. Thankfully, they did not get seriously ill and were able to remain at home rather than requiring hospitalization. While his wife and children have recovered, Rav Zuri is still testing positive for the virus, and he has moved to a quarantine facility, from which he is working remotely.

Despite the challenges of the closure and the quarantine of the director, the staff of the AMIT Pre-Military Technological Junior College in Rehovot continued to work throughout this entire period to ensure that the students were able to remain at their studies and complete the year on schedule. At the time of this writing in mid-May 2020, the students are taking their external exams, and the second year students will be graduating as planned. This is no small task, and was accomplished through the dedicated efforts of the students themselves, the educational staff and the administrative staff. AMIT is grateful to the Matanel Foundation for your vital support of this unique project and is proud to present this update report.

Until the pandemic began in March 2020, the program was running as planned. The 2019-2020 year has 89 participants studying Electronics, Electricity and Power Systems, and Computer Networking (new this year). From Sept. through mid-March, they studied their professions in classroom lectures and hands-on lab work, along with regular Judaic studies, and they participated in a range of empowerment and life skills trainings. There were numerous seminars, learning retreats and trips.

The coronavirus closure happened two days before the scheduled start date for the external exams given by the Ministry of Education; the exams were postponed and the Junior College staff immediately came up with a plan to make sure that the students keep learning while at home. The first stage was to set up a system of distance learning.

To do this, the Junior College received permission to open up the facility for several hours early on so that students lacking computers in their homes could come and borrow the computers. Some ten computers were thus lent out, allowing those students from particularly low-income families to keep up with their studies along with their classmates.

The next step was to provide training to all of the staff members—those who teach the professional classes as well as the Judaic studies teachers and the madrichim—to make sure they were all able to teach classes and hold conversations with students using Zoom and other technologies.

A full schedule of classes via Zoom was created, in order to ensure that the students continued with their studies. In addition, the teachers reached out to the students one-on-one to help them prepare for their upcoming exams. The date for the postponed exams was not known, and it was important that the students not lose their readiness for the exams in the meantime. A website was created early on that provide students with the opportunity

to do practice exams and receive feedback and assistance on topics that were difficult for them.

In addition to their licensing exams, in order to receive professional certification, the second-year students (grade 14) have to prepare a detailed final project that is evaluated externally. Students were able to come to the Junior College at the beginning of the closure to take their tool kits home so that they could continue to work on the projects from home. Their teachers provided them with one-on-one assistance remotely so that they could continue to make progress on the projects.

Through all of these efforts, the students were able to continue with their studies, despite the physical closure of the Junior College.

The AMIT Pre-Military Technological Junior College is more than just a professional training institution, however. This innovative model combines professional studies and licensing with a warm and embracing framework of personal empowerment (the mechina). This aspect of the program continued during the coronavirus period as well. The mechina's social worker, teachers, and madrichim were in frequent contact with all of the students, providing the same hands-on accompaniment as during regular times. If a student missed a Zoom class, the staff reached out to him, encouraging him to continue with his studies and motivating him. Indeed, no students dropped out of the program during the difficult period. In addition to the moral support and motivation provided by the staff, daily Torah lessons continued, with a virtual, on-line Beit Midrash. School-wide and grade-wide conversations with Rav Zuri and other staff members served to keep the students engaged, focused and motivated.

Many of the students come from families with financial difficulties during regular times, and with workplaces closing and people losing their jobs, many of their families experienced even greater hardships. Prior to Passover, the Junior College provided food packages and other assistance to the neediest families, and those families that were unable to pay their sons' tuition during this period were given scholarships (despite the fact that this necessary step caused the Junior College financial difficulties). The social worker kept in touch with all of the students, and helped guide those with hardships to the relevant governmental bodies for assistance.

Now, in mid-May, students are able to return to the Junior College and study in person, in accordance with Ministry of Education rules. The students are currently taking their exams, and the second-year students are also working on their final projects.

Although obviously no seminars or trips were possible during the two-month closure, four activities are planned for the remainder of the year. The traditional year-end trip for the first-year students, to mark their transition to the second year of their studies, will be held (albeit it in a modified form due to budgetary limitations). Rather than a 4-day trip to the north of Israel, it will be a two-day trip to the Jerusalem area, where the students will follow the footsteps of Israeli heroes. In addition to visiting historic sites in and around the capital, the seminar will focus on the subjects of taking responsibility, leadership, and personal development.

There will be an activity for the graduating second-year students to prepare for their upcoming IDF induction (the original plan had to be re-envisioned in light of the situation and the revised plan has not yet been finalized). The second-year students will also have a graduation ceremony with their parents, again within the government's health guidelines.

Lastly, there will be a day seminar including a visit to the Western Wall, which will focus on transitions—from the coronavirus reality back to regular life, from their studies to their upcoming military service, and their future transition to socially and communally engaged citizens, with professional careers and families of their own.

In summary, despite the challenges and uncertainties of this period, the AMIT Pre-Military Technological Junior College continued with its mission, providing professional education and personal development to its students, in order to enrich their lives, enable them to achieve a stronger future and, at the same time, to strengthen Israeli society.

The students, staff, and administration of the Junior College, along with AMIT, thank the Matanal Foundation for the support that plays a vital role in making this possible.