



The Center for Bedouin
Studies & Development
Research Unit



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

**HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?
A HISTORY OF BEDOUIN ARAB GRADUATION FROM
BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV**

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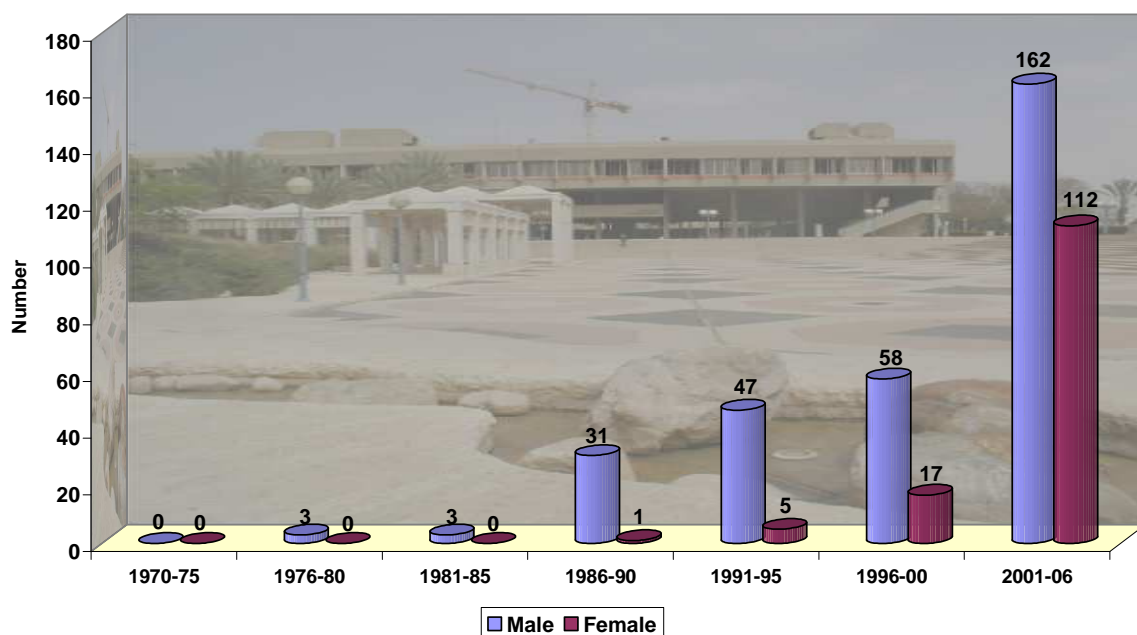
HOW FAR HAVE WE COME? A HISTORY OF BEDOUIN ARAB GRADUATION FROM BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) was established with the unique nation-building mandate to develop the Negev region. Today, BGU has become an internationally recognized institution of higher learning that actively promotes hi-tech industry, agriculture, health services and education in the region.

The Bedouin Arabs are one of the major population groups in the Negev, currently numbering approximately 200,000 and comprising one-fourth of the region's population. Traditionally, the Bedouin were the main inhabitants of the Negev, and derived their livelihood from herding and seasonal agriculture. Since the late 1960's they have undergone a rapid urbanization process. They are now dependent upon integration into the modern Israeli labor market for their livelihood. The unique history of this community has left them with special educational and development needs.

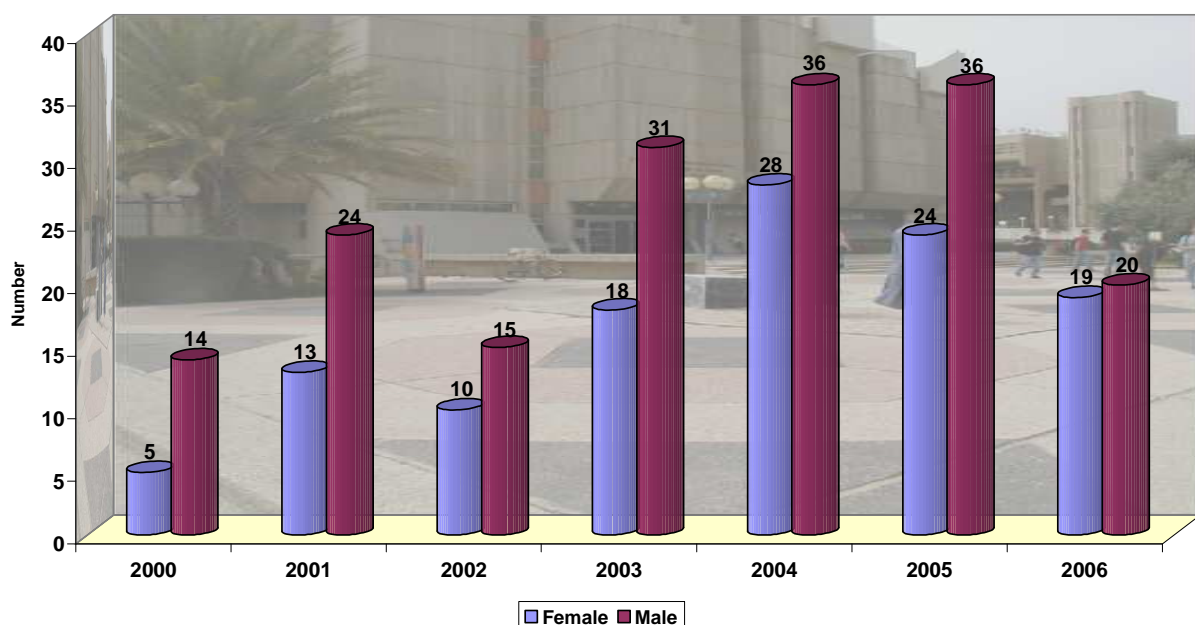
The Center for Bedouin Studies and Development was established at Ben-Gurion University in 1997 in order to address the need for academic advancement in the Bedouin community, as well as to support the community's broader development needs. As such, one of the Center's central goals has been to increase the number of Bedouin university students and graduates, with a particular emphasis on women.

Figure 1
Bedouin Bachelors Degree Graduates from BGU by Gender
1970-2006*



From BGU's first graduating class in 1970, through 1990, there were a mere 38 Bedouin who graduated with Bachelors degrees, only one of whom was female (see **Figure 1**). During the 1990s, there were significant increases in the number of male Bedouin students and graduates. By the late 1990s-2000, the number of female graduates increased to 22, primarily as a result of a pilot intervention program that began in 1993 that provided financial and academic support to a small group of female Bedouin students.¹ The Bedouin Center adopted and significantly expanded this support program, as a result of the involvement of Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Arnow. **Figure 1** shows that in the period beginning four years after the establishment of the Bedouin Center to the present (2001-2006), the number of female Bedouin Bachelors degree graduates jumped to 112, representing over a six-fold increase from the number of female Bedouin graduates in the previous five years (1996-2000). **Figure 2** shows the number of female Bedouin Bachelors degree graduates from 2000 to 2006 (one year before the first cohort of the Center's expanded support program reached graduation). In the following year (2001), the number of female graduates more than doubled. By 2004, for the first time, the number of female Bedouin Bachelors degree graduates came close to that of male Bedouin Bachelors degree graduates. In 2006, their numbers nearly equaled those of the male Bachelors degree graduates, though the numbers of both male and female graduates dropped from that of the previous two to three years.

Figure 2
Annual Number of Bedouin Bachelors Degree Graduates from BGU by Gender
from 2000-2006*

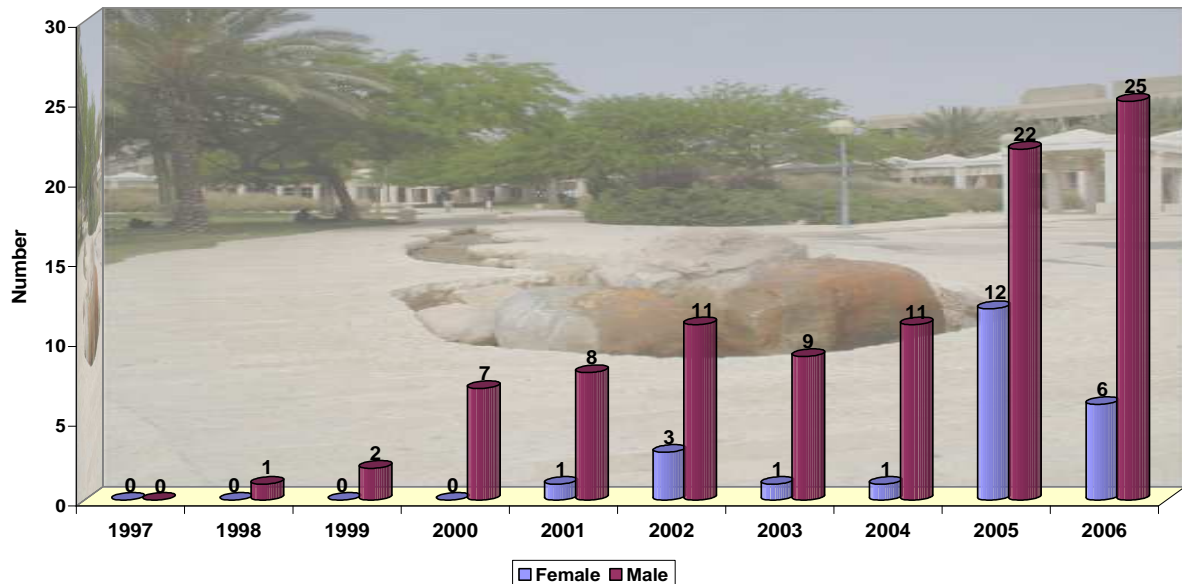


The success of the Bedouin Center program can also be gauged by the fact that its impact doesn't end at the undergraduate level. Its support has produced a significant pool of Bedouin students -- female students in particular -- who have continued on to pursue graduate studies. When the Bedouin Center was established in 1997, there were a total of 12 Bedouin graduates from BGU with

¹ This pilot intervention was funded by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Israel.

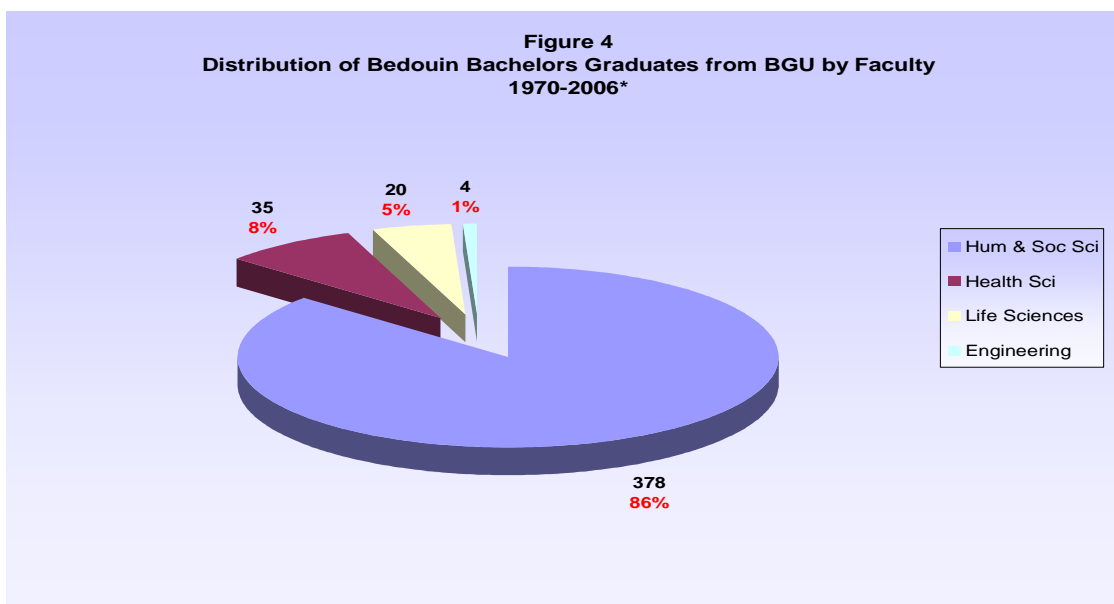
Masters degrees, all of whom were male. **Figure 3** shows that 8 years after the Center's establishment, in 2005, the number of *female* Bedouin Masters degree graduates reached 12 in a single year. The cumulative total of Bedouin women with Masters degrees from BGU grew dramatically from zero in 2000 to 24 in 2006.

Figure 3
Bedouin Masters Degree Graduates from BGU
 1997-2006*



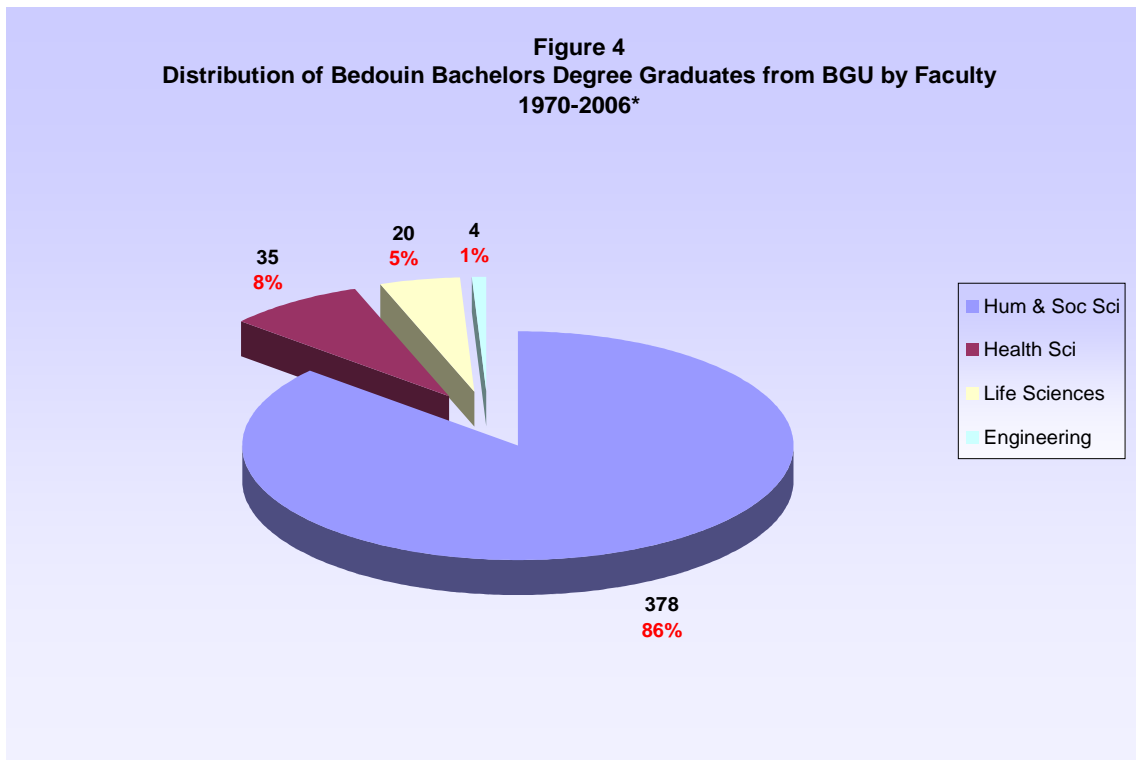
What did the Bedouin study at BGU? An examination of the distribution of Bachelors degree graduates by faculty reveals that 86% graduated from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and 8% from the Faculty of Health Sciences (see **Figure 4**). Only 5% graduated from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, and 1% from the Faculty of Engineering Sciences. Less than 1% (2) graduated from the School of Management.²

Figure 4
Distribution of Bedouin Bachelors Graduates from BGU by Faculty
 1970-2006*



² Management is a newer school that was established in 1996.

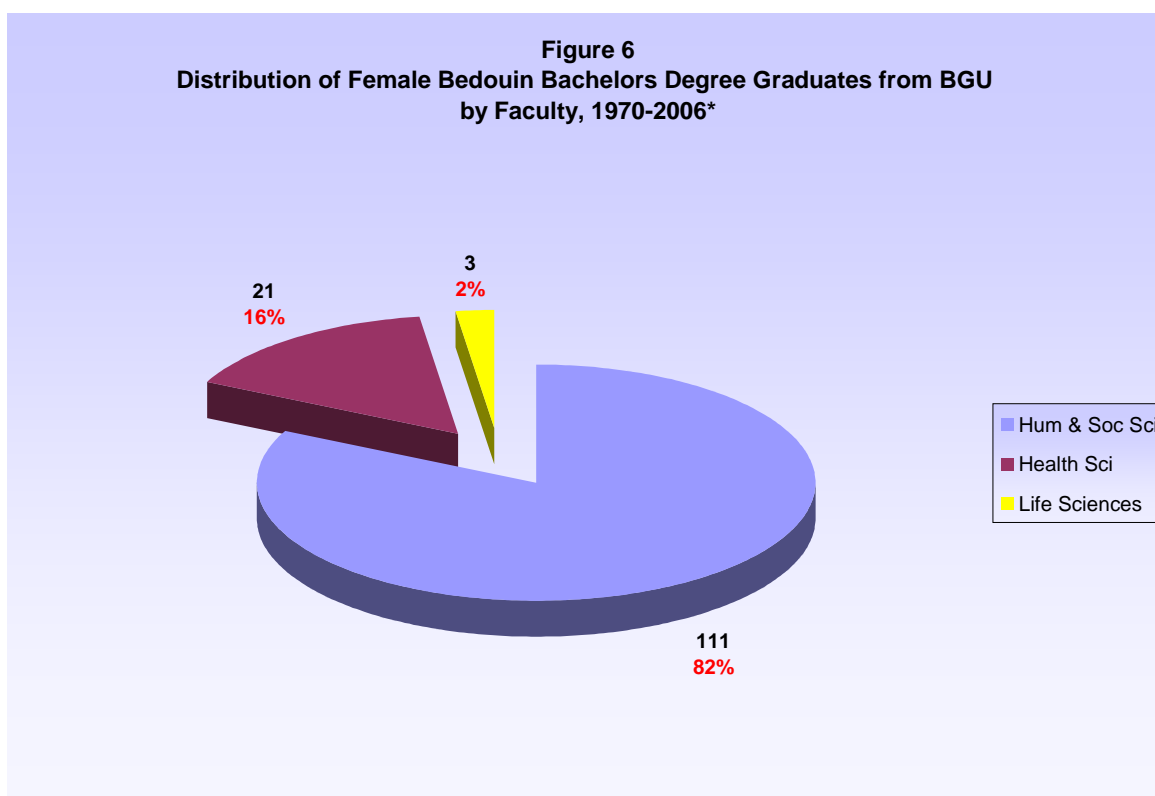
The distribution of Bedouin Masters degree graduates from BGU by faculty is slightly broader. As **Figure 5** shows, 72% graduated from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. A total of 13% graduated from the Faculty of Health Sciences, of whom 11% obtained Masters degrees in health-related fields, and 2% obtained M.D. degrees. Six percent (6%) graduated from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, 4% from the Faculty of Engineering Sciences, and 5% from the School of Management.



This data demonstrates the need for encouraging, equipping and assisting more Bedouin students to enter science and hi-tech oriented fields at BGU at the undergraduate level. This is essential both for the development of the Bedouin community and for its full integration into the modern, hi-tech Israeli labor market.

The lack of female Bedouin Bachelors degree graduates in the science and hi-tech fields is even more pronounced (see **Figure 6**). Again, most are concentrated in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (82%), followed by 16% in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Only 2% graduated from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, and none at all from the Faculty of Engineering Sciences or the School of Management. This reflects a common tendency among women in higher education globally to gravitate more toward the liberal arts and helping professions (such as teaching, social work, nursing and other health-related fields) than to the traditionally male-dominated science and hi-tech oriented professions. However, since the total number of female Bedouin graduates (Bachelors and Masters) from BGU comes to only 158 out of a population of nearly 200,000, the need for Bedouin women in all fields

continues to be great. Thus, the support of female Bedouin students should continue to be a priority for the Bedouin Center.



On the occasion of the Bedouin Center's 10th Anniversary, as we look back to see how far we have come, it is clear that the Center has had a critical impact on higher education in the Negev and has significantly increased the number of young Negev Bedouin who are obtaining higher education at BGU. This ongoing transformation has opened up new horizons – for Bedouin women in particular – that will have a widespread effect on the Negev Bedouin community, far into the future. As one female Bedouin student stated:

When you have a new idea, you have to try it out, and not give up without even trying because someone says it's impossible. Just look at how many Bedouin women are studying at the University today, because someone gave the idea a chance! (Excerpt from the Research Unit's forthcoming monograph on Bedouin women and higher education).

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* Source of data in all figures is the official annual BGU List of Graduates, from 1970 to 2006.