

Exchange Student - Hannah Betts – recipient of the Bladon Family Scholarship for 2019/20

Semester 1- September 2019-January 2020

During my Semester 1 studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I completed the September Ulpan and then 15 Hebrew University credits in 5 different classes. Firstly, I would like to speak of my experience studying the September Ulpan. This experience involved learning Hebrew from having no prior knowledge of the language before. We learnt Hebrew 5 days a week from roughly 8:30am until 1:30pm. I found the first couple of weeks challenging due to not having any prior experience of Hebrew- the pace of the classes was fast and the script and written Hebrew was confusing to get a hang of! However, after getting a fluent grasp of the alphabet I found the language learning then became more natural. It was an incredibly intensive programme, but I found that it was very valuable as meant when settling in to life in Israel, I could read shop signs and supermarket items without feeling completely lost. It also gave me the confidence to speak basic Hebrew to shopkeepers and I found myself answering simple questions in Hebrew when asked in public. The Ulpan was assessed by weekly, sometimes twice-weekly, quizzes, and there was both an oral and final exam. By the end of the Ulpan, I had achieved level Aleph Intermediate.

During the Semester, as stated, I took 5 academic classes. These included: Level Aleph Intermediate Hebrew (6 credits), The History of the Modern State of Israel (3 credits), The Palestinians: Modern History and Society (3 credits) and Issues in Israeli Society (3 credits). I decided out of enjoyment of studying Hebrew during the Ulpan (despite its challenges!) to continue studying it throughout the semester. This involved taking weekly quizzes, a midterm, oral exam and final exam. The final grade I achieved was 85% and allowed me to finish the semester reaching level Aleph Higher. I did not originally plan to carry on learning Hebrew during the semester however I had such a positive experience from the Ulpan and realised the value in learning it. I also have not learnt a language since sixth-form so I took learning Hebrew as a new form of 'brain-training' that I hadn't done for a number of years! My favourite course I took in Semester 1 however was the History of the Modern State of Israel. Without being too basic, this course gave me a clear outline of how the Israeli state was created. I had not done much Israeli history before so I found this course very interesting and the lecturer, Dr David Mendelsson, was a great teacher. Zionist theory was a completely new concept for me, however has inspired me to continue learning it now in Semester 2! At the end of the Semester and after 2 assignments, a mid-term exam and final exam, I achieved 88% in this course. Palestinian History was also an interesting course, as was taught by a Palestinian teacher. He often shared stories of his life history which I found interesting as a first-hand account of a Palestinian who had lived through the experience of the creation of an Israeli state and what came with that. This course involved a midterm and final exam, and I achieved 83% as a final grade. Finally, Issues in Israeli Society interested me as gave a general overview of different demographics and contemporary issues facing Israel today. Although quite a general course, I found again that this allowed me to learn about societal Israeli issues as someone who had never been to or visited Israel before. After submitting a final paper, I achieved 91% in this course.

After studying my first semester at the Hebrew University, I have positive reviews to say about my experience. I found the courses were a particular highlight- I can honestly say that I learnt so much about Israeli and Palestinian history and current Israeli issues, especially in light of the elections going on in Israel at the time. The teaching was to a very high standard and I liked that the contact hours for teaching were high (between 15-20hours a week) as it meant that I really felt like I was getting a quality university experience. I had somewhat expected to be

studying with Israeli students, however all of the classes I took were taught in the Rothberg International School, so this was a bit of a shame as all of my classes were with international students. However, I did manage to meet some Israelis through friends and through the buddy scheme that Rothberg had organised, mixing Israeli students with internationals. The staff at Rothberg were incredibly helpful- beyond anything I have experienced before- with the office of student life running events regularly in the form of trips (I went on two- one to Masada and Ein Gedi, and another to Akko) and socials, as well as the academic coordinators being helpful when needed. Overall, my first semester at the Hebrew University left me excited to return and continue furthering my studies in Israeli history and I hoped for Semester 2 to be able to meet more Israeli students, undertake an internship, and continue visiting places of interest in Israel and the West Bank.