

Signs of Success

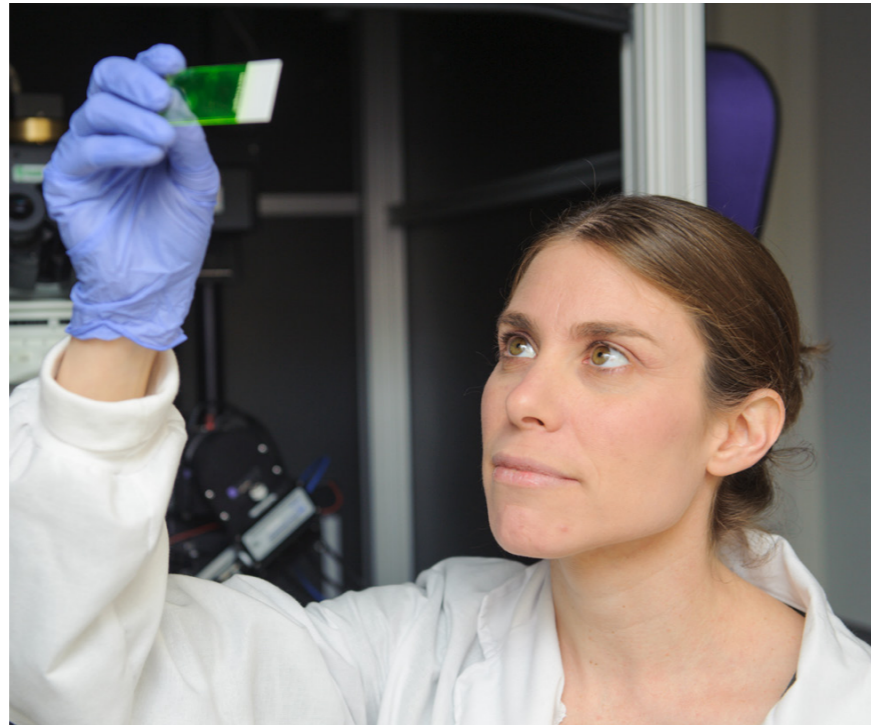
Some 80 percent of Women in Science grant recipients attain faculty positions in Israel

Seven years after the launch of the donor-backed National Postdoctoral Program for Advancing Women in Science, the program, established and operated by the Weizmann Institute of Science, is evidencing major signs of success in its aim to nurture the careers of Israeli women scientists and thereby advance academic science overall in Israel. More than 80 percent of the women who participated in the program have attained faculty positions in Israeli academia: 22 out of the 27 women who completed their postdoctoral studies abroad. Of the remainder, two have accepted faculty appointments abroad and two are working in the Israeli high-tech industry.

The program funds 10 women scientists per year to do postdoctoral research overseas, each for a period of two years. The funds supplement often-small postdoctoral salaries and thus enable women and their families to relocate to the U.S. or Europe for this critical stage in a research scientist's career.

Postdoctoral studies abroad have become a near-necessity in achieving a faculty position in scientific fields in Israel. While half of science students in Israel are women, the bottleneck in advancing to academic careers occurs at the postdoctoral stage, when many women graduates are reluctant to cause their families to relocate, which carries with it financial uncertainty.

The program is fully funded by Institute donors; among them are the Charles H. Revson Foundation in New York and the Clore Israel Foundation, in addition to many additional friends. A total of 75 women have participated in the program to date, with 27 having completed



Dr. Michal Rivlin

the program and the remainder still in the midst of their fellowships. Female graduates of all Israeli universities are eligible for the fellowship, and candidates are chosen on the basis of academic excellence. Single and married women are equally eligible to apply.

"A nation's most valuable resource is the brainpower of its citizens. Today, in the knowledge-based economies of the West and, increasingly, of the globe, no country can afford to neglect half its talent," says Nessa Rappaport, Senior Program Officer of the Revson Foundation.

This success received international

recognition when the Weizmann Institute was awarded the 27th Maria Aurèlia Capmany award by the City of Barcelona for the Institute's efforts to promote the careers of more women scientists.

The Weizmann Institute is the largest contributor of award recipients thus far, having sent a total of 32 women scientists to study abroad. The Institute and Ben-Gurion University have each recruited five program participants thus far.

In 2013-2014 alone, the Weizmann Institute recruited three new female scientists who were all previous



Prof. Michal Neeman (far left) and Prof. Varda Rotter (far right) with recipients of the postdoctoral fellowships and Dr. Susan Gasser (second on the left), recipient of the Weizmann Institute Women in Science Award

recipients of the postdoctoral awards: Dr. Karen Michaeli of the Department of Condensed Matter Physics was a fellow in 2010 after obtaining her PhD from the Weizmann Institute, and did postdoctoral training at MIT. Dr. Michal Rivlin of the Department of Neurobiology, a 2009 fellow sponsored by the Revson Foundation, joined the Institute after a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California at Berkeley. And Dr. Noam Stern-Ginossar of the Department of Molecular Genetics, who won the fellowship in 2010, joined the Institute in January after a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco.

In Israel, where academic careers for women begin at a later age than in most countries, the odds of career goals conflicting with the desire for parenthood are very high. In addition, since Israel is more remote from the hubs of scientific research in Europe and the U.S, it is now commonly accepted that scientists seeking to enter academia must spend a postdoctoral period abroad, to deepen networks and be exposed to the world's most advanced labs and cutting-edge research.

Rivlin recalls that, "the move to California was expensive. Flights for a family of five were costly and the

cost of living was quite high. Since we came without a pre-obtained substantial fellowship and since my husband had difficulty finding work for the first few months, the award money from the National Postdoctoral Program for Advancing Women in Science really helped us keep our head above water until we got settled in."

Speaking at the Clore Lunch on November 4 upon receiving the Clore Prize, Dr. Noam Stern-Ginossar said: "It is not easy to raise a family on a postdoc's salary, and the postdoc award made it possible for me to concentrate on my research knowing that my family was taken care of."