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Ensuring Success of Mimshak, the New ISEES Environmental Science-to-Policy Fellowship Program

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The new Environmental Science-to-Policy Fellowship Program, Mimshak ('interface') launched this April, is the first major initiative serving [the ISEES long-term strategic goal](#) of substantially enhancing scientific input to environmental decision making in Israel. This program will train junior scientists and give them practical experience as interns within government agencies. As a potentially highly visible and laudable component of [the ISEES larger ambition](#), the Fellowship Program will, no doubt, come under scrutiny by ISEES members, funding sources, academia, government, NGO's, environmental consulting companies, and, of course, prospective applicants. It is therefore important to ensure the success of the program.

Some significant challenges that go beyond the recruiting of high quality junior scientists, their training and internships, will have to be met to make the program a resounding success and appealing to prospective applicants. Here I point out these challenges and make some suggestions for how they might be met. My goals are to encourage debate about and engagement in Mimshak by ISEES members, the academic institutions and other relevant organizations to which they belong, and the government agencies with which they seek to interface. These challenges can be summarized as those of mentoring, networking, employment prospects, evaluation and reward systems.

Training and internships are central to the program, but Fellows will need additional, non-financial support during and after the program. Continued encouragement, the opportunity to discuss problems, and help in overcoming obstacles and making contacts, will all make a positive difference to the experience and better prepare Fellows for their futures. An obvious way to do this is to ensure that each Fellow is connected to more senior scientists who have substantive experience in science and policy. ISEES should consider designing an effective, flexible mentoring program; recruit a cadre of willing mentors; articulate and promote the benefits of mentoring to mentors and mentees; and ensure that mentors get recognition for doing this within their academic institutions and the larger scientific community.

Shared experiences and contacts among Fellows are an important aspect of career development. ISEES should encourage informal networking; create more formal opportunities, such as periodic Fellow meetings and professional workshops during and after internships; and take advantage of similar networks beyond Israel (e.g., [AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellows](#), [Aldo Leopold Leadership Fellows](#)). Fellows completing the program should form an alumni group that can help future Fellows. The very modest financial resources required for some of these activities could be provided by ISEES.

Fellows need an outlet for describing their experiences, activities and findings to each other and the wider scientific community. Ecology and Environment is one logical place for such articles. The editorial board should consider creating the opportunity, such as a science-policy section.

If, as is intended, the program is to train Fellows so that some can obtain employment in non-academic sectors, then ISEES needs to start lobbying government now in order to create positions for scientific advisors. ISEES can do the same with NGO's and the private sector. This is a much bigger task with a larger context than just establishing the Fellows Program, but if there are few such jobs for Fellows this can negatively feedback on the program in the future. Some Fellows will, no doubt, elect to remain in academia. While Fellows could just remain in departments, centers for environmental science and policy

activities within institutions, across academia and in the non-academic world. A number of these exist in the US (e.g., [Stanford University](#), and [the Woods Hole Research Center](#) previously directed by John Holdren, current science and technology advisor to President Obama). There is one in Israel, [the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies Environmental Policy Center](#). ISEES members need to start lobbying their academic institutions to create more centers.

Fellows who remain in academia will face challenges with respect to balancing their science-policy efforts with traditional academic activities – grants, research, scientific publication, teaching, and administration. Some academics may not understand or highly value the science-policy efforts relative to more traditional activities. ISEES members need to begin substantive conversations with rectors, deans, department heads and tenure committees at the academic institutions of Fellows, and push for the inclusion of science-policy activities as legitimate components of assessment for re-appointment, tenure and promotion. The leadership at these institutions needs to be provided with convincing arguments why science-policy efforts are central to the environmental future of Israel and good for academia over the long haul. Evaluation committees need to be shown how to explicitly include science-policy activities within faculty assessment criteria. At my home institution, science-policy efforts are an important part of the assessment of scientific staff, along with more traditional criteria.

Finally, Fellows who commit substantive effort to science-policy initiatives deserve recognition for their achievements. ISEES, and perhaps other relevant Israeli scientific societies (e.g. [the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities](#)), need to create a concrete way to openly recognize such contributions: for example, a widely publicized annual award.

Most of the above suggestions have no or limited financial cost; the one that is obviously costly – centers – is, in part, the legitimate realm of enlightened donors, given appropriate fund-raising efforts. Some of my suggestions may already be under consideration at ISEES; some may not. Some may be more workable than others, and I am sure that the creative membership of ISEES can come up with yet other suggestions. Irrespective of the specific actions chosen, the underlying challenges are real and must be met. Meeting them will require substantial time and effort by the ISEES membership and some significant changes within the academic community. If you accept that making Mimshak a success is central to the larger ISEES initiative in science and policy, then the time and effort invested in helping fellows and the Fellowship Program meet these challenges is very worthwhile and very necessary.

Acknowledgements

I thank Marcelo Sternberg and Avi Perevelotsky for comments, and the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Science (KNAW) for financial support. This article was written while on a KNAW Visiting Professorship, hosted by the Netherlands Institute of Ecology Centre for Estuarine and Marine Ecology, Yerseke, The Netherlands, and is a contribution to the program of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies.

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