**Research Proposal**

**Higher Education Policy in Israel: Equal Opportunities for Special Needs Students**

Zehorit Dadon-Golan, PhD

Supervised by:

 Noah D. Drezner and Oren Pizmony-Levy

Teachers College, Columbia University

**1. Survey of the Literature**

Higher education plays a critical role for both individuals and countries. For individuals, higher education affords economic and employment mobility, enhances one’s earning potential, reduces income inequalities, and stops the inter-generational cycle of poverty. For countries, higher education raises the GDP, increases productivity, generates more income from taxes, and reduces expenditures on unemployment and disability benefits (Bloom, Canning, Chan and Luca, 2006; Kingdon and Patrinos, 2009; Oketch, McCowan and Schendel, 2014).

 It hardly needs pointing out that, for people with special needs (learning disabilities and physical handicaps), life is more difficult than it is for others. Not only is their health impaired, but they also experience economic, social, employment, and educational challenges. The government bears the national, political, and social duty to help them; it can do so by severing the connection between the individual achievements of the special-needs population and their circumstances. The goal of that approach is to reduce gaps and help the disabled population realize their potential, thus ensuring that they are equipped with the tools to manage daily living. Given the positive effects of higher education, we believe that the government can reach this goal by providing equality of opportunity and making colleges and universities more accessible to the disabled. It should be noted that, in recent years, the number of special needs students attending institutions of higher education has grown. This may be due to changes in legislation in various places around the world (such as the United States) and in Israel, in particular.

 In light of this, and in light of the important role that higher education plays in economic and personal advancement, it is necessary to assess whether the disabled have equality of access to higher education. Thus, this study, based in Israel and on the Israel special needs population, has the following objectives: Firstly, to measure equality of access for the disabled to higher education (using the two acceptance parameters used by colleges and universities in Israel – the Psychometric Entrance Test (PET) and the average score of the Matriculation Examinations); this will be measured using quantitative research tools, while most studies dealing with special needs at institutions of higher education use the qualitative research approach (Hal and Tinklin, 1998; Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2004; Goode, 2007). The second goal is to measure the rate of equality of opportunity among the disabled; this will be done by applying the Gini index, primarily an economic measure, to higher education and segmenting the variables: sex (male/female), ethnicity (Jewish/Arab/Druze/other), area of residence (north/south/center/Jerusalem), and school (university/college). The third goal is to compare the rate of equal access to higher education between the general population and the special needs population as affected by school (university/college) using the differences-in-differences (DID) technique. The fourth goal is to identify the variables found to be linked to scholastic achievements (Matriculation Examinations, PET, and B.A. grade point average) of special needs students using multi-variable linear regression. The fifth and final goal addresses the fact that Israel does not have a database of background information and scholastic achievements (Matriculation Examinations, PET, BA) of special needs students, and we are interested in creating such a database to serve both the current study and future follow-up studies. In this study, we emphasize scholastic achievements (Matriculation Examinations and PET) because these are the hurdles one must clear to be accepted to colleges and universities; later on, they serve as an indication for equality of opportunity in employment and advanced academic studies (M.A., etc.).

* 1. **Access to Higher Education**

Expanding the rate of participation in higher education is a core aspect of the public agenda. The public interest in access to higher education is growing, thus intensifying previous commitments to that goal. In the United States, for example, the following appears in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26, Section 1) “…higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit” (1948). The declaration was further expanded by the UN Human Rights—Office of the High Commissioner in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, adopted for signature, ratification, and accession in 1976 (Article 13, Section 2c): “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.” In light of this, researchers emphasize that it is necessary to stress the measure of fairness and access to higher education (McCowan, 2015). Furthermore, many Western nations have implemented changes in educational policy designed to expand access to higher education. The United Kingdom has attempted to expand equality of access to the disabled and increase their numbers at colleges and universities (Tinklin, Riddell, and Wilson, 2004). Lancaster, Mellard, and Hoffman (2001) have claimed that providing accessibility to higher education for special needs students is part of the government’s obligation to provide the opportunity to realize their potential and to succeed to the maximal extent of their capabilities.

 However, despite public interest and a growing number of disabled individuals attending institutions of higher education, researchers report that the percentage of participation in various segments of the population remains equal (Allen and Storan, 2005); this has not yet been sufficiently studied. Beyond public interest in the matter, “mainstreaming” has become a critical concern in the educational politics of many countries, which have adopted the approach as a way to create an equal educational system wherein all children are treated the same, regardless of their differences. Expanding access to higher education for special needs students requires attention to many particulars, from making resources available and accessible, to training teachers and academic personnel to help reduce the stigma on these students (Tinklin and Hall, 1999; Lancaster, 2001). At the same time, in order to increase access, it is necessary to ensure there are sufficient numbers of colleges and universities, so that everyone with a minimal threshold of ability can take part (McCowan, 2007).

* 1. **Israel’s Law on Equality for People with Disabilities**

In 1988, as part of the nation’s general move towards reducing social gaps and emphasizing human and civil rights, Israel passed the Special Education Law, which included the directive to favor integrating special needs children into regular schools. In 1998, the state passed a law entitled Equality for People with Disabilities. This law defined a disabled person as someone with a physical, emotional, or mental disability, whether permanent or temporary, whose functioning is fundamentally limited in one or more major aspect of life because of this disability. The Equality for People with Disabilities law views disabled people as being just as valued as abled people and entitled to realize their rights. Thus, the services provided to the disabled are to be given on the basis of maximal consideration of the natural course of their lives, while paying meticulous attention to human dignity and freedom. This law, intended to protect disabled people’s dignity and freedom, enshrines their right to equal, active involvement in society. Additionally, the law specifies that the disabled are not simply another government-supported segment of the population, but rather that they require the support and empowerment of the population as a whole (Arten-Bergman and Rimmerman, 2009).

 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, signed in 1996, includes the right to education. In the main principles on the right to education, the ICESCR unequivocally states that higher education must be accessible to all on the basis of ability and that free education at the secondary and tertiary levels must be progressively introduced. Based on the ICESCR’s approach, the state must promote access to higher education equally to all population segments within its borders. In 2012, the State Comptroller examined the treatment of learning-disabled applicants to and students at institutions of higher education funded by the Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council for Higher Education. The State Comptroller’s office found that, despite the fact that in 2008 the Knesset passed a law on integrating learning-disabled people at colleges and universities, by 2012 – the year of the report – for People with Disabilities the regulations for this had not yet been written.

 In tandem with legislation, there is a great deal of public activity to promote the social rights of the disabled and remove environmental and social barriers to their integration (Rimmerman and Herr, 2004). Social and legal developments reflect changes in how Israeli society views the disabled, now seeing them as equally valuable members of society. Furthermore, Israeli society supports the disabled’s right to equality of opportunity and integration into all areas of life, including education, employment, and more.

 Feldman and Ben-Moshe (2006) surveyed the many hurdles facing the disabled in their various attempts at integration. They found that, despite the expectations that legislation would result in the integration of the disabled into all areas of life, this vision is far from fully realized. As yet, there is no database demonstrating the involvement of the disabled in daily life. Its absence makes it difficult to measure the contribution of the Equality for People with Disabilities law and prevents us from developing the knowledge necessary to determine courses of action and reduce gaps.

* 1. **The Frequency of the Phenomenon**

Greenberg and Laser (2010) estimate that students with learning disabilities in Israeli colleges and universities constitute about 3.4 percent of the student body. The 2005 report by the U.S. National Council on Disability (NCD) notes that, in the 25-64 age group, 43.1 percent of the non-disabled population completed college or university, compared with 21.9 percent of the disabled in the same age bracket. It also addresses the importance of making higher education accessible to students with special needs. Since 1966, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California has carried out a broad survey every four years on a sampling of freshmen students. The report notes that the most common disability that is noted (2.8%) is a learning disability (Ward and Merves, 2006).

 A study carried out by Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000) found that the chances of high school graduates with learning disabilities to study at institutions of higher education is significantly lower than that of their non-disabled peers.

 Arten-Bergman and Rimmerman (2009) found that people without disabilities were notably more educated than their disabled contemporaries: the rate of disabled individuals with only basic education (fewer than 12 years of study) was almost three times higher than the rate of those without disabilities. They further found that the rate of non-disabled people with academic education was more than twice as high compared to the rate of those with disabilities (32.5% compared to 16%).

* 1. **Higher Education and Special Needs**

The road to equality for the disabled in academia is studded with hurdles, including the Matriculation Certificate, PET score, and high entrance requirements for the more prestigious fields of study. Moreover, Borland and James (1999) note that, for people with disabilities, starting university or college is often the first time they are leaving the immediate family environment to live independently, forge social relationships, and navigate their surroundings – activities that are not nearly as daunting for their non-disabled peers. Students with learning disabilities face many challenges in the transition from high school to college. Their disabilities are invisible, which is not the case for students with physical disabilities. Therefore, their needs are not always understood and they do not receive appropriate support. In addition, many learning-disabled students find it hard to report their difficulties in real time, doing so only after the school year has started (Gajar, 1992). However, is necessary to stress that when special needs students receive appropriate support, it increases the probability of accessing higher education and remaining in the system (Getzel, Ipsen, Kregel, Martin, and West, 1993). Furthermore, institutions of higher education have created various programs designed to increase their percentages of special needs students. Such programs include providing access to registration, needs-based teaching, financial aid, and support centers (Tomlinson, 1996).

 Research also shows that an individual’s level of higher education is closely linked to his or her socioeconomic status. The level of education and socioeconomic status of adults with learning disabilities are lower than those of their non-disabled peers, and therefore only 20 percent seek out higher education (Vogel and Sharoni, 2009).

 **Given the research findings and legislation, it is important to measure the equality of access to higher education (B.A.) for special needs students in Israel.**

**2. Research Questions**

Having presented a survey of the literature in the previous section, the following section shall present the research questions.

**2.1 Research Questions**

1. In light of the legislation on increasing access to higher education for the special needs population, to what extent, if any, does the State of Israel provide equal access to higher education to special needs students (including learning disabilities and physical handicaps)?

2. To what extent, if any, does the State of Israel provide equal access to higher education to special needs students (learning disabilities and physical handicaps) by segmentation of variables: sex (male/female), ethnicity (Jewish/Arab/Druze/other), area of residence (north/south/center/Jerusalem) and institution (college/university)?

3. To what extent, if any, does the institution of higher education (college/university) influence access to higher education to the general population versus special needs students?

4. Which of the following variables – sex (male/female), ethnicity (Jewish/Arab/Druze/other), area of residence (north/south/center/Jerusalem), institution (college/university), father’s income and education, and mother’s income and education – are linked to the scholastic achievements of special needs students?

**2.2 Research Variables**

As Table 1 demonstrates, the study’s variables are as follows:

**Table 1: Research Variables**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Variables** | **Variable value** | **Variably type** |
| **Dependent variables** |   | Equality of opportunity measure | 0-1 | Quantitative |
|  |   | B.A. grade point average | 0-100 | Quantitative |
|  | **Previous achievements** | Matriculation average | 0-100 | Quantitative |
|  |  | PET score | 0-800 | Quantitative |
|   |   | Sex | Male | Qualitative |
|   |   |   | Female |   |
|   |   | Ethnicity | Jew | Qualitative |
|   |   |   | Arab |   |
|   |   |   | Druze |   |
| **Independent variables** | **Background variables** |  | Other |  |
|   |  | Area | North | Qualitative |
|   |  |   | South |   |
|   |  |   | Center |   |
|   |  |   | Jerusalem |   |
|   |  | Mother’s income |   | Quantitative |
|   |  | Father’s income |   | Quantitative |
|   |  | Mother’s education |   | Quantitative |
|   |  | Father’s education |   | Quantitative |
|   |  | Institution | University | Qualitative |
|   |  |   | College | Qualitative |

**3. Research Method**

The research methodology selected for this study is a quantitative approach, based on gathering data via questionnaires and analyzing data using economic techniques (the Gini index) and statistical techniques (DID and multi-variable linear regression).

**3.1 The Research Subjects**

The subjects of this study are students with special needs (learning disabilities and physical handicaps) who sat for the state Matriculation Examinations and the PET and who are either currently studying at an institution of higher education in Israel or have applied to one. Due to the challenge of locating and accessing data, the research population consists of volunteers. In addition, data on the general population (Matriculation Examinations average and overall PET score) will be requested from the Education Ministry’s Virtual Research Room and from the National Center for Evaluation and Testing in charge of the PET in Israel.

**3.2 The Research Process**

The research process consists of several major stages. At **stage one**, meetings with several key researchers in higher education, education economy, and special needs will be scheduled in order to map the professional literature and gain an assessment of the general situation. At **stage two**, we will construct a questionnaire corresponding to the research questions, which will then be validated by external judges and pre-tested on thirty research subjects. At **stage three**, we will send emails to all research authorities at the various universities and colleges in Israel to anonymously elicit background data, acceptance data, and general information about special needs students attending their institutions of higher education. Given our concern that institutions will be hesitant to cooperate, a specially constructed research questionnaire will concurrently be sent and published in various media (email, Facebook, WhatsApp) to encourage students with special needs to participate in this study. It is worth noting that, at every stage calling for participation in the study, we will emphasize that the study is anonymous and its findings will be used for research purposes only.

**3.3 Research Tool**

The central research tool that will be used for this study is a series of questionnaires. It will be constructed and validated especially for the purposes of this study (see Appendix 1 for a draft of the questionnaire). The study will entail several questionnaires measuring the research variable, to be filled out by the research subjects.

*Questionnaire No. 1: Demographic Data*

This questionnaire will consist of demographic background data, such as sex, ethnicity, area of residence, age, household income, parents’ educational level, and so on.

*Questionnaire No. 2: Academic Data*

This questionnaire will consist of the test subjects’ academic data, such as Matriculation Certificate grade average, overall PET score, B.A. grade point average, school attended, etc.

*Questionnaire No. 3: Health Data*

This questionnaire will gather basic information about the health of the test subjects, such as disability type, disability percentage, and whether they financial aid from the government (e.g., from the National Insurance Institute, the Defense Ministry, etc.).

**3.4 Research Analysis**

As noted above, this study will make use of several economic and statistical techniques, such as the Gini index, DID, and multi-variable linear regression.

**Gini index definition:** The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation’s residents and is the most commonly used measurement of inequality. It is usually defined mathematically based on the Lorenz curve, and can be thought of as the ratio that lies between the line of equality and the Lorenz curve to the 45° line. The index results vary between 0 and 1, with 0 signifying complete equality (i.e. everyone has the same income) and 1 signifying complete inequality (i.e. one person has all the income and everyone else has no income at all). In this study, the calculation of the Gini index will be done using Formula 1 as presented in the research of Thomas, Yang, and Fan (2000):

Formula 1: 

With  = the Gini index in education; = the average of the multiplicand – a variable that is the product of the Matriculation grade multiplied by the PET score of the entire sampling ; = the relative portion of each segmented population; and  = the multiplicand average in every selected category; and N = the number of categories in the segmentation (N=7). In this study, the Gini index will be calculated using the multiplicand variablethat will be calculated as a multiplier – the PET score by the average Matriculation score.

**Differences in differences (DID) definition:** As Bertrand, Duflo, and Mullainathan noted (2003), the use of this measure became especially popular for finding causal relations, because the measure isolates the effect of the “intervention” from that of the “noise.” In the present study, this refers to an “intervention” being applied to one group (special needs students in the present study) and, by contrast, no “intervention” is applied to another group (the general student population in our study). At the outset of this study, the first difference will be calculated as the difference between the average of the multiplicand variable among the general student population and among the special needs students already studying at university as well as at private colleges. At the second stage, the difference of the multiplicand variable will be calculated for general population students studying at universities compared to those studying at private colleges. Finally, the differences in differences (DID) will be calculated as the gap between the second difference and the first. The benefit of using this measure lies in its simplicity and in the fact that it allows researchers to bypass problems of nonrandom placement of other programs.

The idea of DID was first introduced by Johan Snow (1985) and adopted by economists such as Card and Kreuger (1994), who examined the effect of raising the minimum wage in New Jersey on labor demand in New Jersey and Pennsylvania at 410 fast-food restaurants; they made measurements at two points in time – November, after the minimum wage was raised, and February, before the minimum wage was raised. The calculation of this measure will be effected by an **algebraic table** that calculates the DID, as may be seen in Table 2:

**Table 2: An algebraic presentation of the DID statistical technique**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **General population** | **Special needs population** | **D** |
| **University** |  |  |   |
| **College** |  |  |   |
| **D** |  |  | DID |

Yo = the average multiplicand of the general population attending university; Xo = the average multiplicand of the special needs students attending university; *Ym* = the average multiplicand of the general population attending college; *Xm* = the average multiplicand of the special needs students attending college. The DID will be calculated using Formula 2:

Formula 2: 

**Multi-variable linear regression definition:** The use of this type of regression makes it possible to predict the dependent variable by means of several independent variables. The benefit of this regression is our ability to predict the dependent variable by means of different variables concurrently (Sarid and Sarid, 2011).

 In this study, the regression will be calculated using Formula 3:

Formula 3: $Y=α+β\_{1}X\_{1}\left(female\right)+β\_{2}\left(Jewish\right)+β\_{3}\left(Arab\right)+β\_{4}\left(Druze\right)+β\_{5}\left(North\right)+β\_{6}\left(South\right)+β\_{7}\left(Center\right)+β\_{8}\left(MotherIncome\right)+β\_{9}\left(FatherIncome\right)+β\_{10}\left(MaternalEdu\right)+β\_{11}\left(PaternalEdu\right)+β\_{12}\left(Psychometric\right)+β\_{13}\left(Bagrut\right)$

With the independent variable = multiplicand, and the independent variables = sex (male/female), ethnicity (Jew/Arab/Druze/other – deleted), district (north/south/center/Jerusalem – deleted), mother’s income, father’s income, mother’s education, father’s education, Matriculation Certificate average, PET score.

**4. The Importance and Potential Contribution of the Research**

This importance of this study lies in the potential for making significant contributions to theory, empiric knowledge, and political change. Unlike previous studies in this field, which used the qualitative research method, this study aims to use the quantitative research method and make use of innovative economic and statistical methodologies to measure the equality of opportunity of special needs students’ attempts to access to higher education in Israel. It aims to provide policy makers with a tool that sheds light on various socioeconomic aspects and enables them to attempt to reduce gaps. Furthermore, this research seeks to create a database of special needs students to serve as a source of information for future follow-up studies. Based on previous studies, it appears that no such database to exist. The research findings will describe this population’s equality of opportunity and help identify the related variables, so that the State of Israel can help all citizens realize their potential, regardless of their disabilities or handicaps.

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**Curriculum Vitae**

**Dr. Zehorit Dadon-Golan**

**Address:** 35/12 Balfour St., Ashkelon, Israel **ID no:** 300257490

**Phone:** 050-272-2974 **Email:** zohar643@gmail.com

zohar643@walla.com

**Marital status:** Married + 2 **Date of birth:** April 6, 1987

**Computer skills:** Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook), Lotus Notes, Mainframe, SPSS Statistics

**Languages:** Hebrew, English, Spanish **National Service:** 2005-2006, Assistant Manager of the Office of Mr. Avi Vaknin, Deputy Mayor of Ashkelon, in charge of the city’s welfare programs

**Education:**

2017-2017 Postdoc, Department of Economics and School of Education at Bar-Ilan University. Research topic: The effect of higher education on one’s rate of political tolerance and one’s stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict. Advised by Prof. Adrian Zeiderman and Dr. Iris Ben-David Hadar.

Summer 2015 Intensive course “Inequality and the Changing Distribution of Income,” Department of Economics and Management, Taranto University, Italy. Invited and hosted by the university.

2013-2016 PhD in the Economy of Education, Bar-Ilan University (Presidential Scholar). Doctorate: “Educational Inequality Indexes in Israel.” Advised by Dr. Iris Ben-David Hadar and Dr. Yosef Klein.

2008-2009 MA in Management and Logistics, Bar-Ilan University. Thesis: “Workers’ Logistical Philosophy and Preparedness in Emergencies and Peacetime in the Business Sector and the Army.” Advised by Prof. Uriel Spiegel and Dr. Yuval Hadas.

2006-2008 BA in Logistics and Economics in program for outstanding students with direct track to MA, Bar-Ilan University.

**Employment:**

2017-present Lecturer in MA program (courses in Educational Policy, Quantitative Research, and the Economy of Education). Hemdat Hadarom College.

2015-present Academic Coordinator (MA) in the Hadar Goldin Leadership and School Management Program, School of Education and Security Services Department, Bar-Ilan University.

2008-present Lecturer in courses: The Economy of Education, School Financing and Budget Management, Statistics I, Statistics II, Computer Uses, Intro to Microeconomics, Intro to Macroeconomics. Bar-Ilan University.

2007-2012 Project Coordinator in the Unit for Contractual Curricula, the College Administration, Bar-Ilan University. The job consisted of managing two workers, providing personal advice to clients, marketing and constructing curricula, constructing a budget framework, and tracking routine activity.

2006-2012 Chairwoman of the Labor Party’s Young Guard in Ashkelon. In the context of that job, I participated in delegations in Israel and abroad (sponsored by the EU), organized national and international conferences, and sat on various committees.

**Book Chapters:**

Dadon-Golan, Z. (2018). (In)equality in the Israeli Education System. Trends and causes: 2001-2011. In I. Ben-David Hadar (eds.), *Education Finance, Equality and* *Equity*, Springer (in press).

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**Peer Reviewed Articles:**

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**Research Grants:**

2018 The Research Authority, Hemdat Hadarom College (NIS 10,000).

2014 The Research Foundation of the National Insurance Institute—Research and Planning Administration.

**Scholarships and Prizes:**

2018 Best Article, CIES—Comparative and International Education Society.

2013-1016 Presidential Scholar for Outstanding PhD Candidates, Bar-Ilan University.

2013-2014 Sparks of Dawn Scholarship for Outstanding PhD Candidates, Bar-Ilan University.

**Research Conference Presentations:**

Dadon-Golan, Z. (September 2018). “The effect of higher education on one’s rate of political tolerance and one’s stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict: Is it so?” Hemdat Hadarom College.

Dadon-Golan, Z. (June 2018). “From equal allocation to equality of opportunity in education – round table.” “At the Forefront of Educational Research” conference, School of Education, Bar-Ilan University.

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**Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire**

Dear Student,

I am writing to ask for your help with my study, which seeks to examine whether students with special needs (learning disabilities and physical handicaps) have the same access to higher education as students without special needs.

I am interested in your honest personal opinion. If you do decide to participate, it is very important that you fill out all parts of the questionnaire so that I may receive an accurate and reliable assessment of the current situation.

**The questionnaire is completely anonymous**and its results will be used for research purposes only.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation!

Dr. Zehorit Dadon-Golan

Zohar643@walla.com

**Demographic data:**

1. Sex M / F
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. I am: Jewish / Arab / Druze / other
4. I live in: the North / the South / the Center / Jerusalem
5. My father’s approximate income (in NIS) is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. My mother’s approximate income (in NIS) is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. My father went to school for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years
8. My mother went to school for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years

**Academic data:**

1. Did you sit for the full Matriculation Certificate? Yes / No
2. If you did, what was your Matriculation Certificate average? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Did you sit for the Psychometric Entrance Test? Yes / No
4. If you did, what was your combined score? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you applied to an institution of higher education? Yes / No
6. What type of school are you currently attending? A university / A private college
7. What course of study are you currently pursuing? Social sciences / Exact sciences / Engineering / Healthcare professions
8. What is your expected grade point average at your institution of higher education? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Were you accepted to an institution of higher education? No / Yes / Yes – I was accepted through Affirmative Action

**Health data:**

1. What type of disability do you have? Learning disability / Physical handicap
2. Do you qualify for a disability percentage? Yes / No
3. If you do, what is that percentage? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you receive any type of financial aid from the government? Yes – from the National Insurance Institute / Yes – from the Defense Ministry / No