**Research Team Leadership in the Humanities and Social Sciences**

Position Paper, Israel Young Academy

Prof. Jennifer Oser, Ben-Gurion University

**Section I: Academic Excellence (300 words max)**

My academic contributions are informed by my strong motivation to answer two fundamental questions in political science: Why do people participate in politics? And how does political participation relate to representational outcomes? These seemingly straightforward questions are surprisingly difficult to answer from an empirical perspective, requiring collaborative “basic science” research that advances creative multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks along with sophisticated multi-method research designs.

To date, my published contributions on these topics include two edited volumes, seven refereed book chapters, and 26 peer-reviewed articles in diverse disciplinary venues, including sociology, communications, public policy, psychology, history, and statistics. My scientific approach is characterized by independent leadership, as evident in my modal author position for peer-reviewed articles of first or sole author; as well as by deeply collaborative inquiries, with 19 co-authors who have Google Scholar profiles, including colleagues from multiple unrelated groups of international scholars and several current and former students. The modal article impact factor rank of these articles is the first quartile (Q1 Essential Science Indicator), and the strong positive trajectory of the impact of my work is evident in Google Scholar trend data.

A recent publication that symbolizes the substance and excellence of my research is a lead-authored article that uses multilevel meta-analysis techniques to investigate how political efficacy relates to online and offline political participation (Oser et al. 2022)—published in the top 1% of political science journals, and includes among the co-authors a former student that I began mentoring as a BA student. A related work in progress is a co-authored manuscript titled “Collective Action and Organizing” (Han, Baggetta & Oser 2022) that has been conditionally accepted as an authoritative synthetic review in the *Annual Review of Political Science*, which is currently the #1 ranked journal of the 188 journals in JCR’s political science data.

**Section II. Vision for Proposed IYA Project (1,000 words max)**

The excellence of my academic record has also come to fruition in a successful grant application record, which is the motivation for my proposed IYA project. Informed by the research produced in the context of my two sole-PI Israel Science Foundation personal research grants (2016-2020 and 2020-2024), I am still becoming acclimated to the recent news announced in November 2022 that I have been awarded a 5-year European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant, scheduled to launch in May 2023.

The vision for my proposed IYA project, *“Research Team Leadership in the Humanities and Social Sciences”*is to lead a collaborative effort to systematically gather and share information to promote best practices and policies for leading relatively large research teams in Israel in the humanities and social sciences (henceforth: “HUMSOS”). The primary focus of the proposed project is to support current and future ERC PIs in HUMSOS in Israel, as well as HUMSOS researchers who have similarly large research teams. Even for researchers who critique various aspects of the ERC funding scheme (e.g., Follesdal 2019) there is no doubt that the ERC grants play a major role in shaping conceptions and practices of contemporary academic excellence in Israel, which requires those who care about academic excellence to grapple with its intended and unintended effects on Israeli researchers.

My strong personal motivation to advance this project is a direct result of my excitement and trepidation of launching my own ERC project. My trepidation is deeply felt, as the same month that I learned the news of my ERC grant win, I learned that a highly valued colleague made a final decision to leave academia after a very challenging period of serving as a PI for an ERC grant in Europe. A main source of the difficulties that this particular colleague faced is a challenge that I have discussed with several ERC PIs in HUMSOS, namely the intense work required to rapidly establish a relatively large research team, which has not traditionally been a common approach for conducting high-level research in HUMSOS fields.

This challenge for HUMSOS PIs has already been documented in the research literature in a fascinating article about ERC Starting grant holders (Beerkens 2019), recommended to me as a cautionary piece of research. This study describes the research groups of social science ERC PIs (in contrast to natural science PIs) as inherently “volatile” and very likely to dissolve the moment the grant ends (Beerkens 2019: 268). Further, the study reports that ERC winners in HUMSOS (in contrast to natural science PIs) are not likely to develop a more productive publication record in comparison to short-listed non-winners. While the study discusses the shortcoming of bibliometric measures in HUMSOS as a main potential reason for this finding, my instinct based on conversations with colleagues thus far is that another potential explanation is the sudden and intense administrative burden of creating these HUMSOS “popup” research teams. Since the average ISF grant in HUMSOS is around $200,000 this means that winning an ERC requires a sudden leap to manage seven times as much funding and research activity—a quantum leap that cannot be successfully managed by incrementally building upon prior skills, infrastructures, and policies.

To address these challenges, my vision for this project operates on two distinct but interconnected levels: **(1) Individual-level** support for current and future ERC PIs in HUMSOS, and **(2) Promoting policies and practices** at the institutional and national level.

At the first level of **individual support**, the IYA can play a key role in *information-gathering and sharing* across individuals and institutions, *facilitating collegial community* among similarly situated colleagues, and providing opportunities for *skills-building and strategy sharing* related to discrete team leader tasks and skills. Strategies for this individual support promotion can include conducting a survey and individual meetings to gather information on institutional policies and conditions to prepare an IYA report (e.g., percent teaching release, types of administrative support); facilitating group meetings online and/or in-person on specific topics relevant for ERC PIs; facilitating periodic “spotlight” meetings that highlight the best practices and dilemmas of specific PIs and their research teams; and facilitating collegial community through periodic celebratory gatherings of recently awarded ERC PIs in HUMSOS across all levels (Starting, Consolidator and Advanced).

This first level of promoting individual-level support will directly inform the project’s second level of **promoting policies and best practices**.An example of a potential policy to consider promoting is to encourage Israeli universities to maximize and standardize teaching release percentages for ERC PIs, in line with practices in many European universities. An additional illustrative proposal with particular importance for HUMSOS researchers would be to follow a practice already in place in several European countries to identify fundings sources through universities or national foundations for researchers who advance to the step two interview but do not win the binary yes/no grant decision. Since there are so few large grant sources in HUMSOS, this type of funding policy would incentivize HUMSOS researchers to be willing to invest the intense initial work required to prepare a large-scale grant application like the ERC, which cannot be easily “recycled” to other funding sources, and would strengthen researcher onramps for building up to an ERC-scale research team.

Relevant for IYA’s vision of supporting underrepresented faculty to advance research excellence in Israel, it seems that the challenges related to research team leadership seem to be particularly intense for those in the Starting category (compared to the mid-career and advanced categories), for underrepresented academic groups such as female and minority researchers, and for researchers in institutions with less than average ERC grant management infrastructure (e.g., Follesdal 2019). While I am keenly attentive to these expected additional burdens as a Starting Grant female PI in an institution that has only one other recent ERC HUMSOS PI, I believe that the proposed project can yield beneficial resources for all ERC PIs in Israel, including those in the natural sciences, if conducted through a respected academic organization such as the Israel Young Academy.

**Section III. Commitment to Active, In-Person IYA Participation**

I commit that I do not intend to go on sabbatical abroad in the first academic year as a member of IYA if selected.

**Signature of Candidate**

Prof. Jennifer Oser: Date: XX.1.2023

**References**

Beerkens, Maarja. (2019). "The European Research Council and the Academic Profession: Insights from Studying Starting Grant Holders." *European Political Science* 18 (2):267-74. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-018-0166-7>

Follesdal, Andreas. 2019. "Introduction: The European Research Council @ 10—What Has It Done to Us?" *European Political Science* 18 (2):234-6.

Han, Han, Matthew Baggetta, and Jennifer Oser. (2022). “Collective Action and Organizing” [Manuscript in progress; formal invitation of conditional acceptance to *Annual Review of Political Science* received: April 18, 2022. Manuscript due date: July 26, 2023. Expected publication: Volume 27, June 2024].

Oser, Jennifer, Amit Grinson, Shelley Boulianne, and Eran Halperin. (2022). "How Political Efficacy Relates to Online and Offline Political Participation: A Multilevel Meta-Analysis." *Political Communication* 39 (5):607-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2086329>