

# Bilkent University

## Strategic Plan

*A World Class Academic Community*®

2016

Approved by Senate: 20 Sept 2017

Submitted to the Board of Trustees: 28 September 2017

Ankara, Turkey

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## Foreword

Since its inception in 1984, Bilkent University has grown to become a model university, known for its innovative approaches and structure not only in Turkey but also around the world.

Now in its third decade, Bilkent faces numerous changes and challenges, many of which are formidable: laws governing higher education in Turkey, an increase in the number of state and nonprofit foundation universities in Turkey, a resurgence of demand for students around the world, an emphasis on rankings of universities, new technologies for education, and, as importantly, a rapid increase of knowledge in many fields. Many nations now view universities as an essential part of their economic engine, and are adjusting funding priorities and expectations accordingly.

Against this backdrop, Bilkent University has begun the process of re-evaluating its place in the world and developing a road map that will further its educational goals and vision. Through this process, we are addressing fundamental questions, i.e., How do we deliver the best educational opportunities to our current and future students? How do we make sure that our creative works will have high impact and contribute to the well being of the society in Turkey, in the region and the world? How can we accomplish our goals so that we continue our role as an innovative leader in higher education?

Bilkent's primary goal is to become a world-renowned university that attracts the best students, as well as outstanding faculty, researchers and visitors who collectively educate tomorrow's professionals, scholars and leaders. Our strategy is to focus on people, individually and as a community, attract and retain the best, and enable each to reach his or her potential. Guided by this goal and supported by our strategy, Bilkent University hopes to contribute to the solutions of problems facing our world today.

Accomplishing such noble goals, of course, requires resources. Our top priority will continue to be human resources, followed by physical and or-

ganizational resources. Recognizing that financial resources are the necessary enablers of a strong infrastructure, Bilkent has been structured by its founder, the late Professor İhsan Dođramacı, as a distinctive, financially self-sufficient university. The strategic plan outlined in this report is an attempt to continue his vision for Bilkent<sup>1</sup>.

The plan has two parts. The first part describes the vision for Bilkent, essentially re-stating the vision of its founder the late Professor İhsan Dođramacı, followed by a brief summary of where we are, who our peers and other aspirational universities are, as well as strengths and weaknesses, external conditions, opportunities and challenges. Part I concludes with a description of the process used to develop the plan and outlines the long-term strategic priorities of the University. Part II of the report outlines more specific issues that have been raised during the planning process. While not all are necessarily strategic, they have to be addressed to continue progress towards the vision outlined in Part I. The second part of the report is designed to be updated more frequently than the first part and is mostly for internal use.

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<sup>1</sup>Many actions already have been taken in response to the needs identified and suggestions that were made during the strategic planning process, as noted in the document.

# **Part I: Mision, Vision, and State of the University**

## **1 Mission of Bilkent University**

Bilkent University was founded to provide an environment for learning and intellectual growth encompassing the sciences, technology, humanities and the arts to serve human welfare and to foster peace on earth.

Education at Bilkent is not simply a means to pursue a vocation, a career. Instead, it endeavors to nurture students in the way of thinking and of learning to learn. With its diverse educational programs, scientific and scholarly research endeavors, and artistic and cultural activities, Bilkent University aims to help students develop themselves as critical, analytical and independent thinkers and life-long learners, so that they may become the competent, creative, broad-minded, ethical and socially responsible leaders of tomorrow who will contribute to the advancement of humanity.

The educational philosophy of Bilkent University is founded on the premise that those who produce new knowledge also have the best potential to impart it. Our academic staff are exemplary, and scholarly research at Bilkent extends across a wide spectrum. From nanoscience and nanotechnology to political science, from electronics to economics, from fine arts to management and industrial engineering, from philosophy to computer engineering, and in many other areas of science, letters and the performing arts, Bilkent University provides a uniquely integrated environment.

## 2 Vision: A World-Class Academic Community

Bilkent is an educational community that includes Bilkent University, preK-12 schools that grant International Baccalaureates degrees, the music school, and a renowned Symphony Orchestra. Our vision for Bilkent is to be known as a world-class academic community of students, faculty, and staff who develop and implement processes and best practices to:

*Educate tomorrow's global citizens who conceive, lead and contribute to activities and solve problems for the well-being of humanity, and*

*Create and disseminate art, ideas, and knowledge that enrich humanity and contribute to the quality of life in the nation, region and the world.*

The key to realizing this vision rests with the individuals that make up the community and the stakeholders who benefit from Bilkent's successes. Together, as a community, these individuals and stakeholders will work to ensure that processes are in place to implement the decisions and activities needed to move the University forward. We also will re-examine administrative structures, as well as authorities and responsibilities accorded, to support the strategic vision of each Faculty and School.

We also envision Bilkent continuing as a financially independent institution. An important element of our strategy is to ensure sustainability of Bilkent as a leading university that for the most part depends on its own resources.

### 2.1 Vision for Educational Excellence

We envision our graduates to be educated professionals. By "educated" we mean our graduates will be able to critically think about and easily discuss, both in English and in their native language, topics ranging from

fermions to Paganini, RNA to Rothko, and Shakespeare to poverty, and other global challenges. By “professional” we mean individuals with deep knowledge and high level of competency in their chosen fields, who can pose and solve problems, analyze issues they have not encountered before, and who are able to think critically and creatively.

The opportunities for students to develop such attributes will be offered through varied attractive platforms that are integrated into the formal curricula, as well as the “informal curricula” through which learning takes place outside the classroom. The latter include skills of learning, inventiveness and creativity, leadership and collaboration, and communication.

To complement and strengthen these opportunities, faculty will be provided with support in the science of learning, skills of teaching, psychology of communication, and innovative teaching methods. Educational opportunities will be strengthened through improved infrastructure, collaborative teaching, integrated knowledge and incorporation of grand-challenge problems to curricula and classes, where appropriate. Opportunities will also arise through seminars, debate clubs, and professional clubs.

Measure of success will be the degree to which Bilkent graduates are sought after and how soon they rise to higher levels of responsibilities. An equally important measure will be Bilkent’s appeal to world-class students, both undergraduate and graduate, and to accomplished faculty candidates.

## **2.2 Vision for Creative Activities**

We envision that through their art, design, discoveries, ideas, literature and scholarship, Bilkent faculty and students will accomplish Bilkent’s mission.

Bilkent University has a dynamic academic environment that encompasses diverse disciplines, each of which can leverage another’s accomplishments and strengths. Bilkent is enriched with having targeted collaborative research activities as well as curiosity-driven, single-investigator discoveries



and other creative works. We need to support and strengthen these activities while seeking new research opportunities.

Looking to the future, we see a convergence of arts, humanities, social sciences, and literature with design, physical sciences, life sciences, and engineering and their interaction with laws and politics. Bilkent is uniquely positioned to set the agenda for such collaborative research for next-generation researchers who are curiosity-driven, need-motivated and nature-inspired.

We also see Bilkent playing an important role in meeting global challenges such as energy, environment, water, sustainability, poverty and economy. Faculty will be invited to develop processes by which we can develop new approaches and platforms to increase Bilkent's contributions through leadership. We envision the development of new sustainable mechanisms, such as centers and institutes, through which Bilkent can contribute expertise in areas such as innovation and entrepreneurship.

### **2.3 Vision for a World-Class Organization**

Our vision of the Bilkent community is a rich set of students, faculty and staff who bring the highest level of intellectual discourse to the University. To continue on the path set down by our founder, our goal is to attract, develop, and retain students, faculty and staff who are, or aspire to be, world-class. To achieve such a vision, we recognize the need to create and sustain a supportive ecosystem of operations, processes, and infrastructure that enables clear communication among all parties, open rules of governance, a collaborative environment, and suitable recognition of accomplishments and contributions.

Mentorship for professional and academic advancement that already exists in some units will be made available across the University. Criteria and processes related to promotion and hiring will continue to be better communicated. Departments and Schools that struggle to hire and retain world-class faculty will be provided assistance and schooled in best practices.

Recruitment of undergraduate students will be emphasized, particularly in those areas where student enrollments need improvement. Schools, Faculties, and Departments will be supported in recruitment activities. Undergraduate student residence halls, life on campus, advising, curricula, and extracurricular activities are part of essential information for recruitment, and will be conveyed through published and internet-based channels.

Recruitment and retention of graduate students and post-doctoral researchers are part of a worldwide hunt for talent. Bilkent envisions attracting the best who will bring new ideas and approaches to our academic programs and creative enterprises.

A world-class organization needs world-class academic leadership. We envision providing opportunities for development of next-generation leaders, along with training and a viable means of assessment.

Recruitment, development, and retention of administrative talent are also essential for a world-class community. Periodic training programs are already available for staff. Many of the administrative operations serve the community admirably well. There will be mechanisms introduced to identify exceptions for additional improvement.

### 3 State of the University

Bilkent is a research-intensive university that provides excellent educational opportunities to students. As the first nonprofit foundation (private) university in Turkey, it offers scholarships to attract top undergraduates from Turkey and increasingly from around the world. Of the 13,000 students that attend Bilkent, approximately one-half receive substantial financial support from the university.

Bilkent has a unique funding model, given that it owns numerous companies that comprise its endowment. While Bilkent has flexibility and financial independence, as all universities in Turkey, several aspects of its governance are subject to rules issued by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

Within Turkey, Bilkent is in a class by itself in terms of research and creative activities, the education it provides, and the manner by which the university operates. Bilkent has competition for students from several universities in Turkey that have perceived advantages of location, size, and accomplishments. However, with 25% of our faculty and 8% of our students coming from forty different countries, Bilkent aspires to become a “World University.”

In terms of size, areas of emphasis, and international student population, Bilkent is viewed at a level between (351-400), as compared to universities with similar or slightly better rankings, such as Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS): U. of Science and Technology of China (201-250); Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan (201-250); National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan (251- 300); Technion, Israel (301-350); and Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, India (351-400).

Bilkent is not directly competing with these universities for students, faculty, or resources. Also, given its unique funding model, it is difficult to identify comparable “aspirational” universities. Bilkent’s environment is completely different from that of, say, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, Cornell,

Stanford and others.

## 4 Global and Local Trends

Trends and external factors that adversely affect Bilkent's aspirations are both local and global.

- ▶ Intrusive and pervasive rules and laws governing higher education in Turkey that are designed to improve university processes, but in fact, hamper flexibility, innovation and improvements at Bilkent and other similar universities.
- ▶ Domestic or international rankings of universities, based on quantitative measures, often fail to adequately measure Bilkent goals and accomplishments.
- ▶ Adverse news and perceived trends in the political arena affect recruitment of faculty members from outside of Turkey.
- ▶ Uncertainty in the Turkish economy prevents long-term financial planning.
- ▶ There is the appearance that governmental R&D funds are focused primarily on development and support for industry rather than basic research, which is Bilkent's forte. Such focus causes a disconnect between researchers at universities like Bilkent, who pursue innovative ideas, and funding agencies that determine research agendas.
- ▶ There is a proliferation of universities in Turkey. The number of universities in Turkey increased from twenty-seven state universities in 1985, when Bilkent was established, to 109 state universities and sixty-nine private foundation universities, of which Bilkent was the first.
- ▶ There is a dramatic change in demographics, with a decided shift to a younger population. Currently, 25% of Turkey's population is fourteen

years old and under, and 42% of the population is twenty-five years old and under.

- ▶ Worldwide competition for talented faculty and students continues to increase.
- ▶ Quality of secondary education has dramatically decreased. English language skills of incoming students are at all-time low levels.
- ▶ New technology-based approaches to education, mostly in the USA, offer new opportunities in terms of knowledge availability and dissemination.
- ▶ Developments in technology, such as visualization and virtual reality, are not yet widely used by educational institutions.
- ▶ Advances in science and engineering knowledge continue to be deep and wide, but their integration to education and research pose new challenges and opportunities.
- ▶ Proliferation of research publication outlets make it even more difficult for researchers and universities to have an impact and to measure the significance of their findings.
- ▶ The location of the University is considered by some to be a disadvantage (Ankara vs. Istanbul).
- ▶ The relative youth of Bilkent, as compared to established universities with hereditary wealth and historic reputation, is considered to be a disadvantage.
- ▶ Faculty turnover places an extra burden on smaller academic departments, and the loss of teaching and administrative personnel creates stress for remaining employees.

## 5 Strategic Plan Studies and Priorities

### 5.1 Planning Process for the Strategic Plan

Bilkent University launched a strategic planning process in December 2011 designed to ultimately transition the university from its founding “startup” model to its stated goal of becoming a world-class center of learning and research. The preceding sections of this document regarding Bilkent’s vision, the challenges that lie ahead, and strategic remedies were enunciated as part of this process.

The first phase of the strategic planning process, from December 2011 to December 2013, was initiated by the University Administration. Four working groups comprised of University stakeholders - faculty, student representatives, staff and alumni - each issued a white paper and a set of recommendations on Teaching & Learning, Research, Quality of Life on Campus, and Wider Engagement with Society. Generally, these white papers focused on University-wide directions and strategies rather than specific strategies for each Faculty and Department.

The second phase of the strategic process, between July 2014 and January 2016, focused on Faculty and Departments. The Provost met with each Dean, and members of the Provost’s Office visited each department to learn about their concerns and suggestions. Then each Faculty and Department prepared a strategic plan specific to their respective areas considering questions that were prepared by the Provost’s Office.

The four white papers and the strategic plans developed by each unit were used as a basis to develop the following strategic priorities and the enabling actions described in Part II.

## 5.2 Strategic Priorities

- ▶ Strategically, the highest priority is the need for significant additional financial resources. Additional funds are required to support the priorities listed below and, more importantly, to realize the vision outlined in this plan.
- ▶ Projections of how Bilkent will look like in 5 to 15 years should be made on a continual basis to prevent undesirable deviations from the strategic plan. In particular, the delicate balance between the financial viability of serving a large undergraduate population of primarily tuition-paying undergraduate students and the financial burden of maintaining world-class research centers must be maintained to prevent the university from losing the value of its brand name.
- ▶ The need and strong desire for institutionalizing the University is often expressed, but actions have been slow to follow this goal. Part of the stated reasons stem from lack of a rich cadre of individuals to take on leadership roles on the campus. Centralized decision making without adequate communications also contributes to the slow progress. By its very nature, decisions and many of the activities related to the governance of the university, are conducted by few, and on a part-time basis, since all have other faculty duties. The University should prepare plans to develop the next generation leaders.
- ▶ International presence for Bilkent is another unavoidable next step in becoming a world-class university. Strategies should be developed to determine the type and venues for such presence.
- ▶ Bilkent brand should be both protected and enhanced. Bilkent graduates are perhaps the most important protectors and enhancers of Bilkent brand. Undergraduate education should be reviewed and enhanced with a core curriculum that provides an even better education to future undergraduates who have evolving attributes.

- ▶ Part of being a world-class university is having one or more highly visible programs that attract faculty, students and visitors from around the world. Having even one such program benefits an entire campus and others are able to build on it. Bilkent University should consider targeting, at least, one such program.
- ▶ There is a need to attract senior faculty in many departments who can fill in leadership roles at the University and also attract others. Attracting each such individual is almost a project itself and requires investing time and resources.
- ▶ Because of its modest resources, Bilkent should focus on its unusual, perhaps even unique, aspects to leverage external resources to the university's advantage. These include its economic impact in Ankara and Turkey, Bilkent Symphony, Bilkent high schools, and other initiatives. The success of the "Scholarship for Girls" is one such most recent example of how effective such initiatives can be.
- ▶ Finally, Bilkent should consider if there can be a synergistic collaboration between the Bilkent Holding companies and the university at a greater level than that exists today that can add value to both.