Miriam Elman to assume position of executive director of the Academic Engagement Network

BY JACKIE MIRON

Miriam F. Elman, associate professor of political science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and the inaugural Robert D. McClure Professor of Teaching Excellence, has been appointed the new executive director of the Academic Engagement Network in Washington, DC. Elman and her husband, Colin Elman, a political science professor in the same department, have been at SU since 2008. They have three children, including one currently at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School and another who is a graduate. She will be taking a leave of absence from SU to assume the position.

Elman said that the BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement on campus is "real and growing." AEN seeks to "engage and mobilize" its members on how to combat the BDS movements on campus. Elman has a wealth of knowledge of and experience with the issues surrounding the impact of the movement as it "digs deeper into the bedrock systems of universities." She feels that BDS disrupts learning, and makes Jewish students uncomfortable. Many Jewish students have reported hiding their Jewish identity as the movement crowds out other opinions and voices.

According to its website, AEN is an "active organization of American college and university faculty opposing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, standing for academic freedom and freedom of expression, supporting education and robust conversation about Israel on campuses, and responding to antisemitism where it occurs." It is faculty-focused and one of the only organizations to train professors, administrators and staff in handling situations that affect the Jewish community on campus. There are more than 650 AEN members on more than 250 campuses. AEN provides an agenda for universities to "change the campus climate" and gives advice to campus leadership. Mini-grants are provided for campus educational programs to guide dialogue and schools’ obligations to offer diverse learning opportunities for their students.

Elman believes that the AEN "has already done an enormous amount to counter BDS and anti-Israel activism on campus, to advance literacy in the study of Israel, and to promote and model rigorous research and teaching instead of the blatant propaganda that sadly all too often passes today as serious scholarship."

She says she is "excited to teach the teachers," and deliver talks at universities to "provide knowledge, strength and confidence in changing the dynamic." Much of her passion comes from the desire to make the future right for her own children as they embark on higher education.

Jewish Federation of Central New York President/CEO Michael Balanoff said, "What an honor for Miriam Elman to become the new executive director of the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) in Washington, DC. The organization is fortunate to have someone with her passion and knowledge in this important leadership position. We in Syracuse realize what an asset she is to the future of the Jewish people."