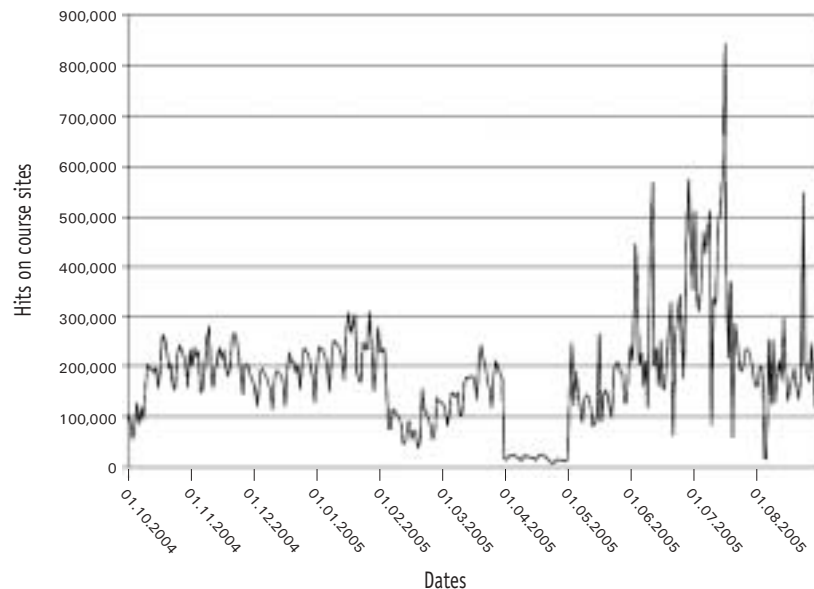


Integrating Technologies into Teaching

As a distance teaching institution, the Open University focuses on harnessing technological innovations in the service of teaching and learning.

Improvement of the Opus Learning Environment

In addition to launching a new version of the OPUS environment, extensive efforts were invested this year in improving the infrastructure and capabilities of the system in order to contend with end-of-semester loads. Performance tests indicated significant improvement and broke the record of more than half a million hits a day. The graph below shows the number of entries into course sites over the past year and the increase during exam periods.



Improvement of the Online Assignment System

The tutors' personal work environment using the online assignment system was improved this year through the use of advanced technology. Training and support provided to tutors using the system were also expanded. About 55,000 assignments were submitted through the system in the 2004-2005 academic year.

Special Projects for Enhancing Teaching Through Learning Technologies

The Open University promotes inter-disciplinary projects aimed at enhancing teaching through learning technologies in order to increase the chance of success for students with specific difficulties:

Etagar (Challenge): This project examines how learning technologies can be harnessed to enhance success and reduce student dropout by focusing on students' needs.

- The first course assignment was found to constitute a significant dropout factor. Accordingly, the University is developing a tool that will automatically report on the status of students' first assignment to tutors, enabling them to contact students who did not submit it.
- To ease students' feelings of loneliness, the University is developing a tool that will enable students to invite other students who are online, to join a conversation on the course website.

Removing Impediments: This project searches for a technological-pedagogical response to help students contend with specific difficulties in study contents. The project steering committee identified courses taken by at least 300 students each semester which have a success rate below 70%. The project focuses on identifying and developing a response to the difficulties.

Maof: Examines alternative models that integrate technologies for developing and teaching distance education courses. The project develops digital models of study material through mobile-learning as an alternative to printed material, and examines the option of offering collaborative assignments to students through Wiki systems and blogs.

- **Videotaped units:** The units are based on videotaped classes – a lecturer with a slide presentation – presented as a package that includes the material plus a study guide. This provides a rapid alternative to the development of study units, and includes the integration of visual and audio components into the material.





Road Signs

This courseware teaches you how to find online or hard copies of bibliographic sources.



Alef Catalog

This courseware teaches you how to use the Alef catalog program shared by all Israeli academic libraries.



Information Literacy

This courseware teaches you how to formulate a research question, to design a search strategy, and to assess the results of the search.



Information Databases

This courseware acquaints you with databases in the OU library, and teaches you how to select an appropriate database and use it.

The following courses are offered in this format: **Introduction to Computer Science Using Java; Teaching Literature: Methodology; Psychology of the Holocaust; Myth and Ethos in History and Cinema.**

- **Narrated materials:** Various courses, that have been audio-taped at the Aleh Center for the Blind at the request of blind students or students with learning disabilities, are being converted to a digital version. Our aim is to make these courses available to all students, thus enabling them to listen to the study material using various media (CD-Rom, MP3) or via the Internet.
- **E-books:** The development of two models of study units has been initiated. The units will be entirely online and students will be able to use different tools to navigate and search within the text itself

Nitzotz (Spark): This project makes the OPUS learning environment accessible to students with learning and physical disabilities based on international standards. Students will be exposed to a variety of assisting technologies and receive appropriate training in using the system according to their personal needs. A number of technologies which enhance accessibility to computers, information and study materials have been developed and significantly enhance the independence and ability of students with learning disabilities to deal with academic difficulties. Tutors help students to locate and use appropriate software. The technologies also enable students in peripheral areas and abroad to keep in touch and to receive distance tutoring.

Dynamic Courseware for the Library

The Open University library is the first library in Israel to offer, as of this year, comprehensive bibliographic training using dynamic and interactive online courseware. The system guides students in searching for information using all resources available in academic libraries (catalogs, databases, etc.) and includes exercises as well as online examinations to assess students' skills in using electronic resources.

Four online programs on the library website aim to meet the pedagogic needs defined by the library staff: information literacy, acquaintance with the catalog, learning to find academic material for writing a seminar paper and learning how to use databases. After studying and doing the exercises in each of the programs, the students take an exemption exam and fill out a short electronic feedback questionnaire.

Call for Proposals for Technology Use by the PBC (Vatat)

In response to the PBC's call for proposals on applications of learning technologies in higher education, about 15 proposals were submitted. The call for proposals underscored change and increased flexibility in teaching methods in courses with a large number of participants, high level computerization, reduced operating costs, and joint development with other academic institutions. Proposals for three courses were accepted: **Marketing Management, Psychology of the Holocaust, Automata Theory and Formal Languages.** The courses differ in their characteristics and for each one, we are developing simulations, taped lessons, etc.

Educational Technology Tools for Project Russia

In teaching its Russian-language academic program in Judaic Studies and in Zionism and Israel Studies, the Open University utilizes a highly-developed website and lessons broadcast over the internet.

In addition to study material, the website (<http://www.hedir.openu.ac.il>) includes links to relevant sites and a forum for the exchange of questions, opinions and ideas between students and their local tutors and Israeli course coordinators as well as among the students themselves. In collaboration with the Jewish Agency, lessons are broadcast live via the internet once every few weeks in lieu of face-to-face sessions. Students at the various study centers can pose questions in real time.