Graduates

In 2010-2011, the Open University conferred Bachelor's degrees on 3,081 students, and awarded Master's degrees to 482 students. Of the students who completed certificate studies, 99 were awarded teaching certificates. 14% of the graduates indicated that they did not have a matriculation certificate when they began studying.

"Thanks to the Open University, I did not let school interfere with my education"

Dor Bar Oz, representative of the graduates at the Spring 2011 graduation ceremony.

Mark Twain said, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." This quotation perfectly illustrates my own story. When I was young, school studies never interested me. I was quite unable to sit and do my homework or prepare for exams. I wasn't lazy and I had no learning disabilities; I simply wasn't interested. On the other hand, I might add that my teachers in junior high school made no special effort to change things. At every parents' meeting my homeroom teacher repeated the same old mantra: "The child has potential but he isn't fulfilling it. Dor shows no interest in his studies and doesn't listen in class." [...] I couldn't understand why it was such a big deal. So what if I failed mathematics, bible, literature and biology? I got a 100 in gym!

However, my dazzling success in gym did little to pacify my parents. In desperation my mother decided to approach the one and only – the school counselor. With a much more direct approach than the homeroom teacher, she simply advised my mother, "Give up, nothing will become of him." I'll never forget it because my mother was so devastated. Actually, I'll never forget it because every Saturday when I visit my parents for lunch, she mentions that counselor...

But back to the story: I was accepted only into the lowest level class in high school, better known as the "disturbed kids' class." Every high school class had a goal: medical biology, computers, biotechnology. The goal of my class was not to drop out of school. I represented the class with honor: I didn't drop out and even managed to complete my *Bagrut* (matriculation) with the respectable average of 67.

And then I went to the army. And three years later I was discharged. And then the best possible thing happened to me: I found I was bored. For the first time in my life I looked to the future and asked myself, "What do I want to do with my life?" And for the first time I realized that I want to study something – but really to study. So what should I study? I was interested in Psychology. And where should I study? At university, of course!

I made an appointment to receive counseling at Tel Aviv University, informing them proudly that I was willing to study Psychology at their institution. Sadly, my new found enthusiasm for studying Psychology made no impression on the advisor, and she recommended that I apply for a program more in keeping with my *Bagrut* results. True, Arab and Islamic Studies or African Studies were suitable alternatives, but even so, I wanted Psychology.

I understood that if I really wanted to study Psychology at a university I would have to improve all of my *Bagrut* grades (except for gym, of course...) and I was frustrated. I had to look for some other academic institution that would be willing to teach me Psychology, and that's how I came to the Open University. The Open University didn't demand top *Bagrut* grades

and I didn't even have to take the psychometric exam. The only requirement was willingness to learn, and it was my good fortune that this was the only thing I had to offer.

I enrolled in two courses in the first semester and studied diligently. I read at home, prepared all the assignments and really became connected. I felt that this time learning really came easy. I took my first exam in Social Psychology – and got a 70. I then realized that I still had a lot to learn, and a lot to learn about how to learn, and that learning wasn't really that easy.

I already had one diploma at home with an average of 70 and I saw where that had brought me. I decided to try again. I went to the second sitting of the exam. I studied, reviewed, memorized, and this time I got a 98. Wow, did that feel good! Like a sweet reward for hard work. And I decided that this was how every course, every semester, would look.

It wasn't only the interesting material and the meticulous OUI textbooks that helped, but also the outstanding tutors who delivered the material in a clear, didactic and challenging way. I continued to work hard and the rewards were not far behind: I was on the Dean's List and the President's List and awarded a grant in recognition of my achievements. I was invited to take part in the first seminar for outstanding students in Psychology, supervised by Prof. Sonia Roccas and began to work as research assistant to Dr. Shachar Eyal.

I was convinced that I was all set to take the world of psychology by storm. And then two major events occurred in my academic life. The first – as part of my practical work in Psychology, I volunteered at the Shalvata Mental Health Center, and the second – the course "Physiology of Behavior." Working at Shalvata gave me a glimpse of clinical psychology from the inside. It was a fascinating, instructional and highly significant experience, but ultimately I came to realize that this was not what I really wanted to do. The "Physiology of Behavior" course, for those of you who are not familiar with it, deals with understanding behavior from the physiological, biological point of view, and explaining the human experience in terms of the molecular, chemical and electric structures in every cell in the body and every neuron in the brain. I was enchanted.

So what combines biology, chemistry, physiology, analytical thinking and treating people? I decided to study medicine. I applied to the School of Medicine at Tel Aviv University. My *Bagrut* grades were replaced by my degree grades. I took the psychometric exam armed with the learning skills I had developed at the Open University. And I was accepted. Yes, the same institution that refused to let me study Psychology opened its doors for me to study medicine.

I am the first med student who came from the Open University. Probably also the first with a grade of 70 on a 3-point *Bagrut* in Mathematics. But I am in no way inferior to any of my classmates. Today, I am about to complete my fourth year, I make clinical rounds in various hospital departments, wear a white coat with a stethoscope around my neck, and treat patients. Those who have known me since childhood can't believe it when I tell them this story, and I owe it all to the Open University.

So if Mark Twain said, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education"; I say, "Thanks to the Open University I did not let school interfere with my education."

I would like to thank the Open University and the faculty for everything you gave me, everything you have given and continue to give to every one of the graduates here today and to those of tomorrow.