

Spotlight: Academia in High School

Gifted and talented high school students can now begin their university studies while still in high school, thanks to the Academia in High School program, which was introduced this year. The scholastic acceleration allows students to complete their university studies earlier and gives them a head start in research, industry, and R&D. The skills and knowledge gained through this program will provide a strong springboard to these talented youth, helping them achieve their professional goals at an earlier age.

Although high school students at the OUI have always had the opportunity to study a wide range of fields, the new program differs in that it offers the option of converting university courses to high school matriculation (*Bagrut*) studies. Successful completion of these courses grants the students both a matriculation grade and academic credits towards a BA.

The program is a joint governmental initiative by the Prime Minister's National Economic Council and the Ministry of Education, with support from the Budget and Planning Committee.

Components of the Program

The Academia in High School program is based on the assumption that approximately 5% of high school students will be able to succeed in college-level academic studies under the appropriate conditions, as follows:

Requirement		Solution
Freeing up time for academic studies	→	Matriculation conversion
Availability and accessibility of academic studies	→	Study at the Open University
Help with study costs	→	Grants and fee reductions
School support	→	Students mentored by course coordinators

Matriculation Conversion

Preparatory courses: Students participate in a preparatory course introducing them to the academic texts and study skills needed to succeed in a university program. The course also helps students gauge their readiness for such a program. Window on Mathematics is a prerequisite for studying mathematics, computer studies and physics, while Academic Reading Skills (specially developed by OUI for this program) is a prerequisite for all other subjects.

Transfer subjects: Prior to, and during 2012-2013, a table of 16 *Bagrut* subjects was created, covering OUI courses for full or partial conversion. Included are Literature, Theater, Art, Cinema, History, Philosophy, The Arab and Islamic World, Media, Civics, Social Sciences, Geography, Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry.

Transferring matriculation subjects: Students who successfully complete the first transfer course in their chosen subject are exempt from studying that subject in high school.

Safety net: The Ministry of Education has formulated procedures to ensure that students do not forfeit a matriculation subject, should they not complete the university transfer course(s) or if they opt out of the course conversion program. While studying their initial transferable course, students continue to study the relevant high school subject. After successfully passing the university course and gaining exemption from that particular class, they may return to their study of the subject if they return to the regular high school program for any reason. In such a case, the Ministry allocates professional tutoring assistance to help in rejoining regular matriculation studies.

Open University Studies

The OUI was selected as a partner in the project because of its unique infrastructure allowing students nationwide to take OUI courses through a network of study centers and tutoring groups. To facilitate distance learning, the OUI offers technologies enabling study via virtual tutoring and the use of course websites, online video coverage and course books in Hebrew. In addition, students have the option of completing their degree, either at the OUI, or at other institutions of higher education, through the Bridges program.

Study Fees and Grants

The OUI offers financial support to young students via a reduction of fees for their first study course and reduced enrollment fees for new students. The Ministry of Education allocates full and partial grants for needy students, determined according to set criteria. Students who are not eligible for the Ministry grant may apply for an assistance grant from the University. In the future, both the Ministry and the OUI will also offer scholarships for outstanding students, according to criteria to be determined by each.

Steering Committee and Coordinator

Participating high schools are required to appoint a steering committee and school coordinator. The coordinators hold informational meetings with parents and students, process student applications (in conjunction with the steering committee), supervise students, track progress, and serve as OUI liaisons. The Ministry of Education has allocated hours for coordinators, depending on the number of participating students in each school.

Program Launch

In April, the Open University hosted a conference to launch the program, to which participating students and school staff were invited. The event included a tour of the university's studios and the Lamda Distribution Center, riddle-solving activities, and a series of short lectures on a variety of subjects by OUI academics. Prof. Eugene Kendal greeted the participants, joined by Dr. Shimshon Shoshani, Deputy Director General of the CHE and former Director General of the Education Ministry, Ms. Dalit Stauber, Director General of the Ministry of Education, and Prof. Hagit Messer-Yaron, President of the Open University.

Preparation for 2013-2014

In June 2013, a meeting took place for school principals and coordinators interested in offering the program to their students in the coming year. In light of the data received for Spring Semester, stricter directives were issued regarding the evaluation and acceptance of students. Since many students from the Arab sector were found to be lacking in Hebrew fluency, the OUI was also asked to design a Hebrew study program specifically for this population, in order to ease their entry into the academic program.

Program Data, 2012-2013

Semester	No. of Students	No. of Schools	Courses		
Fall Semester 2012 (1 st intake)	370		Window on Mathematics	213	
			Academic Reading Skills	136	
		J'lem & environs	11	World of Chemistry	7
		Haifa & North	20	Others	14
			(12 Arab sector)		
		Center, Sharon & Coastal Plain	17		
		South	12		
			(2 Arab sector)		
Spring Semester 2013 (continuation of 1 st intake, start of 2 nd intake)	176 continuing; 110 new	50 continuing; 14 new	Window on Mathematics	58	
			Academic Reading Skills	52	
			World of Chemistry	35	
			Intro. to Computer Science	25	
			Psychology, Economics, Math, Physics	37	
			Others	93	