

Graduates

In 2014-2015, The Open University of Israel conferred bachelor's degrees on 3,202 students (62% were women, and 38% were men). An additional 24 students completed a division of studies following a degree. Master's degrees were awarded to 617 students. Of the graduates, 14% began their OUI studies without high school matriculation. (For data on recipients of bachelor's degrees, see Appendix D. For data on recipients of master's degrees, see Appendix E. For data on teaching certificates and other certificate studies, see Appendix F.)



Moshe Goldstein, representing BA graduates at the Spring 2015 commencement ceremony:

The path from an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva to a university master's degree

My name is Moshe Goldstein. I am 37 years old, married, and a father. I work as an independent insurance agent. I specialize in pension planning, risk management and finance management. I was born into an ultra-Orthodox *Neturei Karta* family in Mea Shearim. At the age of 16, I began asking questions, and chose to leave that lifestyle. The estrangement from my family lasted ten years. Since I was all alone, there were many challenges and difficulties ahead. I began to realize that in order to progress in life, I would have to get an education, even though the conditions appeared impossible. I succeeded due to determination and perseverance, and with the help of good people I met along the way.

My first encounter with studying as a secular individual began without any knowledge of English or mathematics; without understanding how $X+Y=0$. After about two weeks, I began to solve equations with two unknowns, and I earned an equivalency certificate for nine years of school. When I was 17, I enrolled at the ORT School and managed to finish with a complete matriculation certificate. After completing three years of military service, I began studying for a bachelor's degree in economics and management at the Open University, which I completed while working full time. I have just earned my master's degree.

I would like, first and foremost, to thank my dear wife, Yifat, who has supported and encouraged me all along the way. A special thanks to my "adoptive families," who stood by me with encouragement and support.

I would like to give credit to those who made it possible for me to be here today, and thanks to the good people I met on the way who supported and helped me; to the families who adopted me as a member of their households, who encouraged and helped me emotionally and financially so that I could get ahead; and of course to the Hillel – The Right to Choose organization, which helps young adults who have left the ultra-Orthodox world.

I owe the Open University special thanks for the opportunity I was given to both study and work full time, so that I may stand here today as a master's degree graduate. The tools I have acquired in my studies at the OUI enable me to develop models and solutions that help clients and the community where I volunteer, and help me get ahead in life.

The Open University's vision enables every individual to have the opportunity to acquire higher education and an academic degree, and because of this, we stand here as graduates today.



Aryeh Brender, representing graduates at the Spring 2015 commencement ceremony:

Thanks to the Open University, any individual thirsty for knowledge can overcome any obstacle

Hanoch Levin [the late Israeli playwright] said, "I would like so much to get free of myself." As opposed to him, Rachel the Poetess said, "Only about myself did I know how to speak." That is how I would like to begin. I am 45 years old, a resident of Haifa, the father of Stav and Dolev, and grandfather of Ayala and Yisca. I was a computer teacher in a high school. [...] Due to worsening diabetes, my vision became impaired, but I decided not to yield to it. With determination and the help of supportive parents and friends who encouraged me, as well as my two beloved seeing-eye dogs, I discovered The Open University of Israel – a spot of warmth amidst fear and confusion.

I would like to take you back to Fall semester 1988, to my first class in statistics towards my BA in management and education. Making my way to class on the Beit Biram Campus in Haifa, I was panting with excitement. I was concerned about many issues: Would I manage with the assignments and exams after a break of several years? How would I manage to juggle my various commitments? I was helped by a range of tools that the OUI offers students, including course websites, the library, tutorial sessions, counseling, and of course the Department for People with Special Needs. Continuing on to a master's degree, I was faced with the need to write seminar papers and a thesis. [...] Meanwhile, I became a researcher, and learned to articulate research questions related to my field of study. I broadened my education and enhanced my knowledge. Friendships were created. We learned to help and support one another when necessary.

On this moving occasion, I would like to say, personally and on behalf of all the graduating students: We have had the great privilege of becoming members of the family of OUI alumni. Along the challenging path that we have taken, we have met impressive people who were always happy to help, and it is to them that we would like to express our thanks.

I began by telling about myself and that is how I will conclude. I would like to dedicate the diploma that I have received today to my mother, Stella Brender, of blessed memory, and to my father, Feivel Brender, who should be blessed with a long and good life and is here with me. They were actually the engine that pushed me through the course of my studies. Thank you for the support, the love, the appreciation, and the patience, throughout the entire period of my research, and studies, and in my life in general.

Today, when I am asked about my profession and my education, I am more than proud to say: I am active in the framework of informal education, in making services accessible to the blind community in Israel. I have a master's degree in education from the Open University, and I am a doctoral student in the field of leadership and empowerment in education at the University of Haifa. Thanks to the OUI, I have been able to dream – and realize my dreams; to think, to believe in myself, to develop personally, and to aspire to educational research. I am certain that, thanks to the OUI, any individual thirsty for knowledge can overcome any obstacle. The gate is open and the reception is warm and embracing. In my eyes, it is the symbol of equality, acceptance, excellence, humanity, and the acquisition of knowledge and a degree. I wish us all success as we continue on our way.