Teaching

The Office of the Dean of Academic Studies, headed by Prof. Haim Saadoun, deals with university-wide and interdepartmental issues, including the formulation of teaching policies; procedures, rules and regulations pertaining to students; determination of study groups; and instruction and training of teaching staff. As part of the OUI strategic plan, the Office of the Dean of Academic Studies has focused on follow-up and retention of students, planning the strategic placement of study centers, and the opening of study groups.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, 5,341 study groups were opened for 720 courses. Study groups were offered at 76 study centers throughout Israel.

New Study Programs

- B.Sc. in Chemistry (Approved by the CHE for registration)

New Divisions of Study

- natural science
- chemistry
- earth sciences
- geology
- field studies
- molecular biology
- public law
- special education
- learning sciences
- teaching
- leadership and social change (interdisciplinary)
- computer science

New Specializations

- cyber security
- B.Sc. in Natural Sciences (Geology)
- B.Sc. in Natural Sciences (Earth Sciences)

New Courses

History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies

The French Revolution
History of the Middle East (in Arabic)
Introduction to Jewish Thought
Introduction to Kabbalah: Jewish Mysticism from its Inception to the Expulsion from Spain
German Jewry and the Challenge of Modernization (revision)
Jewish History During the Second Temple: Judea and Rome (revision)

Russian Jewry and the Challenges of Modernity (revision)
The Rise of the Monarchy in Israel: Studies in the Book of Samuel (revision)
Rome: Imperialism and Empire (revision)

Language, Literature, and the Arts

European and Byzantine Medieval Art
The Bildungsroman and Its Variations: Generic, Formal, Political and Psychological Implications
Arab Music in the Middle East
The Comedy
A History of Modern Hebrew Literature
Poetics of Narrative Fiction (revision)
The Canaanite Group: Literature and Ideology (revision)
Israeli Theater: Change and Conflicts (revision)
S.Y. Agnon: "Agunot" and "Edo and Enam" (revision)
Introduction to Poetics of Children's Literature (revision)
Introduction to Israeli Cinema (revision)
Introduction to Linguistics (revision)

Education and Psychology

Honors Research Seminar: Language and Aging
Thesis Seminar I (MA)
Thesis Seminar II (MA)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (revision)
Brain and Cognition (revision)
Sleep and Sleep Disorders in Childhood (revision)
Curriculum Development and Implementation (MA, revision)
Social Cognition (MA, revision)

Management and Economics

Strategic Management (revision)
Planning, Analysis and Design of Information Systems (revision)
Emotions in Organization (MA)

Sociology, Political Science, and Communication

The European Union: History Institutions and Policy
Government and Politics in Israel (revision)
Public Policy in an Era of Globalization (revision)
Introduction to Public Administration (revision)
Trends in Israeli Society (revision)
Social Deviance (revision)
Democracy and International Organizations (MA)
Africa Between Democracy and Dictatorship (MA, revision)
Protest as Political Participation (MA, revision)
Introduction to Globalization Studies (MA)
Regulation in an Age of Governance (MA)
Strikes and Labor-Related Conflicts in Democracies (MA, revision)
Contemporary Sociological Theories (revision)
Classical Sociological Theories (revision)

Mathematics and Computer Science

Introduction to Coding Theory (revision)
Introduction to Statistics and Probability for Science (revision)
Introduction to Computer Science Using Java (revision)
Introduction to Computer Vision (MA, revision)
Operating Systems (MA, revision)
Selected Topics in Algorithms (MA, revision)
Workshop: Advanced Programming with Java (MA, revision)
Image Processing (MA, revision)
Programming Languages (MA, revision)
Advanced Programming with Java (MA, revision)
Ordinary Differential Equations (MA, revision)

Natural and Life Sciences

Advanced Electronics
Critical Reading of Scientific Papers and Research Planning
Overview of Nano-materials
Advanced Topics in Wave Theory
Selected Topics in Cell Biology
Thermodynamics
Thermodynamics for Physicists
General Biology II: Structure and Function of Plants and Animals, Ecology (revision)
Seeds: Dormancy and Germination (revision)
Adaptation of Plants to Environmental Stress (revision)
Instrumental Chemical Analysis (revision)

Stem Cells: From Basic Research to Medical Applications (revision)
Plant Physiology (revision)
Receptors and Signal Transduction (revision)
Chemical Kinetics (revision)

Transfer Tracks

Transfer tracks allow students to begin their undergraduate studies within the flexible framework of the OUI, which does not require psychometric entrance exams or high school matriculation. Students who successfully complete a cluster of OUI courses as specified in a relevant transfer track, have the option of transferring to other universities. A new transfer track was opened this year for the Bar-Ilan University Faculty of Law.

School of Local Government

The School of Local Government is a cooperative endeavor of the OUI and the Union of Local Authorities in Israel. It was founded in 2013 to promote higher education among local government authorities. The school currently numbers over 750 undergraduate students who study in programs that combine the social sciences and humanities with local government studies. Forty local authorities, from Ma'alot-Tarshiha to Eilat, participate in approximately 35 study groups. In addition to undergraduate studies, forty students are registered for postgraduate studies in government and public administration (as part of the program for interdisciplinary democracy studies). This year, the first graduate students completed their studies, including seventy students from the Ma'alot-Tarshiha and Beer Sheva groups.

Structured Study Program

This past year, the OUI offered the option of structured study programs in some of the most popular undergraduate degrees. Each program is clearly structured to cover all courses in an organized manner. By planning their studies this way, the students are able to complete a degree within three to four years.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

- **Determining English level:** OUI departments are all set to implement the CHE decisions regarding English classes in higher education institutions.

- **Online courses:** Online courses in academic English have been developed this year in four different levels. The courses, financed by the Planning and Budgeting Committee, are designed for independent study and are available free of charge at http://study.onl.co.il .

Project ECOSTAR Tempus

This year, the OUI continued its participation in the ECOSTAR Tempus project, adjusting the EFL courses proposed at Israel's colleges and universities to EU standards. The OUI representatives for the project are members of the English unit and Research Authority, whose task is to verify that the OUI meets the schedules it has committed to vis-à-vis the EU. The OUI commitment includes developing learning resources to support the teachers who implement the new program in Israel.

Departmental Academic Counseling

The academic counseling unit provides support and academic guidance to thousands of students throughout their studies at the OUI. Given the special structure of OUI studies, academic counseling is invaluable to students, offering them guidance in planning their studies for each semester, and building their study programs overall. Academic advising is provided in-person, by phone, email, or via technological systems such as ZOOM. In this way, students who require guidance but may be unable to visit study centers can be assisted. Particular attention is given to students who may need more personalized attention. In addition, faculty members in each department offer academic advising in their fields of expertise.

Last year, approximately 82,500 counseling sessions were held with prospective and current students. Research carried out by the evaluation department indicates a strong correlation between consistent academic advising and student perseverance and success.

Evaluation

As in previous years, a series of evaluations were conducted in 2015-2016 to provide information and feedback on processes, trends, requirements, and level of satisfaction among various stakeholders at the Open University. The evaluation department provides ongoing feedback on different components of the teaching system, provides data and information to internal and external bodies, offers broad and reliable information resources to decision makers at all organizational levels, and identifies trends and needs. This year, the department conducted the following evaluations:

- **Use of teaching technologies:** The findings indicate an increase in the use of e-learning materials available on the course sites, and higher satisfaction among students using these technologies. Most of the survey respondents reported that they watched the filmed tutorials. An increase was also noted in the percentage of students regularly using filmed tutorials, rather than attending classroom sessions.

- **Teaching quality:** The evaluation department participated in developing evaluation criteria and methods adjusted to the OUI teaching model. This process was part of an overall organizational push to develop criteria for the evaluation of teaching quality, a trend encouraged by the CHE. Additionally, an electronic course evaluation survey was carried out via the public data and criteria survey system (*nemala*). The survey is conducted at the end of the autumn and spring semesters. It main purpose is to obtain regular feedback from students about their satisfaction with the guidance they are offered and with other aspects of the courses, such as the learning materials and technologies. Efforts have been made to increase the rate of response by limiting the questionnaire to seven questions. The evaluation department is currently working with the computer department to enable questionnaire completion via mobile phones.

- **Success rates in undergraduate courses:** Comprehensive assessment was conducted of trends and factors that might influence success rates in undergraduate courses, revealing a number of aspects that are worth rechecking. The idea of evaluating this topic together with student retention, a major focus of the OUI, is being explored.

- **Feedback from OUI graduates:** A survey was conducted among graduates of bachelor's and master's programs to evaluate studies at the OUI, academic studies for advanced degrees, integration into the academic world, and employment.

The survey's main findings show that the chief advantages of the OUI in the eyes of its graduates are the ability to combine academic studies with employment, flexibility, and the absence of admission requirements. Student expectations included the ability to attain a high-quality academic degree equivalent to that of other universities; satisfaction; intellectual challenge; enjoyment of studying; the ability to combine studies with other life responsibilities; flexible study programs and independent study; and acquisition of skills necessary to launch a career and advance professionally. About 90% stated that their expectations had been fulfilled.

Promoting Excellence in Teaching

- **Workshops and training for teaching staff**: The department for promoting excellence in teaching held workshops this year for both new and experienced tutors and for senior faculty members. Teaching instruction videos were developed, focusing on combining guidance strategies with distance learning.

- **Workshops for writing seminar papers**: This past year, intensive work was carried out with the teaching centers and with tutors on opening new writing workshops in courses and programs that have not offered them to date.

- **Observation, feedback and personal guidance**: This service offers feedback to teaching staff. As part of the service, a course coordinator attends study sessions and offers feedback to the tutor in a personal follow-up meeting.

- **Playback Theater Ensemble**: The ensemble has celebrated its third year. This year it was primarily involved in expanding the tutorial "toolbox" to include conflict settlement, listening, and greater use of humor and creativity in tutorials. A new framework of monthly meetings was added, called Meetings in the Square. Ensemble members have also given voluntary performances outside the OUI for several non-profit organizations.

Submitting assignments

The purpose of the assignment submission pilot which was started in 2014 was to examine different formats for submitting assignments. The pilot included evaluations, and the data gathered over several semesters yielded two major findings on courses in which assignments were not obligatory: The rate of students taking the final exams was higher among those who had submitted at least one assignment, and the success rates corresponded to the number of assignments submitted. At a senate meeting, the following was decided: "Fulfilling assignments is a vital factor in the learning process of a course, and in preparing students for the exam. Among other things, it creates a "dialogue" between distance learning students, their tutors, and the studied material. For the assignments to support the course and prepare the students for the final exam, they must be directly connected to the studied and tested material." The senate also decided that faculty members, in consultation with the head of the relevant academic field and the department head, should determine the assignment submission format. Guidelines were defined to determine the maximum percentage of the assignment in the final grade. In view of the above, a decision was taken to end the pilot program during the 2017 school year.

Accessibility to Higher Education for Arabic-speaking Students

- The Office of the Dean of Academic Studies set up a committee to discuss various aspects of teaching services offered to Arabic-speaking students. The committee members are: Prof. Aviad Heifetz, Prof. Haim Saadon (Chairman), Prof. Mustafa Kabha, Dr. Bashir Bashir, Dr. Moshik Lavie, Omar Masrawa, Nir Rubinstein, Yusra Hajaj, Yuval Ben-Atiyah, and Adi Romano-Yair. The committee has been deliberating the following issues: Defining goals intended to enhance the accessibility of higher education to members of the Arab community; trends in Arab-speaking student registration; the Third Hour project; and utilizing budgets from the Yad Hanadiv fund. The Department for Excellence in Teaching held focus groups with teaching centers, and has interviewed tutors in order to identify current needs and improve the teaching services offered to Arabic-speaking students.

Hebrew *mechina*/Preparatory Program

During the 2015-2016 school year, the dean of students launched a preparatory program of Hebrew courses and learning skills for Arabic-speaking students. Interest in

the program has been limited, and ways are currently being sought to continue it.

Learning tutorials offered to Arabic-speaking students include a bibliography tutorial at the library; a tutorial on learning technologies given to new students during the first week of studies; and filmed tutorials in Arabic.

Third Hour Project

The Department for Excellence in Teaching produced lesson plans in eight courses given by the Department of Language, Literature and the Arts, and in four additional courses given by the Department of Sociology, Political Science and Communication, as part of a project that offers an additional (third) hour of study to Arabic-speaking students.

New Study Centers and Teaching Institutions

The Institutions Forum received 19 requests this year from various entities seeking to offer OUI degree programs.

The following new learning institutions were approved this year:

- Har Hazon-Maghar College
- *Netiot* Association
- Rahat Branch of the Central Negev College
- A new study center was also opened in Sderot.