

Integrating Technologies into Teaching

Since its inception, the Open University put technology to the service of distance teaching. In its first years, this was through radio and television broadcasts; in recent years, emphasis has been placed on interactive online communication, both synchronous and asynchronous.

The OPUS Learning Environment

The most prominent development in the OPUS learning environment this year involved providing access to websites based on international standards, to ensure their accessibility to students with various learning disabilities. Work also continued on the computer infrastructure for improving system performance in light of the increased number of courses, number of users and amount of materials.

The Online Assignment System

Use of this system is expanding and about 85,000 assignments were submitted through the system this year, a 31% increase compared to 2004-2005 and a 183% increase compared to 2003-2004. Additional improvements were also implemented in the tutors' work environment.

Technologies for Synchronous Online Tutoring

The University currently operates three synchronous systems for conducting distant tutorial sessions: *Ofek*, InterWise and video-conferencing.



An additional *Ofek* broadcast studio was built on the Raanana campus and in the Spring semester, we began broadcasting simultaneously from two studios. This year, *Ofek* lessons were integrated into 66 academic courses and

there was an impressive increase in student use of recorded sessions on the Internet. During the war, the system was used to compensate students in northern Israel for missed tutorials.



In the Fall semester, we began to broadcast from the video conference studio in Raanana. To date, the system has been integrated into six courses. Among other things, students abroad presented their seminar papers to the teaching staff on the Raanana campus. In addition to OU teaching, the system was used for other purposes: an OU faculty member taught a course on Modern History of Israel to students at the University of Calgary in Canada; On Holocaust Day, a moving meeting took place between Holocaust survivors and high school students in Israel and in Ohio; a meeting was conducted between the *Shoham* Center and its counterpart at the University of Pretoria in South Africa; a meeting was held between the heads of the OU in Israel and the heads of the Open University in Britain to discuss issues of common interest.

Online Collaborative Learning in a WIKI Environment

In about 15 courses in various knowledge fields, both undergraduate and graduate, learning activities were conducted through the Open University WIKI environment, called "WIKIOP". Each of the courses offers a unique learning model.

The WIKI environment, familiar from the Wikipedia project, has great pedagogic potential as a platform for collaborative learning. It offers tools that enable learners and instructors to follow the development of a joint project. The WIKI environment provides evaluation tools for instructors and research tools for researchers. The activities offered to OU students replace the traditional individual assignment with a collaborative assignment. This technology and the learning model it encourages were received favorably by both course coordinators and students.

Digital Learning-Object Development

We began the development of topic-focused learning objects that will replace the expensive and lengthy development of complex CDs. These multimedia objects provide a solution to a specific learning difficulty and are available to students on the course websites. Learning objects were developed this year in a variety of topics: symmetry index, finance theory, concept maps in biology, psycho-physical laws and case studies in macroeconomics.

Vocal Study Units

This year the University offered vocal digital versions of units in 6 courses that can be heard through the course website or MP3 players.

Full Online Courses

This year the University offered two courses that could be studied entirely online: "Marketing," part of the MBA program, which is a joint project of the Open University and Tel Aviv University, and "Instructional Design and Evaluation of Computer Environments" that is studied toward a Master's degree in Education. All study materials in both courses are available to students in digital format on the Internet.

Courses Filmed in Their Entirety

This year the Open University developed study materials on video for two courses: "Psychology of the Holocaust" (in cooperation with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and "Teaching Literature: Methodology." In these courses, the filmed materials replace written study units.

CDs of "Psychology of the Holocaust" and "Teaching Literature: Methodology"

