

Teaching

Constant efforts are being invested in improving and fine-tuning distance learning, the OUI's staple teaching-learning method, with a view to increasing both the number and diversity of OUI students. The range and variety of undergraduate and graduate courses as well as study options had been expanded, and further endeavors made to render the OUI more accessible to underprivileged groups. Furthermore, a standardized mechanism allows students who complete a cluster of courses to continue their first degree studies in other Israeli universities.

The OUI offers state-of-the-art technologies, carefully adapted to various types of course and subject matter. These technologies also accommodate students registered at Study Centers where no study group has been opened. Such technologies proved highly efficient under the constraints of "Operation Cast Lead" as well as the teaching staff strike.

Courses taught for the first time

MA in Cultural Studies

Society, Culture and Representation
Multiculturalism in Israel
Theories and Approaches in Cultural Studies
Anthropological and Sociological Approaches to Cultural Studies

Department of History, Philosophy and Judaic Studies

Contemporary Philosophy of Mind

Department of Literature, Language and the Arts

History of Western Music I
Myth and Ethos in Israeli Cinema
Theater and Society

Department of Management and Economics

Non-Linear Optimization Methods
Performance Appraisal at Work: Evolution and Change (MA)
Advertising Management (rewrite)
Survey Methodology (rewrite)

Department of Sociology, Political Science and Communication

The Political Economy of Israel
Workshop: Video Editing in the Digital Era
Democracy and Mass Communication (MA)
Diplomatic History of the 20th Century: 1900-1945 (rewrite)
Sub-Saharan Africa in International Relations (rewrite)
Religion, State and Politics (rewrite)

Department of Education and Psychology

Teaching Social Sciences: Practical Training (Practicum)
Psychological Testing: Theory and Practice (rewrite)
Physiology of Psychology (rewrite)
Implementing Innovations in Educational Systems (rewrite)

Department of Mathematics and Computer Science – Computer Science Division

Data Mining
Operating Systems (rewrite)
System Programming Laboratory (rewrite)
Compilation (rewrite)
Image Processing (MA) (rewrite)
Computer Organization (rewrite)

Department of Natural Sciences

Biological Aspects of Industrial Microorganisms
Quantum Theory II: The Chemical Bond
Wave Transmission and Antennas
Analytical Electromagnetism
Nerve Cells: Introduction to Neurobiology (rewrite)

Programs and Study-Options

Approved by the Academic Committee

- BA in Social Sciences with a division of studies in Public Law
- BA in Social Sciences with a division of studies in Business Law
- BA in Social Sciences (Political Science)
- MA in Social Sciences (Public Administration and Policy)
- Program in Literature toward a dual-disciplinary BA

Flexible Options for

Dual-Disciplinary Studies

Dual-disciplinary programs already available to students, were offered on a flexible basis for the first time this year. A student may choose any combination of disciplines from a list of pre-designated options; a special committee deals with applications for special dual-disciplinary combinations outside this list.

Changes in Disciplinary Regulations for Students

In the course of their work over the years the university disciplinary authorities have found lacunas in disciplinary regulations. These lacunas were compounded by new developments in technology, particularly in distance learning based on computer networks. New issues needed to be addressed, such as: Is damaging the OUI's computer network an offense? Is sending advertisements to fellow students via OUI's computerized database a punitive offense? Should students' attempts to buy seminar papers on the internet be brought before a disciplinary hearing? Do disciplinary regulations apply to students who have already terminated their studies but permitted to take exams? Which judicial authority is authorized to hold proceedings in extra-curricular matters? Regulations must also be bound by related Israeli legal amendments and court precedents. This year, OUI institutes therefore approved amended regulations with wider application, including representation of students before the OUI Appellate Tribunal in accordance with the law.

Teaching in Times of Crisis

In 2009 the OUI had to make special provisions in times of crisis: the first, Operation "Cast Lead", in the midst of the autumn semester, entailed addressing special needs of students living in the south; the second crisis occurred due to the strike which disrupted the spring semester. The Information Center was available for any query or problem beyond regular hours.

Operation "Cast Lead"

During Operation "Cast Lead" tutorial sessions were cancelled at study centers in Beer Sheva and Ashdod. Students were referred to other study centers in safer regions. At the end of the operation, alternative session dates were set at central southern study centers. Special exam dates were added for students in the south. Regular registration deadline for the spring semester was extended by two weeks to all students residing within 40 km of the Gaza Strip. Students who were on military duty at the time were exempted from late registration fees and allowed to defer studies to the next semester at no extra charge.

Teaching Staff Strike

The teaching staff strike lasted seven weeks during the spring semester disrupting study routines and schedules. During the strike the University assisted tutors who wanted to conduct tutorial sessions by locating classrooms, providing for their security and keeping to the exam schedule. As soon as the strike ended, tutorial sessions were again held at study centers throughout Israel. The University also extended newly scheduled tutorial sessions leading up to the summer semester.

At the end of the strike, OUI management devised solutions to assist students in coping with the strike. A "bundle of concessions" was coordinated with the Student Union:

- Students who wished to complete studies during the disrupted semester were given assistance in tutorial sessions, extra tutoring, intensive courses and increased telephone assistance up to the first round of exams.
- For students willing and able to continue the semester beyond the original date, i.e. after the first round of exams, tutorial sessions were continued and extra tutoring was available until the second round of exams.
- Bringing the 2009 spring semester to its successful close was based on intensive tutorial sessions. However, due to the pressed time table, students were not charged for intensive tutorial sessions if they opted for completing the course during that semester.
- Students unable to complete their spring semester courses, despite assistance and accommodations, were given the opportunity to defer courses to next year at no extra charge.

Moreover, a special committee was appointed to handle requests that fell outside the framework of the agreed accommodations.

Teaching Staff Training

In 2009 teaching staff training programs increased considerably. However the teaching strike prevented their full implementation. In addition to a mandatory training program for new tutors and course coordinators, tailor-made training programs were offered to teaching staff, with a view to enhancing OUI's strategic teaching and study goals. Special emphasis was placed on subject matter and underprivileged groups.

This year appr. 150 new tutors, 160 veteran tutors and 30 course coordinators, new and experienced, participated in training programs. Topics discussed included various aspects of tutoring: heterogenic classes, learning skills, training theory and practice, new students, the Arabic-speaking sector, advanced students, coping with burnout, efficient use of voice and assimilation of technologies in teaching.

Peer group activities continued with experienced tutors meeting for a series of four workshops addressing all relevant issues. A new group of veteran course coordinators began to meet for a series of eight workshops to develop management skills relevant to their functions as course coordinators.

Teaching Assessment

In addition to routine teaching assessment in the fall of this year, other teaching project assessments continued. They included a follow-up study of students who participated in OUI study skills training programs. Its findings clearly indicate that success rates, diligence and credits accumulated were significantly higher among students who participated in training programs.

The findings of another survey, exploring attitudes among OUI teaching staff toward integrating technologies, have been published. This year's annual teaching survey included questions on online teaching. Only 5.6% of respondents in the survey stated that they had never visited the course website, while 72% stated that the site was material in getting assistance from the teaching staff. Further assessment surveys of technology related learning for various teaching projects was carried out, such as the learning patterns of students participating in online tutorial sessions.

Center for Media Studies

The Open Universtisy established a center for media studies in order to promote mass media studies. The Center will be holding seminars, conferences and workshops in related fields. The Center will also benefit the extra-academic School of Communications, Television and Multimedia, *Hasifa*. Last year a state-of-the-art multimedia lab was set up and an educational radio broadcasting studio is under construction.

Better Access for Arabic-Speaking Students

This year too the OUI held "Hebrew as a Second Language" workshops for Arabic-speaking students. Course exam questionnaires were translated into Arabic in certain courses for students entitled to write assignments and exams in Arabic. Prior to the beginning of each semester, a meeting was held for tutors teaching in the Arab sector, to familiarize them with the students' special needs. Further training was offered in the form of workshops on efficient study planning, in Hebrew or Arabic, in groups or individually. This year the demand for individual meetings and workshops in both languages increased.

New Study Center: This year the OUI opened another study center, located in the Bedouin city of Rahat, for Bedouin students.

Expanding Access to Students of Ethiopian Origin

A group of students of Ethiopian origin already completed several courses towards a first degree. Because of further needs to continue support and guidance in studying, several guiding sessions were held, with a view to enhance students' independent study skills.

Expanding Access to Students with Special Needs

There are 255 students with special needs at the OUI, including students hard of hearing, blind, with impaired vision, motor problems and chronic illnesses. All are granted special concessions in studies and exams.

Expanding Access to Students with Learning Disabilities

Training in general and field-specific study skills was offered this year to students with learning disabilities. Tutorial sessions in about 20 academic courses were preceded by special small group support sessions. In addition, online tutoring support sessions were held for "Introduction to Statistics for Students of Social Sciences" and for "Calculus for Students of Economics and Management". These online sessions were uploaded onto the course site. Furthermore,

individual counseling was given for general study skills and in particular for reaching the required level of exemption in English. Workshops were held in the use of supportive technologies in order to enable students with learning disabilities to acquire useful tools for independent study.

Melel – Adult Learning Disability Diagnostic Center

Melel conducts diagnostic tests for individuals who are studying or wish to study at one of the higher education institutes in Israel, in order to determine eligibility for concessions in academic and psychometric exams, as well as for suitable recommendations for assisted studies. Over 250 diagnostic tests have already been carried out at the Center this year.

"Academia Program" for Expanding Access to Higher Education

"Academia Program" is a unique program for making higher education accessible to residents of peripheral communities. Several years ago, *Orek Humanitary* ("Humanitarian Artery") foundation took under its wings a group of students from Migdal Haemek and Nazareth Ilit during their undergraduate studies at the OUI. These students came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and fell short of requirements for admittance to other institutes of higher education.

A steering committee accompanied the group. A year-long preparation program was planned to familiarize the students with academic studies, including English, mathematics, social sciences and a workshop in distance learning and technological skills.

Throughout their period of undergraduate studies these students were accompanied by OUI representatives, and received support for special needs. The costs of the academic package (personal counselors, support in studies and academic counseling) were financed by the foundation's funds and grants from the OUI, in return for the students' participation in community service.

The students began their undergraduate studies in 2004. The first student in the group obtained a degree in Management last year. Most of the other students in this group completed their studies in 2009.

Access to Studies for the Ultra-Orthodox Community

Students participate in a project designated for the ultra-orthodox, which is held in Jerusalem and other OUI study centers throughout the country. Many of these students need supplementary courses in mathematics and English before beginning an OUI academic course. Students were integrated into the undergraduate programs of computer science, social sciences, management and economics.

Academic Projects for High School Students

Programs for high school students continued in 2009, some in cooperation with the Ministry of Education's department for gifted students, others in cooperation with the Municipality of Ashdod, and the Pele Youth program in conjunction with the ICEF Foundation. A total of 848 high school students (1,451 enrollments) studied at the OUI this year, as well as an additional 530 (1,688 enrollments) continuing students, 51 of whom are graduate students, who began their studies during high school. Enrollments were in courses in the exact sciences, social sciences and humanities, and "A Glance at Academia", a pre-academic course.

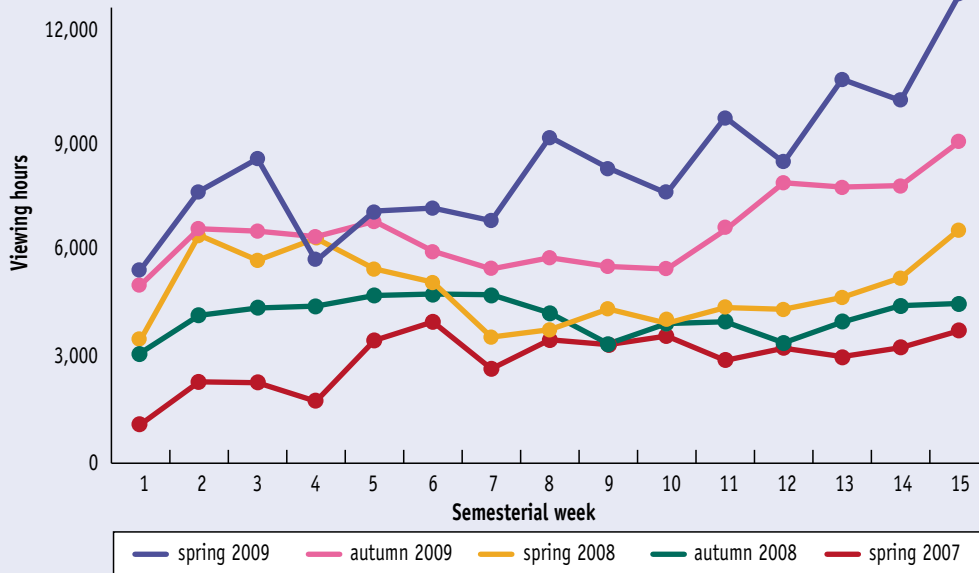
Studies in Prisons

This year an organized study group with face-to-face tutorial sessions led by a tutor was launched at Ayalon prison. Each semester the group will study one course in social sciences. Due to the success of this program, another group will open at Shita prison.

Outstanding Students

This year, the President's List included 321 students (38 of whom were graduate students) who completed their studies in 2009 with an average grade of 95 or above. About 7% were students with learning disabilities. The Dean's List includes 1,317 students, 230 of whom were graduate students, with an average grade of 90-95. About 11% of these students were previously on the President's List, with about 27% previously on the Dean's List.

Viewing (in hours) of Ofek broadcasts, by week over a semester, 2007-2009



Study Guidance

Study skills training is offered to new students during their first semesters at the OUI, with the main focus on developing and improving learning skills. The training is also offered to continuing students. As students approach the stage of writing seminar papers, the University offers them seminar writing workshops. Each semester about 3,500 students participate in these workshops and receive individual guidance at study centers throughout the country.

Increasing Student Perseverance

Across-the-board efforts to increase student perseverance at the OUI continued this year. These included tutoring new students, academic counseling, improving study skills, writing seminar papers and motivating students who had dropped out to resume their studies.

A workshop was developed with a view to training tutors for courses with a large number of new students; workshop participants were given tools to cope with issues related to assisting new students and improving their learning and organizational skills.

Hatchel project: In this project, outstanding veteran students mentored new students in three large courses in the social sciences and in one course in mathematics.

An assessment study accompanying the project has shown significant differences in the success rate of the mentored students in comparison with the control group. This difference is especially marked among students with no matriculation certificate.

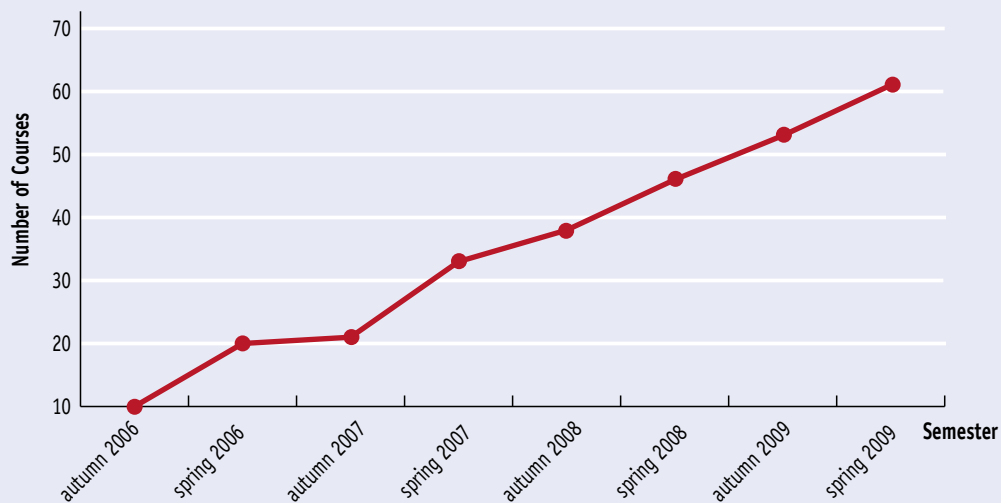
Developing field-specific study skills: A new online workshop for developing study skills was offered in the course "Microeconomics", in addition to study skills workshops for "Introduction to Microeconomics", "Introduction to Psychology", "General Biology I", and "Mass Media".

Integrating Technologies in Teaching

Integrating Synchronous Systems

The use of synchronous technologies has increased (WebEx, GoToMeeting and other tools), enabling synchronous lessons with many participants, with both tutor and students participating from home. This type of lesson allows unrestricted writing and presentations by each participant. Study groups in English, computer science, mathematics, statistics, Middle Eastern studies and Arabic have made use of these tools throughout the year. During the teaching strike these tools were utilized to broadcast lessons to additional groups. Some groups were opened especially for students with learning disabilities.

Number of courses using *Ofek studios*, 2006-2009



Opus, Learning Environment and Course Sites

Opus, the Internet-based learning environment, is an integral part of distance learning and involves both teaching staff and students via browsers available on the market. This year an advanced search engine was added to OPUS, enabling sophisticated and diverse searches. Another innovation is the use of the Rich Site Summary (RSS) content-sharing technology which transmits updates from OUI sites directly to the student's PC. In addition, an "authorization service" was developed. This service examines the identity and authorization of a user accessing other systems which do not have direct access to this information.

Collaborative Online Assignments

Last year a new type of assignment was defined, a "Collaborative Online Assignment" (in Hebrew, abbreviated to *Mamash*). *Mamash* is a cooperative internet assignment for a group of students using a shared technological tool (usually the Wiki environment). This year cooperative activities were offered to students in 15 courses as part of an assignment or as learning support activities.

Online Assignment System

Two new versions of the Online Assignment System were introduced in 2008-2009. These versions include changes

and improvements in the system interface, adaptation to the Vista operating system, the ability to download assignments without having to enter the assignment system, the ability to mark assignments handed in manually, update grades and files, grade shared assignments handed in manually by a pair of students, present detailed lists of students, and more.

Technological Training for Teaching Teams

A training program in teaching-related technologies was offered to teaching teams. The program included workshops in on-line teaching and management, accompanied by individual pedagogic counseling for each new course coordinator, workshops on teaching via video and synchronous systems and workshops on the integration of Wiki in teaching.

OUI Studios

Ofek studios and video-conference classrooms are used to broadcast (via broadband communication) a large variety of course-related tutorial sessions. They are also used to videotape learning materials (clips, expert lectures integrated into course websites), as well as to develop entire video courses for broadcasting via course websites, and occasionally for administrative tasks.



A new studio was added this year which enabled live broadcast of 64 courses during the spring semester and another studio – the fifth – is currently under construction alongside seven video-conference classrooms. Apart from regular lessons broadcast by the system, about 120 review lessons and anchor lessons were broadcast. Dozens of additional special lessons were broadcast via *Ofek* during Operation "Cast Lead", both for OUI students and for Sapir College students (in the western Negev). Due to the strike of the teaching staff during the spring semester, about 80 additional lessons were broadcast. The number of viewing hours during live broadcast and videotapes (including conference and workshop tapes) amounted to over 400,000 hours per semester, an increase of about 90% over last year.

At the end of the year we began testing a video content management system developed by the OUI. The system enables, among other things, editing of recordings, and allows both teaching staff and students to add an index and remarks to the recorded lesson.

Assignment and Exam Management – The *Matmon* System

The *matmon* system was designed to improve preparation and checking of assignments and exams. The first version of the system was installed in several academic departments and its integration is accompanied by training and an active forum. This year, an improved version was developed to enable adding options to various materials.

The system helps the teaching staff to design and assess exams and assignments, and create an exam and assignment database as well as an item bank for each course. The database affords easy and efficient retrieval by characteristics, and serves as an archive. It includes statistical data on exams over the past decade and exam questionnaires from the last three years. Designed with an advanced and user-friendly interface, the system includes a security mechanism that provides access to each coordinator's courses only.



Printed and recorded study materials are mailed from the warehouse on the OUI Dorothy de Rothschild Campus in Raanana to students' homes. 153,997 study kits and 774,045 letters were mailed this year.

Digital Archive of Seminar Papers

As of 2008-2009, students are required to submit a digital copy of their seminar paper through the *Sheilta* system in addition to the printed copy submitted to the supervisor. The digital copy is automatically forwarded to the seminar paper database which will serve as an archive to facilitate easy search and retrieval of seminar papers by various classifications: paper topic, keywords, department, course, semester, supervisor, student and search by word. The database will enable course coordinators to match special keywords to each course. The interface is advanced and user-friendly. Access to the database is open only to course coordinators who supervise seminar papers.

Library Improvements

State-of-the-art Library Catalog

Two automatic functions were added to the catalog. The first is a weekly update of the OUI library collection in the Israel University Libraries Network. The second is an automatic monthly update of catalog listings to electronic journals to which the OUI subscribes, as well as to free cataloged journals.

New Services

A new service available at the library allows email supply on demand of scanned journal articles or page(s) from a book. Another new service is an SMS reminder of due dates for returning books.

Academic Studies in Russian

Project Russia is an academic program for teaching Judaism and Israel studies in Russian in the Commonwealth of Independent States. This year about 20 different courses in Russian were taught, including five advanced courses in which the students could write seminar papers. Approximately 5,600 students studied in about 300 cities and towns. The teaching process is assessed on a regular basis.

The number of tutors and instructors in the Commonwealth of Independent States was reduced this year due to budget cuts, thereby increasing the use of the project's renewed website.