

Foreword



In 1980, the Council for Higher Education licensed the Open University of Israel as a higher education institution authorized to award undergraduate degrees. Two years later, the first 41 students completed their studies and graduated. This year, we awarded a record 3,393 undergraduate and graduate degrees, and next year our total number of graduates will exceed the 30,000 mark. Open University alumni are involved in every branch of Israel's economy and society, together with tens of thousands of additional students who have taken our academic courses and completed their studies at different higher education institutions in Israel. For many, the Open University was the only way to acquire academic education.

The Open University continues, with marked success, to fulfill the task imposed on it by the Government of Israel in its decision of August 19th, 1972 to establish an "Everyman's University," that would enable all who so desire to experience high quality academic studies but award academic degrees only to those capable of fulfilling its requirements.

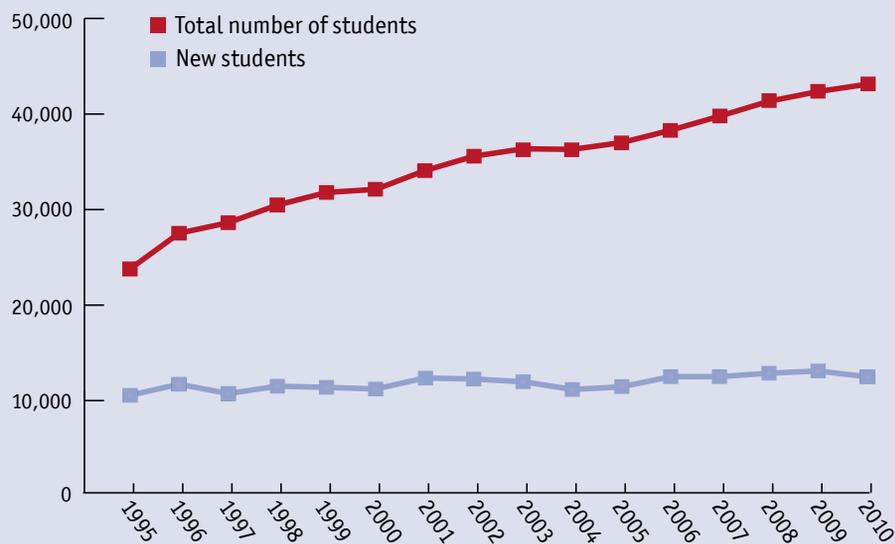
During the 2009-2010 academic year, the Open University had some 43,000 undergraduate students and about 3,500 graduate students (as well as many thousands more pursuing extra-academic OUI studies). Students in the academic track took an average of three courses per year. The growing number of OUI students annually, and accordingly, the

number of graduates, has continued unbroken since 1976, when the first semester of studies began.

The figure shows that over the past 15 years, while the number of new students has remained relatively constant, continuing students are increasingly persistent in their studies and taking more courses, with the result that larger numbers of students are completing their degrees. This is a welcome achievement for which many at the Open University are responsible – those who develop and produce the courses, those who are in contact with the students, and in particular the Office of the Dean of Academic Studies and the Teaching Services System, the study centers located around the country and, of course, the teaching staff, course coordinators and tutors, who represent the link between the study materials and the students. We must take measures to sustain and improve this trend. This is certainly possible as long as we maintain the current academic level while expanding the range of tools available in each and every course and ensuring continuing enhancement of support for students, especially for those who are more advanced.

We also see from the figure that the Open University – as it presently functions – recruits some 11,000-12,000 new students each year. It is essential to maintain these figures, while at the same time, we should strive to reach new populations and expand the numbers of students joining us annually.

Accessing new student communities necessitates the development and application of additional mechanisms beyond those already proven appropriate for existing populations. The most important one is fully online studies, which enables us to reach populations different from current OUI students. Typically, most students achieve the goal of an academic degree via independent study in combination with intensive tutorial sessions, which also offer them a feeling of campus life. But others may prefer online studies: whether knowledge seekers worldwide with an interest in OUI courses, or a young, technologically literate population for whom the absolute flexibility of fully online study is appealing. To date, the University has used technology mainly for "conventional" tutorial sessions where physical contact is replaced by video conferencing, as in synchronous *Ofek* sessions. Such tutorial sessions resemble face-to-face sessions, with a broader range of possibilities owing to the technological format. In fully online studies, there are no interactive or synchronous



Undergraduate students enrolled each year between 1995 and 2010, and the number of new students enrolling each year

sessions; instead, students draw materials from the Internet according to their requirements and abilities – and at their own will. This is not a format suited to the majority of students currently enrolled at the Open University, who seek interactive contact with their tutors. It is, however, possible that a new study format will attract a new and different kind of student. The technological ability of the Center for Technology in Distance Education (*Shoham*) is evident in the *Pe'er* Project, which offers the general public free Internet access to dozens of books studied in academic courses, to audio recordings of those books, and to a wide selection of digitized academic materials developed by the teaching staff. Such technological skills make it possible to break through national barriers and in fact, in 2010, we created our first Russian-language online study program, available on the Internet in the 2010-2011 academic year.

The new study program is designed for Russian speakers worldwide and is based on Project Russia, which was conducted by the Open University over the past 17 years. That project included the translation into Russian of 24 of the OUI's academic courses, which were distributed by various Jewish institutions to many thousands of Jews in the former Soviet Union. In our new program, all the study materials are on the Internet and an online study model for Russian-language courses was developed, based on the books translated for Project Russia. These courses are

intended for the 80 million Russian-speaking Internet users worldwide. We invite them to pursue unique, high quality, academic studies on a variety of interesting subjects, with a primary focus on Israel and Judaic Studies. The program offers a track enabling students who complete it to be awarded a Bachelor's degree from the Open University. The first year of the program's operation will be a pilot, allowing us the opportunity to investigate the option of organizing online studies in other languages to similar knowledge seekers around the world – an innovation holding great potential for attracting an even wider public to Open University courses.

Another major development this year was the introduction of amendments to the Open University statutes. At its meeting of May 12, 2010, the University Council approved amendments to the Open University Statutes and General Regulations. The amendments focused primarily on a change in the division of powers between the Council and the Executive Committee. The main result of the amendment is that the corporate structure of the Open University now conforms to the principles of the Grossman Report as adopted by the Planning and Budget Committee (PBC – *Vatat*). It also reflects the recommendations of an internal academic committee. The Grossman Report set forth the requisite organizational structure for universities, the administrative and academic hierarchy, and distribution

of powers among the bodies functioning within the universities. These principles were adopted by implementing the required changes, with adaptations necessary to suit the unique character of the Open University. The names of some University authorities were also changed: the name of the Executive Committee, while remaining the same in English, was changed in Hebrew (from *Va'ad haPo'el* to *Va'ad haMenahel*), while the Academic Committee became the Senate. Thus, the names of OUI authorities and their characteristics were matched to parallel bodies in other universities. Furthermore, sections of the Statutes and General Regulations were also amended and altered to bring them into line with the times and with technological developments. Overall, this contributed to making the administrative conduct of the Open University comparable to that in force in other universities, as well as intensifying the academic faculty's involvement in the University's functioning.

This year the Council for Higher Education (CHE) approved, as it does every year, new study programs for the Open University: one in Film Studies and another in Special Education. The latter was first submitted to the CHE for approval some seven years ago (!). To avoid repetition of such an occurrence, we initiated a work arrangement with the CHE that aims to prevent delays and to accelerate the approval of new Open University study programs. In order to streamline processes vis-à-vis the CHE and the PBC, a model for study programs specific to the Open University, based on a pool of existing and currently studied courses, was characterized. We proposed that such programs, which comprise the majority of undergraduate programs submitted for CHE approval, should be eligible for a fast-track approval process. After receiving agreement in principle following discussions with the heads of the PBC and CHE, the proposal for this innovative procedure was then submitted for approval by the CHE plenary. It is my hope that we will soon be able to further expand the study programs offered by the Open University, based on the hundreds of courses already available.

In addition, this year, for the first time, an inter-university BA program in Africa Studies to which the OUI is a partner, was approved. This is only the beginning of a trend toward cooperation between universities on new study programs, which we are keen to promote in the coming years.

Last year's President's Report was issued at a time of turbulent working relations that reached their peak in a strike by the teaching staff in April-May 2009. We were concerned with work relations at the University during this year as well. Negotiations were conducted with the aim of signing a collective agreement with the administrative staff, which unionized under the auspices of the *New Histadrut* (Labor Federation). Negotiations continued with course coordinators and tutors, who unionized under the auspices of *Koach La'Ovdim* – Democratic Workers' Organization. In contrast to the unstable atmosphere of a year ago, the two negotiation tracks proceeded this year with no crises. The first to bear fruit were negotiations with the *Histadrut* and, for the first time in the Open University's history, a collective agreement was signed in June 2010 to formalize working conditions for members of the administrative staff. Negotiations with course coordinators and tutors continued through a mediation process, leading to agreements concluded on Sept. 21, 2010. Hopefully, reaching these agreements marks the end of a significant process of change at the Open University toward collective work relations. The OUI has always been capable of coping with change and indeed has been further strengthened by crises encountered along the way. I feel confident that the present change will contribute to increasing the degree of commitment on the part of management and staff to act in full cooperation to achieve the University's goals, while respecting workers' rights and enhancing their status both as a group and as individuals.

This is an appropriate opportunity to thank those who diligently worked to maintain and enhance what we have, while responding to new challenges: the Open University Council; the Executive Committee; the Academic Committee (the Senate); all Open University employees and our wonderful students; and now also – for the first time – the workers' committees that represent the administrative staff and the senior and junior academic faculty, which have demonstrated, and continue to demonstrate, responsibility, leadership and partnership.



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