# Teaching

Distance learning, which makes it possible for students to study anywhere at any time, is a unique characteristic of the Open University. Teaching at the OUI is constantly being improved and upgraded with the help of state-of-the-art technologies. Specific technologies are selected for each course according to its particular features and requirements. This year, there was a special focus on posting video tutorials on many course websites. The range of courses for Bachelor's and Master's degrees grew and the University's activities were made more accessible to various target groups. In addition, more transfer channels were introduced to enable students to continue their studies in other higher education institutions.

## New Programs of Study Approved by the Council for Higher Education

- Program of studies in Film Studies toward a dual-disciplinary BA degree
- Program of studies in Learning Disabilities toward a dual-disciplinary BA degree
- Program of studies toward an interuniversity BA in Africa Studies

## New Programs of Study Approved by the Academic Committee

- BA in Judaic Studies
- BA in Humanities or in Humanities and Social Sciences: Emphasis on Literature
- Program of studies in Art History toward a dual-disciplinary BA degree
- Program of studies toward an interuniversity BA in Africa Studies
- BA in Communication

## Courses Taught for the First Time This Year

### Graduate courses in Cultural Studies
Body and Culture
Jews, Hebrews, Israelis: Cultural Aspects of Jewish Identity
Issues in Intercultural Exchange and Cross-Cultural Encounters
Issues in Spatial Theory

### Dept. of History, Philosophy and Judaic Studies
Medieval Jewish Political Thought
Slavery in Ancient History
Introduction to Logic
The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Empire
The Bar Kokhba Revolt (revised)

### Dept. of Literature, Language and the Arts
Harmonic Structures I, II
Narrative: A Multidisciplinary Perspective
A History of Western Music II

### Dept. of Education and Psychology
Teaching: Art, Craft or Profession? (revised)
Educational Psychology (revised)
Integrating Learning Technologies in Various Disciplines (MA) (revised)

### Dept. of Management and Economics
Introduction to Mechatronics
International Economics (revised)
International Trade Law (MBA)
Public Policy: Theory to Practice (MBA)
Principles of Income Tax (MBA)
Labor Relations in an Era of Globalization (MBA) (revised)

### Dept. of Natural Sciences
Biodiversity and Conservation Biology
Stem Cells: From Basic Research to Medical Applications
Immunology (revised)

### Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science

Mathematical Logic

Algorithms (revised)

Research Seminar: Topics in Computer Vision and Machine Learning (MSc)

Graduate Project in Computer Science (MSc)

Research Topics in Aspect Oriented Software Engineering (MSc)

Advanced Topics in Communication: Connectivity and Network Coding (MSc)

Security in Software Systems (MSc) (revised)

Randomized Algorithms (MSc) (revised)

Modern Problems in Atmospheric Science (revised)

### Dept. of Sociology, Political Science and Communication

Media Law and Ethics in Israel

European Colonialism: Theory, Praxis and Resistance

Public Policy

Workshop: Spatial Policy, Territory and Planning

Workshop: Public Policy, the Military and Security

Sociology of Organizations

Qualitative Research Methods

Democracy and Feminism: Gender, Citizenship and Human Rights (MA)

Workshop: Writing a Policy Paper (MA)

## New Bridges to Other Universities

Transfer channels enable students to take advantage of the Open University's flexibility so they may begin their BA studies at the OUI and then, having passed a cluster of courses, choose whether to complete their degree studies at the OUI or to transfer to another university and continue their studies there.

The universities that are party to the arrangement undertake to accept any student who has successfully completed a pre-determined list of courses with the requisite grades, entirely independent of *Bagrut* grades or psychometric test results. The specific required courses are considered part of the degree program and shorten study time at the other university by about one year.

Transfer channels are especially suitable for applicants whose previous study achievements are not an accurate reflection of their academic ability, for soldiers with academic ambitions and for anyone whose place of residence makes physical attendance at a conventional university campus difficult. They also make it unnecessary for students to improve their *Bagrut* or psychometric grades, which are a prerequisite for acceptance to certain study programs.

This year, bridges were created with Ben Gurion University in Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, with Bar Ilan University in Judaic Studies and with Tel Aviv University in Humanities and the Arts, Sociology and Anthropology, and Political Science.

## Outstanding Students

In 2008-2009, 168 students (including six graduate students) achieved an average grade of 95 or over, an achievement that entitled them to inclusion on the President's List. About 5% of these students have learning disabilities. 839 students (including 120 graduate students) completed their studies with an average of 90-95, placing them on the Dean's List.

## Continuing Studies in Accounting

Graduates with an OUI degree in Accounting with a Division of Studies in Economics are eligible for exemption from some of the Israel Auditors Council final exams, which are a prerequisite for licensing as a registered accountant. In 2009-2010, the Open University launched a year-long program of continuing studies in Accounting during which the students can supplement their professional knowledge in financial accounting, auditing and taxation. Successful completion of the continuing studies program exempts students from some of the Israel Auditors Council final exams.

Open University students took the Council's exams for the first time in July 2010 with impressive results, reaching 2nd place in the overall ranking of university graduates taking the Advanced Financial Accounting exam.

Many organizational changes needed to be implemented quickly in order to accommodate the continuing studies program. These involved developing procedures for tuition payments; finding classrooms large enough for lectures to 70 students or more; and devising a special exam format.

## Improving Student Retention

This year, the perseverance of students who began studying in 1991-1993 was tracked and the findings are now being used as a basis for defining goals and taking steps toward improvement. One suggestion is to increase assistance to students who prove themselves serious and capable, to encourage them to continue their studies toward a degree within a reasonable timeframe and with high achievements. To this end, the following activities were conducted:

- A pilot project offering a workshop for Social Sciences students preparing seminar papers, begun in 2008-2009, was successfully completed. 734 students took the 6-session, 12-hour workshop immediately after completing an advanced course, and it proved a helpful and supportive framework. The proportion of students who successfully completed their seminar papers rose significantly to 83%, as compared to 68% for students who attended regular tutorial sessions.

- The project to return students who had dropped out concentrated this year on personal phone calls to students who began their studies in 1991-1993 and had already accumulated at least two thirds of the credits needed for a degree.

## Guidance for Students with Learning Disabilities

In an attempt to expand support for students with learning disabilities resident in outlying areas, regular meetings are arranged once each semester at the larger study centers. All the students are invited to attend these sessions, with three primary goals: mutual acquaintance of the professional support team and the students, delivery of specific information on activities and services available, and answers to questions and problems raised by the students. During their studies, the students are offered a variety of forms of training in learning skills.

## Accessibility to Speakers of Arabic

Three new courses in which assignments and final exams may be submitted in Arabic were offered this year at study centers in the Arab sector. The courses are "Hebrew Secular Poetry in Muslim Spain," "Hero and Anti-Hero in the Modern Novel" and "Introduction to Statistics I." In addition, tutorial sessions in Arabic were recorded and posted on the course websites to make them available to all Arabic-speaking students, including those attending study centers outside of the Arab sector.

Once again this year, workshops were held to help Arabic speakers learn Hebrew, with 88 students attending. Another workshop, conducted in both Hebrew and Arabic, taught learning strategies to Arabic-speaking students. Students learned how to obtain information from academic texts, analyze the requirements of assignment questions and organize study materials in preparation for exams. They were also introduced to various technological support tools, such as course websites, the online assignment system and *Sheilta*.

## Opening Study Groups in Prisons

Group tutorial sessions were expanded this year to additional prisons (Shitta, Ma'asiyahu and Eshel) and are currently held in four prisons. All activities are held in close cooperation with the Prison Service and its education officers.

## Study Centers

New study centers have been added to the institutions in which the Open University holds studies toward academic degrees: three in the Arab sector, one in the ultra-Orthodox sector, two in Design Colleges, another in Yokne'am, and one at the Performing Arts Academy.

This year, Raanana College and the study center in Katzrin are no longer hosting Open University activities, but tutorial sessions have been transferred to different facilities with no inconvenience to students.

## New Enrollment Methods

Online enrollment has been available for many years to continuing Open University students. This year, for the first time, new students were also able to enroll online from any location, at any time.

## Online Communication between Exam Centers and Exam Coordinators

In the past, on examination days, communication with exam teams around the country was by beeper or telephone. This year, new methods of communication were introduced, including laptops and mobile printers available to the teams at exam centers. A special two-way online system was set up between exam centers and exam coordinators. Among other advantages, this makes it possible to transmit clarifications and corrections on exam questionnaires, print out more questionnaires as required and deal with students who are not registered at the exam center.

# Filming Tutorial Classroom Sessions

The OUI Teaching Committee decided to increase the number of videotaped tutorial sessions to be posted on course websites. Implementing this decision means obtaining the cooperation of tutors and involves considerable administrative work. Tutorials from six courses were filmed this year and uploaded to the course websites for the benefit of all the students in the courses.

## Students' positions on including videotaped tutorials in teaching

A broad survey was conducted among students at the end of the fall semester. 4,687 students responded to the questionnaire (out of 17,828 students who took courses with videotaped tutorials). Their reasons for choosing to watch the tutorials were examined, as well as manner and scope of use, and students' preferences regarding learning via video.

Initial analysis of the findings indicates that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the integration of videotaped tutorials and asked that tutorials be posted on all course websites. However, the students did not agree about the effectiveness of videotaped sessions as compared to face-to-face (F-2-F) sessions. The main reason for choosing to study via video technologies was suitability
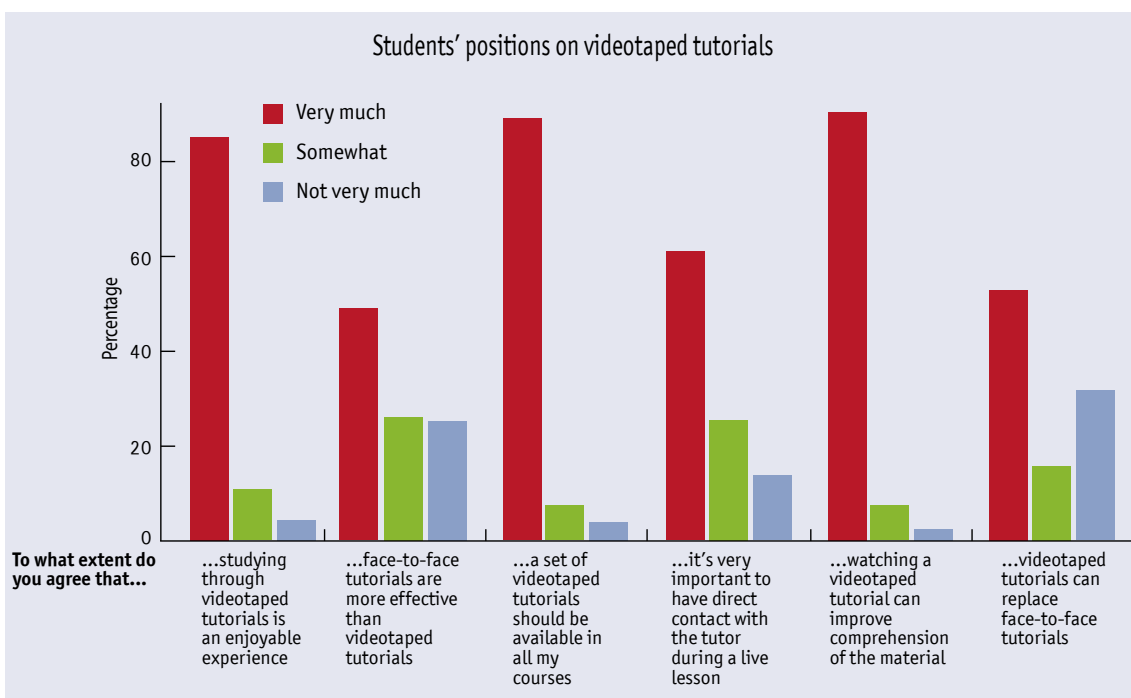
(personal constraints, saving time, saving money, suits individual pace of study and cognitive style).

## Greater use of online video material

The number of courses using synchronous tutorial sessions through various systems – *Ofek*, video-conferencing and virtual tutorials – rose from 73 in the spring 2009 semester to 101 in the spring 2010 semester. The number of hours that students spent viewing live broadcasts and video recordings also grew. In spring, the new *Elluminate* system was tried out in two courses; this virtual classroom software enables a live session to be linked up from the lecturer's or tutor's computer to the student's computer, utilizing a wide range of technologies, such as audio, video, PP presentations, writing pad and chat. The pilot was so successful that expansion is planned for 2010-2011.

An interesting experiment was conducted during the year on an advanced seminar course in Economics. The lecturer taught from a studio in Australia, while students attended and presented their seminar papers from virtual classrooms.

One direct result of the decision to add more video components to all OUI courses is the increased use of studios in the morning; four new broadcasting studios are therefore being planned. Consequently, in addition to videoed tutorials, the integration of video elements in at least 60% of OUI courses is planned by the end of 2012.



Students' positions on videotaped tutorials

## MPs Distributed to Eligible Examinees

To replace the now obsolete CDs and Discmen that were previously used in exams, the Open University has now acquired mobile players. The players contain recordings of exam questionnaires for examinees who are eligible for special examination conditions, or music recordings for students sitting for exams in music. Hundreds of students make use of this option every semester.

## Reorganizing the Information Center

The University Information Center answers general enquiries and students' questions. In order to improve service, this year the organizational structure of the center was changed and a shift management system was introduced. The results are already visible, with a significant drop in professional errors and an increase in the number of calls answered. At the same time, the number of calls refused was greatly reduced and special problems were handled more effectively. A new computerized system was implemented for identifying and managing information, which is a great help to the operators, enabling rapid and convenient retrieval of information and updates.

In addition, the Open University website now has a large database of general, frequently asked questions, complete with automatic answers. The system is active around the clock, thus reducing phone calls to the Information Center. In August 2010, the system handled 8,301 questions, of which 7,532 received automatic answers and only 697 were transferred to an operator.

## The Opus Learning Environment

The Opus learning environment, which is the infrastructure for the development of course websites, will gradually be replaced by a newer environment, though meanwhile we continue to support and update it as necessary. No new components were developed for the Opus environment this year; however, a great deal of work was done to stabilize the system and improve its performance.

## Bringing the Library into the Student's Home

As part of its distance teaching, the Open University aims to "bring the library into the student's home." To achieve this, OUI library services were extended this year to include a new experimental service that allows students to order books via *Sheilta* and receive them by mail. The books are on loan according to the usual library procedure and must be returned at the end of the specified loan period.

This new service is added to the existing service of scanning articles and pages from books that do not exist in electronic format in the library's database (or ordering them from other libraries), and e-mailing them to students. An online survey showed this service to be especially popular among students preparing seminar papers and those who used it when it was first offered were very satisfied.

Additional measures to bring the University library directly to students by expanding the collection of digital journals and books included the following:

■ The acquisition of an electronic archive from Elsevier, a leading scientific publisher, has significantly increased the number of e-journals. The purchase was made possible by a grant offered by the Planning and Budgeting Committee's teleprocessing committee to all universities, to enable the acquisition of e-journal archives. The grant covers 40% of the cost of the archive.

■ A strategic decision made this year to expand the OUI library's digital book collection gradually, is already being implemented. The library is now party to an agreement that enables sharing digital books among the different university libraries, via MALMAD (the Inter-University Center for Digital Information Services).

## Training the Teaching Staff

### Orientation sessions and technology training for new teaching staff

A format for orientation sessions for new members of the teaching staff was consolidated during the year. The sessions are designed to familiarize participants with the various organs of the Open University, necessary from the moment they begin their work: a meeting in the office of the Dean of Academic Studies, a tour of the Raanana campus, a visit to an exam day, and meetings with the Dean of Research and the Dean of Development and Educational Technology.

New teaching staff also underwent training in various technologies, including workshops in course site preparation and administration, individual support for every new course coordinator, workshops in video teaching and synchronous systems, and a workshop that focused on

the use of Wiki for cooperative online learning. Tutors were offered a workshop to familiarize them with the various technologies available for teaching.

### Training programs

To encourage professional development for more tutors, this year, options for the professional development of teaching staff increased, as did the number and variety of workshops for veteran staff members.

The programs were designed to enhance tutoring skills and course coordination, improve processes on the course and departmental levels, increase commitment to the University among the teaching staff and reinforce their sense of affiliation. New programs included planning a lesson scheduled for video-taping; using film as a teaching aid; directing an effective discussion at tutorials; structuring an effective lesson; and tutoring special needs students.

There was increased peer group activity for veteran tutors, focusing on tutoring issues they raised. A workshop was held for tutors who had participated in previous peer group workshops. In addition, a pilot was held, under joint Jewish-Arab moderation, of a peer-group session for tutors of study groups that included Arabic-speaking students.

A new round of managerial development workshops was held this year for veteran course coordinators, aiming to enhance relevant job-related management skills.

Participants in the various training programs included 70 new tutors, 275 veteran tutors, 15 new course coordinators and 40 veteran course coordinators. Several tutor conferences were also organized by course coordinators focusing on content and tutoring issues relevant to their courses. In response to requests from tutors and/or coordinators of certain courses, observations were carried out at tutorials to provide feedback to the tutors.

Tutors in one of the Economics courses took part in a special training program aimed at integrating learning skills into tutoring. Training focused on providing tools for analyzing assignment questions and preparing a draft for answers.

## Teaching Evaluation

A teaching survey portal was launched in the spring semester that enables course coordinators and tutors to obtain survey findings each semester more quickly. The new portal makes it easy to manage feedback, to follow it up, to get an overview of teaching quality, and makes it possible to focus on different components. The time needed for data processing and publication of findings was shortened.

Beyond ongoing teaching evaluation, surveys on OUI teaching technologies were also conducted during the year. These included the evaluation of patterns of use of audio books, and of pilot projects related to the introduction of new technologies such as e-books.

## Improvement of Computerized Systems to Support Teaching

**Online assignment system:** This year, a new version of the online assignment system was launched, containing changes and improvements. Of the 510,000 assignments submitted during the year, about 275,000 were submitted online (an increase of 36% from the previous year).

*Matmon* (assignment & exam management): This system helps course coordinators design and evaluate examinations and assignments, and enables the creation of a pool of exams and assignments, as well as a question bank for every course. A new, upgraded version of the system was installed this year and activity is now underway to increase its use.

**Improvement and increase of links to study centers:** The network connecting campuses and study centers was improved over the past year and the infrastructure for remote campuses is now faster and more secure. A broad, fast and secure infrastructure was also implemented for enrollment and counseling at institutions in which the Open University holds studies. An additional network was established and all classrooms, including video-conferencing classrooms, on all campuses are now connected to a single fast network under central remote management. Hook-up points were added to the wireless network on remote campuses and its functionality was improved.

**Assignment sampling:** Course coordinators sample checked assignments as part of their assessment of tutors' work. This year an automated system was developed that lists tutors and sampled assignments, and enables coordinators to receive assignments for control purposes.

## Formulation of Work Procedures for Academic Counseling

This year we began to formulate procedures and rules to serve as a basis for training academic advisors. Guidelines, procedures and operational rules were proposed and professional dilemmas and value-based problems frequently encountered by advisors were discussed.