

# Students

A "student" at the Open University is a person who registered for one or more courses and has not cancelled or deferred studies. The total number of students represents the number of people studying at the Open University. A student taking two or more courses is counted only once.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, 40,656 students were enrolled in undergraduate courses, compared with 42,129 in 2010-2011. An additional 3,690 students were registered for seminar papers only. Among the undergraduate students, 11,335 (27%) were new students.

There were 3,609 students enrolled in graduate studies (including students taking qualifying courses), compared with 3,657 in 2010-2011. An additional 62 graduate students were registered for seminar papers, 50 for final projects and 42 for theses. The study method at the Open University does not require students to take a structured program over a specific period. Therefore, in addition to absolute numbers, we are presenting data that enables a comparison with students pursuing a full program towards a degree (FTE – Full Time Equivalent). The calculation is based on the number of course enrollments divided by a factor that expresses the number of annual enrollments that would allow the student to complete a degree in three years. In FTE terms, 18,357 undergraduate students were enrolled at the Open University in 2011-2012 (compared with 18,995 in 2010-2011).

## Outstanding Students

An average grade of 95 or over was earned by 198 students (including 27 graduate students), an achievement that qualified them for the President's List. There were 942 students (including 175 graduate students) who completed their degrees with an average of 90-95 (not inclusive), qualifying them for the Dean's List.

### Profiles of outstanding students:

**Gilboa Pavelnik** lives in Hula and works in agriculture. He is studying for a BA in History and Philosophy, while serving as a combat soldier in an armored tank unit. This is the third year he has qualified for the President's List. He enrolled in 12 courses in 2011 and 11 in 2012.



**Aviel Attias**, a Ra'anana resident, is a Computer Science student. At 19, this is the third time that Aviel has qualified for the President's List. He graduated *magna cum laude* with 11 grades of 100 and six grades of 99. Last summer he also won a silver medal in the International Olympiad in Informatics.



**Manal Havshi**, who lives in Ichsal, is a graduate student studying Education: Technologies and Learning Systems. Manal, an accountant, is married with four children. Her husband is director for the Arab sector of the Yad Sarah volunteer organization, where Manal also volunteers. "Studying had a direct impact on me and indirectly on my family too – all for the good. We have begun to speak differently, think differently and even act differently. It is true that I was destined to work inside and outside the home, take care of my children and be a loving mother and wife who would not neglect her husband... I studied with pleasure and motivation... today I feel that it is all behind me and balance is returning to my life..."

## Financial Aid and Scholarships

The OUI awarded 4,556 scholarships in 2011-2012 in various categories (a full scholarship is the equivalent of tuition for one course). Of these 2,899 were financial aid grants and the remainder were academic excellence and sports scholarships. In addition, scholarships were awarded to soldiers in compulsory military service and to students in national service, as well as to students who were newly discharged and to those completing national service

## Undergraduate students – Special populations

Arab sector	3,575
High school students	451
Soldiers in compulsory service	547
Ultra-Orthodox students *	455
Students with special needs	441
Overseas students	663
Prisoners	62

\* ultra-Orthodox students in special projects

## Students with Special Needs

In the 2011-2012 academic year, 441 students with special needs studied at the Open University. All benefited from accommodations for study and exams, customized to their unique requirements.

## Students with Learning Disabilities

**Seminar for course coordinators and tutors:** The seminar addressed the unique needs of students with learning disabilities and how these differences in learning might affect their experience at the OUI. Practical workshops related to different areas of study.

**Center for Students with Learning Disabilities:** Bilingual (Hebrew and Arabic) information pamphlets and posters were produced with the goal of increasing awareness of special services among the general student population, and the Arab sector in particular. Informational meetings were organized throughout the country, and a follow-up process was set up for applicants to the Center.

**Use of technology:** During the past year the Center for Students with Learning Disabilities again expanded the use of assistive technology for qualifying students. Support groups were available for students in various courses and also online. Other study groups featured assistive technology.

## Academic Counseling

### Prospective Students

During the 2011-2012 academic year the Open University introduced a system for providing information for prospective students and others interested in finding out information about the OUI. Academic counselors are available at a call center to field inquiries, provide knowledgeable answers to the general public, and offer guidance to prospective students.

### Increasing Student Retention

The academic counseling center added a special unit whose goal is to bring students back to a regular study schedule so as to help them complete their studies towards a degree. A decision was made to focus initially on students who enrolled any time from 2001 onwards, accrued over 72 credits, then failed to enroll for at least three consecutive semesters, and whose last year of study was no later than 2010. The project is supported by the Steering Committee, chaired by the Dean of Academic Studies. Computer infrastructures have been improved, and suggestions were made as to removing academic obstacles, especially with regard to writing seminar papers, without compromising course requirements.

### High School Students

During the past year, 937 high school students studied at the Open University. Of these, 451 took part in regular academic studies, and 532 participated in the course "A Glance at Academia," with 46 students continuing on in regular courses. Groups from the Arab sector, studying bilingually in Arabic and Hebrew, accounted for 94 of these students. A total of 33 high school students were awarded Outstanding Student certificates for their academic studies in the previous year, 15 from the Office of the Dean of Academic Studies and 18 from the President.

A pre-academic course "A Glance at Academia" was developed specifically for outstanding 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade high school students. It offers a small taste of academic study, together with the learning skills needed to embark on an academic course. The course exposes students to the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences.

During 2011-2012 the Open University organized a series of projects for high school students, including a project

for gifted children; an academic study project in Ashdod; and studies for students in the Biotechnology track at the *Horev* religious high school in Jerusalem. The OUI is also preparing to introduce a national program called "Academia in High School," to allow talented high school students to begin degree studies while still in high school. The Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Education, the Council for Higher Education and the Open University are all partners in this project, which will allow students to exchange high school matriculation (*Bagrut*) studies in 15 subjects for OUI academic courses towards an academic degree.

### Career Guidance and Placement

- In 2011-2012 the Open University career guidance and placement website advertised 3,000 new positions, and 25 emails offering employment opportunities were sent directly to target populations, based on field of study, area of residence, stage of study and other criteria.
- Fifty specific positions were posted on the OUI Facebook page.
- Fifty meetings were held with new employers, with the goal of enlarging the existing employer base. Newly introduced projects included preparation for accountancy internships, professional guidance and counseling, and seminars and visits to companies.

### Student Inquiries

**Regular inquiries:** Inquiries from students that have not yet been addressed are directed to the appropriate authorities for a response. The Office of the Dean of Students follows up every inquiry to verify that the student receives a response within a reasonable time.

**Ombudsman inquiries:** The Dean of Students also acts as ombudsman for students. As such, he acts to ensure that problems have been resolved equitably in keeping with OUI procedures. A situation is referred to the ombudsman after all other University channels have been exhausted.

**Open-door policy:** The Dean of Students pursues an open-door policy which allows students to meet with the Dean to discuss various subjects related to their studies at the OUI.

## Student Rights

A detailed document was signed pursuant to the Students Rights Law, 2007-5767, and the Students Rights Regulations, 2012-5772.

## The Winograd Commission on Tuition Fees

From Fall semester 2011-2012, an undergraduate student who has accrued 18 credits or more may pay a reduced tuition fee when enrolling for an undergraduate course for credit. This replaces the previous system, whereby students were required to pay the tuition fee in full upon registration and then received a retroactive refund. The procedural change also included updating information for students and adapting the computer system for registration at the enrollment center.

## Improved Student Services

### Accreditation of Prior Studies Committee:

Clear procedures were determined to accelerate the handling of referrals to the Committee. Processing time of requests was significantly cut from nine weeks to three.

### Computerized Services for Students

The Open University consistently upgrades student services, making every effort to remain current with intra-University and global trends, and developments. This ongoing effort to improve and streamline services and make them more user-friendly has resulted in a number of innovations: the user interface of the *Sheilta* interactive referral system was redesigned, adding more options for online changes in registration, such as changing courses and deferring studies, in addition to the services already offered. The system serves as an organized channel of communication enabling the flow of information, greater transparency, better work processes and improved efficiency vis-à-vis the referrals center and other professionals.

An advanced infrastructure based on SharePoint 2010 was implemented during the past year to manage OUI content and websites. Concurrently, an external company was brought in to help redesign the home page and other key sites from a visual and content point of view, so as to remain current with OUI policy and market trends. The new platform will afford content editors a high degree of independence in entering and updating content and will make the

system more user-friendly. The new *Ascolot* (School of Interdisciplinary Studies) site is the first to benefit from the successful online launch.

### Additional improvements to the computerized system:

- Expansion of online services: In addition to existing services available on the *Sheilta* interactive system, new options for changes in registration were introduced. Students may now arrange postponement, exchange and deferment of courses online, according to guidelines and dates published in the academic information newsletter.
- Preparation was completed for an online scholarship application.
- As part of the Soft Landing program for the Arab sector, procedures relating to inquiries, enrollment, and grants, as well as tools for use by administrative personnel have been computerized.
- In keeping with the strategic goal of expanding OUI's overseas student population, the website has been upgraded and an online inquiry form has been added.
- Procedures have been changed at the new University Information Center in order to further improve service. Databases have been upgraded and automated systems have been added in order to help the center's personnel improve their ability to serve the public.

## The Student Association

In the past year the Student Association granted services and benefits to fee-paying students, on both the academic and consumer fronts. They also ensured that services are equally accessible to all sectors of the student population, including those living in peripheral areas. For the first time the Association held Student Day independently under the banner of "A Salute to Reserve Duty," at which 81 grants were awarded to students serving in the military reserves. Activities also continued in various projects: Forty-five students participated in a trip to Poland; the "Torch" project for Holocaust survivors; pre-exam marathons; activities in hospitals; social projects around the country; academic assistance to students; establishment of a nationwide referral system for all students; cultural events; lectures and workshops; trips; parties; intensive volunteer days in

different organizations; publication of the Association's *Op* magazine; development of the Association's website; distribution of start-of-year gifts; and the debating club.

The academic year ended with elections for the third term of the Association, with 29,247 students registering in 2011-2012.

## **Student Involvement in the Community**

### ***Perach, Sahlav* and ISEF Projects:**

This year 1,202 students tutored through *Perach* (a mentoring project for schoolchildren) and 44 through the *Sachlav* project (enrichment program for schools and kindergartens that function in a long-day format). Another 12 OUI students participated in ISEF, the International Sephardic Education Foundation.

There are two separate kinds of ISEF activity: social involvement via twice-weekly tutoring through *Perach*; and activities such as social leadership workshops which take place throughout the academic year.

### **Torah Study Center (*Beit HaMidrash*):**

The Torah Study Center addresses issues of justice and society in Jewish texts. Among the issues addressed this year were the image of God; attitudes towards the "other"; attitudes toward women; self defense and its limits; environmental responsibility; *shmita* and sustainability; social-economic justice; the Economic Arrangements Law and/or the Wisconsin Plan; the rights of workers and unorganized workers; equality of education and health services; freedom of expression and conscience; freedom of religion and freedom from religion; collective rights and the question of the Jewish state. Sixteen students participated in the Torah Study Center while volunteering in various organizations, for which two grants were awarded toward future tuition fees.

## **Sport at the Open University**

Topping the OUI team achievements this year at the Academic Sports Association (ASA) games were the chess team and the women's kayak team, both with first-place wins. The OUI ten-pin bowling team was in third place and the men's table tennis team and women's basketball team reached the semi-final. OUI sportsmen and women won gold medals in table tennis and target shooting. At the end of the 44<sup>th</sup> ASA international games OUI sportsmen and women were ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in both men's and women's competitions, and 9<sup>th</sup> overall out of the 27 participating Israeli institutes of higher education. The University again held intramural championships for students and employees in chess, table tennis, ten-pin bowling and debating. The office of the Dean of Students awarded certificates of excellence to 23 female and 25 male students, as well as study grants for achievements in representing the Open University in competitions over the past year.