

Graduates

In 2011-2012, the Open University conferred Bachelor's degrees on 3,162 students, and awarded Master's degrees to 491 students. Of those who completed certificate studies, 160 were awarded teaching certificates, compared with 99 in 2010-2011. Fourteen percent of the graduates indicated that they did not have a *bagrut* when they began studying.

"My limitations do not limit my success"

Noha Abbas, representing BA graduates at the Spring 2012 graduation ceremony

... Once I earned my much-wanted *Bagrut* (matriculation), I decided to leave my village to follow my ambitions and dreams – even with the drawbacks of being a native Arabic speaker and knowing that I would have to study in Hebrew, which is not my mother tongue, and also being visually impaired ... I intended to prove myself and become an educated woman with degrees, so I contacted the Open University. I began studying there on my own, without any real help from any institution or organization ... Half-way through I felt that I was running out of strength. I looked for aids to help me study and cope with my vision impairment and I was helped by computer equipment that allows me to be more self-reliant, such as enlarged-image software and audio software. There were even people who read the academic material aloud to me and helped me understand academic terminology that had previously been hard for me, since it was all in Hebrew – my second language, not my first.

My motivation was boosted and I continued until I was ready to complete my BA. As a result of my academic studies, I would like to open an office to help people with family or social problems. My own experience in coping with difficulties will help me be of assistance to others. ...

My limitations do not limit my success – they only make the road more difficult. But it is important for me to tell you that my success does not end here – I am now continuing to study for an MA at the Open University; in fact I have already completed my first year.

This is my story and it is very different from yours, but also quite similar to yours. As Open University graduates we have much in common. We have special qualities without which we would not be here today. We are all strongly motivated, determined, capable of organizing our time and maneuvering between multiple tasks and assignments; able to face any challenge, whether related to studying, personal, professional, work-related or any other area of our lives. We have all grown stronger, we have advanced and developed, thanks to the qualities we need to become graduates of this university. We have studied hard and gained much more than just academic knowledge and enrichment. We have also acquired life skills, the ability to study any kind of material independently, the ability to use today's state-of-the-art technology and succeed at any task set before us. We can be proud of our achievements as graduates. Every one of us has hurdles and problems. We all face challenges and stumbling blocks. What we share in common is that we have succeeded and can succeed in whatever challenges may follow.

We will not allow disabilities or difficulties to deter us because we are successful achievers. I wish you all the best.



"It's the possibility of a dream come true that makes life interesting."

Dror Cohen, representing MA graduates at the Spring 2012 graduation ceremony



I would like to tell you the story of a young man from Dimona with big ambitions. He first heard about the Open University when he was 17 years old. At his high school they allowed outstanding students to begin studying for a BA while they were still in school. He successfully completed the first course, but unfortunately the project was closed down because most of the students dropped out. Can you blame them? They were only youngsters, and even if they were a bit nerdy, they just wanted to have a good time and enjoy life.

High school ended and the young man was accepted into a software course at the IDF's Center for Computing and Information Systems. From there he embarked on seven

years of military service in the Intelligence Corps' Technology Unit. And if he had to spend such a long time in the army, why not leave with a BA already under his belt? So he enrolled at the Open University, which made studying so convenient, with no need to attend lectures in person and classes held in the afternoon or even on Fridays. True, the effort required from students is not insignificant, since most of the material has to be studied independently, especially if they do not attend all the sessions. Studies are on as high a level as every other university, but the OUI framework allows students to combine study and work. The digital learning environment is also very supportive, with an active forum, and lecturers available to deal with questions both on the phone and by email.

Our young man managed to complete all his studies towards a BSc in Computer Science shortly before his army discharge. Everything went according to plan and he was discharged, degree in hand, and even graduated *magna cum laude*. With a highly-regarded Open University degree, together with the professional experience he had acquired in the army, he easily found work as a software engineer at Microsoft's new R&D facility in Herzliya. In other words, as soon as he left the army he was already well-ahead of his friends and peers in terms of time and status.

But that's not the end of our story. Why make-do with only one degree when he could have two? This time he enrolled in an MA program at a "closed" university, but after only one semester he realized that studying in a closed format did not suit him at all. How could people study without books, without assignments being checked by tutors, with no forum and no video-taped lectures? He packed his bags and left, discovering to his surprise that he could study for a graduate degree at the Open University with a dissertation. He enrolled again, this time for an MA, at the same university he already knew so well and in fact, had fallen in love with. This time too, the study format suited him perfectly, allowing him to hold down a full-time job at Microsoft and study at the same time. ... Once again he completed his MA *magna cum laude* and this is why he stands before you today on this stage.

But even two degrees are still not enough. Back when he began studying for his MA, this young man took a deep breath and decided to embark on another BA at the Open University – this time in Philosophy. Now he is nearing completion of that degree too – a touch of Humanities is good for the soul.

And so we draw to the end of the story I set out to tell you this evening, although in reality it is far from over. Our young man has already registered to study for a PhD in Computer Science at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev – although believe me, if it had been possible he would have preferred to do that too at the Open University. Who knows? Maybe we'll see him here at OUI again, studying for some other degree (although perhaps it would be better for his wife not to hear that!) ...

I will end with a quote from Paulo Coelho's book *The Alchemist*: "It's the possibility of a dream-come-true that makes life interesting." I wish for you a life as filled with interest and dreams as mine is.