

Students

A "student" at the Open University is a person who has 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 OUI. A student taking two or more courses is counted only once.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, 42,560 students were enrolled in undergraduate courses, compared with 40,656 in 2011-2012. An additional 3,763 students were registered for seminar papers only. Among undergraduate students, 13,701 (32%) were new students.

There were 3,755 students enrolled in graduate studies (including students taking qualifying courses), compared with 3,609 in 2011-2012. An additional 67 graduate students were registered for seminar papers, 47 for final projects and 43 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, 18,990 undergraduate students were enrolled at the Open University in 2012-2013 (compared with 18,357 in 2011-2012).

Outstanding Students

An average grade of 95 or over was earned by 224 students (including 28 graduate students), an achievement that entitled them to inclusion on the President's List. There were 1,100 students (including 228 graduate students) who completed their degrees with an average of 90-95 (not inclusive), placing them on the Dean's List.

Profiles of Outstanding Students

Ma'ayan Arie, Ramat Gan – psychology and education student

Ma'ayan works on the social integration and communication requirements of special needs children in a Tel Aviv kindergarten. "Since I dropped out of high school in 11th grade for family reasons not related to studying, and since I had no opportunity to study until the age of 25, I am now well able to appreciate the privilege of being able to study at the Open University. I enjoy every moment of the learning process and the results."

Hanan Avivi, Jerusalem – history student

Hanan is a computer programmer who, in the 2011-2012 academic year, completed five courses with a grade of 100. His father also studied at the OUI. "I really want to emphasize the order, organization, standards and flexibility that are characteristic features of the Open University. It was thanks to that flexibility that I was able to return to academic studies after a break of several years, while also working full time."

Menachem Keren, Kibbutz Sde Boker – psychology student

Menachem, a machine operator in the kibbutz factory, is a three-time recipient of the President's Award for Excellence. He was accepted into the Outstanding Students track for an MA in Brain Science at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. He says that the Open University is "a real pleasure, an exceptionally amazing experience after outright failure in high school."

Neta Amit, Nes Amim – history student

Neta, a retiree from Haifa, was the oldest student at the graduation ceremony. "I approach studying with interest, enjoyment, and full commitment. The actual degree is a bonus for me. In my professional life I dealt in computer science and software engineering. The study of history is fascinating and it enriches my world. Unlike my mindset in the past, today it is very clear to me that wisdom comes from both the practical and the humanist sides of life." Neta is a former recipient of the President's Award for Excellence.

Avraham Friedlander, Yitzhar – psychology student

Avraham served in the IDF's Nahal Haredi combat unit, and currently works as a *mohel* (ritual circumciser). He volunteers in the psychiatric department of Herzog Hospital in Jerusalem. His brother also completed a degree at the Open University. "The study content affects my family, my attitude to my wife, my children, the way we educate them and the order of priorities at home [...]. Studying has made me much more rational than I was before, cooler, and more cerebral."

Financial Aid and Scholarships

In 2012-2013, the OUI awarded 5,319 scholarships (a full scholarship equals the tuition for one course). In addition to 2,672 financial aid grants, scholarships were awarded for academic excellence, for the 1,000 Scholarships and Soft Landing projects, for participation in a Hebrew-language workshop for Arabic speakers, and for athletics. Scholarships were also awarded to soldiers serving in compulsory military or national service, and to those recently discharged from the army or from national service.

Undergraduate students – special populations

Arab sector	4,830
High school students	827
Soldiers in compulsory service	582
Ultra-Orthodox students*	460
Students with special needs	525
Overseas students	730
Prisoners	85

* Ultra-Orthodox students in special projects

Students with Special Needs

In the 2012-2013 academic year, 525 students with special needs studied at the OUI, including 47 students with hearing impairments, 63 students with visual impairments, and 163 students with physical or motor disabilities. All benefited from modified study and exam arrangements.

Accessibility: The Open University is participating in the Revolution in Education initiative of the National Insurance

Institute. The OUI has inaugurated *Tzmicha* Centers at five campuses around the country, including Beit Biram, Beit Yatziv, Wadi Ara, Jerusalem, and Ramat Aviv. Each center includes an accessible classroom and library and assistive learning technologies. Some of the technologies offered include visual magnifiers, laptops with software for document enlargement, text readers, Xmind, personal FM systems and classroom amplification systems, smartboards, and large-size keyboards. Desks and chairs are adjustable. A lending center at the Ra'anana campus enables students to borrow various assistive devices, based on need and availability.

Students with learning disabilities

Meetings: The number of students contacting the accessibility centers is growing steadily. To facilitate face-to-face meetings with students throughout the country, orientation sessions have been arranged at study centers, so students may learn about the technologies available to them.

Diagnosis: The criteria for receiving didactic and ADHD diagnoses were re-examined and rewritten to comply with the regulations for the LD students in Institutes of Higher Education Law. Students renewing their enrollment at the OUI may receive a re-evaluated diagnosis if necessary.

Facilitation for advisors: The Center for Students with Learning Disabilities organized training sessions for coordinators and tutors around the country, in order to help them understand the unique needs of students with learning disabilities. A conference was also held in 2012-2013 to familiarize them with characteristics of learning disabilities, including specific implications for the OUI learning process. During the conference, practical workshops addressed different areas of study.

Expectant and new mothers

In the past year a law was enacted pertaining to the adjustment of study and exam conditions for women who are pregnant, undergoing fertility treatments, have recently given birth, or are in the process of adopting or fostering children. Under the law, students may be eligible for special exam conditions, deferments in submitting assignments and seminar papers, and postponement of studies in certain situations. Applications for modifications due to special circumstances are handled through the Office

of the Dean of Students. In the past year, 500 applications of this kind were received.

Tutoring

Courses taught in the Arab sector: An extra hour of tutoring per meeting is provided for every course held at study centers in the Arab sector. Together with the Department of History, the Dean of Academic Studies has created a program to maximize the efficacy of the extra hour. The program teaches study skills specially adapted to the relevant course.

Increasing Student Retention

In 2011-2012 the academic counseling center added a special unit designed to assist students in returning to their studies and completing an academic degree. The unit targeted 1,700 students defined as "dropouts". Of these, 1,494 were directly assisted in 2012-2013, while others either rejected the approach or could not be located. Meanwhile, 156 students (10.4%) have completed their studies and earned undergraduate degrees; 482 (32.3%) have returned to their studies; and 57.3% have not.

A variety of administrative and academic modifications were introduced in order to encourage students to return to their studies and complete their degrees. The unit is planning on approaching a further 1,034 students who did not enroll in classes during the three preceding semesters.

High School Students

During the 2012-2013 academic year, 827 high school students (9th-12th grade) studied at the Open University. Of these, 80% took part in special programs: 114 were part of a program for gifted children; 115 participated in an academic studies program in Ashdod which encourages outstanding high school students to study towards a degree with partial scholarships from the Ashdod municipality and the OUI; 516 children were part of the Academia in High School project, which offers students an opportunity to study towards a degree. (See Spotlight article, pg. 37)

Student Information Call Center

The Office of the Dean of Academic Studies handled inquiries from 4,683 students during the 2012-2013 academic year. The majority were requests for changes to study programs, requests for modified exam conditions, third-time enrollment in courses (after two failures); and registration for advanced courses. In addition, hundreds of applications were received to defer seminar papers.

Significant improvement in student services at the Student Information Call Center were undertaken during the past year, based on a number of changes:

- Call response time was reduced from an average of 30 minutes to an average of 30 seconds. This was due to several changes, including the training of managers in senior positions; recruitment of more service personnel, and improvement of their training.
- An operational and administrative report system (CCP) was installed at the information center to enable a daily analysis of call center performance, in order to improve processes and prepare for varying seasonal pressures.
- Procedures for the handling of renewed enrollments have improved.

A number of special projects were undertaken, including marketing of the *Sheilta* system; assimilation of an information system; definition of identifying questions on the *Masof* personal identification and password system; targeting certain populations to promote enrollment for the summer semester; and initiation of projects to improve student services.

Career Guidance and Placement

- OPJOB offers career guidance and placement, helps students select a profession, and find employment opportunities.
- More than 3,500 new jobs were advertised on the website in 2012-2013, and tens of emails were sent out directly to target populations, customized to field of study, area of residence, stage of study and other criteria.
- A career management seminar included lectures, workshops and working groups.

- Two workshops on career guidance were held at various campuses. One workshop was geared towards students with special learning needs. In addition, four workshops were offered on searching for employment.
- One hundred meetings were held with new employers with the goal of expanding the existing employer base.
- New projects included an application for the organization and management of candidates and jobs at the unit; career guidance; preparation of a monthly newsletter; and building a graduate student database.

Improved Student Services

Tuition fee calculator: A tuition fee calculator was added to the OUI website to enable users to estimate the cost of courses.

Student account project: A detailed configuration system was implemented in the past year for the Student Account project, aimed at improving financial management services for students and implementing the uniform management of student payments. This should make possible an in-depth analysis of account movements and an improvement of data compatibility between the student administration system and the ERP integrated financial system.

Integration of Google maps into study center presentations: A dynamic Google map was added to the websites of study centers, to facilitate orientation for students and potential students.

Technology-enabled distance sessions: Overseas students studying courses which include technology-enabled distance sessions can now obtain viewing information allowing them to watch the sessions live.

Payment via deposit to the Discharged Soldiers Fund: New regulations enable payment to be made to academic institutions via bank transfer. Registration systems were adapted to support the new regulations, including a pre-printed voucher via the Discharged Soldiers Fund. Payment vouchers may be ordered and printed out at study centers. Bank transactions are transferred to the OUI through an e-safe.

Online applications for scholarships: Students may submit scholarship application forms online, with a user-friendly, advanced system which checks eligibility according to data entered by the student.

Use of Microsoft software: OUI students may now purchase Microsoft software at a discount and use various auxiliary programs free of charge.

Sheilta (interactive online student services)

In order to improve the call response process, the system was enhanced to generate a dynamic form adapted to categories of applications, containing features specific to each application. Some applications are handled automatically by the system (e.g. permits, miscellaneous printouts, changes in registration), and some are transferred directly to the relevant department. The system also enables students to print documents such as public transport travel cards and permits for the *Perach* tutoring project.

Improved lobby page for students

The new OUI website includes a designated page for students containing information on the progress of studies. The system has upgraded the user experience by making content more accessible.

The Student Association

The OUI Student Association is now an official member of the National Union of Israeli Students. The Association has worked to improve the status of OUI students, as demonstrated by its success in advancing the eligibility criteria for discounts on public transportation. The Association continues to provide benefits to students, and strives to adapt its services to all populations attending OUI campuses around the country. The Association established a volunteer department aimed at instituting regional branches at all study centers nationwide. The goal is to strengthen ties between the Association and students and also to launch *Orientalika* – a club offering a new perspective on Middle East studies. The Association is building a database based on social networking sites and cloud computing. Other activities include distributing free resident cards to OUI students in various locations around the country; opening preparatory courses for Hebrew exemption examinations; running the *Hevruta* ("circle of friends") pre-exam study groups; creating a mobile student gallery; loaning cellular modems to students serving in the army reserves, and more. These new activities join existing



ones, including securing personal accident insurance for all enrolled students; the debating club, which won the 2013 Israel Debating Championship; trips to Poland; the Salute to Reservists; the Lapid Project; activities in hospitals; social projects around the country; academic assistance to new and veteran students; cultural and social events, lectures, workshops, and trips; and the publication of the student magazine, *OPS*.

This year, Students Day was held in cooperation with the Student Union of Tel Aviv University. Guests included Shalom Hanoach, Avri Lider, Shlomi Shabat, Mercedes Band, Hadag Nachash hip-hop band and Yirmi Kaplan.

Student Involvement in the Community

Perach, *Sachlav* and *ISEF* projects

This year, 1,059 students from the OUI took part in the *Perach* mentoring project. The *Sachlav* program (enrichment for schools and kindergartens in a long-day format) included 30 OUI students who mentored elementary school pupils throughout the country, in groups and individually.

Nine students took part in the ISEF (International Sephardic Education Foundation) program, with two separate types of involvement: twice-weekly tutoring through *Perach*; and social leadership workshops held throughout the academic year.

Athletics at the Open University

The bowling team won 1st prize in the international ASA (Academic Sport Association) games. The women's judo team won 2nd prize and the men's track and field, tennis, target shooting and beach volleyball teams came in 3rd. In addition to team successes, OUI individual athletes won personal gold medals in judo (men and women), track and field, kayaking, target shooting, and table tennis.

At the close of the 45th ASA games, the Open University was ranked 9th in men's competitions and 8th in women's, with an overall ranking of 8th out of a total 28 participating Israeli institutions of higher education. Four OUI fencers and artistic gymnasts took part in the Universiade games held in Kazan. Intramural OUI championships, including both students and staff, were held in chess, table tennis, bowling, tennis, and rowing.