

Spotlight: The School for Local Government Employees

The School for Local Government Employees was founded in 2013 by the Federation for Local Authorities in Israel together with The Open University of Israel as a means of promoting the vision of the Federation to provide employees of the local authorities with the opportunity for higher education. This vision is compatible with the OUI mission to make higher education accessible to a broad student population.

The school offers employees of the local authorities a bachelor's degree in the social sciences and humanities, combined with a diploma in local government studies. Students concentrate their studies in one day of study per week in order to earn a degree over the course of four years. The first students in the program are now approaching completion of their degrees.

The school is unique in that it provides a structured study program in a group framework, solid support of students at OUI campuses and study centers countrywide, an academic counseling system, and tools for academic support. It is further distinguished by its financial aid program. Students in this program are entitled to a special scholarship of 1,000 NIS from the school and a scholarship from the Federation for Local Authorities in conjunction with *Mifal Hapais* (the Israel Lottery), which amounts to NIS 4,400 per year. In order to receive the scholarship, each student must commit to 60 hours of volunteering in the community.

The school has demonstrated impressive growth. There are currently 400 students in the program, approximately two-thirds of whom are employees of local authorities. The number of local authorities participating in the project has grown from two at the outset, to 32, including Jerusalem, Beer Sheva, Ashdod, Netanya, and Modi'in. The number of groups has grown from four to 22, from Ma'alot in the north, to Beer Sheva in the south. The school is in a constant state of expansion, and there is now demand for a master's degree in government and public policy (in the framework of the Interdisciplinary Program for Democracy Studies).

The study groups are a magnet for other students who are not local authority employees, yet seek accessible higher education towards a bachelor's degree at a location close to their places of residence.

Students within the program report a high level of satisfaction. From a survey conducted by the evaluation department it was found that approximately 80% of the participants responded that they were highly satisfied with their studies and expressed their appreciation for the program. One student wrote:

"The study program through the Federation for Local Government has brought me an opportunity to realize a dream that, as a mature adult, you don't think is possible amidst the intensiveness of your daily life."

The school is administered under the auspices of the OUI's external studies program, and is coordinated by a joint steering committee of the Federation for Local Government and The Open University of Israel. The committee is chaired by Prof. Yagil Levy, and includes three mayors of local authorities. The academic management of the program is the exclusive responsibility of the OUI.

