

# Foreword



In 2014-2015, the year covered in this report, our total number of graduates since the university's foundation has reached more than 50,000. This impressive figure attests to Israel's confidence in the university's goals and practices, reflected in the significant demand for the special path to higher education offered by the university in fulfillment of its academic and social missions.

In order to appreciate the extent of the demand for studies at the OUI, one need only note the enrollment figures. In 2014-2015, no fewer than 47,057 students enrolled in at least one OUI course. This number includes 42,865 undergraduate students, (equal to approximately 25,000 full-time students). OUI undergraduates, in full-time terms, constitute 12% of all Israeli undergraduate students, and 26% of undergraduate university students. These are highly respectable percentages.

We continued our efforts to recruit new faculty this year. Twelve senior faculty members appointed last year joined our ranks in the beginning of 2014-2015. During the year, we recruited another ten senior faculty members, who began their terms at the university in Fall 2015. These appointments were made in accordance with the new rules

for appointments and promotions approved this year by the OUI Senate. The main change in the new procedures is the cancellation of the "visiting" status which had preceded the appointment of new faculty members. The new appointments (minus the six members who retired or took a sabbatical following retirement at the end of 2014-2015), constitute a net addition of four senior faculty members, and bring their total number to 96 at the outset of 2015-2016.

In the areas of course development, learning technologies, and academic programs of study, we have made progress this year in a number of directions. New procedures for the development and updating of courses in the framework of a rolling five-year academic plan at the departmental level were formulated by Prof. Aviad Heifetz, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Prof. Sarah Guri-Rosenblit, Dean of Development and Educational Technology. The planning, which began in 2013-2014, was implemented this past year, and we expect it to result in a more effective mechanism for building and updating the supply of courses.

In the realm of technology, we have further extended the integration and application of tools that enable synchronous online tutoring. This will offer students another alternative to face-to-face tutorial sessions in as many courses as possible.

Our study programs have been broadened to include, for the first time, a dual-disciplinary undergraduate program in Judaic studies. We now offer specialization tracks in production operation and information systems within the framework of an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering and management. Likewise, under the initiative of Prof. Bat-Zion Eraqi-Klorman, Dean of Academic Studies, we have launched a pilot program of preparatory studies for Arabic-speaking students.

Planning has also been completed for two more projects which are due to be launched in the first semester of 2015-2016. One program, which combines undergraduate academic studies with vocational certification, has been advanced under the leadership of Prof. Adia Mendelson-Maoz and Lipaz Vinitzky, Head of External Studies. The second initiative, which was led by Prof. Haim Saadoun in his role as Dean of Students, provides academic mentoring for students of Ethiopian origin.

Research at the OUI has also experienced growth this year. Out of 25 applications, OUI faculty members were awarded eight research grants by the National Science Foundation, an award rate similar to the national average. Five faculty members were awarded competitive grants by the European Union, the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development, and the Volkswagen Foundation. Another six faculty members received other competitive grants.

Construction of our new behavioral research lab in Ramat Aviv is currently in its final stages. Use of the lab will commence in the first semester of 2015-2016, and we are hopeful that its central location will enable a greater number of student subjects to participate in behavioral science research studies.

We have signed an agreement with the Henrietta Szold Institute for joint publication of the well-established journal *Megamot*, with the aim of refreshing its mandate and approach and giving it an interdisciplinary social sciences emphasis. A new editorial board has been appointed, with editors-in-chief Prof. Yoram Bilu (representing the Szold Institute) and Prof. Yagil Levy (representing the Open University). The first issue of the revised journal was recently published, and we anticipate that it will provide a valuable addition to social scientific literature in Israel.

After intense negotiations, we signed new collective agreements this year with the Junior Faculty Council and with the Administrative Employees' Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the negotiating teams of all the parties involved for their concerted efforts and good will, and for their motivation and ability to reach agreements in the best interests of all.

This year, the OUI Council approved a number of additional amendments to the Statutes and General Regulations of the university, in order to complete their adjustment to the guidelines of the Council of Higher Education/Planning and Budgeting Committee (CHE/PBC) which were issued in 2004. The Statutes and General Regulations have subsequently received official certification by the CHE and PBC, which is a necessary condition for receiving institutional autonomy in devising study programs and other academic authorizations by the CHE.

While 2014-2015 was generally a year of progress for the university, it was also, unfortunately, the first year in more

than a decade in which we faced the likelihood of a deficit. In the first few months of 2015, it became apparent that we might be facing a deficit in our operating budget for 2014-2015 and an imbalance in the budget for the years ahead. The reduction in revenue from tuition following a decline of 0.7% in student registration in 2014-2015 (mirrored by the entire university system in Israel), constituted part of the problem. Another reduction in revenue resulted from growth in reimbursements of tuition to students, from a reduction in late registrations, and from a decline in the PBC allocation following Operation Protective Edge. Expenditures, on the other hand, rose, due to an increase in the number of tutorial groups opened this year, and positions added at the Prospective Students Call Center.

In order to cope with the budget challenges, a number of immediate steps were taken to reduce expenses without reducing the number of employees. These steps made it possible to considerably lower, and even eliminate, the anticipated deficit for 2014-2015. Similar steps will be taken in 2015-2016 in order to stabilize the budget.

Simultaneously, at the end of 2014-2015, we started work on a plan for improved efficiency, which should result in long-term budgetary stability, while ensuring continued academic strengthening of the OUI in research, teaching, and digital technology. This planning is critical in light of the imbalance in the operating budget projected for the future, even if enrollment figures remain stable. The reason for this is the expected gap in revenue (tuition and PBC allocations) as compared to expenses (primarily in the realm of salaries), which is likely to persist due to low inflation influencing the market for the foreseeable future.

The work on budget planning for the future has been combined with strategy development aimed at helping the OUI adapt to rapid technological advancements in digitization and teaching. The continuously growing competition over market shares among academic institutions, due to the decline in the number of students in Israel, is likely to continue through the end of the decade, and constitutes an additional challenge.

During the past year, a team led by Chana Klein, Head of the Teaching Services Administration, began investigating possibilities for increasing revenue. Prof. Aviad Heifetz has been directing work to define criteria for opening study groups, while Prof. Oren Soffer and his team have

been examining the structure of teaching and the status of course coordinators. All other issues of concern for our medium and long-range planning will be addressed in 2015-2016, at which time a final program will be devised.

In summing up my remarks, I would like to offer special thanks to Prof. Bat-Zion Eraqi-Klorman upon completing her term as Dean of Academic Studies, a role she filled with tremendous dedication and efficiency; and to Prof. Haim Saadoun, who has completed his term of many years of hard work and notable accomplishments as Dean of Students. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Haim and wish him success as he assumes the position of Dean of Academic Studies, and to congratulate Dr. Moshik Lavie upon his appointment as the incoming Dean of Students.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of our university community for their commitment and efforts towards balancing the budget of 2014-2015 and for their devoted work on behalf of the university. We hope that this dedication will bear fruit and enable the OUI to continue to develop and maintain its unique place in the field of higher education in Israel, as it realizes its academic and social missions.



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