

Graduates

In 2016, The OUI conferred bachelor's degrees on 3,389 students, of whom 992 graduated *cum laude* and *summa cum laude*. An additional 34 students completed a division of studies following a degree. Master's degrees were awarded to 636 students, of whom 119 graduated *cum laude* and *summa cum laude*. Of the graduates, 13% began their studies at the OUI without high school matriculation (for data on graduates see Appendix D and appendix E; for data on teaching certificates and certification studies see Appendix F).

The following are excerpts from the speech Avi Shalom, a *cum laude* graduate, gave at the Spring 2016 graduation ceremony:

"I am extremely excited to be standing here, after a long and winding journey that included dozens of supervised assignments, lectures and tests. I am sure we are all filled with enormous pride and satisfaction at having graduated. I wish to share with you my story about studies and education institutions, which is not exactly a 'love story.'

When I was in the 10th grade, the education system decided to give up on me, although not before throwing at me the well-worn phrase 'It's a pity he has no motivation, because he has so much potential.'

After completing my military service, but not having completed my formal education, I wandered from job to job, until I happened to land a role in an interesting start-up company involved in industry and management. As the company rapidly grew, I managed to be promoted, and reached a senior position. In the meantime, I had married, started a family, and today, have four amazing children.

At the age of 40-plus, I found myself coping again with the feeling that I had missed out and failed. With my family's support, I decided to once again begin academic studies, in spite of my fears and the realization that statistically, my chances of succeeding were very poor. The first course I took was a test case. I knew this could be the beginning or the end of my journey. To my great joy, I passed it successfully and with honors, and was filled with pride over the academic success that I had so missed. The next course was easier, and I began taking several courses simultaneously, improving my academic skills with each new supervised assignment, paper, and course. There were many long, sleepless nights, and many review summaries hanging on every wall in my home. I tried to do everything all at once: work, studies, and family. This was a complex and challenging equation, to say the least. But today, four intensive years have ended with two words: 'Bachelor's degree.' Just two words, but they have an enormous meaning for me and for all of us. A feeling of success has replaced my sense of failure.

That is why I wish to thank this unique institution, the Open University, in the name of all my fellow students. This university has offered us all an opportunity to realize our potential without preconditions, and based on our achievements. This university expects from us resolve, and to be purpose-driven; to shape and develop our didactic capabilities and skills for our academic future. Today I say 'thank you' to the Open University for all the above [...]"



Following are excerpts from the speech Hila Zucker, a *summa cum laude* psychology graduate, presented at the Spring 2016 graduation ceremony:

"I am very excited to be here today. They say that happiness is made up of small moments gathered over life. This ceremony is a moment of happiness and an opportunity to feel pride, satisfaction and gratitude.

Recall the moment it all began, the day you decided to attend the Open University. Perhaps you chose it because other universities do not include 'good intentions' in their admission criteria, do not regard curiosity as a relative advantage, and do not rank motivation, important as it is, right up there next to passing the psychometric test. Perhaps you chose the Open University because you believe that all those criteria are exactly what is needed to start learning. To me, the Open University is exactly what its name suggests. The only institution I know that has the openness to believe that whoever desires success, will manage to succeed. It has the openness to understand that we enjoy the right to choose, we know how we like to do things, and we are capable of deciding in what conditions we will be most likely to succeed. This ceremony, this moment of happiness, is the end-point of our journey.



It took me almost five years to complete this fascinating path. I set out on it even though the phrase 'you have unrealized potential' has been ringing in my ears since elementary school, even though my curiosity was dying after years in school, and in spite of the horror stories I had heard from students at other universities. Cautiously optimistic, I took one course in psychology, thinking that if it would not be fun, I would not be obligated to continue.

The American poet Maya Angelou said that people will forget what you said and what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel. The Open University made me feel that I can excel, that my school teachers were wrong all those years, and that I was lucky to be where my potential was noticed.

At the Open University, I received two Excellence Awards from the dean during my studies, and graduated *summa cum laude*. Just as the billboards read on my way to campus, at the Open University I learned much more than just psychology. I learned the meaning of resolve, persistence, and willpower.

Along this path that is reaching its end today, each of us has been through a personal, heroic journey, and our partners to this journey deserve huge thanks. Thanks go to our wonderful guides – the teaching staff on the different campuses and in video lectures; special thanks go to the facilitators at Beit Biram (Daffi, Yamit, Lior, Yaron and Einav). I thank the writers of the excellent textbooks and the creators of the excellent educational software. Thanks go to the telephone receptionists at the university center, the most effective ones I know... Thanks to you all!

Thank you to our families and friends for their patience, help, and support, and for completing our 'boring' seminar paper questionnaires... you had confidence in us all along the way, and stuck with us even during exam periods. And let us thank ourselves, for reaching this point. I began by saying that happiness is a collection of small moments gathered throughout life, and that this ceremony is a moment of happiness. I will end with wishes and hopes that we graduates experience many moments of happiness, and remember that we must pass on the message we received here – that we must be open to any person, idea, and challenge."