Teaching

The Office of the Dean of Academic Studies, headed by Prof. Haim Saadoun, is responsible for all university-wide and interdepartmental issues pertaining to Open University studies. The office formulates teaching policies and procedures, as well as the rules and regulations that apply to students; tutoring format for courses; the opening of study groups; and the instruction and training of teaching personnel.

Following management's strategic plan, the Office of the Dean of Academic Studies focused on three primary goals this year:

1. Student support and retention
2. Distribution of study centers
3. Planning and opening of study groups

During the past year, 5,440 study groups were opened for 718 academic courses, operating in 74 different study centers all over Israel.

New Study Programs

- Natural Sciences: Philosophical and Historical Aspects Track
- Sociology with a Specialization in Society and Culture
- Social Sciences and Humanities with a Specialization in Society and Culture

New Courses

Dept. of History, Philosophy and Judaic Studies
Jewish Communities of the Medieval Mediterranean
Paradoxes
Seminar for Outstanding Students in Philosophy – C

Dept. of Literature, Language and the Arts
Art in Israel: 1948-1988
The Total Work of Art (Gesamtkunstwerk) in the Twentieth Century

Dept. of Education and Psychology
Digital Technologies in Learning Systems and Training (MA)
Diversity in Education - Theory and Practice
Educational Policy (MA)
Visual Cognition

Dept. of Management and Economics
Economic History
Electronic Auctions and Markets
Seminar: Behavior in Organizations - Motives & influences Methods (MA)
Seminar: The Capital Market in Israel (MA)

Dept. of Sociology, Political Science and Communication
Contemporary Liberal Democratic Theory and its Critics (MA)
Israeli Constitutional Law
Israeli Administrative Law
Local Government Law in Israel
Seminar: Consumers, Business, and Politics (MA)

Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science
Distributed Algorithms for Communication Networks (MA)
Research Seminar: Topics at the Frontier of Computer Science (MA)
CS Colloquium (MA)
Seminar on Cybersecurity
Seminar on Defensive Systems Programming

Dept. of Natural and Life Sciences
Biochemistry I for Chemists
Genetics I
Genetics II
Introduction to Oceanography

The Department for Teaching and Learning

This department was established in 2016-2017 in order to maintain an ongoing dialogue on issues of pedagogy, and to reinforce organizational processes with a view to improving the quality of teaching and learning at the Open University.

Teaching staff are trained in courses designed for new students. These courses focus on defining learning outcomes and training tutors accordingly. Training is designed primarily to combine learning skills, impart

appropriate teaching methodology, and correctly use new technologies for pedagogical support in different types of study groups (distance, intensive, and conventional).

The new department also develops training for "personal tutorials," tutoring workshops for Arabic-speaking students, a course in technological literacy, and the use of different technologies.

A pilot program was launched in 2016-2017 to ensure success in the initial courses typically chosen by students as they begin their OUI studies. On the assumption that success in these courses can predict student retention, 35 of the most frequently chosen courses were selected for enhancement. A combination of study modifications and teaching technologies have been used in order to maximize comprehension, improve the learning experience, and gain better results. The pilot, which supplements other aspects of student retention, is slated for completion in 2020. Teaching staff and Shoham cooperated in the endeavor, under the direction of the Department for Teaching and Learning.

Another prime objective of the new department is to improve learning processes via individual workshops and training sessions designed to improve the learning skills necessary for active learning. These courses are offered to students at study centers through distance learning technologies. For some courses, workshops to improve specific learning skills are also available.

Academic Counseling

The Department of Academic Counseling provides support and academic guidance to thousands of students throughout their studies at the Open University. Given the unique structure of OUI studies, academic counseling is a crucial service aimed at reinforcing the connection between counseling-enrollment-success-retention.

Academic counseling is offered on a semester and yearly basis, in order to build an overall study program, address questions related to fields of study, and coordinate the support systems and services offered by the university. Counseling is available in a number of different formats, which include face to face meetings, and sessions conducted via phone, email, or various technological systems, such as

Zoom. Special attention is paid to specific groups, such as students in the IDF's *Atuda* program, high school students, soldiers on active duty, prisoners, students from the Arab and ultra-Orthodox sectors, and Ethiopian-Israeli students.

During the past year, nearly 70,000 counseling sessions were held with prospective and current students. Research carried out by the evaluation department indicates a consistently clear correlation between regular counseling during studies and student success and retention.

Evaluation

In 2016-2017 the evaluation department conducted multiple assessments, including research and surveys on issues that constitute core OUI functions. Evaluation of systemic changes implemented by the Department of Academic Counseling; data and reports are also processed for distribution to internal and external bodies. The data obtained from the department's findings form the basis for strategic decision making.

This year, the department closely examined perseverance as part of the university's broader focus on student retention (please see "Students," page 35). Research was undertaken to identify potential points at which perseverance and retention can be improved:

- Patterns of perseverance were examined for the overall OUI student body, as well as for specific population sectors.

- Success rates in undergraduate courses were examined and various factors were identified as being linked to student success.

- A graduate studies retention profile was presented, with findings based on hard data, and for some programs, on surveys of dropout students.

- An exploratory study surveyed students who stated that their primary goal in studying at the Open University was to transfer to other universities.

As in previous years, the evaluation department conducted various surveys, including a course evaluation survey, an internal service survey, and an English studies self-evaluation quality survey for the CHE.

Transfer Tracks

Transfer tracks to other universities allow students to begin undergraduate studies within the flexible OUI framework, with no entry requirements, such as psychometric exams or high school matriculation. Students who successfully complete a cluster of OUI courses as specified in any given transfer track may then choose to transfer to another university for completion of their degree.

This year, four new transfer tracks were added:

- Tel Aviv University: Department of Film and Television
- The Hebrew University: Fredy and Nadine Herrmann Institute of Earth Studies
- The Hebrew University: Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- The Technion: Data Science and Engineering

Accessibility to Higher Education for Arabic-Speaking Students

The institutional steering committee set up to improve accessibility to higher education for Arabic-speaking students held discussions on the following matters: formulation of goals, enrollment trends, the Third Hour project, retention figures for Arabic-speaking students, monitoring teaching (checking exams in Arabic), preparatory programs (*mechinot*), a workshop for tutors, and a designated career center.

A workshop for tutors of Arabic-speaking student groups will begin in the first semester of 2018.

The learning support system for Arabic-speaking students will now include bibliographical support in the library and technological training for new students in their first week of studies. Short training films have also been produced in Arabic.

Library

- The first stage of a project to convert the library's video collection to digital format was completed. The 1,400 video hours already digitized cover all areas of teaching at the OUI and include some rare footage, such as an interview by Prof. Dan Miron with Gershom Scholem discussing Nobel Literature Prize laureate Shai Agnon.

- A system was devised for inter-library loans using the library catalog. Administration of the system is effective and transparent and both library and reader can perform follow-up. The OUI also joined a university inter-library book delivery system, guaranteeing supply and receipt of books within three working days.

- The library staff and computer center are jointly working towards conversion of library systems to the Ex-Libris Alma system – an advanced Cloud-based library resource management system which is due to be implemented next year.

School of Local Government

The School of Local Government was founded in 2013 as a cooperative endeavor of the OUI and the Union of Local Authorities in Israel, with the goal of promoting higher education among local government employees. The school currently has over 850 undergraduate students in social sciences and humanities, combined with a diploma in local government studies. Fifty local authorities from Majdal Shams in the north to Eilat in the south, comprising forty study groups, have signed up for the school. A further 65 students are currently studying towards an MA in Government and Public Policy (part of the interdisciplinary democracy studies program). The school is showing a continuous growth curve. This year the first group of BA students completed their studies, with 55 students from study groups in Maalot-Tarshiha and Beer Sheva. One third graduated *summa cum laude*.