

# Students

During the past year, 44,191<sup>1</sup> students were enrolled in undergraduate courses (including those registered for seminar papers). Among undergraduate students, 12,514 (28%) were new students. (For figures on undergraduate students, please see Appendix A.)

Graduate students in 2016-2017 numbered 2,682<sup>2</sup> (including those registered for a thesis or final project). A further 697 students took courses as part of completion studies. (For data on graduate students, please see Appendix C.)

The OUI teaching method does not require undergraduate students to complete a structured study program within a determined period of time. Therefore, in addition to absolute statistics, we are presenting data that enables comparison with students pursuing a full program towards a degree (FTE=Full Time Equivalent). The calculation is based on the number of course enrollments in a given year, divided by a factor expressing the number of annual enrollments that entitles a student to complete a degree over four years. In FTE terms, 23,535 students were enrolled in 2016-2017 (compared with 24,546 in 2015-2016).

## Outstanding Students

During the past year, 215 students, (0.5% of the total OUI student population), including 33 graduate students, were included on the President's List, while the Dean's List numbered 805 (1.9% of the total student population), including 178 graduate students.

## Undergraduate students - special population groups

Population	No. of Students
Arabic-speaking students	6,656
High school students	1,243
Soldiers in compulsory service	694
Ultra-Orthodox students*	1,432
Students with disabilities	816
Overseas students	706
Incarcerated students	46

\* According to figures published by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

## Students with Disabilities

A total of 861 students with disabilities studied at the Open University in 2016-2017. Of these, 51 were hearing impaired, 82 vision impaired, 244 had physical or motor disabilities, 372 suffered from chronic illness, and 129 had psychological impairments (some students may have multiple disabilities). Students were provided with accessible study materials and the study centers they attended provided modifications and special testing conditions.

## Students with Learning Disabilities

Organizational changes at the OUI have resulted in the learning disabilities unit now operating under the auspices of the Dean of Students.

In 2016-2017, the unit worked with 2,628 students, and 1,150 new applications have been received for the coming academic year, out of which 766 students have been granted recognition.

1 Every semester, students enroll at the Open University for individual courses rather than a full academic year or study program. At an advanced stage of their studies, students write seminar assignments, a thesis, or a dissertation. In previous years, the number of students studying at the university in any given year was based on those enrolled in courses for that same year, and did not include those who were enrolled solely for the purpose of writing papers. As of 2016-2017 and henceforth, student figures for any given year will also include those writing seminar papers, even if not enrolled in courses for that year.

2 In the past, the number of graduate students also included those studying towards completion of an MA degree. As of 2016-2017 and henceforth, graduate student figures for any given year will include only those who were accepted for MA studies and are enrolled in courses or are writing a thesis as part of that program.

The unit offers a range of services, from recommendations for diagnosis and testing, to finding appropriate ways of providing assistance, including individual counseling and coaching to strengthen study skills and strategies. Complex personal issues are addressed and follow-up is provided for struggling students, with the aim of finding creative and productive solutions. Coaching includes individual or group study guidance; individual help with EFL courses; modifications, consultation and guidance for supportive technologies, and a dynamic process of exam modifications. The first workshop addressing test anxiety was held in September 2017. The learning disabilities unit also runs a diagnostic center based on Matal tests (by the National Institute for Testing and Evaluation for the diagnosis of learning difficulties). During the past year, the center provided diagnoses for 250 applicants.

### **Student Rights**

Pursuant to the Students' Rights Law, and CHE procedures, special conditions were granted to 1,206 students due to issues and conditions surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, child custody, and fostering.

### **Accessibility**

The Dean of Students promotes a range of infrastructure accessibility measures. Further to the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law, and ensuing regulations adopted by the Open University, studies and services at all study centers must be approved for accessibility. Accordingly, the director-general established an accessibility forum, which was charged with ensuring that all legal requirements were met by November 1, 2017. Since some aspects of accessibility concern structures, infrastructure, and environment, the study center department joined forces with the Office of the Dean of Students to make the necessary modifications, and in 2016-2017, many study centers were granted accessibility permits. Other relevant applications included OUI ceremonies and events, classrooms, and campuses. Five OUI accessibility newsletters were published and distributed to all university employees.

### **Ethiopian-Israeli students**

The Open University extends its unique features and know-how to provide academic and social support for Ethiopian-Israeli students. The special program focuses on reinforcing academic skills, perseverance, and retention. This year, 250 students were included in the program. The first two graduates of the program received their degrees in May 2017.

The university held its first memorial day to commemorate immigrants from Ethiopia who perished on the journey to Israel. Some 300 students, employees and guests attended the official ceremony.

### **Ultra-Orthodox students**

The past year saw the launch of a far-reaching program aimed at encouraging the ultra-Orthodox population to integrate into the Open University. The program represents another step taken towards achieving the university's primary goal of making higher education accessible to as broad a sector of society as possible. The main focus is to raise awareness of the OUI in the ultra-Orthodox community and to increase their numbers among the university's student body. To this end, outreach is taking place via marketing and publicity of the academic and social support being offered. The program is managed by a team of ultra-Orthodox specialists under the direction of a steering committee, headed by the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The program's first steps in 2016-2017 have included the following PR and support systems:

- Two media campaigns were launched for the 2017 spring semester and 2018 winter semester. These were supported by PR designed to boost awareness of the OUI and its unique advantages for the ultra-Orthodox sector.
- A special system was developed to answer inquiries from the ultra-Orthodox population in order to help them take their first step towards studying at the OUI.
- Since the inception of the program there has been ongoing mapping of the needs of ultra-Orthodox students attending the university.

- Contacts with the Kemach Foundation (which provides scholarships and job placement for the ultra-Orthodox) and the Toronto chapter of OUI Friends Association were formalized, resulting in scholarships being awarded to several ultra-Orthodox students.
- Collaborative ventures with various organizations have been undertaken, including courses in English language, a mentoring program, and assistance with integration into the employment market.
- Support and coaching designated specifically for the ultra-Orthodox include scholarships, response to applications, and virtual student groups to encourage collaboration among the students.

According to figures published by the Central Bureau of Statistics, ultra-Orthodox students at the Open University numbered 1,432 in 2016-2017.

### High school students

During the past year, the OUI welcomed 1,243 new students who currently attend high school. This group included 81 students who were granted a year's deferment from military service to enable them to complete their degrees. Of the high school students, 32 were included on the Dean's List and a further twenty received scholarships and were awarded certificates of excellence on the President's List.

For the past five years, the Academia in High School program, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, has encouraged high school students to study towards a degree. High schools and the Ministry collaborate in converting matriculation exams into OUI courses. Some 190 schools have participated in the program since its inception, and 150 are currently active, with 1,199 high school students having taken part in the program this past year.

At a university ceremony in July 2017, the Ministry of Education awarded certificates of excellence and scholarships to 214 students on this program for their achievements in 2015-2016. Since the program started, 564 high school students have registered to convert their matriculation exams, and a further 137 were added this year.

Of the 67 students who were awarded a degree this year, 51 graduated *summa cum laude* and *magna cum laude*.

This year the university opened an automated interface with the Ministry of Education to provide students on the

program with online lists of courses for matriculation, including a calculation of the weighted bonus allocated for each course as per Ministry guidelines.

## Scholarships

This year, 5,021 scholarships were awarded, of which 4,273 were financial aid grants.

## Retention – the Path to Completion

Improving retention figures for Open University students is an across-the-board strategic goal. The Unit of Student Retention was established to maximize the number of students completing their studies at the university, and to minimize dropout rates by creating an organizational language and values designed to improve retention statistics.

Until 2016, the unit primarily worked to prevent dropout and encourage retention among students via special projects. The unit has provided ongoing support for 6,700 students. Since the unit was established, a steady increase has been noted in the number of students returning to their studies. New work procedures were finalized in 2016-2017 to encompass student retention from enrollment to graduation.

## Improvements in Student Services

- **Online enrollment for new students:** Changes were introduced into online registration so as to enable the entire enrollment process for new students to be completed via computer, cell phone, or study center.
- **Online application for student ID card and insertion of photograph:** Thanks to a new process it is now possible to issue student ID cards quickly and efficiently. A passport photograph can be taken on a cell phone and sent independently to the system. Only online applications for student ID cards will be accepted and the new system will replace the ID application form.
- **Confirmation of enrollment and tuition fees via Sheilta:** Students now have the option of requesting confirmation of enrollment and tuition fees online free of charge via the Sheilta system. Confirmation is issued with a scanned signature and stamp and sent to the student by the notification server.

- **Digital identification (OUI Digital):** This app, which has been newly developed and adapted for use on PCs and mobile devices, makes it possible to standardize processes on a variety of computer systems. The new app enables individuals to receive digital services from the university even if they do not yet have OUI student status. It also supports online enrollment, making it possible for individuals to complete the enrollment process independently.
- **Office 365 services:** An agreement between the Open University and Microsoft has allowed OUI students free use of Office 365 software, both for online services and for their own personal computers. Students may install the software on a maximum of five different devices. Sheilta has developed a new app that offers students a simple, convenient connection to the Microsoft Office 365 system and immediate receipt of a system username and password.
- **Degree with specialization:** A process for producing degree certificates for specialization tracks within degrees has been developed. Students now receive an official certificate denoting completion of the degree, with approval from the CHE; and another from the OUI specifying the specialization.

## Career Guidance and Placement

Opjob prepares students and graduates for employment and allows them to discover a variety of career options. The Opjob website offers extensive employment and career information, as well as access to a job search system. Some 6,000 students and 1,700 graduates are seeking work via the system, which carries daily updates of available positions from over 3,000 employers. Four *Opening Options* newsletters distributed during the year included articles on occupational and career issues, tips, and current job information.

A careers center for Arabic-speaking students was established in 2016-2017. The center sponsored six workshops designed to prepare candidates for the work market.

After identifying specific needs and conducting a market survey, Opjob further expanded to provide a nationwide list of establishments offering work and study-related advice

and guidance to OUI students and graduates at special rates and in several languages.

## Student Association

The Open University Student Association continued to work towards enhancing the student experience and services available to all OUI students. Activities were expanded and membership rose significantly. The following clubs and special projects also increased their activities: Op'ale, for OUI students who are also parents; the Real Estate club; Model UN club; the Debating Society; the Opp"ortunity club for small business owners; artists and craftsmen; and Agudate, Israel's first student dating club dedicated to forming friendships and connections.

The Association also organized the following events and activities:

- Student Day took place on five different dates in conjunction with other student associations around the country, and included for the first time, a Student Day for the religious and ultra-Orthodox sectors in the Jerusalem area, with the collaboration of the Municipality of Jerusalem. The Op'ale club held the first Student Day for parents and children at the Kadima-Tzoran swimming pool; over 1,000 students and children attended.
- Social and community involvement: Tens of grants were allocated to students for volunteer activity on campuses, help in the community, military reserve duty, etc. Women's empowerment was also a focus and included lectures, meetings and prestigious seminars around the country.
- A special focus group was established by the Op'ale club to safeguard the rights of students who are parents. The highlight of the group's activities was a trip to Finland by a delegation of students, with the goal of creating a dialog with Finnish students and public figures, in order to gain a deeper understanding of student and parent rights in that country. The group submitted its findings and recommendations to official bodies and national-level decision makers.
- New this year was the Students Leading Accessibility group. Lively volunteer activities were held in cooperation with various NGOs for different projects,

such as Remember and Honor for Holocaust survivors; hospital activities; activities for the elderly; and more.

- The Student Association's external relations department launched a project called Seeking Change, focused on the initiation, building, and operation of social and educational projects, with the collaboration of government organizations and overseas NGOs. The program highlights the diversity of groups in Israeli society in general and at the Open University in particular. The goal is to promote social values such as tolerance, equality, and acceptance of the Other; and to nurture a culture of discussion, while also maximizing personal skills and potential.
- A spoken English course was jointly launched this year with the American Center and US Embassy in Israel. The course, which is offered free of charge, has attracted mainly Arabic-speaking students. It has been held in Akko, Jerusalem, and the Givat Haviva study center.
- The Student Association continued its efforts towards enhancing student life and the study experience. Four cafeterias were opened at study centers in Ramat Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem and Kfar Hayarok. Despite the technical hurdles involved, the association makes every effort to provide student services and sponsor events on campuses around the country. The past year was no exception, with the traditional distribution of an "annual gift" from the association to students at different study centers.

## Athletics

This year's achievements were led by the chess team, and by the women's judo and men's table tennis teams, all of whom won first place in the International ASA Games. The men's squash team came in second and men's judo and bowling won third place.

OUI students also won individual gold medals in men's swimming, men's and women's judo, chess, men's table tennis, and orienteering. Silver and bronze medals were also won in those events, as well as in squash and bowling competitions.

Our athletes also took part in 3x3 basketball, 2x2 beach volleyball, men's mountain biking, and women's kayaking competitions.

As in previous years, intramural OUI championships were held in chess, table tennis, bowling, debating, rowing machines, tennis, and squash. The Open University is the first academic institution in Israel to introduce women's throwball, even before it gained official recognition as a sport. Regular training sessions for the throwball team are held in Tel Aviv with the cooperation of the Student Association. The team has played in competitive games and tournaments. The sport was officially recognized in Israel and worldwide in the past year and is slated to be included in the International ASA Games in the coming year.

Israeli teams, including the OUI, participated in judo, swimming and fencing in the 29<sup>th</sup> Summer Universiade event, held this year in Taiwan. Some "firsts" for the OUI were our participation in the European Chess Championship in Spain, winning third place, and the World Championship of sambo. The Israel team at this year's World Championships and World Cups included judokas (male and female), one swimmer, and one ice skater from the OUI, who won medals and are now on the Israeli Olympic list.

Further to an agreement signed between the Open University and the Olympic and Paralympic committees, outstanding athletes were awarded grants for OUI entries on the Olympic list. The athletes were awarded for their sporting achievements in the international arena and for serving as role models in combining studies with success in other areas.

The Dean of Students awarded Certificates of Excellence to 11 female and 23 male students, along with study grants for representing the Open University in competitions during the year.