

Graduates

During the past year, the Open University conferred bachelor's degrees on 3,046 students, (889 *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude*). Another 35 students completed graduate courses. Master's degrees were awarded to 590 students (132 *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude*). Of the graduates, 15% began their OUI studies without high school matriculation.

For data on recipients of bachelor's degrees, see Appendix C; for data on recipients of master's degrees, see Appendix D; for teaching certificates and other certificate studies, see Appendix E.

Hanan Aldada, a mother of nine from a Bedouin village in the south of Israel, received a bachelor's degree in humanities and social sciences, majoring in Middle East studies.

I married at the age of 18. At that time, strict Bedouin tradition and custom dictated that a woman was not allowed to go out alone, whether to study or to work. After much hesitation and lengthy thought, I worked up the courage to ask my husband's permission to leave the house, explaining that I wanted to study.

There were many hurdles to overcome: our financial status was difficult and, with hardly any transportation in my village, I had no way of getting to my studies. But I refused to give up and never lost hope. Every time I heard of some course starting, I nagged my husband that I wanted to attend.

I was pleased and surprised when, after our fourth son was born, my husband supported my studying. At first I took a kindergarten teacher's-assistant course, then a course in counseling for mothers, and I started to work.

After some time I realized that my desire for more progress and my thirst for knowledge were still not satisfied. I saw myself as an ambitious woman who wanted to develop. I longed to be more closely connected to society and knowledge and to understand what was happening around me. I wanted to study in an academic environment. I sat down to talk to my husband again, and together we decided that I would pursue academic studies. The best place to do that was the Open University.

Studying was a challenge for me. There were even times when I wanted to stop because there were so many difficulties. Because I live in a remote Bedouin village, attending tutoring sessions involved long, tiring journeys: first walking a long way on foot, then waiting for a bus, then another journey, and all this in the evening. It was especially hard in winter, in the rain. But in the end, I completed my degree without failing a single course along the way, and I did so in three years.

The Open University's teaching methods made it possible for me to study in a way that suited me. Open enrollment, study hours adapted to working people, distance learning, support at all levels – all these contributed to the ability and success of a student in my circumstances. I started out in the belief that a Bedouin woman can forge her own path despite all the hurdles, and in return, I felt that the university believed in me too.

As a mother I did not feel that the time I devoted to my studies harmed my children's education. Today, I am proud to have completed my degree, and meanwhile my children are also studying and acquiring an education. This year, my daughter is completing a degree at Kaye Academic College of Education and is a high school teacher. One son is studying human resources at Sapir College, and another son is studying journalism.

My belief in the importance of spreading the message of education and knowledge among Bedouin society led me to open a language center, where I help Bedouin girls and women learn Hebrew so they can qualify for study at colleges and universities. I, and the many women studying at my center, firmly believe that women can succeed in life and become leaders. I am also continuing my own studies, and plan on taking a qualification in special education after completing my degree.

Rachel Gets Salomon, MA *summa cum laude* in cultural studies, representing graduate students at the Spring 2017 graduation ceremony.

I have come here today from Ma'alot Tarshiha in the Galilee. I am 35 years old and have three children. I teach at the Technion's faculty of architecture, and in the department of political science at Emek Yezreel College. I am curator of an international sculpture symposium at Ma'alot Tarshiha and a member of the plastic arts department of the Ministry of Culture and Sport's Cultural Council. I did none of these things before studying towards an MA in cultural studies at the Open University.

We are inclined to view culture as the "cherry on the cake;" – something reserved for leisure and luxury – the prerogative of people with time, money, and ability at their disposal. My choice of cultural studies may not seem a natural one for someone from my background: I was raised in a religious family in the northern town of Ma'alot Tarshiha, the oldest of seven children. I married at 19 and began studying for a BA at the age of 21, when I already had one child. But it was, in fact, that very background that led me to choose cultural studies and to engage more broadly in that area. I want to learn and understand how culture works, why and how Israeli society is what it is, and what factors bring about a uniform and unifying culture, as distinct from one that is diverse and separatist. I was preoccupied with questions concerning the center of the country versus the periphery, feminism, gender, femininity, and ethnic inequality. I found the answers in the deeper, fascinating knowledge that my studies exposed me to. I quickly understood that I had found my place, and decided to leave what I had been doing previously and concentrate on study and research on a dissertation track.

My studies at the Open University, with the wide range of courses offered, the variety of lecturers and tutors, and the possibility of independent study, introduced me to a world of fascinating academic experiences unlike anything I had known before. It became clear that the world of research was where I belonged. I found myself, and this success is only an external expression of what I feel inside.

My dissertation addresses gender and the female body, and examines how to escape traditional male conceptualization of the female body, which continues to perpetuate the existing patriarchal order and oppression of women. My work was reviewed and covered in the press and in articles I have written on popular culture, ethnicity and gender. Currently, I am writing a doctoral dissertation on fashion, ethnicity, and memory in the graduate school of the Technion's design track. My studies at the Open University have not only enriched my world and my knowledge, but have also unlocked doors inside me that had long been closed, and were just waiting to be thrown open.

I would like to thank the Open University on my behalf, and on behalf of other graduates receiving their master's degrees today. My thanks to all lecturers, tutors, the heads of the cultural studies program, and especially, to the two wonderful facilitators who helped me with my dissertation – Dr. Dorit Ashur and Dr. Dafna Hirsch – for the empowering experience and the opportunity you gave me.

Thanks are also due to my small family unit sitting here today; to my partner and my beloved children, for their support and inspiration. Thank you all so much.