

# Foreword



Prof. Mimi Ajzenstadt, President

This report summarizes my first year as President of the Open University, during which I became acquainted with the impressive scope of the university's work – teaching, development, research, and endeavors outside of the academic realm. I discovered the capabilities and strengths of the university, and became aware of the different challenges we will face in the coming years. This year, we have intensified our efforts in numerous spheres and launched new initiatives. Our many ventures are detailed in the report, and my opening remarks will highlight but a few of them.

During the past year, 48,467 students were registered at the OUI, of whom 45,328 are undergraduates. This impressive number is particularly gratifying, as it shows, for the first time in several years, an increase in the total number of OUI students. We hope this trend persists in the coming years.

Underlying the OUI's academic work stands its commitment to social change. Since its establishment, the OUI has offered access to high-quality academic education to large swaths of the population. OUI students come from all social layers and sectors; from the center of the country and from its social, geographic, and economic periphery. The OUI strictly maintains the highest scholarly and scientific standards, while advocating a liberal admission policy, applying unique teaching methods, and allowing for flexible management of learning time, place, and pace. This year, we continued to offer carefully planned curricula in all fields of study, wherever they are in demand. We are pleased to note that many of our alumni have found their place in key social foci. Learning and acquisition of knowledge is extremely important for the students themselves, their families, the community, and society. This becomes doubly important in the present era, where society is oriented to, and based on, knowledge. Access to knowledge is a mechanism of individual, family, and community empowerment, allowing active social and occupational integration, and participation in social, economic and political life.

The OUI has a highly diversified student body. As in previous years, this year too, the OUI made many efforts towards adjusting learning materials to the different populations to improve student retention and identify new prospective student groups.

In the past few years, we have witnessed a welcome increase in the number of outstanding students who have their pick of any other university but choose the OUI for its high-level studies, flexible timeframes, and countrywide availability. An increase has been noticed in the number of students in computer science, engineering, industrial engineering and management, and the life sciences.

The number of high school students who take courses at the OUI has grown significantly in the past year. Some of these students exchange certain high school matriculation exams for OUI courses that also entitle them to academic credits acknowledged by higher education institutions. Some of the students have won awards at international Olympic and other competitions.

This year, we continued to offer study programs for bachelor's and master's degrees in a variety of fields. The uncompromisingly high quality of OUI pedagogic materials underlies the esteem with which the OUI is held by academics in Israel and abroad. We continue to upgrade the courses and verify that their contents are rich and relevant, while continuously expanding the transfer tracks from the OUI to other universities.

The School of Public Policy for Civil Servants was founded this year. Its graduates receive a bachelor's degree in social science and the humanities, as well as a diploma in public policy. Approximately 200 students have already enrolled in the program.

Several key OUI academic and administrative officeholders completed their terms this year. Prof. Sarah Guri-Rosenblit completed her term as Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, and was replaced by Prof. Guy Miron; Prof. Haim Saadoun completed his term as Dean of Academic Studies and was replaced by Prof. Ophir Münz-Manor; Deputy Director General for Human Resource Yossi Maori retired, and was replaced by Ronit Braun-Kaniss; Deputy Director General for Teaching Services Hanna Klein retired, and was replaced by Osnat Getz; Library Manager Dr. Hava Mustigman retired, and was replaced by Shirit Wojakowsky. Dr. Leor Cohen was appointed head of the English unit, and Limor Haimzon was appointed head of the national Academia in High School program under the Dean of Academic Studies. I extend my congratulations and thanks to them all.

A forum took place this year for senior faculty members who have joined the OUI in the past two years. In the forum's sessions, new faculty members were introduced to the unique nature of the OUI, its spheres of activity, and OUI expectations.

In the past few years, the OUI has revolutionized its teaching, adopting new technological methods in addition to printed materials. Currently, a significant part of the learning is carried out on course websites that combine study guides with academic supervision. New OUI studios optimize the digital options of the ZOOM system and distance teaching, while frontal lessons continue in

advanced courses and in classes offered to specific groups that require personal tutoring. All these changes call for adjustments on the part of the teaching staff. They also enable effective tracking of student performance. A new format adjusted to the pedagogy of online learning sequence was launched this year. The format enables personalized learning, deep understanding of student learning processes, and monitoring of individual students. About ninety courses are currently at different stages of learning sequence integration. Initial data indicate that students enrolled in courses that use the learning sequence method are more involved in the courses and are more in touch with the learning content. In the coming months, we will continue to follow the outcomes of this method's integration into additional courses, and implement the insights gained in future course development.

OUI researchers continue to win competitive grants in Israel and abroad. The Research Authority has expanded the available infrastructure, to facilitate the submission of research proposals. The Authority has recently received a grant from the CHE Planning and Budgeting Committee and the Israel-Europe R&D Directorate that will enable promoting the participation of OUI researchers in the European research and innovation program.

Our research institutes continue pursuing their diverse activities. Recently we learned that Olga Tokarczuk was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for this year. Tokarczuk's book *The Books of Jacob* will be published shortly in Hebrew by Carmel Publishing House, in cooperation with the OUI Center for the Study of Relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Prof. Jonatan Meir of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Prof. Avriel Bar-Levav of the OUI jointly undertook the scientific editing of the Hebrew translation, and wrote an epilogue to the book.

Last year, the OUI deepened its ties with Israeli industry. In addition to students from the industrial sector who are studying towards an MBA degree, a program for an MSc in Natural Sciences with an emphasis on Chemistry was offered at the Intel plant in Kiryat Gat. Approximately 100 students have joined the program, which is taught on-site at the plant, with laboratory sessions at the OUI

Ra'anana campus. The OUI has signed a cooperation agreement, the first of its kind, with Western Digital. Under the agreement, students will learn new digital content to be developed especially for OUI students and Western Digital employees. The OUI will establish a laboratory for the course and for other teaching purposes, and the company will donate the required laboratory equipment.

This year, the OUI launched a podcast, *Adraba*, to increase public interest in academic research. The podcast is a cooperative project of the OUI and *Galei Zahal*. Hosted by Prof. Tamar Hermann and Prof. Oren Soffer, it features casual conversations with academic experts in different fields. Four talks are dedicated to each research field. For example, leading up to the High Holidays, discussions covered topics such as the place (or absence) of women in Israeli holidays; Jewish holidays and civil culture; basic concepts in the Muslim calendar and holidays; and emotional challenges during the holidays. The podcast has garnered enthusiastic feedback, with thousands of listeners.

The OUI publishing houses, Lamda Academic and Lamda Scholarship, celebrated national Hebrew Book Week in June 2019, with booths at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, the Station Compound in Jerusalem, and the Carmel Center in Haifa. The displays attracted numerous visitors, and the revenues from this year's Book Week were significantly higher than last year.

The OUI continues offering students with disabilities cutting-edge accessibility services. This year we introduced new technologies such as 3D printing of graphs and the OrCam wearable assistive device for the visually impaired. We also stepped up our efforts to make all printed pedagogic materials of the OUI Publishing House accessible, as well as course websites and thousands of video hours at the Shoham Center for Technology in Distance Education.

The OUI, in collaboration with the Students' Association, this year initiated an annual grant to be awarded to students for an outstanding, significant, and unique contribution to the community, or for far-reaching social activity.

Fundraising in Israel and abroad has been extended with the inauguration of the Association of OUI Friends in Geneva and an event held at the Israeli Ambassador's house in London. Mr. Ronnie Kobrovsky was recently appointed Chairman of OUI Friends in Israel.

The OUI mourns the passing of Prof. Sonia Roccas, a leading Israeli and international Social Psychology researcher. Sonia held key positions at the OUI as Dean of Academic Studies, a member of the OUI Council, and a member of the Executive Committee. We also grieve the death of former Supreme Court President Meir Shamgar. President Shamgar was a member of the OUI Council since its establishment. He has significantly contributed to its work, among other things, by formulating its constitution and regulations. In 1993, President Shamgar was named an Honorary Fellow of the OUI.

Following the writing of this report, we were informed that, for the sixth consecutive year, the Open University has been ranked first among all Israeli universities in the student satisfaction survey commissioned by the National Union of Israeli Students. The Open University was praised by students for the quality of academic content, quality of teaching, and for its ability to remain current. We are proud of our faculty for their contributions to this high ranking.

*M. Aizerstark*