

Graduates

In 2018-2019, The Open University of Israel granted bachelor's degrees to 3,099 students, 1,009 of them magna cum laude or summa cum laude. Another 39 graduate students completed programs for an additional bachelor's degree. Master's degrees were awarded to 523 men and women, of whom 89 completed their studies magna cum laude or summa cum laude. Of those receiving degrees and certificates, 17% did not have high school matriculation certificates. (For data on bachelor's degree graduates, see Appendix B. For data on master's degree graduates, see Appendix D. For data on diploma studies and teaching certificates, see Appendix E).

Yarden Gerbi, Olympic Champion, BA in management and economics. Remarks made at commencement ceremony, Spring 2019

I have waited a long time for this moment. I am sure you have too. And I am excited to be here tonight. As a child, I always liked to dream. When I grew up a little, I understood that I could make my dreams come true. Dreams are the motivation for getting up in the morning; a way of learning about yourself and shaping your personality. My dream began at the age of three, in a small apartment in Netanya. I was sitting with my mother in front of the TV and we were watching the Olympic games in Barcelona. I asked, "Mom, how do you get a ticket for the Olympics? I want to participate." She answered, "Sweetie, you can't buy a ticket, you must work very hard to go there." That was the moment my dream was born.

I didn't know then which sport I wished to pursue, and whether I even liked sports. But no more than three years later, I began practicing judo. I fell in love with the sport. I didn't know that I would go as far as I did. What I did know was that I really, really wanted the dream, and would do everything to realize it. The amount of training increased gradually; my investment in judo grew, and I spent less time in school. Combining studies with sport was really difficult: for several years I woke up every morning at six for training, then went directly to school, and after school – to more training. In high school, the tension between my studies and sports became too high, and I had a talk with my parents. I told them that combining studies and sport was too hard for me, and I suggested that I quit school, and only take the matriculation exams. You should have seen my mother's face at that moment. My mother has a BA in architecture and an MA in Law. My father is very successful at his work, although he never studied in an academic institution. Without my parents I would not be who I am today, and I would not have won all my titles. After thinking the matter over together, we reached an agreement: I would try to pass as many matriculation exams as I could, and if I didn't succeed in completing them, I would take the rest during my military service. That was a decisive moment for me. In the end, I completed by Bagrut during my military service, and proposed going to university even before I was released from the army. You should have seen my mother's face at that moment...



Photo: Gidon Markovitz

At that point, I was already a professional athlete. I trained twice a day, and between trainings I received physical therapy and psychotherapy sessions, and needed time to recover – there was no time for anything else. And if that was not complicated enough, I spent about half of every year in competitions and training camps abroad. None of the academic institutions had any solution for me, until I visited the Open University for an introductory meeting. Learning through the Ofek system and taking online classes fit me like a glove. For someone who had time for nothing else except for judo, and spent long periods abroad, this was the perfect solution. The university and the teachers supported me wholeheartedly, especially Sarit Buchris, who mentored me and helped me so much, for which I am deeply grateful.

I wish to thank the Open University for offering this ideal solution for us athletes, who represent our country around the world, and for giving me the opportunity to tell everyone about this ideal interface and study program.

After having officially completed my degree, I asked myself what was more difficult: being a world champion, winning an Olympic medal, or completing a degree at the Open University in seven years? To this day, I don't know the answer to this question, but I am happy to have achieved all three. Sport has taught me to be highly motivated, and when people tell me that something is impossible or difficult, I find a way to prove that everything is possible if you work hard and really want it.

Congratulations to all of you, and thank you!

Jonas Waitzkin, MBA. Remarks made at commencement ceremony, Spring 2019

My name is Jonas. I immigrated from Brazil twenty years ago, and have been a member of Kibbutz Hatzerim ever since. My decision to immigrate to Israel is closely connected with studying. All my friends in Brazil went to university, and I decided studying was not for me. So I ran away from home, and came to Israel on my own.

I began working as a forklift operator, and was promoted to head of a forklift operators' team, and to several other logistic jobs. But then, my promotion was blocked because I had no education. That was the beginning of my love affair with the Open University.

A year before I married, I began studying in the evenings. Everything went smoothly until Michal became pregnant with Shahaf, my eldest daughter. It was then that I discovered, between baby bottles, at around two in the morning, that this was actually a wonderful time to complete assignments or to prepare for an exam. And then the second child arrived. Ofri joined us and made sure that



Photo: Gidon Markovitz

all assignments were completed at very strange hours. A bachelor's degree in economics and management was completed successfully, along with family, work, and a career. I began that period as a simple forklift operator and ended it as manager of the logistic center at Netafim. And then Oz joined the family. With a third child, we had become a family of five. At this point, what could be better than starting a new job producing cornflakes for Telma, while studying for a master's degree at the Open University?! For the first time, I experience the production world as the plant's operational manager. The assignments again moved to the night hours. And the journey continues.

A wonderful wife – check! A family – check! A BA degree – check! An MA degree – on the way! The only thing missing was relocation to the USA. Our group of five packed its suitcases and we moved to the United States. Don't visualize anything brilliant in New York. We went to southern Texas, where I was hired initially as a manager of a production plant on the Mexico-US border, and a year later, was appointed operational manager for America, meaning Canada, the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. The children needed to learn a new language, but what about me? How could I continue my studies for a master's degree?

The Open University assignments moved to airports throughout the American continent. Taking exams meant a six-hour trip from Southern Texas to the consulate in Houston. In order to do that, you must leave a day earlier, reserve a room in a nearby hotel, and take the tests in the presence of the consul. And one wife and three children continue having fun, with a father who is a little less present at home, but who loves them more than ever. That was the most difficult time during my studies. For the first time, I failed two courses.

After four years, we happily returned to Israel, missing only one seminar paper for the degree. That was easy, and here I am, against all odds, with an MBA in business administration, awarded to a guy who escaped Brazil because he didn't want to study.

Today I am the head of a SodaStream plant; yes, the very same company that was recently acquired by Pepsico for a little over three billion dollars. I am in charge of 600 workers, including 120 Palestinians; newcomers like me, who cross the border every day. They work together with Bedouins from Rahat, Arabs from East Jerusalem, and Christians from Jerusalem's Old City. When I go to work every day I no longer seek the promotion that once was so dear to me. Today we are making peace between all the sectors, and inbetween, I also try to run the plant.

As in every assignment, it is time to sum up. My studies portfolio includes my Michal, a wonderful, strong woman; the best I could ever have hoped for. Shahaf is a wonderful football player, but remains the baby girl who taught me how to complete assignments at night, between baby bottles. Ofri is the best krav maga fighter in the whole world. Oz is the sweetest dog-trainer in the universe. And I, a new immigrant, would never exchange our modest house in the kibbutz for the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. Michal, Shahaf, Ofri and Oz – I owe this degree to you. Thank you!