

# Spotlight: The Assistance Program for Students of Ethiopian Descent

The assistance program for students of Ethiopian descent started in 2017, to promote equal opportunities in acquiring a high-quality academic education and integration in the job market, and to provide academic guidance and support, based on the unique OUI characteristics that make it suitable for students from the social and geographic periphery. The program focuses on strengthening academic skills, encouraging persistence, and preventing dropout. It ultimately aims to help students reach graduation, through advising and support, while providing occupational guidance to ensure integration in the job market.

The program corresponds to a similar effort of the CHE/PBC, which has recently assumed responsibility for facilitating the access of Israelis of Ethiopian descent to higher education. Making higher education accessible to specific populations has been defined as a key goal in the Committee's work plan, and is part of an overall effort to boost academic and research excellence, while making higher education available to every social group and sector, and promoting genuine equality, whereby every student in Israel has an opportunity to realize his or her skills, regardless of origin or place of residence.

When the OUI first launched the program, approximately ninety registered students were at different stages of their studies. In 2018, a decision was made to include new students registered for studies towards a bachelor's or master's degree. A marketing effort and internal advertising significantly increased the number of students of Ethiopian descent registered at the OUI. In the first semester, some sixty new students were added, and the number of registrations grew by a hundred in each of the following semesters. The program currently includes about 450 active students. Six graduates of the program received their degrees in ceremonies held in June 2019.

The program offers counseling, full scholarships, empowerment and employment workshops, individual tutoring to improve learning skills, and financing of psychological testing and therapy. From the students' perspective, the most significant support is the individual tutoring by OUI staff, whose impressive dedication, accessibility and investment, and desire to see their

students succeed makes them partners to the students' progress and ultimate success.

## **Avi Yitzhak, a student in the School for Local Government:**

"The community members took their fate into their own hands, and started marching the rough road to Zion-Jerusalem. In darkness, hunger, and thirst, with serious illnesses that took many lives, knowing that they were paying a heavy price, leaving behind their history and belongings for a greater and more powerful dream. With their own hands, the Jews of Ethiopia etched themselves into an important and significant chapter of the Jewish people's history in its land. This journey is a tremendous source of inspiration for all, both because of the strong determination they showed on the difficult and painful roads, and their staunch resolution to cope with the many difficulties they faced along the way."



Photo: Eitan Avital

Mula Mulo, OUI Student