

Students

During the past year, 45,815 students studied towards bachelor's degrees (including those writing seminar papers). The number of new BA students¹ for the year was 14,248 (31%).

Graduate students numbered 2,418 (including those writing theses or final papers). Another 540 students were enrolled in completion studies.

The OUI method of instruction does not require an undergraduate student to choose a structured program limited by a timeframe. It was therefore decided, alongside the absolute numbers, to also present the data that allow for comparison with the figures for students in a full time degree program, i.e., Full Time Equivalent (FTE). The calculation is based on the number of registrations for courses in a given year, and is divided by a factor that represents the annual number of course registrations by which a student can complete a bachelor's degree in four years. In FTE terms, there were 25,873 bachelor's degree students in 2020 (compared to 24,124 in the previous year).

Retention – The Path to Degree Completion

Improving student retention is a strategic goal for the entire OUI system. The chief goal of the Unit of Student Retention is to raise the rate of student perseverance, and to increase the number of graduates.

In 2020, our efforts focused on developing long-term processes for student retention and the technology to support retention for individual and departmental use. In addition, the unit is working towards an organizational computerized system to track student progress and an integrative business intelligence field of retention topics. The implementation of retention-supporting work routines has expanded, and has been integrated into other units and introduced to additional OUI employees. These processes can be applied to a growing number of students taking a variety of courses in different fields, especially "first courses" and English language studies. A dedicated computerized system documents the measures taken and communicates them to the various university departments.

Currently, the Unit for Student Retention and the Dean of Academic Studies are working together to redefine the unit's responsibilities and mode of work with a view to applying the process to a larger segment of OUI students and departments.

Outstanding Students

In 2019, 220 students, including 19 graduate students, were included on the President's List; while the Dean's List included 667 students (142 graduate students).

Special population groups

Population	BA students	MA students
Arabic-speaking students	6,221	165
High school students	1,876	-
Soldiers in compulsory service	847	25
Ultra-Orthodox students*	2,147	71
Students with disabilities	1,069	64
Overseas students	731	81
Prison inmates	42	-

* According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, "Higher education in Israel – selected data for 2020" and to Central Bureau of Statistics data

1 A "student" at the OUI is defined as an individual who has taken at least one academic course in a given year. "Total number of students" refers to the number of people studying at the OUI. The statistics for students counts a student registered for two or more courses only once.

The Katzir Foundation scholarship was founded in 2000 by the Rashi Foundation to help young people from the geographic and social periphery overcome the socioeconomic obstacles that may prevent them from acquiring an education. Currently, approximately seventy OUI students benefit from Katzir scholarships, including 45 in the Maskila program for single mothers.

This year, the OUI has provided new-immigrant students with assistance and a special program of studies. The assistance is budgeted and managed in collaboration with the Immigrant Student Administration of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. In 2020, approximately 141 new-immigrant students from various countries registered for courses at the OUI, including 63 new students.

Arabic-speaking students

The Dean of Academic Studies is responsible for addressing the needs of Arabic-speaking students. Current projects include Gateway to Academia for Bedouin students from the Negev, and the Mentoring Project. This year was also dedicated to expediting an in-depth evaluation of the support systems offered to Arab-speaking students. The OUI steering committee was expanded to include a larger number of representatives from across the OUI. Prof. Mustafa Kabha was appointed to lead the initiative, along with the Dean of Academic Studies, Prof. Ophir Münz-Manor, who chairs the steering committee. Three teams were set up to examine pedagogy, study centers, student support, strategic planning, budgets, and fundraising. In summer semester 2020 an innovative project was launched in East Jerusalem for outstanding high school students wanting to study computer science online. Next year, a broader OUI project is planned that will offer, for the first time, preparatory classes in Hebrew language and mathematics for residents of East Jerusalem.

Students of Ethiopian descent

The assistance program for students of Ethiopian descent, which included 413 participants in 2020, focuses on reinforcing academic skills and encouraging perseverance.

The OUI commemorated Ethiopian Jews who perished on the arduous journey to Israel. This included a Zoom lecture on the secret Mossad operation to bring Ethiopian Jews from Sudan to Israel. The film *A Sea of Secret*, which depicts the operation carried out by undercover Mossad agents accompanied the lecture, which was attended by OUI students and employees.

Ultra-Orthodox students

Designated OUI staff under a steering committee appointed by the president runs the program for integrating and advising ultra-Orthodox students. The program's goal is to increase retention of these students by providing personal guidance. The benefits offered include facilitating access to information on specific scholarships from philanthropic foundations, referral to academic services provided by the OUI (such as advising, recognition of credits from prior studies, learning skills workshops, English language courses, socio-economical scholarships), and mentoring and internship programs they may participate in during their studies.

During the past year, 2,228 ultra-Orthodox individuals studied at the OUI. This marked a 21% increase in numbers compared with 2019. These students are defined as ultra-Orthodox according to the Central Bureau of Statistics designation, which is based on the type of study framework the students attended during their high school years. The number of ultra-Orthodox students registered for OUI courses this year has grown by 30%, totaling 7,817 enrollments.

A number of structured ultra-Orthodox women's groups studied computer science and management in two seminaries in Jerusalem. A structured psychology group was offered in a seminary in Ashkelon.

Yehonatan Tzalach and Roni Shub, ultra-Orthodox postgraduate students studying social psychology, won PBC excellence scholarships for research-oriented master's degrees. The scholarships are awarded for outstanding academic performance. The aim is to

encourage ultra-Orthodox students to pursue research-oriented full-time graduate studies.

High school students

In 2020, 2,055 young students studied at the OUI while still in high school, 1,669 of them in the Academia in High School program. This year was the eighth year of the Academia in High School program.

The program, run jointly with the Ministry of Education, encourages qualified high school students to take undergraduate OUI courses, which they can exchange for matriculation exams in 17 subjects. In 2020, the program was expanded to include 1,330 new students, a 46% increase compared with the previous year.

Almog and Inbar Wald, siblings aged 17 and 15, won gold medals in the International Olympiad in Informatics. Almog, a 12th grader, has completed all the requirements for a BSc in science, with an emphasis on computer science. Inbar, a 10th grader, is studying science, with an emphasis on computer science.

This year, there was a 51% increase in schools joining the program. The most noticeable increase occurred in Israel's north, with 70% more students enrolling in the program compared to the previous year, and numerous other schools joining in. The OUI has tightened its ties with the heads of education administrations in several local authorities, including Ra'anana, Modiin-Maccabim-Reut, Shoham, Kokhav Yair-Tzur Yigal and Kadima-Tzoran.

Twenty high school students were on the President's List this year, while 33 were on the Dean's List. The Ministry of Education granted honors scholarships to 247 students for their achievements in 2019.

Regional preparatory conferences were held in Ashdod, Petah Tikvah, Beer Sheva, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Jerusalem, Kokhav Yair-Tzur Yigal and Kadima-Tzoran. The OUI held a symposium for students of the Nachshon program in Ra'anana. Around 700 students, parents, and teachers participated in an online introductory conference adjusted to COVID-19 restrictions.

Students with learning disabilities

In 2020, the Eitan Center (the learning disabilities unit) extended diagnosis, counseling, support, and accessibility services to 3,251 OUI students. Of the 1,235 new applications submitted over the year, 679 were recognized for special services.

The center offers a variety of student services, from diagnostics to learning modifications:

- Specific counseling and individual tutoring to empower students and enhance academic skills at different stages of studies, particularly in times of crisis.
- Counseling for complex cases of personal difficulties, monitoring of struggling students, and finding creative solutions to respond to specific needs.
- Mentoring and tutoring individuals or groups; individual tutoring of English Language courses; modification of study centers; enhancement of learning material accessibility; and dynamic adaptation of exams.
- Workshops for exam anxiety. Due to COVID-19, only one such workshop was held this year.
- The center operates a learning disabilities diagnostic center, based on the Learning Functions Tests (MATAL) of the National Institute for Testing, Evaluation and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities. In 2020, the center diagnosed 433 applicants.

During the COVID-19 period, the Eitan Center offered support in various realms to OUI students, faculty, and administrative staff. The center has also dealt with all the specific adaptations that were required for an alternative evaluation of students, including at-risk students who could not attend frontal exams.

Students with disabilities

In the past year, 819 students with disabilities studied at the OUI, including 688 students with hearing disabilities,

61 with visual disabilities, 232 with physical or motor disabilities, 324 with chronic illness, and 198 with emotional disabilities (some of the students have more than one disability).

The Eitan Center also addresses the needs of specific groups of students from difficult social and family backgrounds, in collaboration with various welfare agencies.

Family and personal status

In compliance with the Students' Rights Law and CHE procedural regulations, 1,320 students were entitled to study accommodations due to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, fertility treatments, adoption, or child custody.

Accessibility

The accessibility section of the dean of students, together with the Department of Study Centers, have continued jointly advancing the accessibility of OUI study centers. Various infrastructural and building programs have improved accessibility. In 2020, all 55 study centers received accessibility certification, with the exception of Beit Ayalah in Tel-Aviv, which is currently in the process of obtaining certification by the Department for Structural Preservation .

Two updates on accessibility were produced and distributed to all OUI employees.

Scholarships

In 2020, 6,153 students received scholarships, including 4,754 financial aid grants.

Improved Student Services

- In August 2020, the OUI launched the Hoshen system for managing the personal accounts of OUI students. Hoshen offers high-quality, fast online services, and increases the number of online operations carried out independently. The system offers:

- a comprehensive, fully transparent record of student registration, payment and tuition;
- management of personal accounts, and access to detailed financial information and ability to perform various operations online;
- added online processes that can be carried out independently;
- a simulator to calculate tuition costs prior to registration;
- a display of total costs and fees prior to actual payment.

A pilot prior to summer semester 2020 offered students the choice between receiving course materials in a printed format or online. The pilot covered all courses except for those with open-book exams, courses based on purchased books, and courses whose content does not exist in a digital format. Students of the latter courses automatically received hard copies of the learning materials by mail. Of the students who had the option to choose, 12% chose a digital version and 88% chose printed material.

Career Guidance and Placement

OpJob prepares students and graduates for the world of employment and introduces them to diverse job opportunities by posting extensive information on available jobs and career directions, and offering access to an online job search.

Around 7,300 students and 2,000 graduates are registered and actively use the system. Around 6,000 potential employers are listed, and approximately 400 positions are advertised at any given moment.

Objob provides information on lectures and workshops, and provides counseling and meetings with employers. A career center for the Arab sector is designed for their specific needs. A program launched this year encourages students to experience working in organizations relevant to their interests.

In 2020, three occupational guidance workshops were held (one specifically for Arabic-speakers), 17 online lectures (including nine for Arabic-speakers), and approximately eighty individual meetings with career consultants took place (about half for Arabic-speakers).

The Student Association

In 2020, the Student Association continued its efforts to enhance the learning experience and improve services offered to OUI students.

- The Student to Student mentoring program, which encourages students who have completed courses with honors to mentor new students has gone online, using the Practice makes Perfect platform. For the first time, students and tutors abroad have joined this extremely popular, highly-rated program.
- The practice project, which enables continuous drills in core courses throughout the semester, switched to an online format in spring semester 2020. A practice group was opened for General Chemistry I, led by an OUI honors student.
- All study marathons took place online. Marathons were announced in mathematics courses and in the course Introduction to Psychology, in which fifty students (a record number) participated.
- The Model UN Club has completed its fifth year, offering students tools to integrate into the job market, specifically in the field of local and global diplomacy. The club's delegations have participated in online international conferences. The debate club participated in an online international competition in August 2020. Two OUI representatives won the title of National Debate Champions in the Israeli debate championship held online by the OUI and the IDC Herzliya.

- This year, five Arab scholarship beneficiaries were assigned to different OUI campuses to strengthen ties with Arabic-speaking students. A dedicated Facebook page in Arabic was launched, so that information on benefits and other topics would be accessible to Arabic-speakers.

Athletics

In 2020, most ASA activities, including those run by the OUI, were canceled due to the COVID-19 breakout. The FISU and EUSA World and European student competitions were cancelled, as were the International Academic Sports Association games in Eilat.

Prior to the cancellation, the OUI competed in several internal championships, including tennis, chess, squash, table tennis and rowing machines. The OUI netball teams remain active, and have played some of the planned games, including opposite the Tel Aviv team in the Afek League, and the Givat Haviva team (Wadi Ara) in the Friendship League. The two groups were sidelined for several months, but once conditions permitted, they resumed practice.

The OUI continues its collaboration with Israel's Olympic committee, and offers scholarships in recognition of their efforts and achievements to outstanding Olympic athletes studying at the OUI. Olympic participation has not changed this year, despite the postponement of most of the international eligibility competitions due to the one-year deferment of the Olympic Games.