

Students

During the past year, 49,399 students studied towards bachelor's degrees (including those writing seminar papers). The number of new BA students¹ for the year was 15,952 (32%).

Graduate students numbered 2,703 (including those writing theses or final papers). Another 700 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. Therefore, we also present data for comparison with 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, 29,500 bachelor's degree students were enrolled in 2021 compared to 25,873 in the previous year.

Retention – The Key to Success

Improving student retention is a strategic goal of the entire OUI system. The core mission of the Unit of Student Retention is to develop policies and assimilate strategies, tools, and work processes to assist students in completing their studies – from initial registration to completion of degree requirements.

The unit is currently developing BI-based tools, together with the Data and Business Intelligence team, in order to provide a comprehensive view of student status all along the academic path. These tools will serve management, academic departments, and the students themselves. The hope is that student retention will be improved and students will receive the assistance they need in order to complete their studies.

The "Student's World" BI tool (see page 41) is currently being modified, with the input of each academic department, to fit their specific needs and academic requirements. Departments identify issues that require special attention towards improving student retention.

The unit continues proactive monitoring using computerized retention system dropout indicators to identify struggling students. Proactive monitoring currently focuses on specific student populations such as ultra-Orthodox students and students of Ethiopian descent, as indicated by the academic departments. These processes are continually expanding to meet the university's needs.

Academic Counseling

The Department of Academic Counseling supports thousands of students during their studies. The unique structure of OUI courses requires specialized counseling services to assist students in self-managing their studies. The process is based on identifying needs and strengths, building trust, coordinating expectations, and finding workable solutions.

Academic counselors assist students in planning their semester/yearly class schedules. They help students in formulating study programs and facilitate student access to other sources of support. Counseling is offered in person or remotely. Specific populations receive particular attention. Additionally, faculty members offer academic advising.

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.

This year, an updated academic counseling website was launched, offering useful information for students to make their counseling sessions as productive as possible.

In its efforts to improve existing student services, the OUI launched a review process to reexamine its counseling model. As a result, a new operational policy is being developed.

Outstanding Students

In 2020, the President's List included 301 students, (44 graduate students); while the Dean's List included 1,014 students (181 graduate students).

Special Population Groups

Population	BA students	MA students
Arabic-speaking students	6,098	218
High school students	2,206	–
Soldiers in compulsory service	1,091	28
Ultra-Orthodox students*	2,622	91
Students with disabilities	996	52
Overseas students	824	78
Prison inmates	24	–

* According to Central Bureau of Statistics data

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 preventing 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 continued to offer special assistance to new immigrant students. The support is budgeted and managed in collaboration with the New Immigrant Student Administration of the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption. About 135 new immigrants from various countries registered for courses in 2021.

Arabic-speaking students

The Dean of Academic Studies is responsible for addressing the needs of about 6,500 Arabic-speaking students. In addition to various current projects, this year was also dedicated to expediting an in-depth evaluation of the support systems offered to Arabic-speaking students.

Prof. Mustafa Kabha, who heads this initiative, works together with Prof. Ophir Münz-Manor, the Dean of Academic Studies and chair of the steering committee for Arabic-speaking students.

A comprehensive plan to provide greater accessibility to Arabic-speaking OUI students is currently being formulated. The plan will consider the barriers preventing these students from fully integrating into higher education, and will work to remove these hurdles.

As part of the "bridge to success" (جسر النجاح) project, the OUI senate decided to regulate the studies of "first courses" in Arabic. Arabic-speaking students will be able to choose three "first courses" from a proposed list, which they will be able to study either in a bilingual format or in Arabic. This will assist students in overcoming the Hebrew language barrier at the outset of their studies. Although the OUI has offered courses of this kind in the past, the present decision regulates the study of these courses and highlights the importance of using Hebrew from the beginning of university studies. The goal is to ensure an easier transition for Arabic-speaking students.

The OUI has set itself the goal of promoting excellence among Arab-speaking students, integrating them into various OUI departments, and increasing their numbers in the exact sciences departments. To this end, it offers an academic support envelope adjusted to Arabic-speaking

students in departments and tracks leading to bachelor degrees in science.

Efforts in reaching out to applicants from the Arab community continue. A website in Arabic was launched in 2021 for applicants. The library website also provides information in Arabic. Students can now utilize the Al Manhal database; one of the richest Arabic databases in the political sciences and humanities, comprising books, articles, and PhD theses.

Eaman Mahameed, studying towards her master's degree in education, won the PBC Excellence Scholarship for a research-track master's degree for Arabic-speaking students. The academic excellence scholarship encourages students to pursue graduate studies in the research track without financial worry.

Students of Ethiopian descent

The assistance program for students of Ethiopian descent focuses on reinforcing academic skills and encouraging perseverance until degree completion. In 2021, about 530 students of Ethiopian descent participated in the program, including 110 new students.

The PBC's plan to facilitate access to higher education for individuals of Ethiopian descent has enabled the OUI to continue its efforts in this area. Support is offered via academic advising, comprehensive individual tutoring in ESL, and other counseling services.

As in previous years, the OUI commemorated the Ethiopian Jews who perished on their arduous journey to Israel. Among the guests were lecturers Dr. Wovite Managusto and Dr. Avishai Ben-Dror, and performer Ester Rada. The ceremony was open to all OUI students and employees and was also accessible on Zoom.

Ultra-Orthodox students

A designated OUI team supervised by a steering committee runs the integration and guidance program for ultra-Orthodox students. The program offers guidance and information on various OUI services, including

scholarships, academic advising, accreditation of prior studies, study skills workshops, and English language courses.

During 2021, enrollment of ultra-Orthodox students stood at approximately 2,500, a 12% increase from 2020. A student is defined as "ultra-Orthodox" based on the type of educational institution they attended during their high school period, as defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

This year, several groups of female ultra-Orthodox students studied computer science, political science, and economics and management in three seminaries in Jerusalem. A group in an Ashkelon seminary studied psychology. Another class joined the Pardes program, which combines computer science and Middle East studies with placement in Security System bodies.

Sara Erenraich, an ultra-Orthodox OUI graduate student in computer science, won the PBC Excellence Scholarship for a research-track master's degree for ultra-Orthodox students. This academic excellence scholarship encourages ultra-Orthodox students to pursue graduate studies in a research track and allows them to dedicate themselves to their studies without financial concerns.

High school students

This past year, 2,382 young students studied at the OUI while still in high school, 1,974 of them in the Academia in High School program. This year was the ninth year of the 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. Beginning this year, the students may exchange 5-point matriculation in mathematics. This year, 1,214 high school students joined the program.

This year there was a considerable increase in the number of high school students who received excellence certificates for their studies. The President's List included 22 students from

this group, who each received a scholarship. The Dean's List included an additional 49 students.

Interestingly, in 2021 we noted that 457 young women participated in semester A studies, a 72% increase over the first semester of the previous year. Several initiatives contributed to this growth, including conferences to encourage female students to enroll in computer science programs. In January 2021, a national conference on this subject hosted computer science experts from academia, hi-tech industries, and the IDF.

The OUI attaches great importance to promoting the program among Arabic-speaking students as well. In 2021, high school students from the Nazareth region joined the computer science program, and another class is slated to open in 2022.

The strengthened ties between Academia in High School and the IDF Atuda Academit and Talpiot tracks generated joint conferences for 11th and 12th graders.

In addition, online symposia were held, introducing high school students to the OUI's diverse fields of study via lectures by senior faculty members. About 2,500 students participated in online conferences.

Students with learning disabilities

In 2021, the Eitan Center (learning disabilities unit) extended diagnosis, counseling, support, and accessibility services to 3,780 OUI students. Of the 1,613 new applications submitted this year, 916 were eligible for special services.

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

- Testing for learning disabilities
- Individual counseling and support to empower students and improve their academic skills at various stages of their studies, particularly during stressful situations.
- Assistance with complex administrative and academic issues, follow-up of struggling students, and seeking creative solutions.

- Learning support and assistance: individual or group tutoring, ESL tutoring; study center modifications; accessible study materials.
- Sophisticated solutions for exam accessibility for students with hearing and visual impairments.
- Dynamic exam modifications in all evaluation modes
- Zoom group informational sessions about alternative evaluation methods
- The center includes a learning disabilities diagnosis unit that evaluates students according to the National Testing and Evaluation Center for Learning Disabilities Diagnosis. In 2021, the unit diagnosed 511 applicants.
- Throughout the COVID-19 period, the unit engaged with special adjustments offered in alternative evaluation, including for at-risk students taking frontal exams.

Students with disabilities

In the past year, 1,048 students with disabilities studied at the OUI, including 68 with a hearing disabilities, 73 with visual disabilities (of whom 23 are blind), 405 with physical or motor disabilities, 498 with chronic illness, and 362 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, 1,596 students were entitled to study accommodations due to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, fertility treatments, adoption, or child custody issues.

Accessibility

Physical accessibility

This year, the OUI completed the process of making all study centers legally accessible. This followed five years of efforts

by the accessibility unit of the Dean of Students to create a physically accessible environment for disabled students at study centers located around the country. About 3.3 million NIS was invested in making all the necessary adjustments and construction work to enable physical accessibility, including accommodations for visually and hearing impaired students.

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

Digital accessibility

The expansion of digital accessibility continued this year. The accessibility of exam forms has been regulated, in collaboration with the examination department. Subtitles were added to video lectures and video recordings of events posted on the OUI YouTube channel. Hearing-impaired students can now benefit from real-time transcriptions added to Zoom tutoring sessions. Improvement of access to OPAL course sites and OPAL exams has continued.

We have increased our coordination with MEITAL (Inter-University Center for e-learning, IUCEL) and the Israel Accessibility Association. The Experts Committee of the Standards Institute of Israel, which determines Israel's internet standards, includes OUI representatives.

Scholarships

During the past year, 6,340 students received scholarships, including 4,754 financial aid grants.

Improved Student Services

- The academic call centers have integrated a multi-channeled communication system that facilitates using email and WhatsApp. Forms for filling and signing digitally on a cellphone or a computer have also been developed.
- Due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, OUI systems and work processes have had to adjust to decisions taken hastily under circumstances of uncertainty. This entailed changes to timetables and greater flexibility in student payments, waiving late registration and extra

tutoring fees, changes in free registration, better credit terms, a 50% refund of payment for studies abroad, and a security fee grant.

- Since the COVID-19 outbreak, various alternative methods of course evaluations have been adopted. This has entailed coordination in devising test questionnaires, making the questionnaires accessible to students, submitting and correcting exams, registering the results, and returning the corrected exams to students. Exam date options have been doubled to allow for the scheduling of alternatively evaluated exams. The process for assigning dates to different course exams, and for referring students to different exam systems was improved. A reminder and message service for students was developed, as well as a system to allow OUI support personnel to assist students before, during, and after an exam. The newly-developed system offers an immediate secured response to a large number of students. The OPAL exam system was set up concurrently.
- This year, an online system for managing seminar papers was launched. The new process is uniform and transparent. It provides fast documented feedback, and shortens processes through automation. The system also allows course coordinators to monitor the writing process and the interaction between students and supervisors.

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. About 9,000 students and 2,200 graduates are registered and actively use OpJob.

This year, about 700 students participated in activities offered by the center, including lectures, workshops, counseling, and meetings with potential employers. In 2021, OpJob ran twenty workshops, mostly on Zoom, and about sixty individual meetings with career counselors. The

center follows and assists students who enroll in courses that include internships in relevant organizations. This year, about sixty students benefited from OpJob's assistance in finding relevant internships, writing CV's, and preparing for interviews. This kind of support is vital for developing a career, acquiring relevant experience, fostering professional ties, enhancing personal and professional skills, and gaining acquaintance and understanding of the relevant job market.

This year, the OUI offered students from different populations and sectors enrolled in particular study fields a new program that enables them to be mentored by representatives of business organizations or OUI graduates. About 150 students have joined the program and are acquiring real-life skills, and developing important contacts.

OpJob's career center also assists Arabic-speaking students in finding jobs to suit their skills. About 250 Arabic-speaking students and graduates participated in a digital employment fair held this year.

The Student Association

In 2021, the OUI Student Association continued its efforts to enhance the learning experience and improve services for OUI students.

The association's academic department has instituted several projects to support OUI students in their studies. These include Students for Students – a mentoring project with experienced tutors; “Practice Makes Perfect,” which provides exercises to foster skills necessary for success in core courses; online training in collaboration with the Practis company; an English learning app with multiple interfaces, including speech and accent practice in collaboration with Burlington English, and career courses combining English studies with employment preparedness.

The scholarship and social engagement department continued to promote volunteering in non-profit organizations directly or indirectly involved in the COVID-19

crisis, such as the SAHAR mental health association, and the LATET organization for humanitarian aid. The OUI Model UN club continued offering students tools to integrate into jobs related to local and global diplomacy. The Saluting the Reserves project offered a scholarship to students serving in the IDF reserves.

The association continues to organize events to benefit OUI students, including Students' Day, a club for students with children, a sports club, a club for small business owners and a club for those in the arts.

Athletics

Due to COVID-19, sports activities were curtailed in 2021. The FISU and EUSA World and European student competitions were cancelled.

The Academic Sports Association (ASA) organized a chess competition on Zoom, at which OUI chess masters won first place. An ASA table-tennis championship resulted in a first-place award for the OUI player.

The OUI sports coordinator continues to be the OUI ASA representative on the Olympic Audit Committee.

Ran Sagiv, an OUI student, and his brother Shachar, represented Israel at the triathlon competition at the Tokyo Olympics. Several other athletes, former OUI students, joined other Israeli teams. The OUI continues to collaborate with the Israeli Olympic Committee, offering study scholarships to senior Olympic athletes who have not yet had an opportunity to participate in actual games. They will continue to receive support in their studies, as will Olympic athletes eligible for Olympic Committee scholarships, and other Israeli team athletes.



Photo: Harel Zilberman, ASA Israel

Ran Sagiv, OUI student, in Tokyo triathlon.