

 **THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF ISRAEL**

**Department of Education
and
Psychology**

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

Education

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The Open University of Israel
EDUCATION SELF-EVALUATION REPORT
Executive Summary

The Open University of Israel (OUI) is unique on the Israeli academic scene. Although it resembles other universities in its pursuit of excellence in teaching and research, it differs from them in its educational mission – wide accessibility to quality higher education, and in its main method of instruction – distance learning. The OUI is dedicated to the creation of university-level materials that are suitable for self-study and for the development and implementation of versatile means, including technological means, for support of learning.

Teaching and learning: At the OUI, students enroll in one or more courses each semester. The course materials (books, study guides, videotaped lectures, etc.) are sent to students before the beginning of the semester, with instructions for self-study and with homework assignments for the entire semester. The students study the materials mainly on their own, and submit assignments according to a predetermined schedule. The learning process is supported by detailed personal feedback on assignments and by various learning aids, printed and electronic. Tutorials held at study centers throughout the country, or via the internet, help to clarify and practice applications of the subject matter and encourage socialization with peers. At the end of the semester, students take monitored written final exams. Since assignments and exams are prepared in advance, the same pre-set high standard is preserved regardless of tutorial mode or student profile.

Academic staff: The OUI academic staff consists of senior faculty, course coordinators, and tutors. The senior faculty is the academic leadership; its members, who excel in research, initiate study programs and are in charge of developing all course materials. Senior faculty are also responsible for quality control and supervision of all ongoing instructional activities. Each OUI course is managed administratively and academically by a course coordinator. The course coordinator is responsible for the smooth, effective running of the teaching system. Coordinators prepare new assignments and exams for each semester, maintain the course website and enrich it with appropriate materials, participate in course revision teams, and hire and supervise tutors. Tutors, whose number in each course depends on the number of students enrolled and their geographical dispersion, conduct group tutorial sessions, grade homework assignments and provide personal support when necessary.

The Education programs: The Education & Psychology department offers single- and dual-disciplinary undergraduate programs in Education, and a graduate program (MA) in two tracks: thesis (research) and non-thesis (final exam or project). In 2012, there were 59 academic staff members in the department: 13 senior faculty members and 46 course coordinators (6 and 23, respectively, in the Education division). In addition, there are approximately 150 tutors who tutor study groups. In 2011-2012, 16,882 students took undergraduate courses in the department with a total of 31,354 course enrollments (1,377 enrollments and 647 undergraduate Education students). 368 students took graduate Education courses (1,091 course enrollments). Enrollments in courses offered by the Department of Education and Psychology represent 27.8% of all course enrollments at the OUI, reflecting the high level of departmental activity. Between 2008 and 2012, a total of 1,754 students were awarded Bachelor's degrees in the department: 211 in Education, 1,271 in Psychology, and 272 in the dual-disciplinary program in Psychology and Education. 249 students graduated from our MA program (19 in the thesis track).

The main strengths and weaknesses that were pointed out in the self-evaluation process, and the actions that will be taken in order to improve the weak points that were found.

Strengths: Academic excellence: Our courses and programs are held to superior academic standards, and enable capable students to continue to advanced degrees or to transfer credits to other universities. The OUI study method increases students' independent study ability. The OUI pays serious attention to recruitment and training processes of the staff; as a result the academic standards are maintained, the tutoring level is high and the ongoing contact with students is extensive.

Equal opportunity and flexibility: Our programs increase access to higher education through open admissions for undergraduates, distance learning using advanced technologies, and addressing the needs of special population groups. Flexibility in time, place, pace and teaching methods allows our students to excel in academic studies alongside demanding careers or other obligations.

Academic quality assurance and learning outcomes: The OUI system ensures preservation of quality, standards and high control of learning outcomes, from the initial stages of course planning, via its rigorous course development procedure, to actual course operation and the examination system. We view stability in academic standards as one of our major advantages over traditional methods of higher education in which academic standards may differ from year to year, depending on teaching staff or student body.

Research: Senior faculty members conduct research as a major part of their role. Although their small number limits the overall impact of their work, individually they achieve high research standards, as measured by the number of articles published in leading refereed professional journals and books, research grants, memberships on journal editorial boards and contributions to international conferences.

Broader impact of our program – a gate to higher education: Thanks to our unique method of study, combined with our insistence on academic excellence, our programs open a gate to high education for students who choose to pursue a limited program. These include students who use our “bridge” program to begin their studies at the OUI and then directly enroll in second year studies in any university in Israel.

The lack of a PhD program is a major weakness and we view this as a major goal. As with our thesis track MA program, but much more so, a PhD program will serve as a stimulus for research and academic excellence in the department and its programs. We view the success of our research oriented MA program as a step toward a full research graduate program that includes a PhD.

The extent to which the Study Program has achieved its mission, goals and learning outcomes. Are the Institution, Parent Unit and Department satisfied with the outcomes of the Study Program?

We believe that our programs achieve the OUI mission of facilitating access to higher education through a system that offers equal opportunity via open admissions, and does not require adherence to specific yearly loads or regular classroom attendance; promoting academic excellence, both in research and higher education and providing a suitable framework for academic and professional advancement in Education to promising candidates who cannot study at traditional universities. Two key ingredients assure the academic excellence of our programs: a rigorous and extensive peer review process of programs and study material; and the strict separation of academic requirements from student profiles, in which our course material is based on pre-set academic standards, independent of the extremely heterogeneous student body.

Learning outcomes: Our undergraduate programs impart the theoretical and applicative background that our graduates need to continue to advanced Education studies. Our graduate program provides graduates with the ability to independently acquire knowledge in advanced theoretical aspects as well as expand their career options in education and other areas.