



**SELF-EVALUATION REPORT 2015**  
**Economics**

## Executive Summary

**The Open University of Israel (OUI)** is unique on the Israeli academic scene. While resembling 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 independent study, and to the development and implementation of versatile means, including technology, for support of learning.

**Teaching and learning:** At the OUI, the main course materials (books, study guides, etc.) are sent to students before the beginning of the semester, with instructions for independent study and with homework assignments for the entire semester. Study is mainly independent and students submit assignments according to a predetermined schedule. The learning process is supported by detailed personal feedback and by various printed and digital learning aids. Tutorials held at study centers throughout the country, and online, help clarify the material, provide practice, and encourage interaction 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 standards are preserved, regardless of tutorial mode or student profile.

**Academic staff:** The academic staff consists of senior faculty, course coordinators, and tutors. The senior faculty is the academic leadership; its members conduct research, initiate and manage study programs, and are in charge of developing all course materials. Each OUI course is administratively and academically managed by a course coordinator. Coordinators prepare new assignments and exams for each semester, maintain the course website and supplement 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 individual support when necessary.

**Economics programs:** The Department of Management and Economics offers single- and dual-disciplinary undergraduate programs in management, economics, and accounting, as well as an MBA. There are 10 senior faculty members and 65 course coordinators in the department. In addition, approximately 400 tutors lead study groups. In 2013-2014, approximately 11,000 students studied towards an undergraduate degree in the department (approximately 4,000 towards a degree in economics).

## Strengths and Weaknesses

A short summary of the main strengths and weaknesses pointed out in the self-evaluation process.

### Strengths

**Academic excellence:** Our courses and programs are held to superior academic standards, and enable students to continue on to advanced degrees. The OUI study method increases the independent study abilities of our students.

**Equal opportunity and flexibility:** Our programs increase access to higher education through open admissions for undergraduates. The distance learning methods that we employ,

incorporating advanced technologies, address the needs of various population groups. Flexibility in time, place, pace, and teaching methods allows our students to excel in academic studies while maintaining demanding careers or other obligations.

**Academic quality assurance and learning outcomes:** The OUI system ensures the preservation of quality and standards, and greater control of learning outcomes. Rigorous course development procedures ensure academic quality, from the initial stages of course planning, via its rigorous course development procedure, to course operation and examination.

**Research:** A major part of the role of senior faculty members is to conduct research. Although their small number limits the overall impact of their work; individually, they achieve high research standards, as measured by their publications in leading refereed professional journals, research grants, contributions to international conferences, etc.

### **Weaknesses**

**Small number of senior faculty members:** The main weakness of the OUI's study programs in economics is the small number of senior faculty members. Compared to other universities, studies in the OUI are much more structured, leading to more administrative duties for faculty members. Although the research and high-quality academic studies are definite strengths of the OUI, these could be improved even further if the administrative load could be shared by more than the current ten senior faculty members in the department (five economists and five specializing in management).

### **Actions taken to address weaknesses**

A short description of the actions the Institution, the Parent Unit and the Department are going to take in order to address the weaknesses that were found.

The number of senior faculty members specializing in economics has grown from 2 to 5 since the previous evaluation. Plans to further increase this number are currently considered by the OUI's management.

### **Mission, Goals, and Learning Outcomes**

A brief summary of the extent to which the Study Program has achieved its mission, goals and learning outcomes, and whether the outcomes comply with its mission statement.

**Mission and goals:** We believe that the study program in management achieves its mission and goals, which are, to a very large extent, derived from those of the OUI. In fact, the four main strengths specified above correspond to the main elements of the OUI's mission.

**Learning outcomes:** The analysis in this evaluation process reveals that the economics study program specifies learning outcomes clearly and that they are internalized well by our students.

## Changes since the last evaluation

A brief description of the main changes that have been made in the program since the last evaluation.

The Department of Management and Economics is relatively new, having been formed in 1997. Its first 17 years have been characterized by rapid growth, which can be divided into two stages: an initial stage based on new beginnings, and a later stage based on maturing and stabilizing. The 2007 self-evaluation was conducted during the transition from the first stage to the second, and contributed to this evolution.

The most notable elements in the pre-2007 departmental growth were the initiation of the study programs in management, economics and accounting, and the development of a large number of new courses for these programs. The main **post-2007** elements in the department's growth include the following:

- Final and permanent accreditation has been received from the CHE for each of the department's BA degrees and the MBA degree.
- New courses have been added to the economics study program (e.g., Game Theory and its Applications to Economics and Management; Public Economics, Contemporary Theories of Social and Economic Justice; Economic History), but the major effort in course development has been directed towards updating and revising existing courses. In some courses the original version has been replaced by a completely new one (e.g., Intermediate Macroeconomics A; Intermediate Macroeconomics B), and many others have been partially, but significantly, revised (e.g., International Economics, Price Theory B; Price Theory C; Business ethics, Cost and Managerial Accounting; Judgment and Evaluation for Economics and Management).
- The number of students has risen: In 2005-2006 the OUI conferred 164 BA degrees in economics, whereas in 2013-2014 the OUI conferred 275 BA degrees in economics.
- The study program in accounting, which includes a relatively large division of study in economics, was initiated in 2005. It had no graduates in 2005-2006, but has grown and become one of the OUI's largest programs, with 225 graduates in 2013-2014.
- The single-disciplinary study program towards a BA in economics which was initiated in 2003 and had one graduate in 2005-2006, has grown into a viable program with 54 graduates in 2013-2014.
- A study program in economics was created to modularly fit into a dual-disciplinary undergraduate study program. In 2013-2014 the OUI granted 221 dual-disciplinary bachelors degrees in economics.
- The number of the department's senior faculty members specializing in economics has grown from two to five.