The Open University of Israel

Zippy Erlich
The Open University of Israel, Israel

Judith Gal-Ezer
The Open University of Israel, Israel

INTRODUCTION

The Open University of Israel (OUI) is a distance education institution with open admissions that offers academic studies to students throughout Israel. Its home-study method allows its students to pursue higher education whenever and wherever convenient. The OUI offers over 500 courses in life sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, computer science, social sciences, management, Jewish studies, education, humanities, psychology, communications, music and art, and more, and has about 38,000 students all over Israel and abroad.

The OUI has traditionally taken advantage of existing technologies and has integrated state-of-the-art technology into its courses. For several years, the OUI has been integrating computer-mediated-communication (CMC) technologies into its course Web sites to improve its distance teaching. These new teaching methods expand and enrich the written textbooks that are the basis for teaching at the OUI. The incorporation of technological teaching methods is fully adapted to the written study materials that are prepared by experts in their fields.

Below, we will present the OUI and its distance learning methods, which include the integration of the CMC technologies.

BACKGROUND

The OUI, a distance education institution authorized by the Council for Higher Education of Israel, was established in 1976 to provide academic studies to students throughout the country. The OUI is characterized by open admissions and a flexible curriculum, method, and pace of study. The OUI's uniqueness, as well as characteristics it has in common with other open universities, can be found in a comparative study of distance and campus universities (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999).

Since its establishment, the OUI has been growing steadily. In the past decade, student enrollment increased by more than 100% to more than 38,000 students, compared to about 18,000 students in 1993. Figure 1 depicts this growth. Today, every sixth student in Israel studies at the OUI, making it Israel's largest university.

To better serve the growing number of students, the university has stepped up the development of new courses and new programs toward bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as the development of innovative teaching methods integrating a variety of advanced technologies such as computer-mediated communication, multimedia elements, and interactive broadband communication.

OPEN ADMISSIONS

The OUI is open to all those who wish to take a single course or a battery of courses, or to pursue a full program of studies toward a bachelor's degree, and also offers master's degrees for students with a bachelor's degree. Students pay tuition for each course they choose to study rather than for a full-time, full-year program as is typical in other universities. The OUI combines its open-admissions policy with uncompromisingly high standards and exacting requirements in studies, and judges students on their achievements in demanding OUI studies rather than on their prior scholastic achievements. Enrollment does not require matriculation or any other certificate from another educational institution to provide proof of prior scholastic achievements.

Applicants joining the OUI are not required to enroll in a faculty or department, but rather register
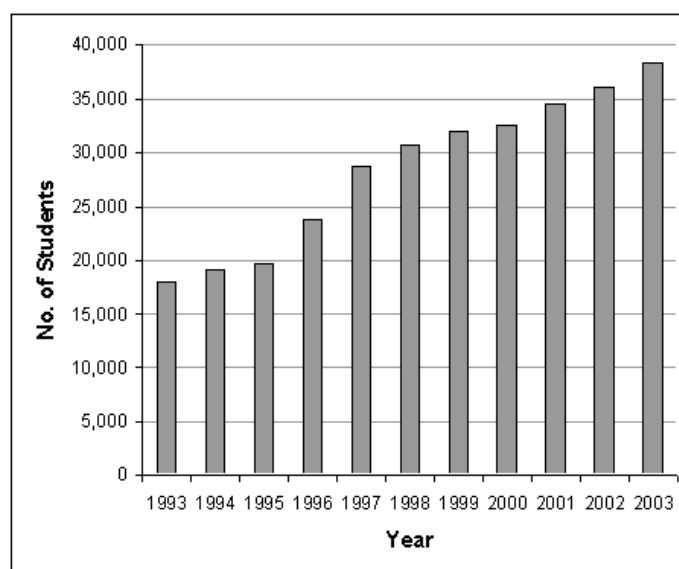
Figure 1. OUI growth in the last decade

Table 1. OUI disciplines and fields of study

Disciplines	Fields of Study
Humanities	Judaica, History, Philosophy, Literature, Linguistics, Music, Film Studies, the Arts
Social Sciences	Psychology, Education, Sociology, Political Science, International Relations, Communications, Management, Economics, Accounting
Sciences	Chemistry, Physics, Life Sciences (Biology), Geology, Mathematics, Computer Science
Engineering	Industrial Engineering and Management, Software Engineering, Information System Engineering

for specific courses. The students select the courses that comprise their program of studies from a varied and wide-ranging selection. Students' successful completion of the requirements of each course serves as the university's sole criterion regarding their academic achievements.

In contrast to the open-admissions policy for undergraduate studies, admission to graduate studies is contingent on prior scholastic achievements including a bachelor's degree.

CURRICULUM

The OUI curriculum is relatively flexible. The university offers over 40 programs of studies—single-, dual-, and multidisciplinary—and undergraduates can

also design a personal program of studies based on internal logic and academic justification, accepted in the general university community and bound by rules that limit the multidisciplinary flexibility of the program.

The OUI offers over 500 academic courses in diverse fields on different levels and of varied scope, leading to BA, BSc, MBA, MA, and MSc degrees. The main disciplines and fields of study are listed in Table 1.

STUDENT PROFILE

The open time frame of studies at the OUI allows students to work at their own pace, keeping a balance between their studies, their jobs, and their

Related Content

Modular Web-Based Teaching and Learning Environments as a Way to Improve E-Learning
Oliver Kaminand Svenja Hagenhoff (2004). *Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning (pp. 190-212).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/modular-web-based-teaching-learning/8569

Exploring the Effectiveness of Self-Regulated Learning in Massive Open Online Courses on Non-Native English Speakers
Liang-Yi Chung (2015). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies (pp. 61-73).*
www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-the-effectiveness-of-self-regulated-learning-in-massive-open-online-courses-on-non-native-english-speakers/128416

Overcoming the Digital Divide
Al P. Mizelland Cecil Sugarman (2005). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning (pp. 1453-1459).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/overcoming-digital-divide/12298

A Component-Oriented Approach for Mixed Reality Applications
Michael Haller (2008). *Online and Distance Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1600-1623).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/component-oriented-approach-mixed-reality/27493

Business Students as End-User Developers: Simulating "Real Life" Situations through Case Study Approach
Sandra Barker (2008). *Online and Distance Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 2886-2894).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/business-students-end-user-developers/27596