The only university in Israel that was nearly fully prepared for the transition to distance education is the Open University, which provides, on a routine schedule, undergraduate degrees by means of a system of online courses; pre-recorded lectures in addition to live classes, filmed in studios by means of Zoom involving the active participation of the students. All this, in addition to textbooks and essays which allow the students to learn on their own, comprise the educational program. As a result of the novel Coronavirus outbreak, the university has expanded the distance education to include graduate degrees and has widened the scope of the online infrastructure.

“There is a difference between distance education and online instruction,” says the president of the Open University, professor Mimi Ajzenstadt. “It is impossible to be satisfied with distance education - we’re not speaking about taking a computer and teaching a class on Zoom. Online instruction is an entire pedagogical-technological doctrine: one must know how to divide the class time, which reference material to provide, and how to make the lesson meaningful and productive.”

According to Mimi, the online education infrastructure in the university has doubled as a result of the public health crisis. “We are working intensively to answer all questions and inquiries students or staff members may have,” she says. “We have become a laboratory of distance education - yesterday we recorded and provided 200 lectures, as opposed to 70-80 on an average day. We have provided the professors with all the tools, including electronic boards allowing them to present equations on a screen, and there has been an amazing recruitment. This is an opportunity to combine distance education within the higher education system. What we have now is the right direction, but it must be deeper - not simply based on a computer and a camera.”