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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS
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**Service Quality and Student Satisfaction
at the Open University of Cyprus**

IOANNA SIAKALLI

SUPERVISOR
DR. PETROS DEMETRIOU

NICOSIA, MAY 2020

Open University of Cyprus

Faculty of Economics and Management

Master in Business Administration (MBA)

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The present Postgraduate (Master's) Dissertation was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the postgraduate degree in Business Administration (MBA)

Faculty of Economics and Management
of the Open University of Cyprus

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Summary

In today's new context of higher education, universities are facing issues of increased competition and privatisation, and are struggling to maintain an advantage in their target markets. Within this setting, students are increasingly being acknowledged as customers (Akinyele 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006; Munawar khan, Ahmed & Nawaz 2011; Weerasingh, Lalitha & Fernando 2017), and thus as being at the core of the process of quality monitoring and assessment. Achievement of student satisfaction and loyalty are now at the centre of the strategy of universities, which are increasingly working towards deepening their understanding of what their customers define as 'good service' and ensuring provision of high quality educational services to them. Universities offering online education are no exception, as they, too, have to become increasingly competitive in order to survive in today's rapidly evolving online HE market.

This study focuses on the non-instructional dimension of online higher education and uses the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) as a case study. Four Units of the core administrative services of the OUC are examined in this study, with the aim of measuring the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni, based on the quality of service they received from these administrative Units. In particular, the study sought to identify which parts of these Units left alumni satisfied or unsatisfied, and ultimately provide recommendations for improvement.

Quantitative research methods were employed to help to answer the research questions. Data was collected from a sample of 168 alumni of the OUC. The results showed a high overall level of satisfaction of alumni with the administrative services, which should, however, be interpreted with caution, based on the limitations of the sample of the study. Different levels of satisfaction arose when looking at specific services of the four Units. In particular, dissatisfaction was prevalent in alumni's responses regarding the delay in the processes followed for degree recognition, the library services and the training they received as students on how to use its resources, as well as connectivity-related issues regarding the eLearning platform (eClass). Dissatisfaction was also noted in the data regarding receipt of on-time and accurate responses from administrative staff. Recommendations focused on the same services, with the addition of better circulation of studies-related information.

Περίληψη

Στο σημερινό συγκείμενο της Ανώτερης και Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης (AAE), τα πανεπιστήμια έχουν να αντιμετωπίσουν αυξημένο ανταγωνισμό και ιδιωτικοποίηση, και αγωνίζονται να διατηρήσουν πλεονέκτημα στις αγορές-στόχους τους. Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, οι φοιτητές αναγνωρίζονται ως πελάτες (Akinyele 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006; Munawar khan, Ahmed & Nawaz 2011; Weerasingh, Lalitha & Fernando 2017) και αποτελούν τον πυρήνα της διαδικασίας αξιολόγησης ποιότητας. Η επίτευξη της ικανοποίησης και αφοσίωσης των φοιτητών βρίσκεται πλέον στο επίκεντρο της στρατηγικής των πανεπιστημίων, τα οποία εργάζονται για την καλύτερη κατανόηση του τι οι πελάτες τους ορίζουν ως 'καλή εξυπηρέτηση' και την παροχή εκπαιδευτικών υπηρεσιών υψηλής ποιότητας. Τα πανεπιστήμια που ειδικεύονται στη διαδικτυακή AAE δεν αποτελούν εξαίρεση, αφού και αυτά πρέπει να γίνουν ανταγωνιστικά, για να επιβιώσουν στην ταχέως εξελισσόμενη αγορά της διαδικτυακής AAE.

Η έρευνα αυτή εστιάζει στη μη εκπαιδευτική διάσταση της διαδικτυακής AAE και χρησιμοποιεί το Ανοικτό Πανεπιστήμιο Κύπρου (ΑΠΚΥ) ως μελέτη περίπτωσης. Τέσσερις από τις βασικές διοικητικές Υπηρεσίες του ΑΠΚΥ εξετάζονται, με στόχο τη μέτρηση του επιπέδου ικανοποίησης ή δυσαρέσκειας των αποφοίτων του ΑΠΚΥ, βάσει της ποιότητας των υπηρεσιών που έλαβαν. Συγκεκριμένα, η έρευνα επιδιώκει να προσδιορίσει ποια κομμάτια των Υπηρεσιών αυτών ευθύνονται για την ικανοποίηση ή δυσαρέσκεια των αποφοίτων και, τελικά, να δώσει συστάσεις για βελτίωση.

Για την απάντηση των ερευνητικών ερωτημάτων, γίνεται χρήση ποσοτικών μεθόδων. Δεδομένα συλλέχθηκαν από 168 απόφοιτους του ΑΠΚΥ. Τα αποτελέσματα φανερώνουν υψηλό επίπεδο ικανοποίησης των αποφοίτων από τις διοικητικές υπηρεσίες, κάτι το οποίο θα πρέπει να ερμηνευθεί με προσοχή, λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τους περιορισμούς του δείγματος. Διαφορετικά επίπεδα ικανοποίησης παρατηρήθηκαν για διαφορετικά τμήματα των τεσσάρων Υπηρεσιών. Δυσανεμία παρατηρήθηκε σχετικά με την καθυστέρηση στις διαδικασίες αναγνώρισης τίτλων σπουδών, την εκπαίδευση που λαμβάνουν οι φοιτητές για χρήση του υλικού της βιβλιοθήκης, και για θέματα συνδεσιμότητας με την πλατφόρμα τηλεκπαίδευσης. Δυσανεμία παρατηρήθηκε επίσης σχετικά με τη λήψη έγκαιρων και ακριβών απαντήσεων από το διοικητικό προσωπικό. Οι συστάσεις που έγιναν αφορούν τις υπηρεσίες αυτές, καθώς επίσης και την καλύτερη διακίνηση πληροφοριών σχετικών με τις σπουδές.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context

This study is set within the changing context of Higher Education (HE), in which students are increasingly being acknowledged as customers (Akinyele 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006; Munawar khan, Ahmed & Nawaz 2011; Weerasingh, Lalitha & Fernando 2017) and, thus, as key stakeholders in the process of quality monitoring. The principles of marketisation and the forces of increased competition are entering the HE market and affect all HE institutions, including those focusing on online and distance learning. Acknowledging that a positive perception about the quality of service offered contributes to the establishment of a positive image of the institution in existing and future students, and eventually leads to higher levels of satisfaction (Popli 2005), HE institutions are now working towards this direction. Following a customer-driven approach, universities are focusing their efforts in deepening their understanding of what their customers define as 'good service', in an attempt to identify the factors that influence student satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Ahmed *et al.* 2010; Ekinici 2004).

1.2 Rationale

Following the general principles set by the service industry, HE is taking rapid steps in the area of monitoring service quality from its customers' perspective. Even though a number of models and frameworks have been created and applied on measuring service quality, only a few are applicable in the area of HE, and even fewer in the area of online and distance HE. As such, the area of customer satisfaction and perceived service quality in online HE is an area that has not been thoroughly explored yet, aside from a handful of

studies (e.g. Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016; Martínez-Argüelles, Castán & Juan 2010; 2012) that have been carried out on it.

The Open University of Cyprus (OUC) is Cyprus' only university dedicated to online learning. Through its online nature and the methodology followed, it offers students high quality HE. The academic personnel makes use of the various technological means of synchronous and asynchronous communication available at the OUC, via the University's main educational tool; the e-Learning platform (eClass). The academic community of the OUC is supported by its administrative services, which are organised into ten Units. The main aim of all Units is to offer the best experience possible to all students and members of the University community, and to continuously work towards improving it.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

Using the OUC as a case study, this study aims to measure the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni, based on their perceived quality of service they received from four of the administrative Units of the OUC.

With this aim in mind, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What was the overall level of satisfaction of OUC alumni in regards to the administrative services they received as students?
2. Which parts of administrative services left OUC alumni satisfied or dissatisfied as students?
3. Which areas of administrative services could be improved, in order for the OUC to achieve a higher level of satisfaction through its administrative services?

1.4 Contribution of this Study

This study aims to contribute to the literature regarding student satisfaction of service quality in the field of online HE. Focusing on administrative services, as part of service quality, it aims to advance the understanding on which services of administration contribute to alumni's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, based on their perception of the

quality of administrative services they received during their studies. The focus of the study on the OUC will additionally allow for recommendations for improvement to be made to the University's management, as a derivative of alumni's remarks.

1.5 Structure and Outline

This study is presented in six chapters. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature in six parts: the first is a description of the changing context of HE; the second introduces the literature that sees students as the customers of HE institutions; part three offers an overview on the literature on service quality in HE; the fourth part describes the importance of student feedback; part five offers an overview of models and frameworks developed in previous research with the aim of measuring perceived service quality in the HE sector in general and in the online HE sector in particular; and the last part focuses on the OUC, its structure, organisation, and administrative services. Chapter 3 provides an overview and justification of the methodology followed in the study including the research questions and hypotheses, the use of quantitative methods, participants, data collection and analysis, and limitations to the study. Chapter 4 presents key findings collected from the 168 alumni who participated in the study by completing the questionnaire. Chapter 5 discusses the main findings of the study in relation to the three key issues arising from the research questions. Chapter 6 concludes with reflective comments on the study, areas for further research, and recommendations for improvement of service quality.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Changing Context of Higher Education

Higher education (HE) today is going through a period of radical transformation. The forces of globalisation, in combination with the introduction of information technologies in the educational services of HE institutions (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2012) are creating a competitive environment, in which the HE market is now a global phenomenon. This new era for HE has seen an increasing number of HE institutions worldwide, a derivative of the privatisation of HE in many parts of the world. In the new globalised HE market, institutions are attracting, and thus fighting for, both home-based and international students. Privatisation has also led them to search for and obtain new sources of funding, as governmental funding is reduced. These changes are not limited to the conventional universities, but are also true for the online and distance HE sector. The appearance of new entrants in the market that offer their educational services online and with the use of information technologies (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010) further increase the competition among both conventional and online HE institutions. Universities are thus rethinking their traditional roles and work towards repositioning themselves through strategic direction setting (Moratis & van Baalen 2002). As such, searching for new ways to attract and maintain stronger relationships with students is of vital importance.

The increasing number of HE institutions worldwide, both conventional and online, leads to an increase of choices for students locally and globally, and to a subsequent increase of their bargaining power, as they are seen as customers. Universities are now forced to work in two directions: On the one hand, they are adapting their strategy in order to attract as many students as possible, whereas on the other hand, they are adjusting their

line of work so that they satisfy their current students' needs and expectations, thus maintaining high retention rates (Weerasingh *et al.* 2017). Struggling to remain competitive in their own target markets has led universities to adopt market-oriented strategies in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors and gain competitive advantage. Theories and concepts that have traditionally been successfully used in the business market are now being applied to the field of HE, with the aim of 'gaining a competitive edge, and gaining a larger share of the international market' (Hemsley-Brown & Optalka 2006:318).

In the context of increasing competition, universities are therefore equipping themselves with the necessary marketing principles and strategies that will enable them to be adequately equipped to face the challenges in the international HE market (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003). The increased array of choices students have when it comes to choosing or recommending a HE institution, has led to the introduction of consumer behaviour in HE markets (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006). Understanding what the key influences are in this regard is thus vital, today more than ever, for universities.

2.2 Students as Universities' Customers

Lewis and Smith (1994) make the observation that albeit most HE institutions have a clear mission, very few actually identify who they serve. This derives from the fact that even fewer do indeed acknowledge that they serve customers. In the new era of increased globalisation and marketisation in HE, this can be very problematic, as universities need to have a clear understanding of who they serve, in order to be effective. Akinyele (2010) argues in this regard that customer-driven organisations are successful and their success stems from the fact that their focus of what they do and who they serve is unified.

The term *customer* is defined as the 'recipient or beneficiary of the outputs of work efforts or the purchaser of products and services. It can be a person, a unit, a department, or an entire organization. Customers have wants, opinions, perceptions, and desires which are often referred to as the voice of the customer' (Akinyele 2010:611). In order to understand what customers want and need, it is important to first understand who the

customers are. For HE institutions, students are their basic customers (Akinyele 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006; Munawar khan *et al.* 2011; Weerasingh *et al.* 2017). Choosing institutions, paying for tuition and administrative fees, selecting a programme of study, and choosing whether to remain enrolled on the course or not, are just some of the aspects that come along with the students' role of the customers in HE. The transfer of practices and concepts from the field of business to HE is thus imperative, in order for any HE institution to develop a competitive strategy.

As previously mentioned, the aim of HE institutions is thus twofold: gaining new customers and retaining their existing ones (Weerasingh *et al.* 2017). To survive in the competitive HE environment, universities focus on customers' perception of service quality, both academic and non-academic, since their perception of good quality is of the utmost importance when making these choices. Identifying the factors influencing student satisfaction in HE is among the top priorities for universities who want to stay competitive in the HE market.

2.3 Service Quality

The linkage between HE institutions' success in the market and service quality calls for a closer look at what constitutes service quality. When discussing the role of service quality in HE, Shank, Walker & Hayes (1995) state that:

Higher education possesses the characteristics of a service industry. Educational services are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable from the person delivering it, variable, perishable, and the customer (student) participates in the process. Additionally, colleges and universities are increasingly finding themselves in an environment that is conducive to understanding the role and importance of service quality; this environment is a fiercely competitive one.

Quality can be defined as the 'ability of a service to satisfy customers' (ISO, ISO 9004-2 1991). Perceived service quality, on the other hand, is defined as the overall evaluation by the customer of how good or bad a product or service has been (Asthiyaman 1997). Perceived service quality is directly linked to the customers' expectations, which

constitute their desires or wants (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). A service can therefore be evaluated as 'good' or 'bad' depending on what the customers' initial expectations were and the degree to which those expectations were met after receiving the service.

Having a good grasp of what customers expect is possibly the most critical step in delivering high quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1992). It is imperative for an organisation (in this case, a HE institution) to have a clear understanding of what their customers (in this case, students) want in terms of service, so that they design programmes that match these expectations of what constitutes good service. An 'inside-out' approach, which focuses on the inputs of academic and administrator insiders on what 'quality of service' entails, should therefore be avoided, as it hardly is ever successful (Joseph, Yakhou & Stone 2005). Instead, input should be received from outside, and specifically from the students themselves, either incoming, current, or former. In their study, Zeithaml *et al.* (1992) indicate that poor performance of service-related businesses, often stems from inadequate information about their customers and their needs and wants. As such, 'providing services that customers perceive as excellent, requires that a firm know what customers expect' (Zeithaml *et al.* 1992:51).

2.4 The Importance of Student Feedback

Within this context, it is imperative for HE institutions to identify and understand what students, either incoming, existing, or former, desire and expect from the institution (Joseph *et al.* 2005). An inside-out approach, as mentioned before, should be avoided. Instead, students' opinion on what they consider to be key elements in service quality should be measured by institutions, in order to address the issues of quality. Universities should seek to collect feedback from students and alumni about their experience. Popli defines feedback as 'the expressed opinions of students about the service they receive as students (customer satisfaction)' (2005:19). He explains the importance of creating an emotional bond between students and their institution, which he describes as 'customer delight' (Popli 2005). Customer delight is defined as the situation in which the experiences of the customers exceed their expectations (Popli 2005). Customer satisfaction is thus the creation of an emotional bond with the brand (i.e. the institution), which subsequently

leads to increased customer loyalty. He finally argues that a HE institution can only delight a customer if they know what their expectations are (Popli 2005).

Customers' expectations and perceptions about service quality form the basis of customer satisfaction (Ekinici 2004). Previous research has shown a positive and significant relationship between quality of services and customer satisfaction (Ahmed *et al* 2010). This was explained by the fact that a positive perception about the quality of service offered, leaves a positive image of the institution in the minds of students and alumni, and subsequently leads to a higher level of satisfaction. Overall, student satisfaction is defined as 'a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students' educational experience, services and facilities' (Weerasingh *et al.* 2017:534). It refers to the feeling of pleasure or disappointment, which results from comparing perceived performance to expectations.

Students are thus increasingly being acknowledged as key stakeholders in the process of quality monitoring and assessment. Actively monitoring their expectations, preferences, and feedback can help institutions identify areas for improvement and determine where to allocate resources (Joseph *et al.* 2005). Harvey (2003) identifies, in this regard, six main reasons on the importance of collecting student feedback, as it can: (1) provide information for improvement; (2) provide information for prospective students; (3) provide information for current students; (4) address accountability issues; (5) provide benchmarking information; and (6) be used to make comparisons between and within institutions. He also notes the importance of feedback in assisting in an institution's continuous quality improvement process.

2.5 Evaluating Service Quality in Online Higher Education Environment

A student-centred approach is increasingly being followed in order to enhance the quality of service in HE. This strategy puts students at its centre and considers them as customers and key stakeholders in the process of quality assessment. Universities are thus working towards providing high quality educational services to them, with the aim of achieving student (and thus customer) satisfaction and loyalty. Having a clear definition of what

constitutes service quality is therefore critical and most scholars tend to agree that it is the evaluation of customers' experience, which is directly linked to their expectations (Asthiyaman 1997; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1992).

Following the general pattern set by the service industry, HE is also advancing in the area of monitoring service quality from its customers' perspective. While in the early stages, most models focused on teaching and learning, lately a broader approach has been employed by many studies (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2012). These studies now take into consideration not only the core service (teaching), but also peripheral services, such as administrative or backup services, that are also a huge part of a student's experience. A number of models and frameworks (in the service, online service, and online HE sectors) have been developed thus far, trying to achieve this aim. The most important and relevant ones are described below and form the basis of this study.

Parasuraman *et al.* were the first to develop a model that linked the business environment to service quality attributes (1985). They identified ten components of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, and understanding the customer. They then condensed these into the SERVQUAL model, which is organised into five main variants: 'tangibles', which includes the appearance of facilities, equipment, and personnel; 'responsiveness', which is the willingness to provide services to customers fast; 'reliability', which refers to the ability to perform services correctly and in a trustworthy manner; 'assurance', which is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to create trust and confidence; and, lastly, 'empathy', which refers to the extent to which the organisation is accessible, easy to contact, and always aiming to understand their customers' needs (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). SERVQUAL has been used to measure service quality mainly in the traditional learning environment that is characterised by direct interactions between employees and customers. Therefore, its appropriateness in measuring e-service quality, which is characterised by customers and websites of service providers, has been questioned.

In an online environment, interactions are digital and, as such, models created for the service settings were found to be incompatible with the e-service settings. Three

problems were found: Firstly, most of the variants of those scales were linked to the interpersonal interaction that characterises *traditional* services (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010). In the absence of these interactions, as it happens in online environments, the scales and variants had to be adapted to fit the e-service context. Secondly, the absence of tangible elements from the e-service context, such as premises and facilities, had to be replaced by the equivalent indicators of quality. The aesthetics and ease of use of the online interface can replace those tangible indicators (van Riel *et al.* 2004). Lastly, in the HE service sector students are not simply regarded as users but also as customers. They should thus be at the core of the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, since they should be equipped with a certain degree of skill in working with information technologies, they play a contributing role to the quality of service they receive and subsequently to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010).

A number of models for assessing quality of service in online environments has been developed. WebQual was created by Loiacono, Watson and Dale (2000) as an e-service quality measurement scale that consists of 12 variants: trust, response time, ease of understanding, information fit-to-task, tailored communications, intuitive operations, visual appeal, innovativeness, emotional appeal, consistent image, relative advantage, and inline completeness. SITEQUAL was another model created with the aim of evaluating website quality and consists of security, processing speed, ease of use, and aesthetic design (Yoo & Donthu 2001). Yang, Jun and Peterson (2004) identified six dimensions for measuring e-service quality: credibility, security, attentiveness, reliability, access, and ease of use. Even though most of these models are based on the website service quality field, they provide a good starting point for measuring e-learning service quality.

In regards to measuring e-learning service quality, Peltier, Schibrowsky and Drago (2007) identified six factors to measure online teaching quality in the USA: interactions between students and students, interactions between instructors and students, lecture delivery quality, course content, course structure, and instructor support and mentoring. In the United Kingdom, Ozkan and Koseler (2009) identified six factors used to evaluate student satisfaction: supportive issues, instructor attitude, learner perspective, content quality, service quality, and system quality. In Taiwan, Wang, Wang and Shee (2007) developed a multi-factor model to evaluate the success of an e-learning system, which identified three

factors as determinants of the system's success: system quality, information quality, and service quality.

These models, though related to HE and online environments, mainly touch upon and focus on a specific area of HE. The aim of each model is thus different and specific: to evaluate the quality of online teaching, to assess student satisfaction, or to evaluate the effectiveness of an e-learning system. However, the learning process in an online environment is complex and made up of different sub-processes, both instructional and non-instructional, which are extended over a period of time (the duration of each degree) (Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016). These models do not evaluate the quality of services offered by a HE institution holistically, taking into consideration the student experience as a whole.

Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* (2010; 2012) were the first to evaluate the holistic student experience in online HE with regard to the quality of service, both instructional and non-instructional. Using the Critical Incident Technique they attempted to identify the main dimensions that contribute to students' perception of service quality in the Open University of Catalonia. Their list of critical incidents highlighted six dimensions that play part in shaping students' experience: Learning processes; Administrative processes; Teaching materials and resources; User's interface; Relationships with the community network; and Fees and compensations. Martínez-Argüelles and Batalla-Busquets also looked into student experience and its relation to student satisfaction and student loyalty (2016). They based their research on a model that identifies two main dimensions of service that form the basis for both quality and satisfaction: instructional and non-instructional. The instructional dimension includes the core service-teaching, whereas the non-instructional dimension includes the administrative services, the additional services, and the user interface.

2.6 Open University of Cyprus

The Open University of Cyprus (OUC) is one of the eight universities in the Republic of Cyprus and one of the three public universities in the country. Established in 2002, the

OUC is the country's only university dedicated to online learning. It aims to offer 'accredited distance learning degrees at all levels (undergraduate, master and doctoral)' (Open University of Cyprus 2020) within its three faculties: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences; and Faculty of Economics and Management. During the academic year 2018-2019, the OUC had 4,100 enrolled students, offered 26 academic programmes of study, and counted a total of 5,811 alumni (Open University of Cyprus 2020).

The mission of the OUC is to provide individuals with the opportunity for lifelong learning and for acquiring new knowledge and skills needed to start or progress within their professional career, make a shift in the professional career, or pursue HE studies should they not have been able to do so in the past (Open University of Cyprus 2020). The OUC also aims to establish Cyprus as a regional centre for education, scientific research, and innovation. It therefore works towards establishing more collaborations and partnerships with other HE and research institutions, through highlighting good practices and upgrading its e-learning infrastructure.

The online nature of the OUC and the methodology followed, breaks constraints such as time, local limitations, age, occupational status, or family responsibilities (Open University of Cyprus 2020). Through distance learning education, students have access to high quality education. The academic personnel makes use of the various technological means of synchronous and asynchronous communication available at the OUC, to offer student support, tutoring, and monitor student progress. The OUC's credit system is based on the concept of Thematic Units, which are adaptable to the European Credit and Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Depending on each programme of study, the Thematic Units might have a duration of either one semester or one academic year.

The main educational tool used at the OUC is the eLearning platform (eClass). The platform facilitates online teaching and learning, and allows the establishment of virtual classrooms that are equipped with real-time and asynchronous tools. Aside from watching their online lectures on eClass, students also have access to online course material, are able to view and submit their assignments and coursework and receive

feedback, organise their study calendars, and interact with their course-mates in the online environment of the university. Live interaction is also made possible through the platform with their programme's academic coordinator and teaching staff. At the end of their semester or year (depending on the programme of study they follow), students are required to attend a final written examination, where physical presence is required.

The administrative services of the OUC continuously provide support for the teaching, research, and social services of the University, as well as support to the university community. The OUC is organised into the following administrative Units: Office of the Director of Administration and Finance; Research, Industry, Liaison and Innovation Unit; International Cooperation, Development and Communication Unit; Finance and Human Resources Unit; Information Communication Technologies Unit; Library; Students and Programmes of Study Support Unit; Operational Support Unit; Educational Methodology and Educational Material Lab; and Events Office. All Units have at the centre of their mission the students and the University and work towards improving the OUC experience, for both students and members of the University community.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

'The research problem must determine the research approach and the methods employed. No single approach fits every problem; a choice must be made' (Westbrook 1994:242).

This chapter explains and justifies the decisions made in conducting this study. Considering that only a relative handful of studies (Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016; Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010) have specifically examined student satisfaction as a derivative of service quality in online HE, this study aimed to contribute to this scarce knowledge base. Its aim was to identify the sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni, based on their perception of the quality of services they received from administrative services during their studies. As a case study, it focuses on the OUC and, in particular, its administrative services. Quantitative methods were employed for the collection of data, which was analysed using descriptive statistics. Online questionnaires were emailed to the alumni, who had given the Alumni Office consent to be contacted, thus ensuring that the study was compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data analysis was based on the research questions as well as the theoretical model that formed the basis of this study. The limitations of the study were also identified. The research began only after receiving approval from the Director of Administration and Finance of the OUC.

3.2 Research Questions

Drawing upon relevant literature, the study focused on measuring the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni, concerning the administrative services of the OUC. The investigation was guided by three sub-research questions:

1. What was the overall level of satisfaction of OUC alumni in regards to the administrative services they received as students?
2. Which parts of administrative services left OUC alumni satisfied or dissatisfied as students?
3. Which actions could the OUC administrative services take towards their improvement, in order for the OUC to achieve a higher level of satisfaction through its administrative services?

3.3 Theoretical Models

The research of Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* (2010) and Martínez-Argüelles and Batalla-Busquets (2016) formed the basis on which this study was developed and data was analysed. A combination of their models was created that best suited and matched the services of the OUC. Both studies broke down the student experience in online HE with regard to the quality of service into instructional and non-instructional. Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* (2010) identified six dimensions that shape student experience: Learning processes; Administrative processes; Teaching materials and resources; User's interface; Relationships with the community network; and Fees and compensations. Martínez-Argüelles and Batalla-Busquets (2016), on the other hand, identified four dimensions: Teaching; Administrative services; Additional services; and User interface.

The research of Martínez-Argüelles and Batalla-Busquets (2016) showed that out of the four dimensions, teaching was found to be the most relevant in terms of affective student perception of service quality, however administrative services had a higher relative importance in terms of student satisfaction. Furthermore, considered as a whole, 'non-instructional services (administrative services, additional services, and user interface) had a higher impact on students' perceived student quality and satisfaction than teaching' (Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016:274).

Having this in mind, this study focused on the non-instructional dimension of online HE. Considering the organisation followed at the OUC and its core administrative services, the following four Units that play part in shaping students' (and thus alumni's) experience were identified: Student support services; Library services; eLearning platform (eClass); and Accounting Services. These were further analysed into their respective services, which formed the basis for the questions asked in the questionnaire (Appendix A).

3.4 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were formulated taking into consideration both the theoretical models on online HE described in the previous section of this chapter and the energies made by the administration of the OUC thus far. Even though both studies (Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016; Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010) focused on student satisfaction and perceived student quality, only the 2010 study identified the aspects with which students expressed the greatest satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The following hypotheses are thus formed, on the basis of that study:

1. The overall level of satisfaction of OUC alumni in regards to the administrative services they received as students is expected to be low.
2. Services concerning student support and accounting services are expected to leave alumni dissatisfied, due to their high degree of bureaucracy and, oftentimes, inaccuracy of responses provided by administrative staff. A neutral feeling is expected regarding the eLearning platform (eClass) as it does serve its purpose, though there is still room for improvement. Library services are expected to leave alumni dissatisfied, as no training is provided to students on how to use the library's resources, thus most of them are likely to be unfamiliar with this service.
3. Recommendations for improvement are expected to arise regarding all services, with a focus being on better communication of available services and simplified and more transparent (thus less bureaucratic) services.

3.5 The Use of Quantitative Research Methods

Given the research questions of the study, it seemed appropriate for a quantitative approach to be followed. Quantitative research is specific in its surveying, as it builds upon

existing theories (Leedy & Ormrod 2001). Models and theories found in relevant literature were thus used in both the construction of the questionnaire and the data analysis process. In quantitative research, the data collected is used to objectively measure reality, with the intent to 'establish, confirm, or validate relationships and to develop generalizations that contribute to theory' (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:102). As such, the study aims to measure the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni from the administrative services of the University, and, in particular, to identify specific elements of these services that are responsible for the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the alumni. Ultimately, the research aims to generalise its findings to theory, thus contributing to a field that has not been investigated enough.

3.6 Open University of Cyprus as a Case Study

The research questions will be answered through the case of the OUC and in particular through the study of its administrative services. Even though all administrative units of the OUC have at the centre of their mission the students, only a few actively interact with them. Therefore, since this study focuses on the student perspective of the quality of services, only the four largest (in terms of level of interaction with the student) units will be studied. The four units, along with their main responsibilities are described below.

3.6.1 Student Support

Student Support services fall under the Students and Programmes of Study Support Unit. This Unit aims to provide information to prospective students, current students, and the University community overall, regarding their study and academic work within the OUC. It is, in essence, the focal point between the student and the University. The Unit's main responsibilities include preparation of examinations timetables, issue of certificates of student status and transcripts, issue of degrees, announcement for admissions in programmes of study, student enrolments, preparation of academic calendar, services to prospective and current students, management of scholarships, management of student requests, removals from the student register, withdrawals from Modules, termination of studies, interruption of studies, recognition of Modules, requests related to student pregnancies and/or medical issues, etc., handling of exceptional requests (for studies, submission of written assignments, complaints etc.) (Open University of Cyprus 2020).

3.6.2 Library

The OUC Library is essentially an electronic library, based on its operation, and a hybrid library, based on its content. It is physically located in Nicosia, Cyprus and its collections include printed, digital and audio-visual material. Library members, which include Faculty members, administrative staff, visiting professors, students and others involved in research, have access to and can use the collections and library services of the OUC Library. Its main services include its comprehensive collection of books, journals, periodicals and other related publications from both printed and electronic databases, electronic sources (international databases, e-Journals, e-books, and digital collections/resources), interlibrary loan, document delivery services, and search and management tools to create bibliographies (Open University of Cyprus 2020).

3.6.3 Accounting Services

Accounting Services belong in the Finance and Human Resources Unit. Accounting Services, and specifically the Expenditure, Revenue and Accounts Office are responsible for the financial management of students.

3.6.4 eLearning Platform (eClass)

The Digital Content Management Sector, which belongs in the Information Communication Technologies Unit, supports educational procedures, through the continuous development and administration of the eLearning platform (eClass) and tools. Its main responsibilities include, administration of eLearning platform (eClass), plagiarism detection, and provision of training to all users concerning the tools used; administration of synchronous communication tools and live video streaming during lectures and public events presentations; development and support of virtual labs; development and administration of university website; and administration of Library Systems and Digital Content Management Systems (Open University of Cyprus 2020).

3.7 Participants

A decision was made to include alumni rather than students in this study. This decision was based on two reasons. First, alumni questionnaires as a means to measure student

satisfaction are not uncommon in the literature (Leckey & Neill 2001). These questionnaires are considered to have the advantage, over student questionnaires, of allowing the study to investigate all aspects of student experience, from the application status until the graduation. Second, a quality assurance questionnaire is already administered by the University to all students at the end of each Module. If a student is enrolled in two Modules during one academic term/year, this student will be asked to complete the questionnaire twice. Therefore, this questionnaire tends to focus on the student experience within or related to that particular Module. Additionally, these questionnaires are often completed with hesitation by the students, who might be worried or having doubts regarding their anonymity and the effect a potential breach of anonymity might have on their final grade. The inclusion of alumni in this study would thus overcome this issue and, simultaneously, it would avoid any confusion with the questionnaire administered by the OUC.

Alumni were therefore contacted for this study. After receiving approval from the Director of Administration and Finance, a database with the personal emails of the alumni of the OUC was provided by the Alumni Office. This database included only the alumni from whom the Office had already gained consent to communicate with via email, in accordance to the GDPR. Out of the approximately 6,000 alumni of the OUC (Open University of Cyprus 2020), only 845 had granted the Office with consent, and those were contacted for the purposes of this study. Three weeks after sending out the questionnaire, data was collected from 168 participants.

3.8 Data Collection

A survey design was chosen, as it would provide the study with a quantitative description of the attitudes and opinions of OUC alumni, by studying a small sample of this population. The results derived from the sample, will allow to draw inferences to the population (Creswell 2014).

A questionnaire was thus chosen as the preferred method of data collection, due to its multiple advantages. To begin with, it is an economic design, as both its creation and

administration using Google forms cost nothing. Moreover, it allows for a rapid turnaround in data collection and it cancels the potential limitation of geographical limits. Considering that the majority of OUC alumni live outside of Cyprus, choosing a method that would allow to reach them, regardless of geographical location, was of the utmost importance. Finally, this method allowed for the identification of attributes of a large population, from a smaller sample (Creswell 2014).

The questionnaire was cross-sectional, since the study did not aim to compare results between two or more different time-periods. Instead, it focused on measuring the overall past experience of the participants and, therefore, the data would be collected in just one point in time. It comprised of close-ended questions and one open-ended question at the end, for additional comments.

The questionnaire was created on Google forms, which is a web-based application, used to create forms (surveys, quizzes etc.) for data collection purposes (Appendix A). Following suit with the electronic format of the questionnaire, it was emailed to the alumni database that was provided by the Alumni Office for this study. Creating an Internet survey and administering it online, allowed the study to reach a greater number of alumni, thus ensuring a more accurate representation of the alumni population in the sample. Aiming to eliminate a possible language limitation, two versions of the questionnaire were created, one in Greek¹ and one in English².

The questionnaire was eventually sent to a total of 845 alumni. Due to time constraints, it remained open for three weeks. At the end of this period, a total of 168 responses were received, 167 from the Greek-language questionnaire and 1 from the English-language questionnaire.

¹ Link to the Greek-language questionnaire:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScjnGzcodgqfEo_q6iyV1SnoRpDPR-3GvAZX_OkG7YhAzgtQQ/viewform

² Link to the English-language questionnaire:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf5HhPIXv1Bd4nB-MgPDmNzk9L5jPkEY106A1z-SGPZ1UMTvA/viewform>

3.9 Data Analysis

The data was analysed on Microsoft Excel. The statistical analysis quantitatively described the features of the data set. Data analysis was carried out on the basis of the theoretical models that were used to develop the questionnaire.

3.10 Limitations of the research

This research is constricted by the composition of its sample. Considering that the alumni contacted were the ones who had given their consent to the University to communicate with them, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of these people had a positive experience at the OUC, and therefore wanted to stay in touch. It is therefore likely that the data is skewed, which somewhat limits generalisability of the findings.

Furthermore, the study is subject to the limitations of quantitative research and specifically the use of questionnaires. Despite the advantages of using a predominantly close-ended questionnaire, it had, at the same time, a limited ability to probe answers. Answers are limited in the questions included in the questionnaire and the researcher is thus not able to either steer the study elsewhere or to seek for more explanations, if interesting findings arise along the way or if more explanations are required.

Finally, the study is constricted by time. The short time-frame within which this study had to be completed did not allow for it to expand to other areas that influence student and alumni satisfaction, such as the instructional processes (teaching and learning). Limiting the focus to administrative services, and even more on four particular administrative Units, means that the study cannot draw inferences regarding the overall student experience of OUC's alumni.

Chapter 4

Report of Findings

4.1 Key Issues

Within the rapidly changing world of HE that is characterised by marketisation and globalisation, HE institutions are moving towards a customer-driven approach. For them, students are their basic customers (Akinyele 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006; Munawar khan *et al.* 2011; Weerasingh *et al.* 2017) and they therefore work towards gaining understanding of what they want and need. Focusing on customers' perception of service quality and identifying the factors influencing student satisfaction in HE is of the utmost importance for universities who want to stay competitive in the HE market. Having a clear understanding of what their customers consider to be 'good service', allows HE institutions to steer their focus and strategy towards this direction. A positive relationship also exists between customer satisfaction and customers' perceptions of service quality (Ahmed *et al.* 2010; Ekinci 2004). This is due to the fact that a positive perception about the quality of service offered, establishes a positive image of the institution in students, and eventually leads to higher satisfaction. A student-centred approach is thus recommended, as students' opinion on what the key elements in service quality are, should be measured by HE institutions to address the issues of quality.

The area of customer satisfaction and perceived service quality in online HE is an area that has not been thoroughly explored yet. Only a handful of studies (e.g. Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016; Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010; 2012) have been carried out on it, but definitely none regarding Cyprus. This study focuses on the case of the OUC and aims to measure the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni, based on their perceived quality of service they received from the administrative services of the University. In particular, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the overall level of satisfaction of OUC alumni in regards to the administrative services they received as students?
2. Which parts of administrative services left OUC alumni satisfied or dissatisfied as students?
3. Which areas of administrative services could be improved, in order for the OUC to achieve a higher level of satisfaction through its administrative services?

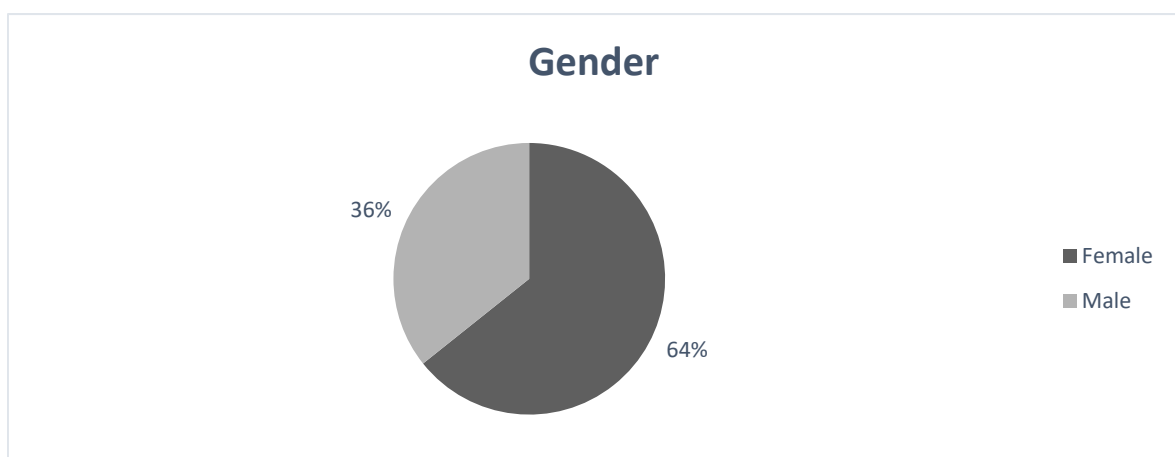
The findings of this study will help to answer these research questions, throwing light on alumni's perception of service quality of the OUC administrative services, and leading ultimately to recommendations for improvement, as a derivative of alumni's remarks.

4.2 Demographics

The questionnaire was emailed to the 845 OUC alumni, who had given the University consent for it to communicate with them. Three weeks after the questionnaire was sent, 168 responses were gathered, 167 from the Greek-language questionnaire and 1 from the English-language questionnaire. A general description of the sample is presented below.

4.2.1 Gender

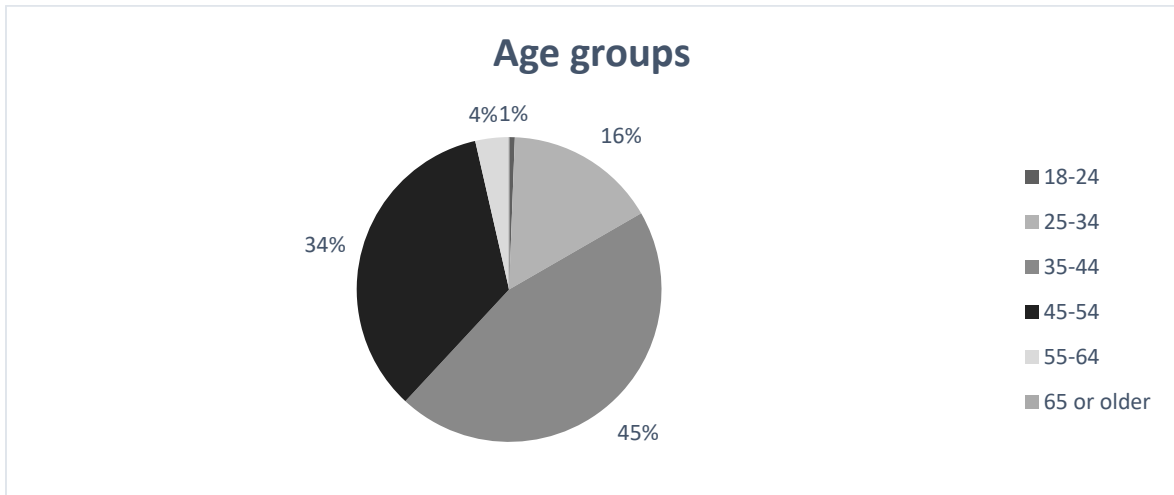
Out of the 168 respondents, 108 (64%) were female and 60 (36%) were male.



Graph 1: Gender

4.2.2 Age

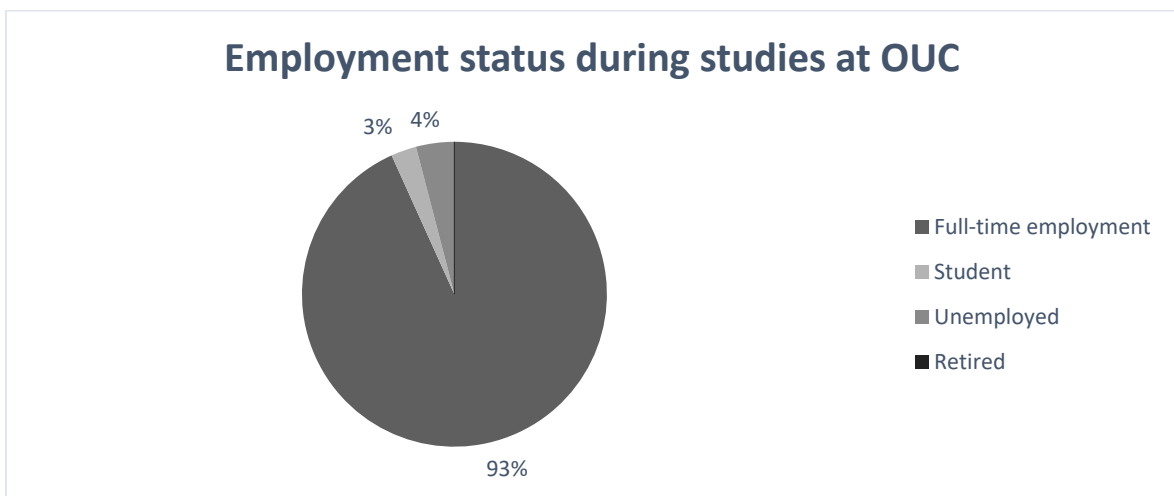
The majority of the 168 respondents were aged 35-44 (76 respondents, 45%), whereas 58 (34%) of them were aged 45-54. 27 (16%) respondents belonged in the 25-34 age group, 6 (4%) in the 55-64 age group, and only 1 (1%) in the 18-24 age group. No one from the respondents was older than 65.



Graph 2: Age groups

4.2.3 Employment status

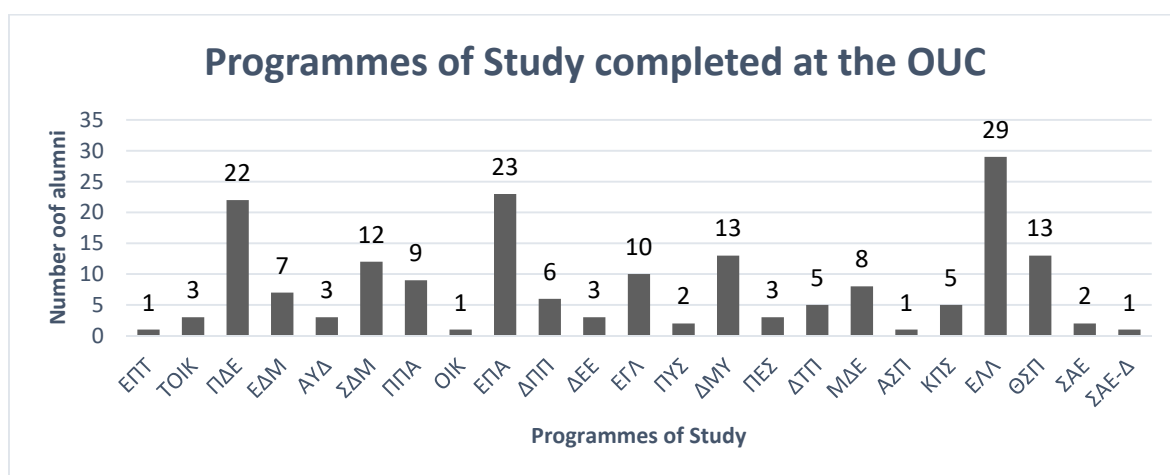
When asked what their employment status was for the longest duration of their studies, the majority of respondents (138 respondents, 82%) answered that they were employed full-time. 20 respondents (12%) that they were employed part-time, 6 (4%) that they were unemployed, and 4 (2%) that they were students. No one identified themselves as being retired, which is in accordance to the age data collected in the previous question.



Graph 3: Employment status

4.2.4 Studies at the OUC

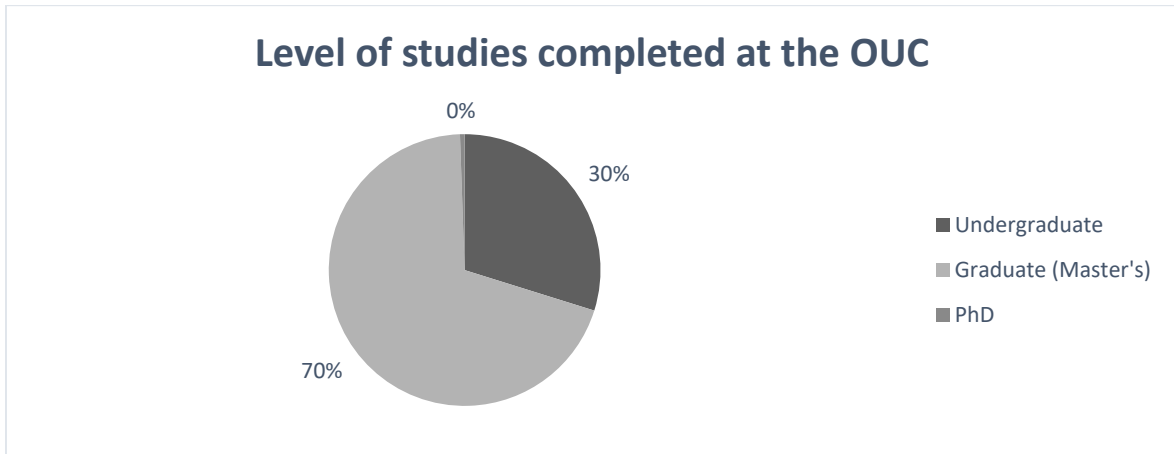
Respondents were asked to denote all the programmes of study they had completed at the OUC. 182 responses were thus collected, representing 22 out of the 26 programmes of the OUC. The vast majority of the respondents had completed one or more of the three following programmes: *Studies in the Hellenic Culture* (29 out of 182 responses, 16%), *Educational Studies* (23 responses, 13%), and *Business Administration (Bachelor)* (22 responses, 12%). The next programmes that appeared more often in the responses were *Theatre Studies* and *Healthcare Management* (13 responses, 7% each), *Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning* (12 responses, 7%), and *Greek Language and Literature* (10 responses, 6%). The rest of the responses came from the following programmes (in descending order based on number of responses): *Cultural Policy and Development*; *Master in Business Administration (Greek MBA)*; *Communications New Journalism*; *Environmental Conservation and Management*; *Management, Technology and Planning*; *Social Information Systems*; *Banking and Finance*; *Information and Communications Systems*; *Computer and Network Security*; *European Union Law*; *Wireless Communication Systems*; *Health Policy and Planning*; *Applied Health Informatics*; *Economics*; *Police Studies*; and *Wireless Communication Systems (PhD)*. These results are presented in Graph 4, below, using the abbreviations of each programme of study (Appendix B).



Graph 4: Programmes of Study completed at the OUC

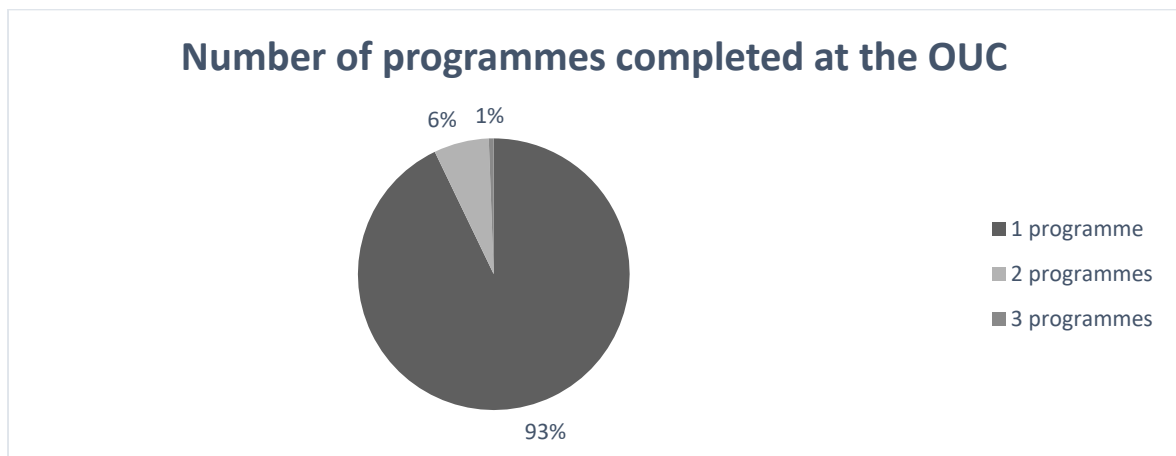
From the data above, the following inferences can be made regarding the level of studies completed by the OUC respondents. The vast majority of the 182 responses (126 responses, 70%) had completed graduate (master's) studies at the OUC, whereas 54

responses (30%) stated that they had completed undergraduate studies. Only 1 respondent had completed PhD level studies at the OUC.



Graph 5: Level of studies completed at the OUC

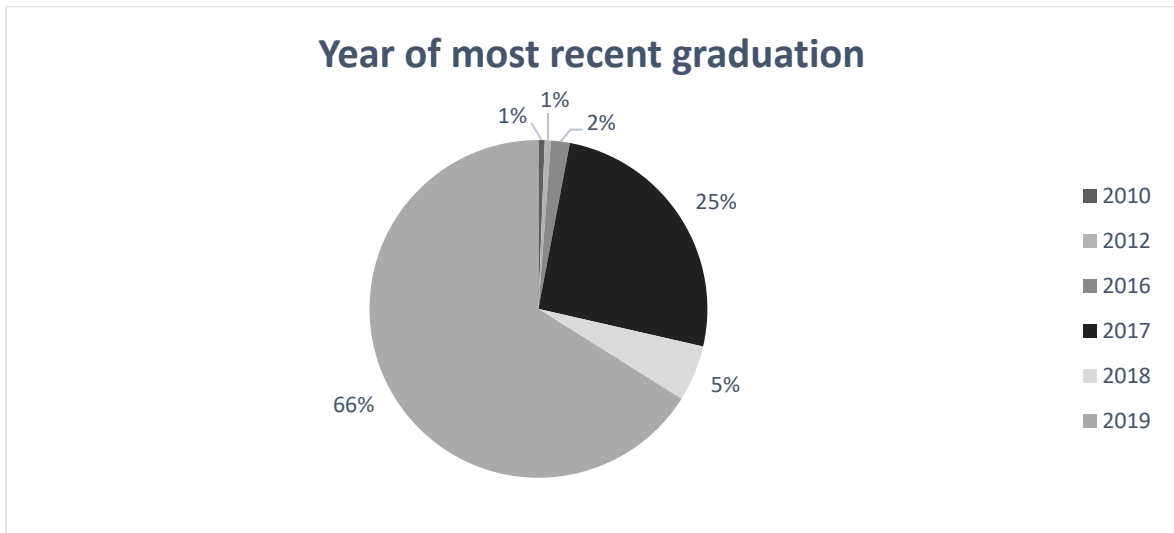
Moreover, the vast majority of the respondents (156, 93%) had only completed one programme of study at the OUC, 11 of them (6%) had completed 2 programmes, and only 1 of them (1%) was a 3-times alumnus/a of the OUC.



Graph 6: Number of programmes completed at the OUC

4.2.5 Year of most recent graduation

Over half of the 168 respondents were recent alumni of the University, as 111 (66%) of them graduated in 2019. The next largest group of respondents graduated in 2017 (43 respondents, 25%), followed by 2018 (9 respondents, 5%), 2016 (3 respondents, 2%), and 2012 and 2010 with 1 respondent (1%) each.



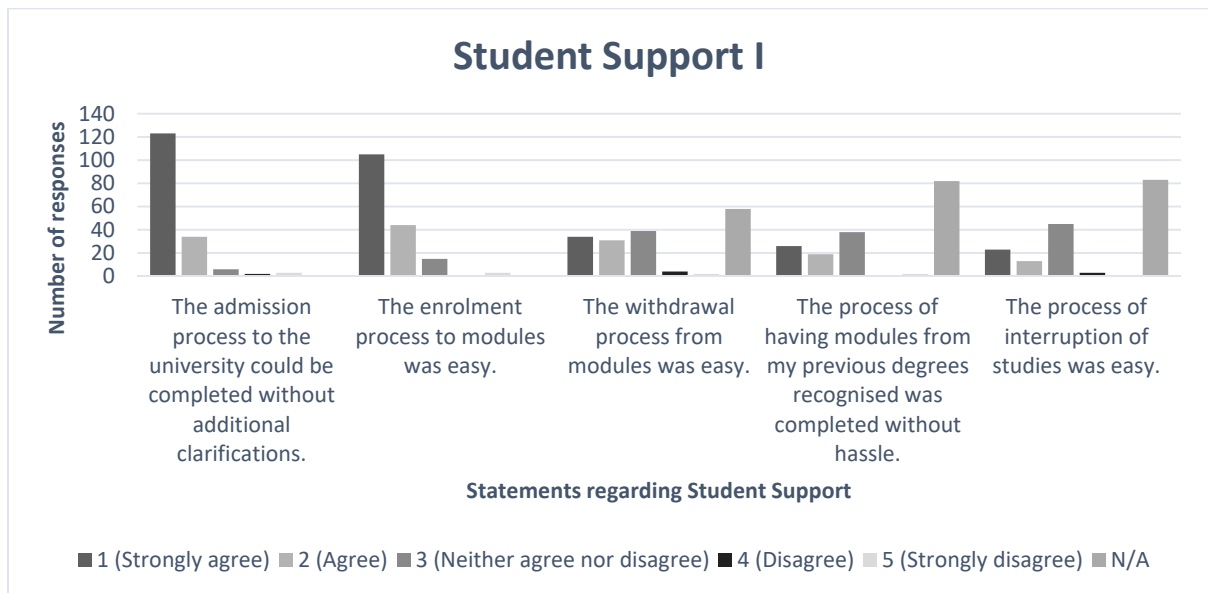
Graph 7: Year of most recent graduation

4.3 OUC Administrative Services

As previously mentioned, alumni were questioned regarding their experience with four OUC administrative Units. Those were Student Support, Library, Accounting services, and eLearning platform (eClass). The questions addressed a combination of topics and services that arose from the literature and that were specific to the OUC context.

4.3.1 Student Support

Because of the broad array of services provided by this Unit, the results are broken down into two parts. The first part includes services that have to do with the academic progress of the student, such as admissions, enrolment/withdrawal from modules, recognition of modules, and interruption of studies. As can be seen from *Graph 8* below, the admission and enrolment processes seem to be sufficiently organised and working, as the majority of the respondents strongly agreed with these statements (123 responses, 73%, and 105, 63% respectively). The high percentage of N/A regarding the statements on withdrawal from modules, recognition of modules, and interruption of studies does not come as a surprise, as these are services that only a part of the student population utilises. It is interesting to note, however, that the majority of alumni (38-45 responses, 23%-27%) has mixed feelings about these services, as they ‘neither agree, nor disagree’ with them.



Graph 8: Student Support I

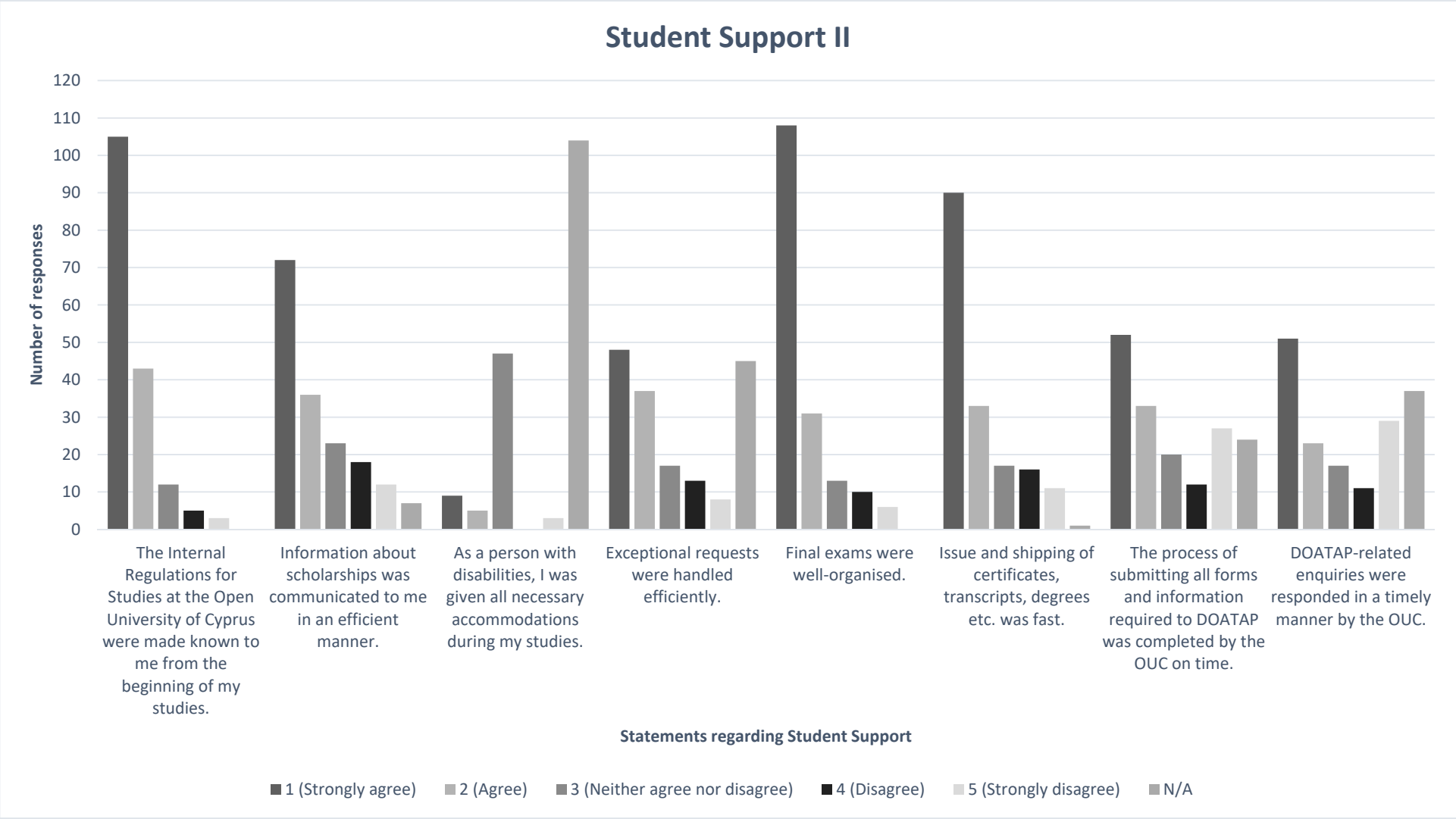
The next set of questions concerned processes related to organisation of the Unit, on-time completion of services, and effective communication of accurate information. The results of these questions are more diverse than the previous ones, as can be seen in *Graph 9*, below. In all questions, more positive responses ('Strongly agree' and 'Agree') were received than neutral or negative ('Neither agree nor disagree', 'Disagree', 'Strongly Disagree'). However, the negative responses, albeit less in number, should not be overlooked and are thus highlighted below.

When asked whether the *Internal Regulations for Studies* (Open University of Cyprus 2018) were made known to them prior to beginning their studies, the majority of alumni (148 respondents, 88%) agreed or strongly agreed with it. A similar amount of 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' responses were collected from alumni when asked whether final exams were well-organised (139 respondents, 83%), as well as regarding the question on fast issue and shipping of various certificates, (123 respondents, 73%). 45 of the 168 (27%), however, were either neutral ('Neither agree nor disagree') or dissatisfied ('Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree') with it. Similarly, when asked whether information about scholarships was communicated to them in an efficient manner, 108 (64%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, whereas nearly one third of them (53 respondents, 32%) neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with it.

More than 2/3 of the respondents who had an exceptional request at some point during their studies, agreed or strongly agreed that it was handled efficiently (85 out of 168 respondents, 51%), whereas 38 (23%) were not satisfied. The remaining 45 (27%) did not use this service. The questions about DOATAP³ yield interesting results. It is important to note that this is a service applicable only to Greek alumni, therefore around 18% of respondents stated that they did not use this service. When asked whether they felt that submission of relevant forms to DOATAP was completed by the OUC on time, just over half of the respondents (85, 51%) responded positively, whereas 59 (35%) did not agree with this statement. Moreover, only less than half of the respondents (74, 44%) agreed that their DOATAP-related questions were answered by OUC administrative staff on time, whereas 57 respondents (34%) did not agree with this statement.

Answers collected regarding the question on persons with disabilities (PwD) are confusing. Considering that this population is a small minority of the university community (there are only 40-50 students who are identified as PwD per academic year), it seems highly unlikely that 64 of the 168 respondents (38%) belonged in this group (these were the number of respondents who did not choose the N/A answer). Considering that out of those 64 individuals, the vast majority of them (47 respondents) chose the answer 'Neither agree, nor disagree', it is possible that there was some confusion regarding this question. If this is not the case, the results of this question are alarming.

³ DOATAP is the Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Center. It is supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Education and it is the responsible organisation 'for the recognition of university or technological degrees that are awarded by foreign Higher Education Institutions (H.E.I.)' (DOATAP 2020).

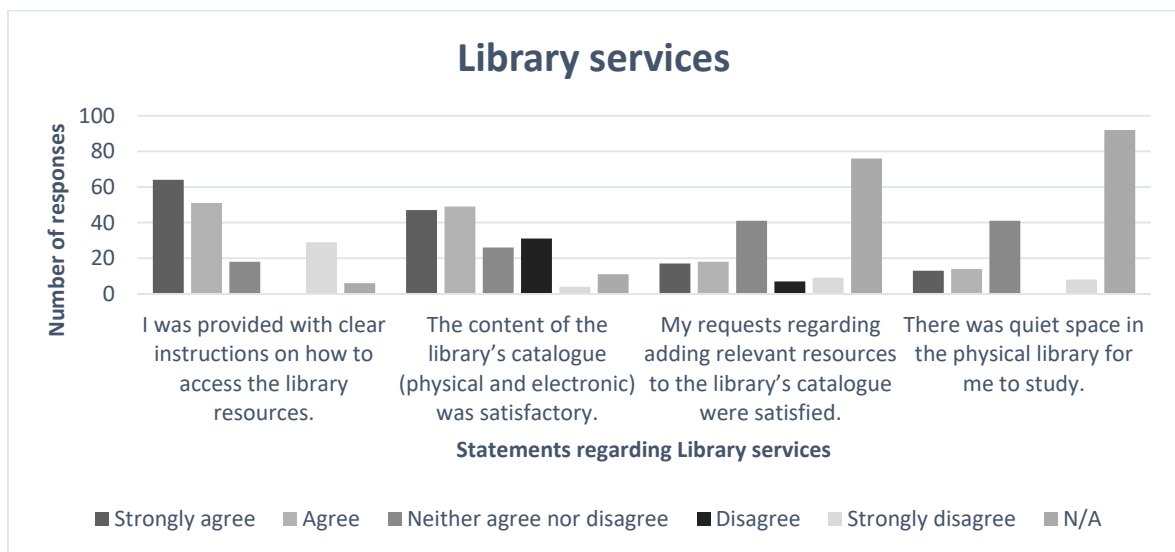


Graph 9: Student Support II

4.3.2 Library

Alumni were also asked about the OUC Library services. 115 (69%) of the respondents felt that they were provided with clear instructions on how to use the library resources. However, an alarming 17% (29 respondents) completely disagreed with this statement, whereas 18 respondents (11%) neither agreed, nor disagreed, revealing that more than a fifth of the respondents was not able to use the library resources offered by the University. Additionally, 96 (57%) respondents were satisfied with the content of the library’s catalogue, whereas 35 respondents (21%) expressed their dissatisfaction and 26 (16%) felt neutral about it, which also rings bells about this service.

When asked about the effectiveness with which requests for additional resources to the library’s catalogue were handled and regarding the physical space of the library, the vast majority of respondents either did not use these services (76 respondents, 45%, and 92 respondents, 55% respectively) or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements (41 respondents, 24% for each).

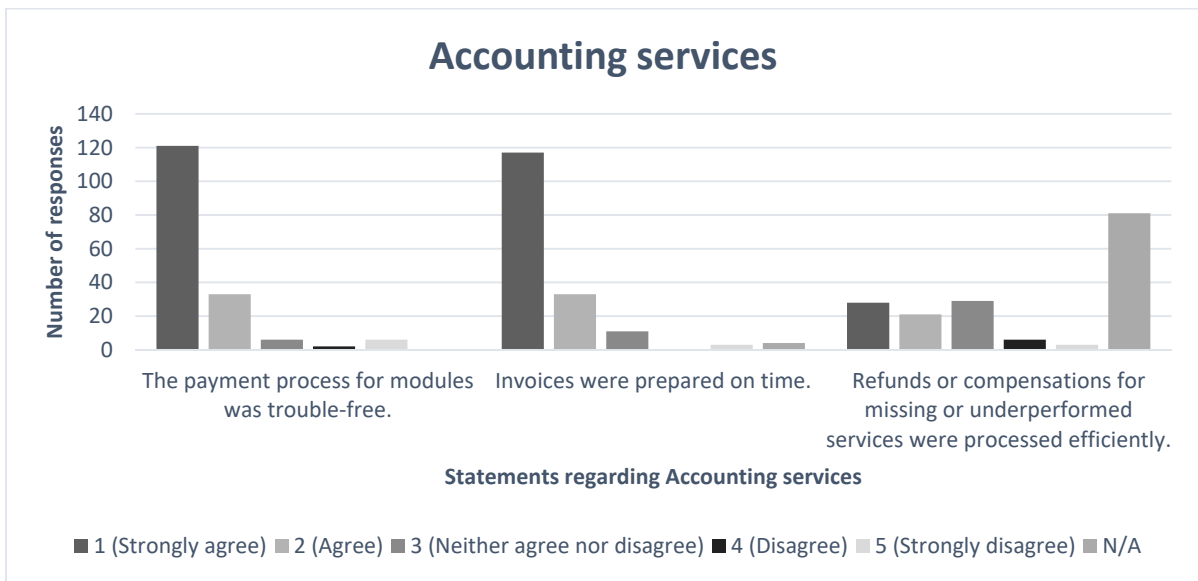


Graph 10: Library services

4.3.3 Accounting services

The vast majority of the responses regarding Accounting services of the OUC were positive. 154 respondents (92%) did not account any problem with the payment process and 150 of them (89%) received their invoices on time. Almost half of the respondents (81 respondents, 48%) never needed a refund or compensation for missing or

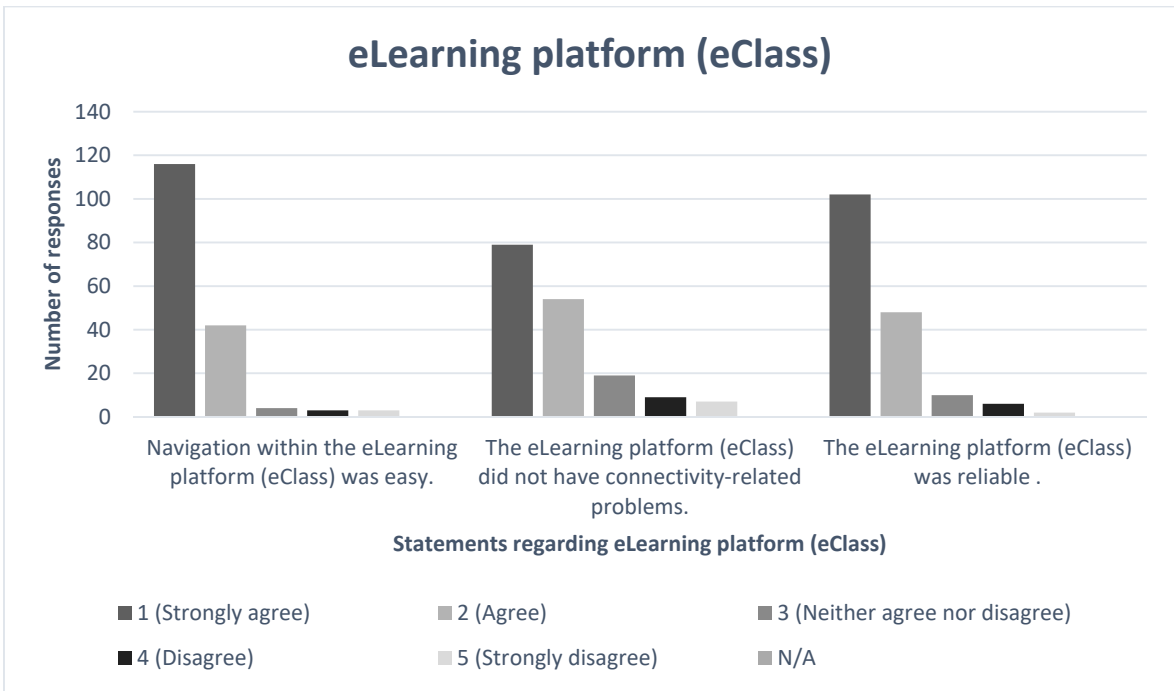
underperformed services. Of the remaining 87 (52%), almost half of them (49 respondents, 29%) agreed that these were processed efficiently, 29 (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 9 (5%) were not satisfied.



Graph 11: Accounting services

4.3.4 eLearning Platform (eClass)

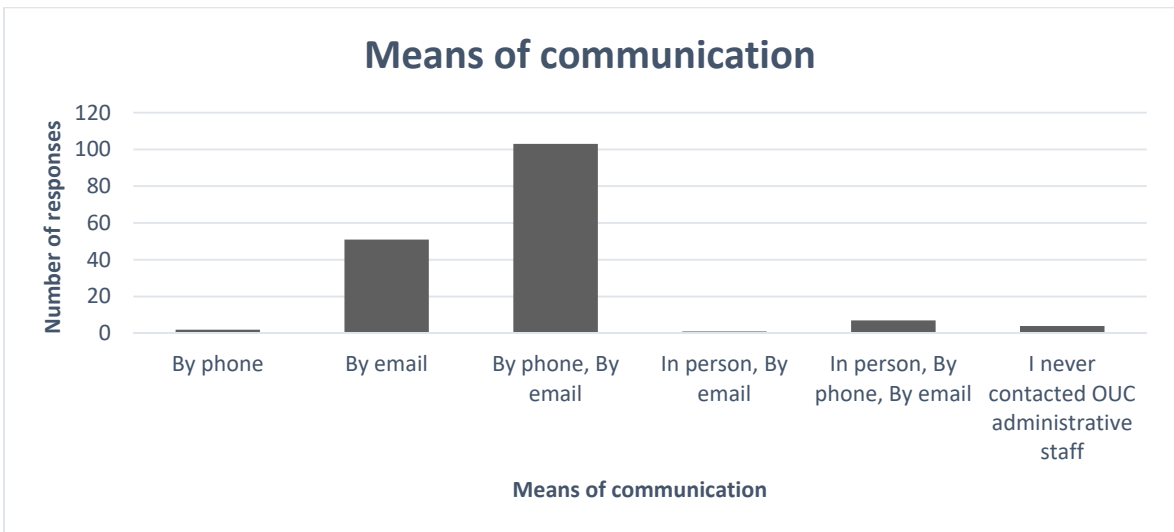
Responses related to the eLearning platform (eClass) were also mainly positive. 158 of the 168 respondents (94%) confirmed that navigation within the platform was easy and 133 of them (79%) that they experienced no connectivity problems. Finally, 150 respondents (89%) agreed that the platform was reliable. 6 (4%), 16 (10%), and 8 (5%) respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the three statements, respectively.



Graph 12: eLearning Platform (eClass)

4.4 Communication with OUC administrative staff

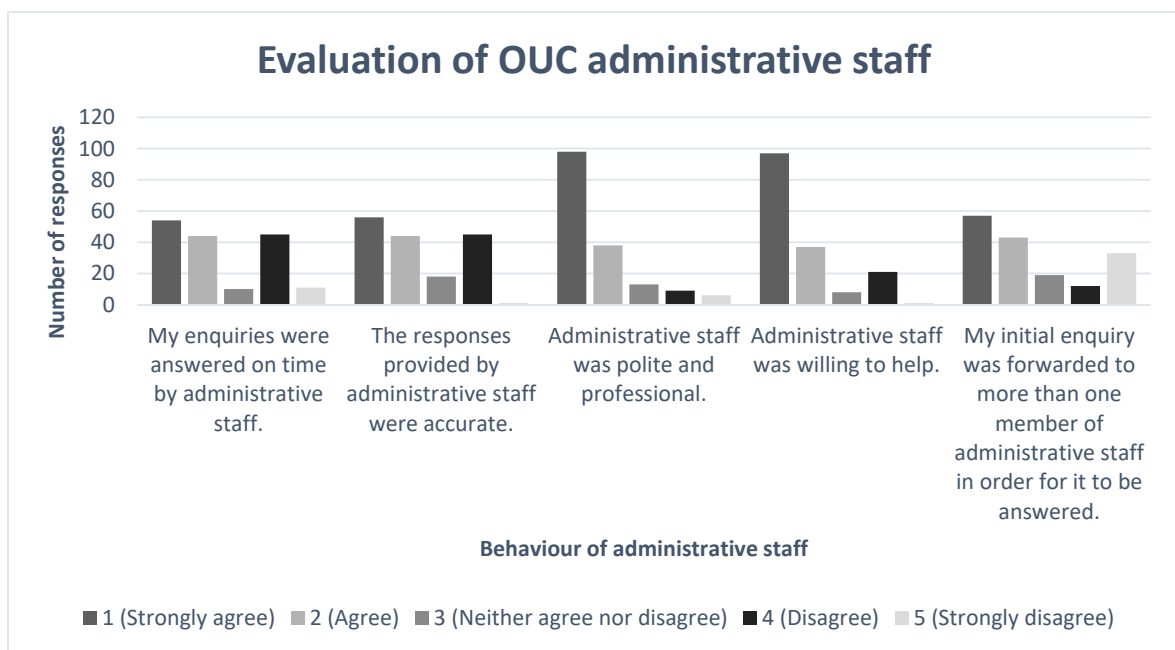
A combination of phone and email was identified by the majority of respondents (103, 61%) as their preferred means of communication with OUC administrative staff. This was followed by 51 respondents (30%), who stated that their communication was done solely via email.



Graph 13: Means of communication with OUC administrative staff

The results above reveal that, for the most part, communication between students and the University is not made in person, thus administrative staff's organisation, timely and accurate responses and communication skills are an important factor when it comes to achieving higher or lower levels of customer satisfaction.

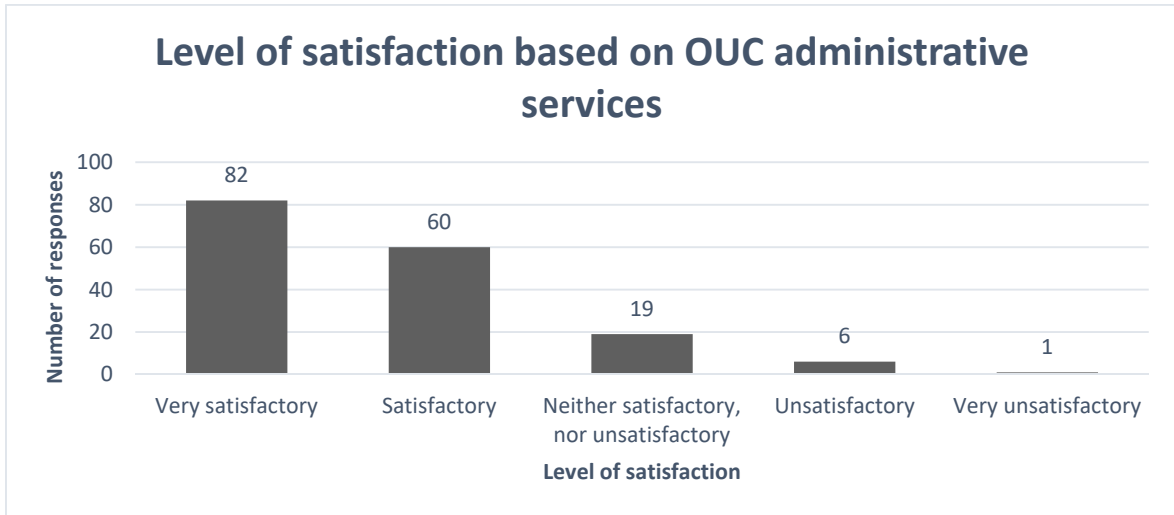
Evaluating these elements was thus crucial for measuring the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of alumni. Responses reveal that alumni were most satisfied with the politeness, professionalism, and willingness to help of administrative staff, as 136 (81%) and 134 (80%) respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed with these qualities. On the contrary, significant levels of dissatisfaction were noted when alumni were asked about whether they received on-time responses from administrative staff and whether these responses were accurate. Specifically, 56 (33%) and 46 (27%) respondents respectively disagreed and completely disagreed with these statements. Lastly, the majority of the respondents (100 respondents, 60%) stated that their initial enquiry had to be forwarded to more than one member of administrative staff for it to be answered, which reveals lack of internal organisation.



Graph 14: Evaluation of OUC administrative staff

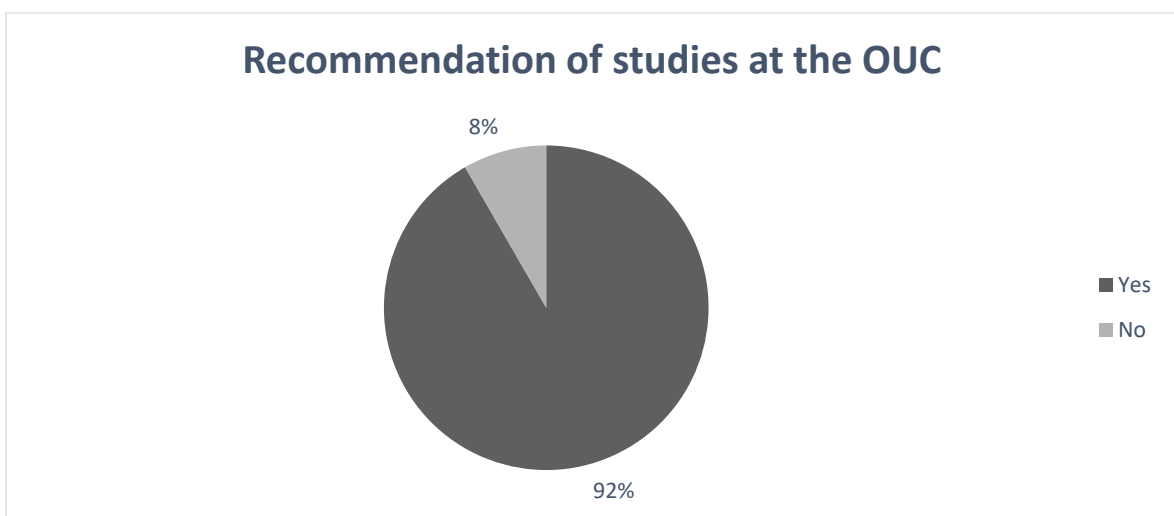
4.5 Overall evaluation

Despite ups and downs in terms of quality of the OUC administrative services, the vast majority of respondents felt satisfied with their overall experience as a student receiving services from administrative staff at the OUC. 82 respondents (49%) found their experience to be 'very satisfactory', 60 respondents (36%) to be 'satisfactory', 19 (11%) to be 'neither satisfactory, nor unsatisfactory', whereas only 6 (4%) and 1 (0.6%) characterised their experience as 'unsatisfactory' and 'very unsatisfactory', respectively.



Graph 15: Level of satisfaction based on OUC administrative services

As such, 154 of 168 (92%) of respondents, would recommend the OUC to friends and family, whereas only 14 respondents (8%) said they would not do so.



Graph 16: Recommendation of studies at the OUC

4.6 Recommendations for improvement

In the last part of the questionnaire, alumni were asked to identify which services of the OUC were in need of improvement, in order for the experience of future students to be improved. Respondents could choose more than one recommendations, hence the final number of recommendations collected (234) exceeds the numbers of respondents (168). The variety and great number of recommendations made, reveals that despite the overall positive feeling, there is still room for improvement and students/customers would like to see certain changes in the future. As already mentioned, in total, 234 recommendations were gathered, which corresponds to 1.4 recommendations per respondent.

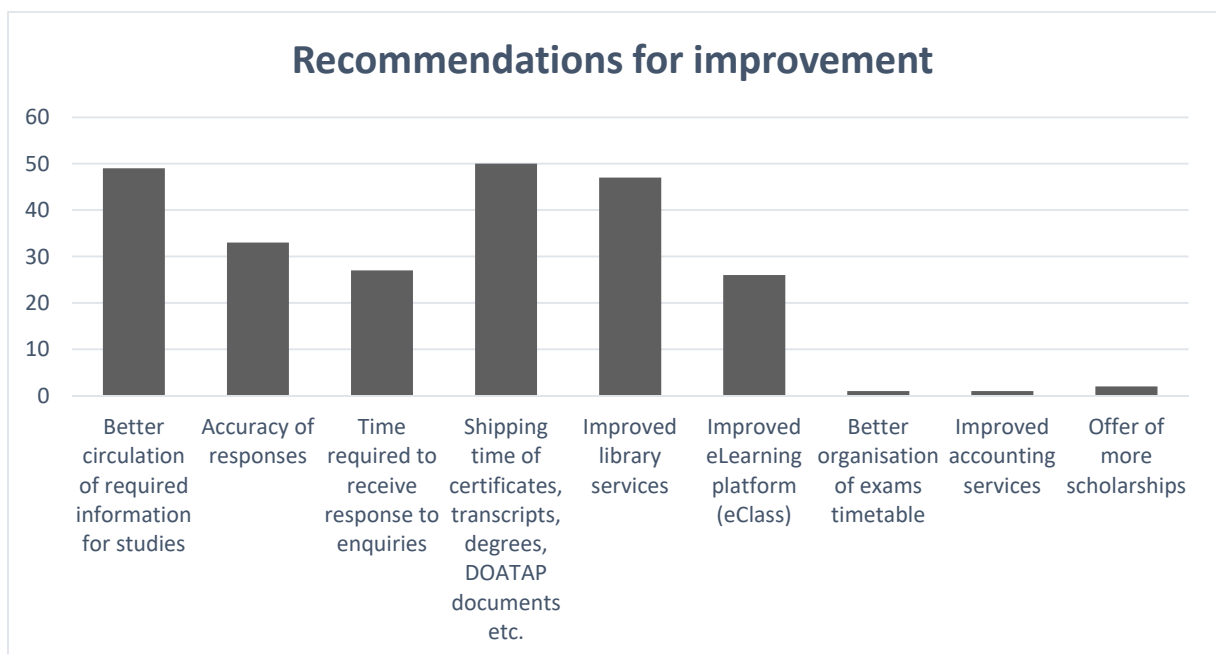
There was also an 'Other' option, as well as a last, additional question that allowed respondents to add other recommendations or comments. Where possible, these recommendations were merged with the ones provided in the questionnaire (Appendix A), as they were essentially a more detailed description of the same category. For example, a few of the respondents mentioned that *shipping of documents to DOATAP should be faster*, which was then counted towards the improvement of 'Shipping time of certificates, transcripts, degrees etc.' option. Others included specific details about the library (i.e. *addition of more books related to their programmes of study, addition of a books shipping service for Cyprus*), which were incorporated in the 'Improved library services' option, whilst others included recommendations about *more specific staff responses* and *avoidance of responses that are simply copying the Internal Regulations for Studies*, which were counted towards the 'Accuracy of responses of administrative staff'. Any recommendations provided that did not match the ones set by the questionnaire, were grouped and included separately as different categories in *Graph 17*, below.

The three most popular recommendations made concerned improvement of shipping time (51 of 234 responses, 22%), better circulation of studies-related information (49 responses, 21%), and improved library services (47 responses, 20%). The open-ended question allowed respondents to expand on these topics and revealed the main sources that are in need of improvement. Specifically, alumni's comments showed that the need for improved shipping time was mainly related to the time required to send documents to DOATAP. Comments on the library services, on the other hand, focused on the inclusion

of more material related to specific programmes of study and the development and implementation of shipping services within Cyprus, to accommodate students from other cities who cannot visit the physical premises of the library in Nicosia.

Other recommendations concerned greater accuracy of responses by administrative staff (33 responses, 14%), faster response to enquiries (27 responses, 12%), and improved eLearning platform (eClass) (26 responses, 11%). Specifically, alumni recommended avoiding responses from administrative staff that cite the Internal Regulations for Studies, instead of providing a personalised answer. Other comments emphasised the need for better knowledge of the specifics of each programme of study by all members of administrative staff, which reveals lack of internal organisation and failure to direct questions to the correct person or Unit within the University.

Lastly, 2 respondents commented on the need for more scholarships to be offered (1%), 1 respondent on better organisation of exams in order to better accommodate students travelling to the exam locations (0.4%), and another respondent on the need to have improved accounting services (0.4%). These were recorded as separate categories.



Graph 17: Recommendations for improvement

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Overview

This Chapter discusses the findings reported in Chapter 4, by synthesising the collected data with existing literature on service quality in online HE. The discussion is organised in relation to the three research questions and hypotheses of the study.

5.2 Key Issues

5.2.1 What was the overall level of satisfaction of OUC alumni in regards to the administrative services they received as students?

The results from the data collected reveal interesting trends for the sample as a whole. The majority of the respondents express satisfaction with the service they received from the OUC administrative services. The vast majority (49% and 36%) described their experience at the OUC, based on the quality of service they received from the administrative services as 'very satisfactory' and 'satisfactory', respectively. Following suit, 92% of the respondents would recommend studying at the OUC to friends and family, based on this positive experience. The limitations of the sample, however, might provide a potential explanation regarding the difference between the hypothesis and the final results. In order for the study to be compliant with GDPR, the questionnaire was only sent to those alumni who had given their consent to the OUC's Alumni Office to communicate with them. It is therefore highly likely that alumni who did not have a positive experience with the University, would not want to stay in touch with it and continue receiving the University's news. These results must therefore be interpreted with caution, due to the limitations of the sample.

5.2.2 Which parts of administrative services left OUC alumni satisfied or dissatisfied as students?

Though the majority of respondents expressed their satisfaction with most of the Units and services they were asked to evaluate, a closer look at the data reveals that there are mixed feelings regarding specific Units of the OUC administration and specific services they offer.

Around 35% of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with how the procedures regarding DOATAP were handled by the university. In particular, they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements 'The process of submitting all forms and information required to DOATAP was completed by the OUC on time' and 'DOATAP-related enquiries were responded in a timely manner by the OUC'.

Further investigation is required into the processes regarding PwD. A disproportionate part of the sample to the population (38% of the sample, in comparison to 1-2% of the population) responded to this question as having utilised the service and therefore as being PwD, by stating that they neither agree nor disagree with the fact that necessary accommodations were provided during their studies. This reveals a possible misunderstanding and as such no certain results can be drawn regarding this service.

Results regarding the library services yield concern, as expected from the hypothesis, since around a fifth of the respondents expressed disagreement with being provided with clear instructions on how to use the library resources and with the content of the library's catalogue being satisfactory. An additional 16% and 11%, respectively, felt neutral about these statements. These trends reveal that a large part of the student population is unaware of the library resources, not adequately trained, or not trained at all on how to use them, thus leaving one of the University's biggest resources unutilised.

Respondents expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with the Accounting services of the OUC, unlike what was expected as stated in the second hypothesis and as observed in relevant literature (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010). This reveals a good organisation of

the Unit. Results regarding the eLearning platform (eClass) were equally positive, with the greatest proportion of dissatisfaction stemming from connectivity-related issues users had experienced when using the platform.

Lastly, when evaluating the administrative staff and their organisation, responses, and communication skills, respondents seemed to be most satisfied with how polite, professional, and willing to help the staff was. Significant levels of dissatisfaction were noted in the data collected regarding receipt of on-time responses from administrative staff and accuracy of responses, which was also the case in previous research (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010) and was thus expected and stated in the second hypothesis. The high number of responses stating that their initial enquiry was forwarded to more than one member of administrative staff reveals lack of internal organisation.

5.2.3 Which areas of administrative services could be improved, in order for the OUC to achieve a higher level of satisfaction through its administrative services?

The big number and variety of recommendations made by respondents (1.4 recommendations per respondent) shows that despite their overall satisfaction with the quality of service received from administrative services, alumni feel that there is room for improvement, as stated in the third hypothesis. In combination with the various levels of satisfaction observed from the evaluation of the different services, these data analyses allow for a better understanding of the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of OUC alumni with the quality of services they received from administrative services. Additionally, the observations below form the basis for the recommendations made in Chapter 6, towards the University's management.

Regarding the Student Support services, alumni seem to be most dissatisfied with the processes that have to do with DOATAP and, in particular, how fast the required documents are sent by the OUC to DOATAP and how quickly OUC administrative staff responds to alumni's questions regarding this process. Even though this matter only affects Greek nationals, it is still of great importance for the University, as the majority of its alumni are Greeks. This was also highlighted in the last question, where alumni were

asked to add any additional comments they wanted. A great portion of these comments expressed alumni's dissatisfaction regarding the process of having degrees recognised by DOATAP, which takes too long. OUC should work towards resolving this issue, not only internally but also externally, working directly with DOATAP. Lack of action towards this direction could be harmful for the University through word-of-mouth (Arambewela & Hall 2009), as unsatisfied alumni could discourage others from enrolling to the OUC.

The high level of neutrality regarding the services provided to students identified as PwD signifies that further research is required in terms of the service received by these students, due to potential misunderstanding of the sample. Should the OUC like to receive information solely from this population, then an additional research should be carried out, where only these students/alumni are emailed, in order to avoid future misunderstandings, as previously mentioned.

Furthermore, the alarming results regarding the Library services reveal that students seem to be not using the library databases and material sufficiently. This stems from the fact that students are not properly trained and do not know how to search for resources in the library's databases. It is thus not surprising that alumni asked for improved library services in the recommendations section of the questionnaire. The OUC should ensure that new-coming students go through training on how to use the library's online and physical catalogues effectively, in order to be able to carry out academic research, using the materials provided to them.

Moreover, even though respondents seem to be mostly satisfied with the eLearning platform (eClass), a significant portion of them had suffered from connectivity problems when accessing it during their studies, which is in accordance with previous research carried out at the Open University of Catalonia (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010). Improvement of the eLearning platform (eClass) also arose as a recommendation in the questionnaire. Taking into consideration that the eLearning platform is the main means used by students during their studies, the OUC should take drastic steps towards its improvement. Further investigation by the eClass administrative team is therefore

required, in order to overcome this issue and smoothen and improve the learning experience for all students.

Additionally, considering that emails and phone-communication were the main means of communication between students and administrative staff, their internal organisation and good manners are at the core of the student experience. These communications are often the only form of interaction between the student and the University, aside from the virtual classes and the interaction with their tutors. Therefore, the results that show that alumni were not satisfied with the response times of administrative staff and with the accuracy of their responses, are alarming. These results are also consistent with previous research done on online HE (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010).

Finally, respondents also commented on the fact that administrative staff failed to provide one single response to enquiries, which were oftentimes forwarded to more than one member of staff. Recommendations by alumni included the need for better circulation of information related to their studies and faster shipping of administrative documentation, which is also found in previous research (Martínez-Argüelles *et al.* 2010). These highlight the need for administrative staff to ensure a smoother line of work internally, as students should not see internal correspondence among members of staff redirecting their questions to each other. Instead, a clear, compact, and accurate answer to their questions should be received, regardless of the number of people that were required to answer it.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Summary

In this new era for HE, students are increasingly being acknowledged as being at the core of the process of quality monitoring and assessment. Joseph *et al.* emphasise the importance of actively monitoring their preferences and feedback, in order for HE institutions to determine where to allocate resources to achieve improvement (2005). Aiming to achieve student/customer satisfaction and loyalty, universities are thus increasingly working towards ensuring provision of high quality educational services to their customers. Online and distance universities are no exception, as they, too, have to become increasingly competitive in order to survive in today's rapidly evolving online HE market. However, the complex learning process of online environment needs to be taken into consideration when attempting to evaluate student satisfaction in such institutions. Martínez-Argüelles and Batalla-Busquets describe the online learning environment as being made up of different sub-processes, both instructional and non-instructional, which are extended over the time-period of each degree (2016). Considered as a whole, non-instructional services, which include administrative services, additional services, and user interface, have been found to have a higher impact on students' perceived service quality and satisfaction than teaching (Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets 2016).

Moving along this line, this study focused on the non-instructional dimension of online HE, using the OUC as a case study. Four Units of the core administrative services of the OUC were used in this study, which were chosen based on the extent of their role in shaping students' (and thus alumni's) experience. Those were, Student Support services; Library services; eLearning platform (eClass); and Accounting Services. The four Units

were further analysed into their respective services, and formed the basis for the questionnaire that was sent to the OUC alumni (Appendix A).

Data was collected from a sample of 168 alumni of the OUC, who graduated from 22 programmes of study. The results showed that the overall level of satisfaction of alumni with the administrative services they received was high. This should be interpreted with caution, taking into consideration the sample of the study, which included only those alumni who had granted the OUC consent to communicate them. It is therefore highly likely that a great part of the population that was dissatisfied with the OUC as a whole and its administrative services in particular was not represented in the study, as it is likely they did not give their prior consent to the University to contact them. However, the University should maintain and strengthen those aspects that have been referred to as positive by the respondents and work towards improving those that were not.

A closer analysis of the data reveals that there is no uniformity regarding the level of satisfaction alumni experienced across all services of the four Units. Whereas in most areas the majority of respondents are satisfied with the different services, dissatisfaction is mostly prevalent in alumni's responses regarding the processes followed by the University in regards to DOATAP, the library services and the training they received as students on how to use its resources, as well as connectivity-related issues they experienced when using the eLearning platform (eClass). Dissatisfaction was also noted in the data regarding receipt of on-time and accurate responses from administrative staff. Recommendations made by alumni focused on the same services, with the addition of better circulation of information related to their studies.

6.2 Further research

The results of this research yield interesting findings regarding the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of OUC alumni with the administrative services they received during their studies from the University. The limitations of the study, however, highlight the need for further research. Acknowledging the limitation that occurred due to the strict timeframes within which this study had to be completed, further research could be

carried out on the instructional processes within the OUC. This would complement the present research and allow for a holistic representation of the experience and satisfaction levels of OUC alumni.

As the study was limited to the restrictions of quantitative research, future research on the field could benefit from mixed research methods. Qualitative data could complement and enrich the collected data of this study, by shedding light to areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of alumni. Such methods would allow alumni to provide specifications for their various comments and evaluations. Additionally, recommendations for improvement could be even more detailed, setting an example for both the OUC and other HE institutions focusing on online education.

Lastly, as noted in previous sections of this study, the disproportionately high number of respondents who identified themselves as PwD shows that there was some misunderstanding regarding this question. As such, no valid conclusions can be drawn from this question. Should the University like to investigate the efficiency of the services provided to PwD students, additional research is required. Future research should focus solely on this population, and questionnaires should be sent only to students/alumni that are PwD, in order to create a clear picture of their level of satisfaction from the relevant administrative services provided to them.

6.3 Recommendations

The results of this study ultimately lead to a series of recommendations for improvement addressed to the OUC management team. To begin with, in order for the University to overcome the problem regarding DOATAP, improvement of both its internal processes and direct work with DOATAP is required. Internally, administrative staff should be better-informed on the process, to ensure quick and accurate response to enquiries. Working with DOATAP is also necessary, in order to ensure that a smoother line of work exists between the two institutions and to limit the time needed for the recognition of the degrees of Greek nationals, due to the large impact this has to their level of satisfaction.

Obligatory training courses should be developed and offered by the Library online to all new-coming students of the University, through the eLearning platform (eClass). These courses should focus on training students on how to use the library resources and online databases and utilise them in their research and study. Courses by the Library, in collaboration with the different programmes, could also be developed and offered online on different referencing styles. Additional programmes could also be developed and offered all year round to those who want or need them, both programme-specific and regarding general library and research skills. The Library services should also consider offering training on other relevant processes, such as referencing, or targeted training for specific programmes in collaboration with the academic coordinators.

Moreover, taking into consideration the central role of the eLearning platform (eClass) in the learning experience of all students, the effective and problem-free function of it should be a priority for the responsible administrative unit of the OUC, or any University focusing on online learning. As such, additional work should be carried out in order to overcome any connectivity-related issues with the eLearning platform (eClass) and smoothen the learning experience for all students. Its further improvement should be a continuous goal for the eClass administrative unit, as well as its enhancement with educational features that are designed to improve the learning experience of users.

Working towards minimising response-time and ensuring accuracy of responses provided by administrative staff, a smoother, internal line of work of administrative staff should be introduced. The creation of a single line of communication, perhaps in the form of a department that links, internally, the various Units within the OUC, is thus advised. This department will bear the responsibility of communicating with the student and will ensure that each enquiry is answered with a single, comprehend, and accurate response. As such, and along the same line, abolition of different email addresses that students can contact and creation of one address that will be supervised by a specific part of the University is advised. Additionally, key performance indicators could be set by the management team, to ensure that a common line of work is followed by administrative staff. These indicators could focus on setting a target response-time, within which a response needs to be sent to students' enquiries (i.e. all enquiries should be responded within 72 hours). Alternatively, a target ratio of resolved complaints to complaints

received could be set, towards which all members of administrative staff should comply. Such measures could eliminate any issues of dissatisfaction with response-time and act as an additional pressure towards responding with accuracy to all enquiries received.

Last but not least, students should be receiving all important information regarding their studies on time. On the one hand, this will ensure that students are well-informed about all aspects of their study. On the other hand, the number of repetitive enquiries on such information towards administrative staff will be reduced, allowing members of staff to utilise their time better. Another measure taken towards this direction would therefore be the creation and circulation of a welcome package, addressed to all new-coming students. This package would include all relevant information required regarding their studies and communication information of people/Units within the OUC, for all study-related issues. A section with Frequently Asked Questions and answers could also be included, in an attempt to minimise enquiries received and free-up time of administrative personnel.

The recommendations above aim to facilitate the OUC in designing its future strategic planning and thus achieving higher levels of student/customer satisfaction. Internal reorganisation and restructure, both within the different Units and within the OUC as a whole, is of course required for their effective implementation. Though some of the recommendations are specific to the OUC, the majority of them can be extended to other universities offering online degrees.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

A.1 Word version

Measuring the level of satisfaction of Open University of Cyprus former students – Questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, which is developed as part of my Master's dissertation for an MBA at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC).

You received this questionnaire because you are a former OUC student. The aim of the questionnaire is to identify the sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of former OUC students, based on their perception of the quality of services they received from administrative staff throughout their studies. When answering the questionnaire, I please ask you to try and bring to mind both your communication with OUC administrative staff and your overall experience as a user of the University services.

Please do not write your name on this questionnaire. Your responses will be anonymous and will never be linked to you personally. The questionnaire takes approximately 5-7 minutes to answer.

Your contribution is of immense importance to my dissertation. Once again, I am extremely grateful for your contributing your valuable time, your honest information, and your thoughtful suggestions.

Thank you,
Ioanna Siakalli
(MBA student - Open University of Cyprus)

* Required

Demographics

1. What is your gender? *
 - Female
 - Male
2. What is your age group? *
 - 18-24

- 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65 or older
3. What was your employment status for the longest duration of your studies? *
- Full-time employment
 - Part-time employment
 - Unemployed
 - Student
 - Retired
 - Other: _____
4. Which programme(s) did you complete at the Open University of Cyprus? Choose all that apply. *
- Adult Education for Social Change
 - Applied Health Informatics
 - Banking and Finance
 - Business Administration (Bachelor)
 - Business Administration (PhD)
 - Cognitive Systems
 - Communications New Journalism
 - Communications New Journalism (PhD)
 - Cultural Policy and Development
 - Cultural Policy and Development (PhD)
 - Economics (Bachelor)
 - Educational Studies
 - Educational Studies (PhD)
 - Enterprise Risk Management
 - Environmental Conversation and Management
 - Environmental Conversation and Management (PhD)
 - European Law
 - Greek Language and Literature
 - Greek Language and Literature (PhD)
 - Health Policy and Planning
 - Health Policy and Planning (PhD)
 - Healthcare Management
 - Healthcare Management (PhD)
 - Information and Communications Systems
 - Information and Communications Systems (PhD)
 - Management, Technology and Quality
 - Master in Business Administration (English MBA)

- Master in Business Administration (Greek MBA)
- Police Studies
- Social Information Systems
- Social Information Systems (PhD)
- Studies in Hellenic Culture
- Studies in Hellenic Culture (PhD)
- Sustainable Energy Systems
- Theatre Studies
- Theatre Studies (PhD)
- Wireless Communication Systems
- Wireless Communication Systems (PhD)
- Other: _____

5. What year did you complete your latest degree at the Open University of Cyprus?

*

- 2019
- 2018
- 2017
- 2016
- 2015
- 2014
- 2013
- 2012
- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008

Questionnaire

The following questions aim to rate your experience as a student at the Open University of Cyprus. Please answer them to the best of your abilities, based both on your communication with OUC administrative staff and your overall experience as a user of the University services.

1. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 indicating “Strongly agree” and 5 indicating “Strongly disagree”), rate the following statements regarding the services you received at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC). Choose "N/A" if you have not made use of the service in question. *

	1 (Strongly agree)	2 (Agree)	3 (Neither agree nor disagree)	4 (Disagree)	5 (Strongly disagree)	N/A
The admission process to the university could be completed without additional clarifications.						
The enrolment process to modules was easy.						
The withdrawal process from modules was easy.						
The process of having modules from my previous degrees recognised was completed without hassle.						
The process of interruption of studies was easy.						
The Internal Regulations for Studies at the Open University of Cyprus were made known to me from the beginning of my studies.						
Information about scholarships was communicated to me in an efficient manner.						
As a person with disabilities, I was given all necessary accommodations during my studies.						
Exceptional requests were handled efficiently.						
Final exams were well-organised.						
Issue and shipping of certificates, transcripts, degrees etc. was fast.						
The process of submitting all forms and information required to DOATAP was completed by the OUC on time.						
DOATAP-related enquiries were responded in a timely manner by the OUC.						
I was provided with clear instructions on how to access the library resources.						
The content of the library's catalogue (physical and electronic) was satisfactory.						
My requests regarding adding relevant resources to the library's catalogue were satisfied.						
There was quiet space in the physical library for me to study.						
The payment process for modules was trouble-free.						
Invoices were prepared on time.						

Refunds or compensations for missing or underperformed services were processed efficiently.						
Navigation within the eLearning platform (eClass) was easy.						
The eLearning platform (eClass) did not have connectivity-related problems.						
The eLearning platform (eClass) was reliable.						

2. Which means of communication did you use to contact OUC’s administrative staff?
Choose all that apply. *

- In person.
- By phone.
- By email.
- I never contacted OUC administrative staff. (Please skip the next question.)

3. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 indicating “Strongly agree” and 5 indicating “Strongly disagree”), rate the following statements regarding your communication with OUC’s administrative staff?

	1 (Strongly agree)	2 (Agree)	3 (Neither agree nor disagree)	4 (Disagree)	5 (Strongly disagree)	N/A
My enquiries were answered on time by administrative staff.						
The responses provided by administrative staff were accurate.						
Administrative staff was polite and professional.						
Administrative staff was willing to help.						
My initial enquiry was forwarded to more than one member of administrative staff in order for it to be answered.						

Overall evaluation and Recommendations

1. How would you rate your overall experience as a student receiving services from administrative staff at the Open University of Cyprus? *

- Very satisfactory

- Satisfactory
- Neither satisfactory, nor unsatisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- Very unsatisfactory

2. Based on the quality of administrative services you received, would you recommend studies at the Open University of Cyprus to a friend or family member?

*

- Yes
- No

3. Which of the following aspects of administrative services would you identify as in need of improvement at the Open University of Cyprus? Choose all that apply. *

- Better circulation of required information for studies.
- Time required for administrative staff to respond to enquiries.
- Shipping time of certificates, transcripts, degrees etc.
- Accuracy of responses of administrative staff.
- Improved eLearning platform (eClass).
- Improved library services.
- Other: _____

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

A.2 Screenshots

Measuring the level of satisfaction of Open University of Cyprus' former students - Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, which is developed as part of my Master's dissertation for an MBA at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC).

You received this questionnaire because you are a former OUC student. The aim of the questionnaire is to identify the sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of former OUC students, based on their perception of the quality of services they received from administrative staff throughout their studies. When answering the questionnaire, I please ask you to try and bring to mind both your communication with OUC administrative staff and your overall experience as a user of the University services.

Please do not write your name on this questionnaire. Your responses will be anonymous and will never be linked to you personally. The questionnaire takes approximately 5-7 minutes to answer.

Your contribution is of immense importance to my dissertation. Once again, I am extremely grateful for your contributing your valuable time, your honest information, and your thoughtful suggestions.

Thank you,
Ioanna Siakalli
(MBA student - Open University of Cyprus)

* Required

Demographics

What is your gender? *

- Female
- Male

What is your age group? *

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

What was your employment status for the longest duration of your studies? *

- Full-time employment
- Part-time employment
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired
- Other: _____

Which programme(s) did you complete at the Open University of Cyprus?
Choose all that apply. *

- Adult Education for Social Change
- Applied Health Informatics
- Banking and Finance
- Business Administration (Bachelor)
- Business Administration (PhD)
- Cognitive Systems
- Communications New Journalism
- Communications New Journalism (PhD)
- Computer and Network Security
- Computer and Network Security (PhD)
- Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
- Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (PhD)
- Cultural Policy and Development
- Cultural Policy and Development (PhD)
- Economics (Bachelor)
- Educational Studies
- Educational Studies (PhD)
- Enterprise Risk Management
- Environmental Conservation and Management
- Environmental Conservation and Management (PhD)
- European Union Law
- Greek Language and Literature
- Greek Language and Literature (PhD)

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- Master in Business Administration (English MBA)
- Master in Business Administration (Greek MBA)
- Police Studies
- Social Information Systems
- Social Information Systems (PhD)
- Studies in Hellenic Culture
- Studies in Hellenic Culture (PhD)
- Sustainable Energy Systems
- Theatre Studies
- Theatre Studies (PhD)
- Wireless Communication Systems
- Wireless Communication Systems (PhD)
- Other: _____

What year did you complete your latest degree at the Open University of Cyprus? *

Choose ▼

Next

Questionnaire

The following questions aim to rate your experience as a student at the Open University of Cyprus. Please answer them to the best of your abilities, based both on your communication with OUC administrative staff and your overall experience as a user of the University services.

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 indicating “Strongly agree” and 5 indicating “Strongly disagree”), rate the following statements regarding the services you received at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC). Choose “N/A” if you have not made use of the service in question. *

	1 (Strongly agree)	2 (Agree)	3 (Neither agree nor disagree)	4 (Disagree)	5 (Strongly disagree)	N/A
The admission process to the university could be completed without additional clarifications.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The enrolment process to modules was easy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The withdrawal process from modules was easy.

The process of having modules from my previous degrees recognised was completed without hassle.

The process of interruption of studies was easy.

The Internal Regulations for Studies at the Open University of Cyprus were made known to me from the beginning of my studies.

Information about scholarships was communicated to me in an efficient manner.

As a person with disabilities, I was given all necessary accommodations during my studies.

Exceptional requests were handled efficiently.

Final exams were well-organised.

Issue and shipping of certificates, transcripts, degrees etc. was fast.

The process of submitting all forms and information required to DOATAP was completed by the OUC on time.

DOATAP-related enquiries were responded in a timely manner by the OUC.

I was provided with clear instructions on how to access the library resources.

The content of the library's catalogue (physical and electronic) was satisfactory.

My requests regarding adding relevant resources to the library's catalogue were satisfied.

There was quiet space in the physical library for me to study.

The payment process for modules was trouble-free.

Invoices were prepared on time.

Refunds or compensations for missing or underperformed services were processed efficiently.

Navigation within the eLearning platform (eClass) was easy.

The eLearning platform (eClass) did not have connectivity-related problems.

The eLearning platform (eClass) was reliable .

Which means of communication did you use to contact OUC's administrative staff? Choose all that apply. *

- In person.
- By phone.
- By email.
- I never contacted OUC administrative staff. (Please skip the next question.)

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 indicating “Strongly agree” and 5 indicating “Strongly disagree”), rate the following statements regarding your communication with OUC’s administrative staff?

	1 (Strongly agree)	2 (Agree)	3 (Neither agree nor disagree)	4 (Disagree)	5 (Strongly disagree)
My enquiries were answered on time by administrative staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The responses provided by administrative staff were accurate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administrative staff was polite and professional.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administrative staff was willing to help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My initial enquiry was forwarded to more than one member of administrative staff in order for it to be answered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Overall evaluation and Recommendations

How would you rate your overall experience as a student receiving services from administrative staff at the Open University of Cyprus? *

- Very Satisfactory
- Satisfactory
- Neither satisfactory, nor unsatisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- Very unsatisfactory

Based on the quality of administrative services you received, would you recommend studies at the Open University of Cyprus to a friend or family member? *

- Yes
- No

Which of the following aspects of administrative services would you identify as in need of improvement at the Open University of Cyprus? Choose all that apply. *

- Better circulation of required information for studies.
- Time required for administrative staff to respond to enquiries.
- Shipping time of certificates, transcripts, degrees etc.
- Accuracy of responses of administrative staff.
- Improved eLearning platform (eClass).
- Improved library services.
- Other: _____

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Your answer _____

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Appendix B

Abbreviations of Programmes of Study

Abbreviation	Explanation
ΑΣΠ	Police Studies
ΑΥΔ	Computer and Network Security
ΔΕΕ	European Union Law
ΔΜΥ	Healthcare Management
ΔΠΠ	Environmental Conservation and Management
ΔΤΠ	Management, Technology and Planning
ΕΓΛ	Greek Language and Literature
ΕΔΜ	Communications New Journalism
ΕΛΛ	Studies in the Hellenic Culture
ΕΠΑ	Educational Studies
ΕΠΤ	Applied Health InformaticsΣ
ΘΣΠ	Theatre Studies
ΚΠΣ	Social Information Systems
ΜΔΕ	Master in Business Administration (Greek MBA)
ΟΙΚ	Economics
ΠΔΕ	Business Administration (Bachelor)
ΠΕΣ	Information and Communications System
ΠΠΑ	Cultural Policy and Development
ΠΥΣ	Health Policy and Planning
ΣΑΕ	Wireless Communication Systems
ΣΑΕ-Δ	Wireless Communication Systems (PhD)
ΣΔΜ	Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
ΤΟΙΚ	Banking and Finance

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