Director’s Report: The Local and Global Impact of Jewish Studies

Yiddish Courses Return to Campus

Jewish Studies Students Abroad

Exploring the Vibrancy of Jewish History

Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellows Update
Jewish Studies, as an intellectual field and a course of study, is remarkable in its richness and breadth. It encompasses thousands of years of culture and history across a variety of regions, and it brings together a broad range of academic fields. But what really matters is the effect that this intellectual richness has on students, both inside and beyond the classroom. By studying the history of Jews in the United States or Argentina, for example, students develop a nuanced understanding of how ethnicity affects a person’s feeling of being “at home” in a country, especially when national politics clash with an individual’s cultural identity. Or, by taking courses in Jewish philosophy, students are challenged to consider what happens when what a person believes and what a person knows come into conflict, and how one makes ethical choices in the midst of that conflict. These are the kinds of issues that connect the field of Jewish Studies to the liberal arts core of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. They prompt students to grapple with important political, cultural, and intellectual challenges, and to connect what they’ve learned to the conditions of the present.

Throughout this newsletter, you’ll see examples of how students experience the richness of the courses and other resources offered by the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies, and the profound local and global impact of their education. A course in Yiddish literature enables students to understand the dynamic interaction between a single language and an international community of speakers. When studying abroad, students not only get the chance to apply the languages they’ve learned in the classroom to everyday conversation with friends and neighbors, but also learn how a second language is something that you can inhabit, how it becomes a part of who you are. By taking the lessons learned at UW–Madison to another part of the world, our students gain a fresh perspective on Jewish history and culture, as well as on their own identity, allowing them to decide what they want to do next. And as you can see from the profiles of former Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellows, our students and alumni do a great deal: teaching future educators about the ethical stakes and obligations of teaching, researching how religious minorities can be treated more justly, studying how Jewish education programs foster a sense of Jewish identity, and preserving our cultural heritage in digital and print libraries.

The students in the Center for Jewish Studies at UW–Madison leave our program as exceptionally well-prepared citizens of the twenty-first century, deeply knowledgeable about the richness of Jewish culture and eager to use what they’ve learned to make a difference in the world. It is in the very best sense that we provide a crucial part of their liberal arts education.

Michael Bernard-Donals, Director
Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies
and Nancy Hoefs Professor of English

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Yiddish Literature and Culture Courses Return to Campus

BY ALLISON BLOOM

The study of Yiddish has a distinguished history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In 1916, UW offered the first Yiddish course on a U.S. college campus, and the study of Yiddish culture has played a key role in the curriculum and programming of the Center for Jewish Studies since its founding more than two decades ago. Even though a shortage of faculty has made it difficult to offer regular courses in Yiddish language, the Center has offered other ways to engage with Yiddish culture, including courses in Yiddish literature in translation taught by the late Irv Saposnik and a popular course on Yiddish song offered by Pamela Potter. Professors Tony Michels and Mark Louden have led independent studies on various aspects of Yiddish culture and language, and the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture and the student-run Yiddish Culture Club have organized a number of lectures, concerts, and events. And thanks to the generosity of several friends of the Center, students wishing to further their study of Yiddish have been able to do so by attending intensive summer courses at YIVO and the Yiddish Book Center or participating in the new Helix Project (see story on page 6).

Despite these advances, the Center for Jewish Studies has barely been able to keep up with student demand for Yiddish courses. Thanks to Professor Philip Hollander (German and Jewish Studies), this picture is about to change.

Hollander is reviving a class in European Yiddish literature and culture, scheduled for Spring 2014. Exploring the foundations of Yiddish culture through literary and filmic sources, the course will introduce students to the Yiddish language and explore Yiddish culture through folklore, poetry, fiction, and cinema. It will use texts from a variety of sources, including the tales of Nachman of Bratslav and the fiction of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Yitzhok Leibush Peretz. The course will examine the contrasts between interwar Polish and Soviet Yiddish cultures, and conclude with an examination of Yiddish-language responses to the Holocaust.

As a complement to the European Yiddish course, Hollander will also introduce a course in American Yiddish literature and culture. Students will learn about Jewish immigration to America through immigrant letters and literature, examine the Jewish labor movement through “sweatshop poetry” and American Yiddish cinema, probe works of the Yiddish stage, study the achievements of the “In Zikh” and “Di Yunge” literary groups, and examine the fiction of Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer.

These courses will eventually be offered as a two-semester sequence, strengthening the Jewish Studies curriculum by giving students more exposure to Yiddish literature. Expressing excitement about teaching the new courses, Hollander observed that “Yiddish prose, poetry and drama constitute an important part of the Modern Jewish Literature class I offer every spring, and the students really love the Yiddish material and want to know more. Yiddish language and culture constitute an important part of the American social fabric.”
Jewish Studies Students Abroad

Nearly half of Jewish Studies majors and certificate students study abroad at some point during their time at UW–Madison. Here are some of their stories. – L.S.

**Rebecca Joey Schwab ’14**  
Recipient of the Weinstein-Minkoff Scholarship for Study Abroad in Israel  
Majors in Jewish Studies and Hebrew, Certificate in Middle East Studies

*Where and when:* Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Spring 2013  
*Why Hebrew University?* I am a Jewish woman who loves the Hebrew language. Hebrew is almost a hobby, and being able to live in a country where the language of TV shows, commercials, and conversations on the street are all in Hebrew was amazing. Also, as a Middle East studies certificate student, it is important to experience the controversies and real life situations that occur there. **Favorite course:** Jewish Experiential Education, which was a course and a fellowship. Through the class, I had the amazing opportunity to observe a Muslim 3rd grade class from Issawiya, travel to Masada and hear multiple narratives of the site, as well as study the Jewish phenomena of Birthright and Jewish summer camp. The class was paired with an internship, and I worked as a preschool teacher (or Ganenet) for a local Jewish preschool in Jerusalem. This course has instilled in me a passion for the field of Jewish experiential education. **Greatest challenge:** My time abroad felt like I was home. I finally felt like I could use my love for the [Hebrew] language and grow as a person. I think my biggest challenge was leaving.

**Emily Liebman ’14**  
Majors in History and Political Science, Certificate in Jewish Studies

*Where and when:* John Cabot University in Rome, Italy, for five weeks in summer 2013  
*Why Rome?* I’ve been dreaming of going to Italy since I was a little girl because I love everything Italy has to offer. Also, I was very interested in studying in a place of ancient history that has had an incredible impact on political systems today. **Other travels while abroad:** I traveled to the Capri, Positano, Pompeii, Florence and Venice. **Unexpected experience:** I did not expect to pick up much of the language while I was there, but I actually ended up learning enough of it to get me around. I definitely knew how to order food at the restaurants and markets like a pro by the end of my time in Italy.

**Ben Cowen ’14**  
Majors in Hebrew, Journalism, and Communication Arts, Certificate in Jewish Studies

*Where and when:* Sydney, Australia, Spring 2013  
*Why Sydney?* I chose to study in Sydney for the great weather, beautiful beaches, and awesome people. **Favorite Course:** Digital Business Innovation. **Study abroad highlight:** Skydiving onto a beach in Sydney. **Most unexpected experience:** Eating kangaroo!
Jewish Studies Scholarship Recipients
During the 2012–2013 academic year, the Mosse/Weinstein Center awarded nearly $24,000 in need- and merit-based scholarships and grants to the following students:

Robert and Lynn Berman Scholarship
Aliza Luft

Robert and Beverly Natelson Family Scholarship
Alainya Kavaloski

Lipton Essay Award
Catherine Bonesho
Jacob Beckert

Lipton Certificate/Major Award
Michael Felknor

Lipton Award for Study Abroad
Christine Kopanon

David Sorkin Scholarship
Valeria Navarro-Rosenblatt

Marjorie and Harry Tobias Scholarship
Michael Felknor

Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund
Aaron Dowdall
Michael Gordon
Lance Hawley
Chris Jones
Geoffrey Ludvik
Aliza Luft
Valeria Navarro-Rosenblatt
Irene Resenly

and the diversity of the campus. Favorite course: Hebrew. I was in the highest level the university offered, and it was the hardest class I have ever taken. The class vastly improved my ability to speak my opinions in Hebrew comfortably and made me enjoy learning Hebrew. Highlight: My living arrangement. I lived with five Israeli Arabs—four Muslims and one Christian—and throughout the course of the year we became best friends. Although it almost sounds like something out of a sitcom, it worked magnificently. Greatest challenge: Speaking only Hebrew. After my first semester, I was disappointed with myself for speaking more English than Hebrew. I pledged to myself to talk only in Hebrew to Israelis. It was challenging, for my roommates spoke perfect English, but I kept to my commitment and vastly improved my Hebrew the second semester. Unexpected experience: The diversity of friends I made. I had Israeli Jewish friends, Israeli Arab friends, Druze friends, a Bedouin friend, Russian Israelis and an Ethiopian friend. In many places in Israel it would not be possible to know all these people at once, but the University of Haifa brings all these people together in a way that isn’t possible in the rest of Israel.

Eliana Goodman ’14
Majors in Jewish Studies and Social Welfare

Where and when: Australia in Fall 2012, Israel in Spring 2013 Favorite classes: In Australia, Aboriginal Sydney, because most people in my class were Australians and for part of the class we needed to travel. In Israel I enjoyed Israeli Cinema and was able to see popular or old Israeli films that helped me connect better with the land of Israel. Beyond the classroom: In Israel, I babysat and I volunteered at a special needs facility called kedoshei kahir every week. Unexpected experience: In both countries I made many lifelong relationships with not only Americans, but also Australians and Israelis. Being abroad helped me become more open-minded and more aware of my surroundings.
At UW–Madison and at universities across the United States, Holocaust education has ensured that students learn about the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. But what, precisely, was destroyed? Christine Kopanon, a recipient of the Lipton Study Abroad Award, explored this lost culture during the summer of 2013, when she traveled to Eastern Europe as part of the Helix Project, an initiative of the Los Angeles organization Yiddishkayt.

Noting that most students enter college “able to name more sites of mass slaughter than cities that once flourished with nearly majority Jewish populations,” the Helix Project aims to teach students about Yiddish culture as it existed in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Students begin their journey in Los Angeles with a week of intensive study of Jewish cultural history, language basics, and team-building exercises. The participants then take a whirlwind tour through the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania—present-day Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus. “We visited historical locations of Jewish communities,” Kopanon recalls, “where there was often barely anything left. We visited cemeteries that are now in disarray, former sites of synagogues, and former educational facilities. We would stop and sing in Yiddish, or read Yiddish poems. Not everyone could speak Yiddish, but everyone was able to learn the songs that originally came from this area.”

Kopanon is majoring in both History and English, and her interest in the history of religions—particularly coursework with Tony Michels, Mosse Associate Professor of American Jewish History—gave her some previous knowledge of Jewish history. When Yiddishkayt’s executive director invited Michels to lead sessions of the program in Los Angeles, Michels immediately thought that Kopanon would be a perfect fit.

The highlight of the trip for Kopanon was the opportunity to meet many fascinating people, including people who had experienced Yiddish culture personally before it was largely destroyed. Kopanon relates that it was these people who made the experience so memorable: “In Lithuania we met a woman named Fania who had lived in Vilnius her entire life. She was 91 years old and still teaching Yiddish. She had been in the ghetto during World War II and met her husband while she was a partisan in the Lithuanian forest. She gave an incredible account of her life before World War II in stunning vibrancy. She told stories about her childhood and being a partisan as if it were a commonplace event. It was truly a gift to spend the afternoon with her.”
Suzanne Rosenblith graduated in 2001 with a PhD in Educational Policy Studies. She is now Associate Professor and Chair of Teacher Education at Clemson University, where she teaches historical and philosophical foundations of education. Her research focuses on the intersections between religion, education and pluralist, deliberative democracies. She writes, “I am especially interested in questions regarding the ethical obligations of teachers to their students when controversial issues, specifically religious in nature, are raised in public school classrooms.”

Rebekah Irwin received an MA in Library and Information Studies in 2003. She is now the head of Collections and Digital Initiatives at Middlebury College. Rebekah provides guidance for the acquisition and long-term planning of all of Middlebury’s library collections, both off- and online. She is also involved in supporting digital scholarship and digital humanities efforts across the College, including Digital Collections at Middlebury. She is a liaison to the American Studies, Hebrew, and Jewish Studies programs.

Matt Boxer writes, “This fall, I will defend my doctoral dissertation [in the department of Sociology at UW–Madison] on the effect of Jewish community size on Jewish identity. I currently work as a senior research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis, where I also lecture in the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. I work on a wide variety of projects related to Jewish education, including Taglit-Birthright Israel, Jewish summer camps, service learning programs, and Israel studies courses on North American college campuses.”

Maggie Wunnenberg Kirsh, who received her PhD in History in 2012, sends the following: “I have contributed chapters to three book projects related to children in postwar Europe, and I am currently turning my dissertation into a book manuscript. As a recipient of the Fred and Ellen Lewis Joint Distribution Committee Archives Fellowship, I spent the autumn of 2012 in New York, conducting research for my next project, ‘Relief Agencies, Social Workers, and Constructs of Illness and Health, 1945-1950.’ I am interested in exploring the ways in which physicians, social workers, and educators in Europe, North America, and Israel articulated concerns over the psychological and spiritual health of child Holocaust survivors. Thanks to the Life Reborn Fellowship, I will continue researching this topic at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the spring of 2014. I have also enjoyed being back in the classroom. In addition to offering a course on the Holocaust for the College of William and Mary’s DC summer session, this fall I will teach a section of Modern European History at American University.”

Assaf Meshulam received his PhD in Curriculum and Instruction in 2011. He is currently a Senior Teacher in the Department of Education at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

In 2000, Laurence and Frances Weinstein established the Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellowship in Jewish Studies and Education. Here are updates from five alumni of the program. – L.S.
Upcoming Events
Complete information about Center for Jewish Studies events is available at jewishstudies.wisc.edu

My Race: A Jewish Girl Growing Up Under Apartheid in South Africa
Lorraine Lotzof Abramson
October 8, 4:00 p.m.
Union South

October 9, 7:00 p.m.
Milwaukee JCC

Kutler Lectures in American Jewish History
Stephen J. Whitfield
October 16, 4:00 p.m.
October 17, 4:00 p.m.
Education Building

Philosophy and Literature: The Ancient Quarrel
Rebecca Goldstein
October 29, 5:00 p.m.
Union South

Together, We Make a Difference
Your gift, big or small, makes all the difference in ensuring that the study of Jewish history, literature, culture, and the arts will be available to a new generation of Badgers.

Designating your gift to the Center for Jewish Studies Fund for Excellence allows us to:

• Open our classrooms to all who wish to take Jewish Studies courses
• Recruit and retain award-winning faculty
• Support public lectures and events that enrich the education of students and community members

For more information about giving to the Center for Jewish Studies through the Share the Wonderful Annual Campaign, or to learn about other giving opportunities, please contact Ron Luskin at the UW Foundation (ron.luskin@supportuw.org or 608-265-3526).