Why we are here

While most readers of this newsletter know me as the Director of the Center for Jewish Studies, I also serve as the chair of the University Committee, the executive committee of the Faculty Senate. And in my capacity as University Committee chair, I’ve met with members of the Wisconsin state legislature to discuss UW–Madison’s role in the state, the value of higher education, and the ways we can measure our impact on the people of Wisconsin. In these conversations, one question comes up again and again: “Why are we here?” For me the answer is fairly simple: to create well-informed and critically aware citizens, and to provide the knowledge and aptitudes that are necessary for people to be productive participants in our communities for years to come.

As you’ll see in this newsletter, the Center for Jewish Studies plays a crucial part in answering that question. From our courses to our programming, we open our doors to students and community members who want to know more about Jewish history, culture, and the complexity and richness of Jewish life in the United States and around the world. This spring’s Semester of the Arts includes an art exhibition on the region of Chernobyl, made infamous by the nuclear disaster there in 1986 but which has had a vital role in the Jewish life of Ukraine for centuries; a series of concerts—the Fusions project—featuring the interplay of Jewish and Arabic music; and the performance of a play written by the grandson of Isaac Babel about life in Odessa before the Russian Revolution. You’ll also read about what goes on in our classes when traditional-age students and members of our community learn together and share their experiences. We’re profiling two members of our talented faculty—Emeritus Professor Bob Skloot and Professor Claudia Card—whose award-winning teaching brings their groundbreaking research to the classroom and the broader public. And you’ll see firsthand how an undergraduate student experiences what the Center for Jewish Studies and the University of Wisconsin have to offer.

We are here to bring our talents and our knowledge of Jewish history and culture to students and the public, to make sure that the Jewish experience is better understood by all of those with whom we and our students come into contact, and to help students learn—really learn—what it means to participate fully in their roles as citizens.

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

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For more than two decades, the Center for Jewish Studies has enriched the community with a range of academic programming and outreach events, including seminars, lectures, symposia, film screenings, and multi-day events such as the Greenfield Summer Institute and the biennial Conney Conference on Jewish Arts. This spring, the Center embarked on one of its most ambitious public outreach offerings in recent years: a full semester of arts programming, featuring an impressive roster of internationally acclaimed artists. Thanks to generous grants from the Anonymous Fund and the Madison Jewish Federation, as well as the support of more than a dozen campus and community partners, the Center for Jewish Studies was able to bring an art exhibition, a one-man show, and a concert tour to audiences in Madison and beyond.

The Semester of the Arts kicked off on February 6 at UW Hillel with an art exhibition by Dresden-based artist Marion Kahnemann. *Behind the Back of Time: A Chernobyl Project* explores the region around Chernobyl from a Jewish perspective. Through collage, found objects, and mixed media, the exhibition offered viewers a compelling look at the complex history of Jews in Chernobyl—one that goes beyond pogroms and the nuclear disaster.

In March, the series turned from visual art to theatre in a production of Andrei Malaev-Babel’s one-man show *Babel: How it was Done in Odessa*. One of the greatest prose writers of the twentieth century, Isaac Babel was arrested on Stalin’s orders in 1939, tortured, tried, and finally, in 1940, executed in Moscow. His unpublished manuscripts were confiscated and are still missing. *Babel: How It Was Done In Odessa* is a tribute to Isaac Babel by his grandson, who performed five of Babel’s stories in this solo performance. Over 120 students, faculty, and community members were in attendance.

The series concluded with three concerts—two at UW–Madison, one at Chai Point Senior Living in Milwaukee—by Fusions, a trio featuring UW–Madison professor of cello Uri Vardi and Israeli musicians Taiseer Elias (oud) and Menachem Wiesenbarg (piano). The three musicians presented an unusual and intriguing program highlighting the connections between Arab and Israeli folk and art music, which are rarely heard together. The Madison and Milwaukee concerts are part of a larger tour of the Midwest.

“The Semester of the Arts is one of our most exciting new public outreach efforts,” noted Michael Bernard-Donals, Center director. “I’m thrilled that the Center for Jewish Studies was able to bring to Madison such an impressive group of artists, and I hope the series will inspire and engage not only those interested in the work of Jewish artists, but also those interested in the arts more generally. I’m immensely grateful to the many campus and community partners who made the Semester of the Arts a reality.”
Name: Rebecca Schwab ’14

Hometown: Chicago

Why she became a Jewish Studies major: “I started out with a Jewish Studies class my very first semester, because college is so big and I wanted to make it smaller for myself. I love learning about the Jewish influence on America from a historical perspective.”

Typical day: Gets up at noon and grabs a yogurt before picking up posters for the upcoming Israeli Film Fest that she chairs. Attends afternoon seminar on Judaism and the Arts. Heads to Hillel, where she is the Israel intern, for a couple of hours of socializing, studying, and eating a kosher dinner with friends at Hillel’s Café O. Gets a ride from the local Shaliach to Temple Beth El to teach a Hebrew class from 6:30 to 9:15 p.m. Arrives home at the co-op Ofek Shalom to answer e-mails and unwind with her roommates.

Favorite college activity: Jewop, the a cappella group she helped establish at Hillel as a freshman and for which she has been business manager for four years. A member of the alto section, she had multiple three-hour rehearsals per week leading up to the March national Jewish a cappella competition in Washington, D.C., where Jewop won second place overall and an additional award for best beat boxer.

Part-time job: Teaching Hebrew to local high-school students on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, through the Jewish Federation’s Midrasha. She has taught the same group of students for the last four years and seen them grow up. “They want to learn Hebrew and they want me to be their teacher. I think that’s all you could really want.”

Major academic project this year: Senior capstone seminar. Researching the March on Washington in 1987 in support of Soviet Jewry and exploring its demonstration of Jewish unity.

Career plans: Using her Jewish Studies major to become involved in the Jewish community professionally. “There are so many options in that world. I would love to do mission trips to Israel, because I speak Hebrew and I love Israel.”

Quiz Answers

1. Karaites
2. Sefirot
3. Haskalah
4. Gemara
5. Babylonian
6. Maimonides
7. Get
8. Halakhah
9. Sandy Koufax
10. University of Wisconsin-Madison
There was a Jewish agricultural settlement in Arpin, Wisconsin, in the early 1900s. And you don’t have to be a UW alumnus or wait until age 65 to audit UW–Madison Jewish Studies classes for free.

Those are two of the most surprising facts learned by senior auditors in courses at the Center for Jewish Studies this year. Under the University’s Senior Guest Auditor program, any Wisconsin resident 60 or older can audit lecture courses tuition-free with the consent of the instructor. As part of the Wisconsin Idea that the University should improve people’s lives beyond the classroom, the Center is able to open its classrooms to the community.

“I’m surprised more people don’t do it,” remarked David Steinberg, who audited “Introduction to Judaism” in the fall semester. Steinberg, who has a PhD in History, said it was “nice to get back to someplace where there’s intellectual stimulation.”

One of the most popular courses for auditors last semester was Tim Crain’s “Jewish Wisconsin,” which had 10 senior auditors and 12 traditional students, and where students learned about those early Jewish agricultural settlements. In such a small class, the students engaged with some of the auditors. Michael Pressman, who has audited six courses to date, found “that [interaction] made the class even more special;” particularly when the auditors were able to be resources for the students. Phyllis Holman Weisbard, recently retired as the University of Wisconsin Women’s Studies Librarian, shared information with the class on how to access archival material, while students interviewed Pressman and others about how the Holocaust affected them for an assignment the students had in another class.

In “Jews and American Popular Culture” this semester, students heard from Professor Tony Michels about how Yiddish newspapers in America, like the Forward, helped Jewish immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century learn about American life. Meanwhile, three class members have audited nearly 30 courses for just that purpose. Galina and Genrik Babich and Natalia Chubukova moved here from Moscow 12 years ago. Galina Babich explains, “We first studied English, and then we realized if we’ll be living in this country, we’ll need to know a lot about it, because we lived in a different world.” Genrik Babich will spread the word about what he’s learned in the class even further in the page he writes in Russian every month for the Jewish Federation of Madison’s publication, Madison Jewish News. Says Michels, “Having auditors in the class is great. All of us benefit from hearing about their experiences.”

There are Senior Guest Auditors in five Jewish Studies classes this semester. Since auditors are registered as UW students, they have free access to many campus facilities and resources, including 40 libraries and computer labs. Summing up his auditing experience, Pressman says, “Everybody I tell I’m doing this is pretty jealous.”
BY ALLISON BLOOM

Although Jewish Studies scholars typically focus on Jewish life, history, and culture, there are many instances when inquiries that begin within Jewish Studies can lead a scholar to questions of truly universal import. Claudia Card (Emma Goldman Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies), for one, began theorizing about the nature of evil after she developed a course on the Holocaust. This work has made her a sought-after speaker and thinker on some of the toughest moral questions that Jewish Studies can raise.

Professor Card recently spoke at the U.S. Air Force Academy, where a philosophy course on ethics is an integral part of cadets’ education. Her talk on the topic of surviving genocide was related to her recent work concerning moral responses to atrocities. “If we conceive of genocide,” she writes, “as a process of destroying the ties that bind people into a national, cultural, ethnic, or religious group, there is no need to say that a genocide was only ‘attempted’ on the ground that not everyone in the group was killed. But did those who were not killed truly survive? If the group no longer exists, under what identity could they survive?”

Professor Card explains that both the Air Force Academy talk and her trilogy of books on evil grew in part out of her teaching in Jewish Studies: “In 1999 philosophy professor Dan Wikler and I applied for a Jewish Studies course development grant to create a course on moral philosophy and the Holocaust. After Wikler retired, I developed the course on my own.” As she taught the course several times, she realized that in the history of ethical theory, though several philosophers had written about specific evils such as the Holocaust, no one had yet explored what distinguished real evils from lesser wrongs and “bads.”

The first volume in her trilogy, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (2002), began to explore these questions; in Card’s view, “evils are more complex, of a higher order, in that they presuppose more basic ethical concepts and distinctions, such as excusable/inexcusable and tolerable/intolerable harm.” The second volume in the trilogy, *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide* (2010) develops some of Card’s earlier questions by looking at specific types of evils. She is now at work on the third volume of this trilogy, about surviving atrocities. Her Air Force Academy talk drew from this book, and she will be presenting more of her current work at the Greenfield Summer Institute in July 2014.
Robert Skloot, professor emeritus of Theatre and Drama and Jewish Studies, created the academic specialty of Holocaust and the theatre in the 1980s, served as director of the Center for Jewish Studies from 1998 to 2001, and taught and directed plays at UW–Madison for a career spanning forty years. Yet his most important work may be what he has been doing since his retirement six years ago: spreading the message of his 2006 play *If the Whole Body Dies: Raphael Lemkin and the Treaty Against Genocide.* The play has been performed throughout the United States, as well as in England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Bosnia, Peru, Cuba, and Argentina. It has recently been translated into Hebrew and published in a journal in Israel.

Skloot talks about how he came to write a play about Lemkin, the little-known Polish-Jewish lawyer who coined the term *genocide* and who spent his life ceaselessly lobbying for the adoption of a United Nations treaty to prevent and punish it. Skloot explains, “I knew retirement was near and I decided to try something new: to write a play.” He felt the world should know what an extraordinary person Raphael Lemkin was. “He was one of the great, influential world citizens of the twentieth century, one about whom more deserves to be known.” The ratification of the genocide treaty was “an astonishing achievement that Lemkin called the happiest day of his life.” In traveling and doing readings and talks about the play and its protagonist, Skloot uses the theatre to keep alive Lemkin’s fight against genocide in our own day.

Next fall, Skloot will return to teaching as the Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Professor of Holocaust Studies at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. He will continue to keep the issue of ethics central to his scholarship. “How can we live in a way that’s ethical?” In his work on the theatre of the Holocaust, he focuses on ethical decisions faced by characters who confront terrifying and often lethal choices. He asks students to ponder, “If I had lived there at that time, what would I have done?”

Skloot’s play is the hallmark of his belief that the theatre is uniquely suited to create empathy. “When audiences are connected to people on stage and connected to each other in the community of the audience, something happens that is not only emotionally satisfying but also socially necessary in order to provide an additional way to confront the horrors that people have done to themselves and the world. When our hearts are beating in the same rhythm as the people on stage, and when people in an audience are actually weeping together, something is happening that is positive and essential.”
Upcoming Events

Complete information about our events is available at jewishstudies.wisc.edu

**Tobias Lecture**
“Anti-Judaism and the History of Thought”
David Nirenberg (University of Chicago)
April 24, 4:00 p.m.
Union South
Free and open to the public

**Jewish Madison in the 1960s**
Paul Soglin, Ben Sidran, Jane Brotman
May 21, 7:00 p.m.
Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center, Milwaukee
FREE (Registration required)
More information at jccmilwaukee.org

**Greenfield Summer Institute East**
May 22, 9:30 a.m.
Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center, Milwaukee
Registration required; tuition: $18
More information at jccmilwaukee.org

**Greenfield Summer Institute**
“Jews and their Neighbors”
July 13–17
Grainger Hall
Registration required; tuition: $175

Test your knowledge: Intro to Judaism

Over 100 students from all majors and backgrounds enroll in Introduction to Judaism each year. How would you do on the final exam? Take this quiz to find out.

– Jordan Rosenblum, Belzer Associate Professor of Classical Judaism

1. Founded by Anan ben David, this group of Jews rejected rabbinic law.
2. Medieval Jewish mystics understood the Godhead to be divided into 10 emanations, or _____.
3. The Jewish Enlightenment, or _____ sought to fuse Enlightenment values with a progressive vision of Judaism.
4. The Talmud is comprised of the _____, which comments on the Mishnah.
5. While there are two Talmuds, when people refer to “the Talmud,” they generally refer to the _____ Talmud.
6. For this Medieval philosopher and physician, Judaism was all about faith.
7. You’ve got to get this to have a rabbinic divorce.
8. The Hebrew term for rabbinic law is _____.
9. This person famously refused to pitch in the World Series on Yom Kippur.
10. This world-renowned university never had an official quota for Jewish students.

Answers on page 4