Director’s Report

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Jewish Studies Alumni, Faculty, Students, and Friends

Greenfield Summer Institute Preview
Not long ago, I came across a letter written by student Norman Nosquao in 1924 and published in the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle. Nosquao wondered just what sort of a place Jews could and should make for themselves at the University of Wisconsin. His sense of feeling like an outsider—that there was no social space for him or for other Jewish students—was what led to the establishment a few years later of Hillel, private dormitories, and other campus Jewish social organizations. But while the decades that followed saw the growth of Jewish presence in the UW and Madison community, Jewish history and culture was still largely absent from the classroom. As one alumnus from the 1930s remembers, in the curriculum “there was Communism and sex, but no Jews.”

This picture began to change with the establishment of the department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies in the 1950s, and finally, in 1991, with the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies. The Center’s founding ensured that Jewish history, culture, the arts—in other words, the full range of Jewish experience—had a place alongside the other subjects taught at UW as a rigorous and intellectually vibrant course of study. This is particularly important in a globalized world, where it is more critical than ever to understand the experiences of our fellow citizens, and to have a sense of how others’ histories impact our own. The fact that we have regular waiting lists for some of our key courses, and that our students reflect a diversity of religious, geographic, and economic backgrounds, shows that students at UW most certainly view Jewish Studies as integral to their education.

Those waiting lists also make clear why we need to redouble our efforts to expand the Center’s offerings, expertise, and reach. As you’ll see in our Spring newsletter—a significant supplement to our traditional annual newsletter—the Center is abuzz with activity inside and outside of the classroom. Demand for our courses is higher than ever, and enrollment in our major and certificate programs is increasing rapidly. At the same time, the university is experiencing steep cuts in funding from the state, threatening the future growth of the Center. To ensure that we continue to serve our students, and that our programming be accessible to all in the spirit of the Wisconsin Idea, we need to do all we can to build an endowment to become self-sustaining. When we succeed, there will never again be a question of whether we can ensure a place in the curriculum for the study of the Jewish experience.

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New Student Organizations

This fall saw the founding of two new student organizations sponsored by the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies: the Yiddish Culture Club and the Jewish Studies Graduate Student Association. Both of these groups not only serve students at UW–Madison, but also benefit the greater community by organizing public lectures and events. Through the initiative of these groups, the number and scope of Jewish Studies program offerings for students, faculty, and the general public has already increased significantly.

Founded by DeeDee Hirschtritt, the Yiddish Culture Club aims to promote Yiddish culture both as it existed historically and as it relates to our lives today. Hirschtritt, a senior majoring in History and Women’s Studies and earning a Jewish Studies certificate, was inspired to start the club after spending a summer at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA. She is now a Cultural Liaison for the Book Center, which gave her a grant to support Yiddish cultural events at UW. Since its inception, the club has started a Yiddish short stories (in translation) reading group, as well as a monthly lecture series featuring a roster of local Yiddish specialists, including UW professor Mark Louden, Mayrent Institute director Henry Sapoznik, and Paul Buhle, editor of Yiddishkayt and a frequent contributor to assorted progressive Jewish publications in the US, Canada, and Israel.

The Jewish Studies Graduate Student Association was the brainchild of Allison Bloom, a PhD candidate in Music History and Project Assistant at the Center for Jewish Studies. Although UW does not offer a dedicated graduate degree in Jewish Studies, a significant number of graduate students choose to pursue research in Jewish Studies-related topics. Yet because these students are spread throughout different departments, it has often been challenging for graduate students with a shared interest in Jewish Studies scholarship to come together. The Graduate Student Association aims to change this dynamic by bolstering a sense of community among Jewish Studies graduate students. Currently, the group has approximately fourteen members drawn from departments such as Hebrew and Semitic Studies, English, History, and Anthropology. Over the past few months, the group has hosted guest lecturers, convened a study group, and provided an informal forum for graduate students to present their own research.

The founding of the Yiddish Culture Club and the Graduate Student Association represent an important development for the Center for Jewish Studies: a student-driven, grassroots effort to expand opportunities to learn more about Jewish history, religion, language, and culture.
Each year, the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies awards over $20,000 in grants and scholarships. What follows are profiles of two scholarship recipients, who were awarded funding to pursue research and travel in summer and autumn 2011.

Who was Madame Judith? The simple answer is that she was just another actress on the stage of the Comédie-Française, the French national theater, from 1846 to 1866. The more complex answer is that Judith was one of several Jewish women in the public eye around whom the French constructed the stereotype of la Juive—the Jewess—during the mid-nineteenth century. With the support of the Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund and the David Sorkin Scholarship, I was able to travel to Paris to conduct my dissertation research on the development of French anti-Semitic stereotypes about women. I spent my days examining documents, which range from state correspondence at the National Archives, to communal records at the Central Jewish Consistory, and administrative dossiers at the Comédie-Française archives. By unraveling the personal lives and professional trajectories of women such as Judith, I can answer a key question: How did the emerging stereotype of la Juive influence the lives of individual Jewish women?

Juliet Bernat, born in 1827, took Judith as her stage name, had love affairs with two princes, initiated a press war against the Comédie-Française, and even dined with Victor Hugo and George Sand. She also proudly proclaimed her French-Jewish identity throughout her career, despite outbursts of anti-Jewish sentiment in French society. My time in Paris has allowed me to trace the connections between Judith and other successful Jewish women, such as the Baroness Betty de Rothschild, a respected philanthropist, and Eugénie Foa, a novelist and early feminist. In October, I presented my preliminary research to an audience of UW-Madison alumni at the Centre Medem Arbeter Ring, a Yiddish cultural center in Paris. In April, I plan to travel to London to visit the Rothschild Archive, which holds much of the documentation on the entire Rothschild family. When I return to Madison in June, I will begin writing my dissertation to answer a larger, more difficult question: Who was the French Jewess?
—Katherine Eade

Thanks to the generous support of the Ida and Isaac Lipton Award and the Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund, I spent this past summer in New York City studying Yiddish at YIVO and completing archival research for my Master’s thesis, a project examining Jewish communist youth education entitled “Constructing Citizens in Yiddishland: Exploring the Politics of Gender and Race in Jewish Communist Schools and Summer Camps in New York and New Jersey, 1920–1950.” Each morning, I rode the train from
Queens to the Jewish Theological Seminary on the Upper West Side and settled in for several hours of intensive Yiddish language and cultural immersion. In Perl Teitelbaum’s intermediate grammar class, we worked through Sheva Zucker’s textbook masterpiece and learned a few of Perl’s favorite songs along the way. After grammar class, I trekked down the hall to Itay Zutra’s Yiddish literature class, where we read and discussed Yiddish classics by authors such as Sholem Aleichem, Soloveitchik, I. L. Peretz, and Morris Rosenfeld. Most afternoons, we practiced our Yiddish conversation skills with Yankl Salant, talking politics, culture, and the progress of our academic research. When we didn’t have conversation class, we attended workshops on topics such as reading Yiddish manuscripts and learning Yiddish folk songs, film screenings (including Josh Waletzky’s Image Before My Eyes and Partisans of Vilna), and lectures with Eve Siculair, Marc Kaplan, and other experts in Yiddish literature, history, and culture.

On Fridays, I hunkered down in NYU’s Tamiment/Wagner Labor Archives. There, I read Yiddish- and English-language songbooks, correspondence, newsletters, literary magazines, and stories and plays written by campers and counselors at Jewish summer camps. Many writers focused on the subjects of American, Jewish, and American-Jewish history, as well as their radical political and cultural heroes, both Jewish and non-Jewish. I was amazed to see how kids and adults grappled with difficult questions around racial and economic justice, showing courage and contradiction in their personal narratives and their political expressions. I was also amazed that after only a few weeks, I could sort through a Yiddish-language archive and understand what I encountered with greater proficiency. That my dictionary and I began to go our separate ways was a testament to the strength of YIVO’s summer program and the incredible teachers who devote themselves to it.

Six months later, as I construct a story out of these archives that will soon take the shape of my Master’s thesis, I remain grateful for the support of the Center for Jewish Studies and its generous donors for making my Yiddish training and this research project possible.

—Avi Cummings

Handel Ehrlekh, a Hasidic monopoly-style game played on the last day at YIVO

The following graduate students were awarded travel grants through the Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund:

- **Michael Gordon** (Spanish and Portugese) is conducting archival research in Italy for his dissertation on Jewish mediators, pirates, privateers, and merchants in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean.
- **Chris Jones** (Hebrew and Semitic Studies) presented a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature conference in San Francisco.
- **Mary Kirsch** (History) traveled to London to present at the conference “Beyond Camps and Forced Labour” and conduct research at the Wiener Library.
- **Britt Tevis** (History) traveled to the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives in New York City for research on her dissertation, which examines the influence of Jewish lawyers in the development of twentieth-century American law.
The twentieth anniversary of the Center for Jewish Studies gives us much to celebrate and much to contemplate regarding the future development of Jewish Studies at UW. In the past six months, the Center organized four events that brought together current and former students, faculty, board members, and friends of the Center. In October 2011, board member Ros Greenfield hosted in New York City a gathering that featured Mosse Professor of American Jewish History Tony Michels, who gave a lecture on “The Jewish Impact on the Rise of American Universities after World War II.” On November 6, the Center celebrated its twentieth year with a gala evening at Monona Terrace through the generous support of Frances Weinstein and Mosse Program director John Tortorice. The evening’s highlights included reminiscences by Jewish Studies alumni Abbie Steiner ’08, Ari Moffic Silver ’05, and Annie Polland ’95; a performance by UW Hillel’s a cappella group Jewop; and a keynote speech on the future of Jewish Studies by the nationally renowned American Jewish historian Deborah Dash Moore. And in February 2012, Center director Michael Bernard-Donals and Doug Rosenberg (Director, Conney Project on Jewish Arts) spoke at two events in California—one in Los Angeles (hosted by Peter and Julie Weil) and one in Palm Desert (hosted by Marv and Babe Conney). Additional events in Milwaukee, Chicago, and Florida are planned for the coming year.
For the theme of the thirteenth annual Greenfield Summer Institute, Center for Jewish Studies faculty have chosen a topic that touches on all areas of Jewish life, history and culture: Jewish Memory and Nostalgia. The Greenfield Institute, which takes place July 8–12, 2012, offers an opportunity for adult learners to explore Jewish culture and history through lectures, films, and concerts.

Acclaimed professors from UW–Madison and experts from around the country will address the theme of Jewish memory and nostalgia from a variety of perspectives. Lecture topics will include how memory works in the brain; nostalgia and memory in Jewish culture from ancient times to the modern day; how nostalgia has affected the formation of Jewish identity in Israel and the diaspora; the interaction of history with personal memories of Jewish life; the memories and nostalgia of Jewish communities in America, from Brooklyn to Wisconsin; and how memories of the Holocaust inform educational efforts. Screenings and discussions of the films Four Seasons Lodge and A Ladies’ Tailor will investigate how memory shapes artistic portrayals of Jewish history. The Institute will also offer plenty of opportunities for socializing, exploring Madison, and enjoying the UW campus—including an evening concert on the Memorial Union Terrace by Klezmer band Yid Vicious.

For the first time this year, the Center is offering online registration (though registration by mail will still be available). The registration deadline is June 8, 2012. Visit http://jewishstudies.wisc.edu/greenfield/ for registration and additional information.
Center for Jewish Studies Online

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