



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM IN JEWISH STUDIES

Annual Report
2006-2007

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Program Director

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THE PROGRAM IN JEWISH STUDIES

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The Program in Jewish Studies (PJS) was formally launched in August 2002, when Provost Nicholas Zeppos appointed Jack M. Sasson to a three-year term as its director and commissioned a committee to shape the program. Now concluding its fifth academic year, under the directorship of David J. Wasserstein, the Program in Jewish Studies continues to grow and to contribute to the teaching and research mission in the humanities of Vanderbilt University.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt the major news in this fifth year of our existence as an independent program within the broader structures of Vanderbilt life has been the establishment, thanks to the generosity of Cindy and Dan Edelman, of an endowment permitting the creation of the Eugene Greener, Jr. Professorship in Jewish Studies. Named in honor of her father, the chair seeks to encourage the growth of Jewish studies at Vanderbilt, to contribute to the development of intellectual activity in our University over the range of Jewish studies, and to help promote our Program to the ranks of the highest ranks of American university life.

The creation of such a chair inside the Program in Jewish Studies marks in a sense the coming of age of the Program at Vanderbilt. It demonstrates the commitment of Vanderbilt to our Program and its work, through its efforts to secure the Edelman gift; it marks the solidity of the belief among our donors in the value and importance of what our Program is doing, their recognition of our achievements to date. Their investment in our future is a sign of confidence in our mission and in our capacity to respond to that mission. We are grateful to them for that trust.

The first holder of this chair is David J. Wasserstein, currently the Director of our Program. He will be delivering an inaugural lecture as holder of the professorship in early September 2007. A full report on that event will appear in next year's Report.

2006-2007 Committee

In its fifth year, the Program in Jewish Studies was served by a Steering Committee made up of the following (in **bold** are appointees in the Program):

Gregory Barz, Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology, Blair School of Music (on leave)

Dan Cornfield, Professor of Sociology; Acting Director of the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies

Sara L. Eigen, Assistant Professor of German

Ellen Goldring, Professor of Education Policy and Leadership, Peabody College

Cathy Jrade, Professor and Chair of Spanish and Portuguese

Shaul Kelner, Assistant Professor of Sociology and of Jewish Studies

Richard King, Associate Professor of Religious Studies

Allison Schachter, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and of English

Jeffrey Schoenblum, Centennial Professor of Law, School of Law (on leave)

Martina Urban, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and of Jewish Studies (on sabbatical)

David Wasserstein, Professor of History and of Jewish Studies, Eugene Greener, Jr. Professor of Jewish Studies (Director of the Program)

Professors Barz and Schoenblum were on leave from Vanderbilt, and from our Committee, during the first semester of 2006-07; and Professor Urban was on leave for the entire year.

Professors Barz, Jrade and Schoenblum completed their terms of office as members of the Committee this year. We thank them for their contributions to our work.

Faculty Development

- We carried out a search, together with the History Department, for a junior position in Modern Jewish History.

This post was to be shared with the History Department, and the search was held in the Fall of 2006. A Search Committee was established with the following membership: Michael Bess (History); Ellen Goldring (Peabody; Jewish Studies Committee); Shaul Kelner (Jewish Studies); Rowena Olegario (History); David Wasserstein (History and Jewish Studies; Chairman). The post was advertised in the Fall, indicating a preference for a candidate with expertise in the history of the Jews in the modern Middle East, Zionism and the State of Israel. We received some two dozen applications. However, after inviting four candidates to campus for interview, the Committee decided that none of them offered quite what we were seeking at this stage, and we asked the Dean for permission to hold another search in 2007-08. We hope to be able to carry out that search in the coming year.

- We asked Richard McCarty, Dean of the College of Arts and Science, for permission to initiate a new search in Fall 2007 for a junior level appointment in Rabbinitics, to start in Fall 2008.

- VISITING PROFESSOR INITIATIVE

- We renegotiated with Sasson Somekh (emeritus Halmos Professor of Arabic Literature at Tel Aviv University) to come to Vanderbilt as a Visiting Professor in Fall 2006, to offer courses on modern Arabic and Judeo-Arabic literatures.



Professor Somekh, born in Iraq and recently retired from Tel Aviv University, recently published his memoirs (in Hebrew, The Last Arab Jew; an English translation is forthcoming), in which he uses his life's trajectory as a paradigm for cultural dislocation, but also as a yearning for a lost past. Earlier in his career, Somekh became the premier interpreter of Arabic literature, writing very profoundly about Naguib Mahfuz, the Nobel Laureate from Egypt, and so bringing him and his writing to the attention of the western world. He has had many honors and has taught at many universities in this country, Europe and Israel.

- We negotiated with Claude Klein (Professor of Law, and recently retired Dean of the Faculty of Law, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) to teach a total of four courses, two in Fall 2006, and two in Spring 2007 in the PJS. This plan, supported by an anonymous outside donor, has had to be postponed. It is hoped that Professor Klein will come to Vanderbilt in the next year or so.
- We negotiated with Adam Meyer (Fisk University) to teach a course on 'Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: Black-Jewish Relations in the 1950s and 1960s'.

Intracollegiate Professors:

- Greg Barz arranged to teach JS 115.02 Music and Jewish Tradition, Spring 2007. The course was not held.
- Helmut Smith taught JS 156 The Holocaust, Fall 2006 This course attracted the largest number of students in the history of the Program in Jewish Studies here at Vanderbilt, with 56 registered.
- Paul Miller taught JS 294.08 Latin American and Caribbean Jewish Writers in Spring 2007.
- Jay Geller taught JS 244 Freud and Jewish Identity in Spring 2007.

For 2007-08 we hope to have the following:

Adam Meyer to teach JS 115F.04 Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: Black-Jewish Relations in the 1950s and 1960s as a Freshman Writing Course – Fall 2007

Greg Barz to teach JS 115F.02 Music and Jewish Tradition – Spring 2008

Bob Barsky to teach JS 115F.07 From Einstein to Chomsky: Revolutionary Sciences in Jewish America - Spring 2008

Martina Urban to teach JS 246 Berlin and Jewish Modernity – Spring 2008

Tom Schwartz to teach JS 256 Power and Diplomacy in the Middle East – Spring 2008

Curriculum Development

New courses taught in this year included:

Fall 2006:

Jewish Studies 156. *The Holocaust.* (Helmut Smith) This course is an introduction to the Holocaust: its origins, the way it happened, the issues it raises.

Jewish Studies 115F.05. *Gender, Sexuality, and Desire in Jewish Literature.* (Allison Schachter) Do images of the Jewish mother and the neurotic Jew in American popular culture originate from the Bible? This course offers study of the history of Jewish culture through an examination of changing representations of gender in Jewish literature and film. The texts considered both represent and challenge accepted ideas about gender roles, male and female sexuality, marriage, and beauty ideals. Questions included whether male and female writers portray gender differently. The readings spanned a broad range of literary texts, from biblical stories to contemporary American Yiddish literature. Topics discussed included same sex desire, Jewish mothers, henpecked husbands, drag, and representations of the Jewish body.

Spring 2007:

Jewish Studies 135. *Introduction to Hebrew Literature.* (Allison Schachter) A look at the origins and development of Hebrew literature from the environs of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century to post-modern Israeli literature written at the end of the twentieth century.

Jewish Studies 254. *Jewish Literary Centers.* (Allison Schachter) Jewish culture and literature are historically transnational, multilingual, and multicultural. 20th-century Jewish literature was written especially in such literary centers as New York, Berlin, Vienna, and Tel Aviv. The goal was to understand how the shifting centers of Jewish culture shaped the direction of Jewish modernism. Particular attention was paid to both Hebrew and Yiddish literatures to understand their shared influences as well as their significant differences. Students read works by a range of authors including Sholem Aleykhem, Isaac Babel, Franz Kafka, Leah Goldberg, and Yehudit Katzir.

Jewish Studies 294.08. *Jews and Judaism in Latin American and Caribbean Literature.* (Paul Miller) The primary concerns and themes of Jewish writers in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as isolation and insularity, immigration and assimilation, displacement and exile, the overcoming of historical adversity, and the problematic place in the national consciousness, are in fact resonant with the main intellectual currents of Latin America and the Caribbean.

○ *New for 2007-08*

Jewish Studies 246. Berlin and Jewish Modernity. *Rise of Jewish modernism presented by Jewish writers in Germany from 1900-1933. FALL, SPRING. [3] Urban.*

Through the prism of twentieth-century Berlin we shall examine the many facets of the Jewish experience of modernity as it crystallized in the cultural and political life of this uniquely creative urban center. Arguably the most vibrant metropolis of the early twentieth century, Berlin was a magnet for intellectuals, writers, cultural and literary critics, musicians, artists and bohemians from throughout Europe and beyond. During the years of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) Jewish cultural life flourished, witnessing an ever increasing participation of Jews in the buoyant intellectual, artistic and scientific life of the metropolis. As many Jews reinvented themselves through modern cultural forms, their transformation from the perennial “outsider” to “insider” had far-reaching consequences. In forging a new understanding of modernity, Jews also faced the challenge of reconciling the imperious reality of civilization’s orientation to the material and pragmatic realm with subjective culture, including fundamental Jewish values. We shall employ a sociological and cultural-philosophical perspective to assess the nature of Jewish modernist creativity, its relation to cultural criticism and to probe theories of culture propounded by Jews in this period. In tracing the unique experience and spirit of the Berlin Jew until the eve of the ascendancy of National Socialism, we shall draw upon a great variety of primary sources, ranging from correspondence, autobiography, paintings, cartoons, essays and prose, to theater and cabaret.

Program Development

- We continued stimulating awareness about JS through faculty lunch- and supper-seminars
 - Sasson Somekh – 2 November 2006 – *Growing up as a Jew in Baghdad*
- We increased student awareness about JS, via the web, brochures, open-house and advertisement
- We subsidized four MA students at 15% of tuition (with the Graduate Department of Religion providing 70%, for a total of 85%)
- We hosted a conference:
 - **JEWES AMONG ARABS: The Future of Their Past** – November 30-December 2, 2006

Greetings – Richard McCarty, Dean, College of Arts and Science

Opening Speaker, **Sasson Somekh**, Visiting Professor in Jewish Studies, Vanderbilt University; emeritus, Tel Aviv University, *On Writing an Autobiography*

Opening Remarks, **David Wasserstein**, Jewish Studies and History, Vanderbilt University

Orit Bashkin, Modern Middle Eastern History, University of Chicago, *A Success Story--A Trip to Sasson Somekh’s High School*

Mark Cohen, Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, *Geniza for Islamicists and Islamic Geniza*



Allison Schachter, Sasson Somekh, Shaul Kelner

Lital Levy, Society of Fellows, Harvard University, *Before “Jews” and “Arabs”*: Arab Jewish Writers in the Modern Hebrew and Arabic Renaissance Movements

Lenn Goodman, Philosophy, Vanderbilt University, *Hikma and Falsafa: What can a Philosopher Learn from the Arabic Texts of Jewish Philosophy?*

Nancy Berg, Modern Hebrew Language & Literature, Washington University-St. Louis, *Self-Portrait of the Past*

Abraham Marcus, History, University of Texas at Austin, *Writing the History of Syrian Jewry*
Conclusion

(Unfortunately, Mark Cohen and Nancy Berg were prevented by severe weather from reaching Vanderbilt and participating in the conference.)

► We supported sponsorship of conferences:

- **Joint Meeting of the Southeastern College Art Conference and the Mid-America College Art Association** – October 2006

- **Legal Reckonings - An Interdisciplinary Conference** – February 5, 2007

Legal Reckonings brought together scholars from the disciplines of sociology, literature and political theory to trace the movements of the subject of law. The image of the prisoner of Abu Ghraib is only the most recent reminder of a form of extraordinary arrest, a stopping of all movement that occurs when one is no longer a subject of the law but its spectacle. The legal reckoning is therefore a risk, a hazarding of interpretation that aims to locate the movement that appears to be lost, to identify how the subject navigates between the ordered, systematic elements of the law and its scattered routes of possibility.

To find promise in the law as a site for historical thinking is to set the legal reckoning in motion. The scholars who came together for ‘Legal Reckonings’ have engaged in interdisciplinary thinking that focuses on the subject that is formed by, and in turn deforms, legal categories. Speakers included Jaya Kasibhatla (English, Vanderbilt), David Lloyd (English, USC), Nasser Hussain (Law, Jurisprudence & Social Thought, Amherst), Colin Dayan (English, Vanderbilt), and Avery Gordon (Sociology, UCSB).

- **On the Lip(s) of Miriam’s Well: Jews/Women/Cultures** – March 2007



This first major university conference to explore Jewish women and the arts was co-chaired by Joy Calico (Blair School of Music), Jay Geller (Divinity School) and Bill Smith (Psychology). It had a global perspective: North African as well as North American, Eastern as well as Central European, Israeli as well as Diasporic. It also covered a broad range of cultural practices (Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardi), languages (Hebrew, Yiddish, and Ladino), and convictions (from traditional to secular).

On the Lip(s) of Miriam’s Well:

► **JEWIS / WOMEN / CULTURES**



► We supported sponsorship of lectures throughout the Vanderbilt community

- Holocaust Lecture Series
- William C. Donahue, Associate Professor of German and Jewish Studies at Duke University – February 8-9, 2007 – gave a public lecture on Elias Canetti and conducted a discussion with interested faculty and students on Bernhard Schlink and the Holocaust.
- Clifford Orwin, Professor of Political Science, Fellow of St. Michael’s College, Director of the Program in Political Philosophy and International Affairs, University of Toronto – January 26, 2007 – “Judaism as a regime: Josephus’ defense of the Torah”. Josephus’ *Against Apion* (ca. 95 C.E.) is one of the oldest extant works of Jewish apologetics. Orwin argued that writing in the wake of the catastrophe of 70 C.E., Josephus’ intention was not merely to influence Gentiles’ understanding of the Jews, but to shape the Jews’ understanding of themselves. Those who

describe the work as incorrigibly conservative in its focus on the central role of the priesthood overlook the fact that Josephus undertakes a fundamental reinterpretation of the significance of that priesthood.

- Rabbi David Ellenson, President, Hebrew Union College – November 17, 2006 “Great Leaders Will Sprout from Among Them: Orthodoxy and Conversion to Judaism in the Modern Era” - Orthodox Jewry has responded to intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews in many different ways. In this lecture Rabbi Ellenson examined a variety of standpoints and issues in Orthodox rabbinical writings on the matter, and the implications these hold for contemporary Jewish life.



Ellenson

NEWS OF OUR FACULTY



Shaul Kelner published, with Benjamin Phillips, “Reconceptualizing Religious Change: Ethno-Apostasy and Change in Religion among American Jews”, *Sociology of Religion* 67(4), 2006, pp. 507-24; “Who is Being Taught? Jewish Early Childhood Education’s Adult-Centered Approach”, ch. 3 in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 2007, pp. 59-79; with Steven M. Cohen, “Toward the Study of Community Effects on Jewish Engagement: The Case of Educational Enrollment”, ch. 9 in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 2007, pp. 257-74; with Steven M Cohen, “Why Parents Send Their Children to Day Schools”, ch. 4 in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 2007, pp. 80-100. His course Soc 218, Tourism, Culture & Place, developed with

a CAS Venture Fund Grant for Creativity in Curricular and Pedagogical Approaches, was featured in *The Tennessean*. He was selected to participate in the Workshop for Early Career Faculty in Jewish Studies, American Academy for Jewish Research, University of Michigan Frankel Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies. He was appointed as Co-Principal Investigator, Vanderbilt Center for Nashville Studies “Engaging Nashville Survey”, and served as a panelist, “Social Science and Teaching about American Jewry”, at the December 2006 meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, San Diego. He contributed an Op-Ed in the *Forward*: “Tales of Two Jewries Don’t Tell Much Anymore”, March 2, 2007, and gave a presentation to Wexner Foundations Heritage, Graduate and Israel Fellow Alumni Study Day “Los Angeles Urbanism and the Web of Diaspora”, Los Angeles, March 18, 2007.

Allison Schachter delivered a lecture, “A Forgotten Woman at the Center of Hebrew Modernism: Rereading Leah Goldberg’s *And That Is the Light*”, at the Program in Jewish Civilization, Georgetown University, March 29, 2007. She delivered papers at several conferences: “On Language Pangs, Or Reading Yiddish in Hebrew”, Reflections: A Conference Honoring Chana Kronfeld, U.C. Berkeley, March 26, 2007; “Bullfrogs, Lilies, and Bogs: Traversing the Gendered Landscape of Hebrew Poetry with Dahlia Ravikovitch and Leah Goldberg”, On the Lip(s) of Miriam’s Well: Jews/Women/Cultures, a conference held at Vanderbilt University, March 18-20, 2007; “‘A Yellow Lily Among Bullfrogs:’ Leah Goldberg in Dahlia Ravikovitch’s Poetic Corpus,” Association of Jewish Studies Annual Convention, December 17-19, 2006. She published “The Shtetl and the City: The Origins of Modern Jewish Nostalgia in Shloyme reb khayims and Ba-yamim ha-hem”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 12.3 Summer, 2006; “Language/A Yiddisher Kop” *Haaretz* (English edition; Hebrew is forthcoming), April 1, 2007 (a review of Hanna Wirth Neshet’s *Call it English: The*



Languages of Jewish American Literature). She was a recipient of a fellowship for participation in the American Academy for Jewish Research and Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies Workshop for Early Career Faculty in Jewish Studies. She is working towards the completion of a book manuscript entitled *Geographies of Jewish Modernism: Itineraries of Hebrew and Yiddish in the Twentieth Century*, and of an article, "Traversing the Field of Hebrew Literature with Dahlia Ravikovitch".



Martina Urban spent the academic year in Berlin to work on her second book, on David Koigen's phenomenology of religion and theory of a 'religion of culture' out of Jewish monotheism. She received the University Research Grant from Vanderbilt University in support of this project and was awarded an additional fellowship from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in summer 2006. She presented initial research on the topic at the VIIIth Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies which was held in Moscow in July 2006. An extended version of the paper will be published in the *Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* in spring 2008. Her current work contextualizes Jewish theories of religion within the larger discussion of deconstruction

and the quest for a 'religionless religion'. Her book *Aesthetics of Renewal*, which examines the nexus between Martin Buber's representation of ecstatic mysticism and critique of culture, has been accepted for publication by The University of Chicago Press.

David J. Wasserstein: *The Legend of the Septuagint, From Classical Antiquity to Today*, begun by Abraham Wasserstein and completed after his death by David Wasserstein, appeared during the year (Cambridge University Press). Other publications included *Mamluks and Ottomans, Studies in Honour of Michael Winter* (ed., with Ami Ayalon; Routledge); *Daghestan and the World of Islam* (ed., with Moshe Gammer; Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Humaniora 330); *Language of Religion – Language of the People, Medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed., with E. Bremer, J. Jarnut, M. Richter, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich); 'Introduction' (with M. Richter), pp. 11-14 and 'Language and prayer among Muslims, Christians and Jews in the early Islamic world', in *Language of Religion*, pp. 49-59; 'The date and authorship of the Letter of Consolation attributed to Maymun b. Yusuf', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 32, 2006 (Studies in Memory of Franz Rosenthal), pp. 410-18; several articles in the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem); as well as book reviews in academic journals. He also lectured, on the subject 'Ibn Biklarish – Isra'ili', at the meeting on Ibn Biklarish held in the British Academy in London; and on the topic 'Taxonomies of Inheritance: Jewish Texts in al-Andalus' in the Judaic Studies Program in Princeton, for whose Advisory Council he serves as Chairman.



ADMINISTRATION

Through its Administrator, Lynne Perler, the Program

- Maintained the office of the PJS
- Maintained the PJS website
- Promoted the PJS through student-targeted print advertising (*InnerVU*, *Hustler*, etc.):
 - August 2006 – advertised Fall 2006 JS courses in *Hustler*
 - August 2006 – delivered 4500 flyers to student mailboxes for Fall 2006 courses
 - November 2006 – delivered 4500 flyers to student mailboxes for Spring 2007 courses
 - November 2006 – advertised Spring 2007 courses in *Hustler*

- April 2007 – delivered 4500 flyers to student mailboxes for Fall 2007 courses
- April 2007 – advertised Fall 2007 courses in *Hustler*
- Promoted PJS through community-targeted print articles of interest (Nashville Business Register, etc.)
- Participated in student-targeted events – Majors Fair, Freshman Parents Weekend, A&S Open House, Graduate Orientation
 - August 2006 – Participated in Freshman Parents’ Weekend at Hillel (August 20)
 - October 26, 2006 – Student Information session

GIFTS

During the year the Program was enriched through the generosity of several donors. We note here in particular the establishment of the Eugene Greener, Jr. Professorship in Jewish Studies (see above, p. 2). Professor David J. Wasserstein, currently Director of the PJS, is the first holder of this chair. Diane and Steven Miller gave the sum of \$25,000 to support acquisition of library materials for the Program. We also benefited from a gift in honor of Eugene Greener, Jr. from Ms Carolyn Goddard, and a gift of books from Professor Stephen Entman, which grace the library in our conference room. We thank them all for their generous support.

LOOKING AHEAD

As it anticipates its sixth year of operation, the PJS hopes to forge ahead on all fronts, securing it as a premier program among peer institutions. What are our ambitions for the future?

Faculty Development

- To fill the Modern Jewish History position
- To continue the Visiting Professor program
- To establish a position in Rabbinics

Curriculum Development

- To continue negotiations for a Study Abroad program in Spain
- To continue to work towards the renewal of the Study Abroad program in Israel
- To stimulate the production of more JS courses taught by faculty from within and without Vanderbilt
- To concretize Service Learning opportunities
- With Peabody College, to create a Master of Education in Jewish Studies program, with multiple foci

Program Development

- To continue seminars for faculty and launch equivalent forums for undergraduates
- To broaden public interest in JS through lectures and conferences
- To seek new funding support for the Program’s expanding teaching and research activities



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