



ANNUAL REPORT

2008 - 2009

Leah Marcus, Program Director

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Jewish Studies Annual Report 2008-09

The Program in Jewish Studies has had a year of growth and consolidation. In July, 2008, the directorship of the program passed from David Wasserstein to Leah Marcus. We honored Professor Wasserstein for his service in a gala reception on September 23, 2008. This report will cover developments during the past year under four rubrics: Faculty, Library expansion, Curricular reform, and Programs.

Faculty

The Program has hired three new faculty members during the past year. Traditionally, all Jewish Studies faculty also have an appointment with another department or program at Vanderbilt. We now have a total of four tenure-track faculty whose tenure home is Jewish Studies as opposed to a department. We are happy to welcome them all and even happier to report that they have already made tremendous contributions to the program.



Adam Meyer, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies, non-tenure track, comes to us as a mid-level faculty member from Fisk University. He excels in undergraduate teaching and specializes in Jews in America, specifically, relationships between the African-American and Jewish communities as reflected in American literature and culture. He has developed a new gateway course to the Jewish Studies major: JS 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies. This course runs through the four central areas covered under the major in order to give students an overview of the field of Jewish Studies. It has already been quite successful, both in terms of student response and in terms of its ability to funnel interested underclassmen into the major. Prof. Meyer has also developed other courses in Jewish-American literature and helps fill a gap in staffing courses in Jewish literature.

Ari (Alexander) Joskowicz, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, has a recent PhD from the University of Chicago and spent a year at the University of Mississippi before coming to Vanderbilt. He is a specialist in modern European history, especially the history of Western and Central European Jewry from the Enlightenment to the present. He teaches our always oversubscribed course on the Holocaust and plans to offer other courses in modern Jewish history. He has a secondary appointment in the Program in European Studies and teaches “The Idea of Europe” for that program. With the hiring of Professor Joskowicz, our program in Modern Jewish History is complete, since we now have experts in both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish history. In Spring, 2010, Professor Joskowicz will be a Fellow of the prestigious Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, where the topic for the year is Jewish secularism.





Philip Ackerman-Lieberman, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, has a rabbinics degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary and a recent PhD from the Princeton department of Near-eastern Studies. He spent a year in a post-doc at New York University before coming to Vanderbilt. He is our long-awaited “Mr. Rabbinics,” and will teach a new course, JS 233 Issues in Rabbinics, for the first time in Spring 2010. He is also an expert on the history of Jews in Islamic lands, particularly Egypt. He is a member of the Princeton Geniza Project and an expert in reading and interpreting documents from the Cairo Geniza, an invaluable repository of materials about Jewish culture between 1000 and 1900 C.E. He can also teach classical Judaism, medieval Jewish history more broadly, and comparative law. He will soon have a courtesy appointment in the Law School and offer an annual course there on Jewish law, history of contracts, or comparative law.

In addition to hiring new faculty the Program has also expanded and defined its presence in the University community by creating a “core faculty” of fifteen interested participants who have either primary or secondary appointments in the program, who teach frequently in the program, and who help in planning and policy decisions. The core faculty come from many departments and schools around the University, and have greatly increased the scope and diversity of Jewish Studies. This group supplements the Jewish Studies Steering Committee by keeping abreast of detailed management of the program, leaving the Steering Committee free to consider broader issues. While the Jewish Studies Steering Committee met on a monthly basis in the early years of the program, we have now reached the point in terms of critical mass that Jewish Studies faculty can take over most day-to-day decisions. The Steering Committee now meets only one or two times a year, but is still highly valuable to the program in that it gives its input from faculty in administrative units that are otherwise not represented or under-represented in Jewish Studies, such as Peabody, Blair, and the Law School.

Library Expansion

Vanderbilt has many excellent resources in the field of Jewish Studies. But we have been lacking when it comes to recently published materials, particularly Hebrew language books. In the past, Jewish Studies faculty have had difficulty in getting the books they needed for their research because the Central Library did not have the capacity to order Jewish Studies books as part of their regular acquisitions schedule. We are happy to report that Jewish Studies books are now acquired on the same basis as books in more mainstream fields. With the help of David Wasserstein and Bill Hook, Director of the Divinity Library and the Zimmerman Judaica Collection, Jared Ingersoll of the Central Library and the Program in Jewish Studies put together funding for the acquisition of the Patterson Collection, a major collection of several thousand books in Hebrew and other languages, to fill gaps in our Jewish Studies collection. We look forward to working with the Central and Divinity Libraries on other special acquisitions in the field of Jewish Studies as budgetary requirements permit.

Also with the help of an anonymous donor, the Program in Jewish Studies has created its own small but wonderful library collection, housed in Buttrick 141 as part of the Jewish Studies suite of offices. Though

the Buttrick Jewish Studies collection does not circulate except to faculty, it offers a convenient way for students and specialists in Jewish Studies to consult standard reference materials, recent general-interest books, and key journals in the field.

Curricular Reform

During the past year, the Jewish Studies major has been streamlined and tweaked to make it more appealing to undergraduates. We have doubled the number of majors from four to eight and expect that several more students who are currently sophomores will sign on as majors later this year. We have also had good luck in filling our Jewish Studies courses: not one course has been cancelled due to low enrollment, and several have had to turn away students. The Holocaust course offered in Fall 2009 turned away more students than it enrolled (85 students tried to register but the course limit was 38). We have also created courses to appeal to students in areas of the University that might otherwise not have Jewish Studies courses available to them. JS 136W *Imagining the Alien: Jewish Science Fiction* is one of these: it meets at 4:10 pm, right after many lab courses get out, and appeals to students in natural science and engineering.

This past year the Study Abroad program with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was reinstated after several years' absence because of political unrest in Israel. We are also planning to expand our Global Learning options to other universities in Israel.

In addition, the Program in Jewish Studies has expanded the language offerings students may present in order to fulfill the language requirement for the major. Previously modern Hebrew was required of everyone; now interested students can substitute biblical or rabbinic Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, and Judeo-Arabic. Modern Hebrew will remain the odds-on favorite, but this expansion allows students to tailor their language work to their primary areas of interest within Jewish Studies. Students wishing to learn a language not formally taught at Vanderbilt can sign up for independent study with individual faculty. We are also hoping to expand our offerings in modern Hebrew. If there is student interest, next year we will for the first time teach modern Hebrew literature in Hebrew.

2008-09 Courses, Professors, and Enrollment

JEWISH STUDIES

Jewish Studies 115F.04 FYS: *Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs:*

Black-Jewish Relations in the 1950s and 1960s – Adam S. Meyer - 15

Jewish Studies 115F.05 FYS: *Gender, Sexuality, and Desire in Jewish Literature* – Allison Schachter - 12

Jewish Studies 115F.07 FYS: *From Einstein to Chomsky:*

Revolutionary Sciences in Jewish America – Robert Barsky - 8

Jewish Studies 115F.08 FYS: *Berlin: Cabaret, Communism, Creativity* – Martina Urban - 12

Jewish Studies 157 *Modern Jewish History* – Julia Cohen - 26

Jewish Studies 180W *Introduction to Jewish Studies* – Adam Meyer – 14 - 19
Jewish Studies 235W *Hebrew Literature in Translation* – Allison Schachter - 11
Jewish Studies 250 *The Problem of Evil in Judaism* – Martina Urban - 5
Jewish Studies 253W *Witnesses Who Were Not There:*
Literature of the Children of Holocaust Survivors – Adam S. Meyer - 15
Jewish Studies 256 *Power and Diplomacy in the Modern Middle East* – Thomas Schwartz - 22
Jewish Studies 296 *Senior Project in Jewish Studies* – Leah Marcus - 1

OTHER COURSES taught by Jewish Studies Core Faculty

Religion 3116 *Law in the Hebrew Bible*-Douglas Knight
Religion 3823 *Literature of the Ancient Near East* –Jack Sasson
Religion 3151 *Jesus and Early Christian Communities* – A.-J. Levine
Religion 3810 *West Semitic Inscriptions* – Jack Sasson
Religion 3125 *Book of Genesis* - Jack Sasson
Religious Studies 207 *Jesus the Jew* – A.-J. Levine
Religious Studies 112 *Introduction to Judaism* – Martina Urban
History 287c *Cities of Europe and the Middle East* – Julia Cohen
Religion 3311 *Modern Critics of Religion* – Jay Geller
Religion 3531 *Religious Narrative and the Self* – Jay Geller
Religious Studies 220W *Constructions of Jewish Identity in the Modern Period* – Martina Urban
Religious Studies 229 *The Holocaust: Its Meanings and Implications* – Jay Geller
Religious Studies 239 *Religious Autobiography* – Jay Geller
English 283 *Jewish American Literature* – Allison Schachter
English 355.01 *Special Topics: Literary Geography* – Allison Schachter
Music Literature and History (Blair) 219 *The Bible and Music* – A.-J. Levine
Philosophy 350.02 *Readings in Philosophy* – Idit Dobbs-Weinstein

Programs

During the past year, the Program in Jewish Studies has continued its highly popular series of Jewish Studies Faculty Suppers, bringing in a number of interesting speakers from the community and allowing time for conviviality and discussion.



On September 8, 2008, Professor **Allison Schachter** of Jewish Studies and English spoke about her new work on “Itinerant Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish in the Twentieth Century.”

David and Leah Marcus, Julia Phillips Cohen, Allison Schachter

On Tuesday, October 28, 2009 we were mesmerized by singer-songwriter **Jill Rogoff**, who presented a program reflecting her journey in Jewish music. Her latest album is *The Voice of the Wanderer*.



Lenn Goodman, the recipient of the 2008 Sutherland Prize for Research at Vanderbilt University, spoke on December 1, 2008 about his reactions to a new biography of Maimonides, *Maimonides: A New Life* by Joel Kraemer.

The finale was February 23, 2009, when we were all touched by the German Department's graduate students' multi-media presentation on Rosenzweig's Love Letters to Gritli Rosenstock.

After the February presentation, the Faculty Supper Seminars were suspended to show the Program's support for college-wide cost-cutting measures in response to the national liquidity crises.

We also for the first time organized a lecture series around a single topic, "Translation and Transmission," bringing in scholars as diverse as Chana Bloch, who translates from biblical and modern Hebrew, Bernard Avishai, who talked about *Translatio imperii* – the "translation" of political forms from one regime to another in Israel, Jeffrey Shandler, who is an expert in modern Yiddish and translation, Israeli writers and translators Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman, and Willi Goetschel, philosopher and humanist, spoke about translation and conversion in Heinrich Heine. At the end of the year, we held a very stimulating and exciting Jewish Studies faculty symposium on the topic of translation that served to round out the year's ongoing discussion by making connections with our own faculty and their issues with translation. In planning our speaker series, we have worked very productively with Vanderbilt Hillel, who now co-sponsors some of our speakers and we theirs.



Chana Bloch



Peter Cole



Bernard Avishai



Jeffrey Shandler



Adina Hoffman



Willi Goetschel

We have also built bridges in the Jewish community, particularly the Jewish Federation. With the help of Steve Edelstein, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, we created a new internship program there for Vanderbilt students. This has already proved successful, in that a Vanderbilt intern is volunteering full time at the Federation this fall. We have also worked on creating a FEREP presence at Vanderbilt. FEREP is the Jewish Federation Executive Recruitment and Education Program, designed to address the national shortage of qualified professionals in Federation leadership positions. It offers scholarships for master's-level students who want to get degrees in public policy that will lead to a career in administration in the Jewish Federation and other community organizations. The Program in Jewish Studies worked through much of the spring on this program with the Department of Education Leadership and Public Policy at Peabody and we are close to submitting a proposal to the New York headquarters of the newly named Jewish Federations of North America. If accepted, this proposal will allow us to offer scholarship aid to graduate students working in Jewish Studies and Public Policy; the program will also create many fruitful opportunities for collaboration among Arts and Sciences faculty and Peabody. We hope eventually to extend the program to the Owen School of Management. We are also working on other programs to increase the Nashville Jewish community's involvement in Vanderbilt programs, and vice versa.

All in all, the Program in Jewish Studies has had a most productive year. We set in motion a number of initiatives that are already bearing fruit. Looking forward, in addition to the plans already discussed, a major priority will be the creation of a PhD program in Jewish Studies. There is already considerable demand for this program: Jewish Studies programs are expanding across the US and there is a broad need for new faculty. A PhD at Vanderbilt would also help to solidify our existing MA program and enable a fruitful range of cross-disciplinary initiatives that are currently underexploited.

The Program in Jewish Studies is now vital and healthy. It has become a genuine hub for the academic side of Jewish life at Vanderbilt, and we look forward to expanding its reach and elan over the next several years.