

Jewish Studies Annual Report 2011-12

Leah Marcus, Director

The Program in Jewish Studies was formally launched in August 2002, when then-Provost Nicholas Zeppos appointed Jack M. Sasson to a three-year term as its director and commissioned a 7-member committee to shape the program. This summer therefore marks the tenth anniversary of the program and we look back with pleasure on the many strides we have made since its inception, with thanks to its early directors Jack M. Sasson (2002-05) who founded the program, David Wasserstein (2005-08), and Leah S. Marcus (2008-12), who is stepping down as of August 1 to be replaced by the first program director who began his academic career at Vanderbilt, Shaul J. Kelner (2012-15). We look forward to our second decade as a new beginning under the leadership of Professor Kelner. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have contributed to the program, whether as donors, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, or attendees at our various programs. What follows is a survey of our major accomplishments during the 2011-12 academic year.

Staff

Lynne Perler, who has served as Administrative Assistant for the Program in Jewish Studies since the early days when Jack Sasson was still program director, has moved to a different position at Vanderbilt. We wish her well and thank her for her hard work and dedicated service to the program. Daniel Cunningham, who had just graduated with highest honors as a University Scholar at Vanderbilt, replaced Lynne as a temp for a few weeks in October and November, 2011, and did a remarkable job assimilating the complexities of the job almost instantly. Our new Administrative Assistant, Lindsey Bunt, came on board November 7, 2011, and we are delighted to have her. As all who have worked with her have discovered, she is a delight to have around and a goldmine of administrative expertise and efficiency. If you have not already met Lindsey, she invites you to come by 140 Buttrick and say hello. We are very proud of her affiliation with our program and look forward to working with her for a long time to come.

Faculty

A major event of the 2011-12 academic year was the awarding of tenure and promotion to Shaul J. Kelner, of the Department of Sociology and the Program in Jewish Studies. Professor Kelner was the last junior faculty member to be hired before a change in administrative policy allowed faculty to be hired with tenure homes in Jewish Studies as opposed to one of the traditional academic departments. He has, however, been a key member of the Program in Jewish Studies since his arrival on campus in 2005 as a beginning Assistant Professor of Sociology. Professor Kelner has achieved quick prominence in the field of Jewish Studies (as well as sociology) through the publication of his award-winning book, *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010). He also has strong ties to the Nashville Jewish Community, having served on the boards of Hillel, the Jewish Federation, and Akiva School, where he is currently director of the board. As of August 1, 2012, Professor Kelner will also be Director of the Program in Jewish Studies. We are looking forward to an expansion of alliances with the Nashville Jewish Community as a result.

As always, our faculty have been active in their various fields, presenting papers at a number of national and international conferences including the Association for Jewish Studies, Jewish Law Association, and Middle East Studies Association. In addition, there have been four new books to come out of the program, two of them related to Jews and modernity. Jay Geller published *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of*



Modernity (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) and Allison Schachter published *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). We held gala receptions to congratulate each of these scholars on their achievements, Professor Geller's was in early September, after his talk inaugurating the 2011-12 Jewish Studies Lecture Series and including a response by Barbara Hahn (see below), and Professor Schachter's was in February. In addition, Professor Douglas A. Knight published a new study, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), which we celebrated at a Jewish Studies Faculty Supper in his honor; and Professors Knight and Amy-Jill Levine published a

co-authored book, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011). We congratulate all of these wonderful colleagues on their achievements, which are rapidly adding luster to our young program.

Course Offerings

We continue to expand the range of courses we offer to reflect strong interest on the part of undergraduate and graduate students. During 2011-12, we offered the following courses:

Fall, 2011

JS 115F.01 In a Pluralistic Age: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Spain (Lieberman)

JS 115F.04 Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: Black-Jewish Relations in the 1950s and 1960s (Meyer)

JS 123 Jews in the Medieval World (Lieberman)

JS 138W Jewish Humor (Klass)

JS 156 The Holocaust (Joskowicz)

JS 158 World Jewish Communities in the New Millennium (Kelner)

JS 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies (Meyer)

JS 248W Jewish Storytelling (Schachter)

JS 258 Topics in Modern Jewish History – Evolution of Ethiopian Jews (Quirin)

Spring, 2012

JS 124 Perspectives in Modern Jewish History (Joskowicz)

JS 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies (Meyer)

JS 219 The New Testament in Its Jewish Contexts (Levine)

JS 233 Issues in Rabbinic Literature (Lieberman)

JS 250 Is G-d Guilty? The Problem of Evil in Jewish Thought (Urban)

JS 252 Social Movements in Modern Jewish Life (Kelner)

JS 253W Witnesses Who Were Not There: Literature of the Children of Holocaust Survivors (Meyer)

The Program in Jewish Studies continues to allow interested members of the Vanderbilt and Nashville communities to audit our courses free of charge, subject only to the professor's permission. Those who have taken advantage of this opportunity have very much valued the experience and we hope for more Vanderbilt and Nashville participation in the future.

Undergraduate Major

The Jewish Studies Major and Minor continue to prosper, we had one major graduate during the past academic year: Robert Friedman in December, 2011. Mr. Friedman is now pursuing graduate work at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. The shape of the major has also changed somewhat. In cooperation with the Department of Religious Studies, we have added a third year of Hebrew for students who arrive at Vanderbilt already fluent in Hebrew: Hebrew 201 and 202W. We are very excited about this addition, which testifies to the dedication of our Hebrew teacher, Miriam Halachmi. The spring half of the course, as indicated by its W designation, counts as one of Vanderbilt's required writing-intensive courses, but the writing is in Hebrew – a Vanderbilt first.

Graduate Programs

We currently have four students in the Jewish Studies MA program who are at various stages towards completion of their degrees. Rachel Whitley, who was awarded her MA degree during summer, 2011, is currently a candidate for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Sam Lorber is working on his thesis about early Yiddish songwriters in America and also developing a new performance technology program for the Pearl Cohn Entertainment Magnet High School in Nashville. Tamesha Derico has spent much of summer, 2012, in Israel as a Tikvah Fellow in Holocaust Studies; she has also been researching the Ethiopian Jewish Community in Israel for her MA thesis. Raina Shults is in her second year, beginning work on her MA thesis in Biblical studies.

We are continuing to make progress towards a Vanderbilt PhD in Jewish Studies. Our original idea, as discussed in last year's Annual Report, had been to create separate degree tracks for Jewish Studies in Philosophy, History, and the Graduate Department of Religion. However, we have rethought this idea because it now seems to us overly restrictive. We now plan to offer the PhD on the Stanford model: Jewish Studies will not grant its own PhD degrees, but will help to support degree candidates in Jewish fields across the College of Arts and Science. Eventually we hope to have our own graduate fellowship money to award Jewish Studies PhD candidates, so that they do not have to be sponsored by their home academic department.

Lecture Series

During 2011-12, the program planned and sponsored the following events and speakers:



Jay Geller
September 5, 2011
“Symposium: Yet Another Jewish Question?”
Respondent: Barbara Hahn



Matt Goldish
September 14, 2012
“Where Magic Meets Law: Some Strange Cases from the Responsa Literature”

Jonathan Boyarin
October 26, 2011
“Trickster’s Children: Genealogies of Jewishness in Anthropology”





Aron Rodrigue

November 2, 2011

“A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi”



Maurice Samuels

November 7, 2011

“France’s Jewish Star: Rachel at the Comedie Francaise”



Rachel Havrelock

February 20, 2012

“The History of the Map of Israel”



Yuri Lane
February 20, 2012
“From Tel Aviv to Ramallah: A Beatbox Journey”



David Sorkin
March 26, 2012
“Rethinking Jewish Emancipation in Europe, 1550-1950”

We also take it as part of our mission to co-sponsor other campus and community lectures related to Jewish Studies topics. Last year’s lectures co-sponsored by Jewish Studies include:

October 24, 2011 – Moshe Semyonov – “Immigration, Ethnicity and Residential Segregation in European Countries” – Co-sponsored by the Department of Sociology

December 7, 2011 – Gal Uchovsky – “Walk on Water” – Co-sponsored by Vanderbilt Hillel

January 15, 2012 – Matthew Ramsey – “Jews and the Enlightenment: The French Revolution and Beyond” – Co-sponsored by West End Synagogue

January 22, 2012 – Barbara Hahn – “Jewish Women in the German Enlightenment” – Co-sponsored by West End Synagogue

January 26, 2012 – Alicia Ostriker Poetry Reading – Co-sponsored by the Department of English

January 29, 2012 – Nina Warnke – “Shylock Re-Imagined: Yiddish Performances since the Haskalah” – Co-sponsored by West End Synagogue

February 5, 2012 – Julia Cohen – “Jews in the Late Ottoman Empire: Greece and Turkey” – Co-sponsored by West End Synagogue

February 12, 2012 – Gary Gerstle – “New York’s Jewish Immigrant Communities” – Co-sponsored by West End Synagogue

February 21, 2012 – Robert Watson – International Lens Film Series screening of “Where are you Going Moshe?” – Co-sponsored by the Office of Arts & Creative Engagement and the Office of International Student & Scholar Services

March 15, 2012 – Russell Jacoby – “Bloodlust: On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present” – Co-sponsored by the Department of French and Italian

April 11, 2012 – The Black-Jew Dialogues – Co-sponsored by the Department of English, Program in African American and Diaspora Studies, Bishop Johnson Black Cultural Center, Office of Leadership Development and Intercultural Affairs and Office of the Dean of the Ingram Commons

April 20-21, 2012 – Marc Shapiro – “R. Jehiel Jacob Weinberg and the Challenge of Halakhah and Modernity,” “R. Shlomo Goren: The Revolutionary Chief Rabbi,” and “Is the Philosophy of R. Kook still Relevant?” – Co-sponsored by Eastside Gun Shop in memory of Dr. Juda Rozenberg and the Jewish Federation of Nashville

Jewish Studies Faculty Suppers

Every year the Program in Jewish Studies sponsors three or four Jewish Studies Faculty Suppers that give Jewish faculty and friends from around the university the opportunity to mingle and discuss questions of mutual interest. Last year’s seminars were all extremely interesting, and we thank the presenters and participants.

October 11, 2011 – Doug Knight – “Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel”

January 23, 2012 – Earl Fitz with Respondent Paul Miller – “What is a Jewish Author?: The Case of Clarice Lispector”

March 20, 2012 – James Quirin – “Ethiopian Jews”

Conclusion

Looking back over the past ten years, we are proud of the progress we have made. We started out as a gleam in Nick Zeppos’ and Jack Sasson’s eye, and we are now a lively program with a high profile at Vanderbilt and an emerging profile among Jewish Studies programs around the country and abroad. In conclusion, we would like once again to thank all of those who have contributed to the program. As we begin our second decade, we are looking forward to further expansion of our events and course offerings, and to an enhanced presence at Vanderbilt and in the Nashville community.