**LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS**

Perched on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the University of California at Santa Cruz is well situated to play a role in the globalization of knowledge that is such a hallmark of higher education at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We are happy to report that Jewish Studies at UCSC is continuing to make a vital contribution to this aspect of the University's mission.

We offer an array of courses that emphasize the international character of Jewish civilization—exploring both Israel, its historic birthplace, and the Diaspora. Our students can now take their junior year in Israel, and UCSC sends more students on Birthright Israel than any other UC campus. Studying the history and culture of the Jews is a preparation for the global work world they'll be entering upon graduation.

As we have developed the new Jewish Studies major we've kept this global perspective in focus. We've also emphasized, as we noted in a brief comment on the subject a couple of years ago for the Koret Foundation, that it's not possible to be an educated human being at the beginning of the twenty-first century without some knowledge of the history and culture of the Jewish people. The students who take our courses—over half of whom are not Jewish—know how profoundly Jewish people and Jewish achievements have altered the course of the modern world. Our newly instituted gateway course—Jewish Studies 1, "Introduction to Jewish History, Literature, and Culture"—which attracted 160 students last year, features a panoply of the Jewish thinkers and actors who have inflected world history, from the legendary King David to a galaxy of Jewish stars in every field of culture during the twentieth century.

The international character of Jewish civilization is a prominent theme in our courses on the history of Jewish music taught by Avi Tchamni, including his "Music of the Jews in the lands of Islam," which attracts nearly a hundred students each time he offers it.

And the international story continues: this year our new Jim Joseph Teaching Fellow, Paula Daccarett, will teach a course on the history of Latin American Jewry—perhaps the only such course in the nation—as well as courses on Jewish women's history and Jewish port cities of the Mediterranean. And in the spring we will offer a course focused entirely on one of those port cities, "Jewish Writers and the European City: Venice," in tandem with a three-day conference on "Women, Jews, and Venetians." That one is scheduled for May 15–17. Come and join us for it, and participate in the pleasure of Jewish study—and the chance like our students to talk, discuss, argue, and think—of course with refreshments—as we get to know each other and celebrate Jewish life and culture!

Of course, language study is central to the success of any program with an international dimension, so it is a pleasure to report that Jewish Studies at UCSC is expanding our Yiddish program. Last year 25 students took the class and many were turned away. This year, with a quick infusion of help from the Koret Foundation, we have two Yiddish classes, taught by Jon Levitow with an emphasis on the transnational character of that most peripatetic of languages.

In these difficult economic times it’s remarkable that we have been able to begin our Jewish Languages at UCSC

**JEWISH LANGUAGES AT UCSC**

The last few years have been very difficult for language instruction at UCSC, as painful budget cuts have resulted in the elimination of several languages and numerous courses from the curriculum. But the Division of Humanities continues to provide funds for no fewer than five courses in Hebrew. And with additional support from the Koret Foundation, instruction in Jewish languages—both Hebrew and Yiddish—is flourishing. Tammi Rossman-Benjamin's courses in Hebrew are more popular than ever, and Jon Levitow's introduction to Yiddish attracted a record number of students for a new language course at UCSC.

Tammi Rossman-Benjamin's introductory Hebrew course attracted more than forty students in the fall of 2010—the highest enrollment number in her dozen years of teaching Hebrew here. Three quarters of Hebrew language instruction are among the requirements of the new Jewish Studies major, inaugurated this year. But most of the students who enroll in Hebrew language courses are not Jewish Studies majors or minors. Many Jewish students take Hebrew either before or after their Birthright trips to Israel: for them, mastery of Hebrew is a passport to a deeper relationship with the vibrant culture of contemporary Israel. Others attracted to Hebrew include Linguistics majors fascinated by Tammi Rossman-Benjamin's structural approach to the study of the language. And still others are particularly interested in reading the Hebrew Bible in its original language rather than in English translation.

One of the most popular features of the Hebrew language courses at UCSC is their emphasis on culture as well as language.
BUDAPEST/SANTA CRUZ

Since its founding, the Center for Jewish Studies at UCSC has forged partnerships with Jewish scholars from other continents, sponsoring an international conference on anti-Semitism in 2003; hosting scholars from Israel in fields as diverse as history, literature, philosophy, theater, archeology, and environmental studies; and participating in the founding of the Venice Center for International Studies in 2009. Another exciting collaboration has been an ongoing exchange with Jewish Studies scholars in Budapest.

Géza Kállay, a professor in the Department of English Studies at Eötvös Loránd University, and his wife Katalin Kállay, who teaches American literature at Károli Gáspár University in Budapest, have been frequent visitors to UCSC in recent years, teaching courses in the Departments of Literature and Philosophy. Katalin Kállay’s participation several years ago as an instructor in the interdisciplinary course on the Holocaust taught by Murray Baumgarten and Peter Kenez at UCSC led her to develop the first course on the Holocaust offered in a Hungarian university.

That course in turn led to a major event in Budapest: in September 2009, Károli Gáspár University hosted an international conference on the Holocaust entitled “Witnessing Responses: A New Generation’s Perspectives on the Holocaust,” organized by Kata Kállay. An unusual feature of the conference—the first on this subject in Hungary—was the extensive participation of undergraduates, including two from UCSC: Darcy Ballister presented a paper entitled “The Poetry of Dan Pagis: ‘Counter-monument’ in Post-Holocaust Verse,” and Justin Katz spoke about the broader theme of the conference, with a paper entitled “The Next Generation: Moving Forward but Never Forgetting.” UCSC’s Peter Kenez, who was born in Budapest and has published a memoir of his experiences there (Varieties of Fear: Growing up Jewish Under Nazism and Communism, 2001), began the conference by giving its keynote address.

Santa Cruz and Budapest are almost as far apart as two cities can be on the planet Earth, but scholarship in Jewish Studies has built a bridge between them!

THE 2010 HELEN DILLER FAMILY FOUNDATION DISTINGUISHED LECTURER: HARRIET MURAV

The Helen Diller Family Endowment continues to provide the foundation for Jewish Studies at UC Santa Cruz. In addition to funding the administrative and support staff of the Center for Jewish Studies, as well as courses in Hebrew and Yiddish, the endowment enabled us to sponsor the 2010 Helen Diller Family Foundation Distinguished Lecture by Harriet Murav of the University of Illinois.

Professor Murav, one of our country’s leading experts on Russian Jewish literature, examined three Russian-language poems by Il’ia Sel’vinskii, which were among the earliest artistic responses in any language to the Nazi mass killings of the Jews. The lecture succeeded brilliantly in introducing a major writer with whom most members of her audience were previously unfamiliar.

Sel’vinskii’s poem “Ia eto videl” (“I saw it”) first published in January 1942, describes the poet’s reaction to the sight of seven thousand corpses—shot by Hitler’s Einsatzgruppen—in a ditch outside the city of Kerch. The Einsatzgruppen, the paramilitary death squads of the SS, were responsible for the murders by shooting of over one million Jews in Eastern Europe, and they were the first organizations to commence mass killing of the Jews as an organized policy of the Nazi regime.

The term “Holocaust,” Professor Murav noted, did not appear in Russian until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, and the event itself was nearly expunged from official histories and public memory. Nevertheless, she writes, “in the former Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, the scholarly and artistic response the destruction of the Jews takes on its own, distinct outline, which combines the perspectives of victim, avenger, and victor.”

Professor Murav’s forthcoming book, Music from a Speeding Train: Russian Jewish and Soviet Yiddish Literature of the 20th Century, will be the most comprehensive work on Russian Jewish literature yet published. She participated in UCSC’s conference on “Russia, The Jews, and the Arts,” sponsored by the Koret Foundation, in 2008, and is currently serving as an adviser to UCSC graduate student Polly Zavadivker, who is working on three of the greatest Russian Jewish writers: S. An-sky, Isaac Babel, and Vasily Grossman (see Polly Zavadivker profile below).

PROFILE: POLLY ZAVADIVKER

Polly Zavadivker, a graduate student in History specializing in Jewish Studies, was the recipient this year of a bountiful harvest of awards and grants: a UC Santa Cruz Institute for Humanities Research Grant, a grant from UCSC’s Academic Resources Center to facilitate archival research in the Houghton Library at Harvard University, a Department of History Dissertation Research Fellowship, an American Association for University Women Scholarship, and the Lisa and Ernest Auerbach Fellowship in Jewish Studies from the Center for Jewish Studies.
THE GOLD LECTURES AT UCSC: CROSSING BOUNDARIES AND BUILDING BRIDGES

A generous grant from the David B. Gold Foundation has enabled the Center for Jewish Studies at UCSC to launch a new program entitled "Crossing Boundaries and Building Bridges." Designed to highlight interdisciplinary work in the field of Jewish Studies, this program has produced a lively series of collaborations. Recent events have included a gathering of UCSC alumni who have become professors in Jewish Studies programs across the country; an interdisciplinary colloquium on Jewish and African-American ghettos; a conference on the transformation of kabbalistic traditions as they migrated from the Sephardic Jewish world to the Yiddish-speaking zone over the course of the early modern period; and a dialogue on the impact of gentrification on the Hasidic enclave in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

An especially exciting event was the appearance of Rebecca Goldstein, long a favorite in courses on Jewish fiction at UCSC, in January 2010. The Center for Jewish Studies co-sponsored her visit with UCSC’s Living Writers Series. The most "interdisciplinary" of contemporary Jewish novelists, Goldstein is a philosopher as well as a writer of fiction, and the author of a brilliant book on Spinoza. She read the first chapter of her new novel, 36 Arguments for the Existence of God, to an audience of nearly two hundred, and participated in a lively question-and-answer session on her career after the reading.

Another highlight of the academic year was a Gold Lecture by David Biale, the Emanuel Ringelblum Professor of Jewish History and Chair of the Department of History at the University of California, Davis. Professor Biale’s lecture, "Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought," showed how major figures in the Zionist movement, from Moses Hess and Theodor Herzl in the nineteenth century to Vladimir Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion in the twentieth, embraced and embroidered secular versions of Jewish messianic themes.

Courtney Bender, Associate Professor of Religion at Columbia University, engaged in a dialogue with the Center’s co-chair Nathaniel Deutsch on her new book, The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination (University of Chicago Press, 2010). Professor Bender currently serves as the co-chair of the Social Science Research Council’s initiative on Spirituality, Political Engagement and Public Life, funded by the Ford Foundation.

Benjamin Lapp, Professor of German History at Montclair State University, offered a Gold Lecture entitled “Jews in Germany or German Jews?” on the theme of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust. Beginning with a description of the situation of Jews in DP (“Displaced Persons”) camps in the years after 1945, Professor Lapp illuminated the slow re-establishment of Jewish life in Germany during subsequent decades, with particular emphasis on the influx of Russian-Jewish immigrants during the 1990s. The lecture also examined literary representations of the German Jewish community, including work by the great critic and memoirist Marcel Reich-Ranicki.

Two of our Gold Lectures this year focused on Hebrew poetry. Paul Mann, Professor of English at Pomona College, connected Yehuda Halevi’s poems about his longing for Jerusalem with Professor Mann’s own travels to Jerusalem and immersion in Jewish texts more than half a millennium after Halevi’s quest to return to the great city from his exile in Spain. And Shira Stav, visiting last year from the Department of Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, examined “Father-Daughter Relationships in Modern Hebrew Women’s Poetry,” the subject of her dissertation and a forthcoming book.
Murray Baumgarten, Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Co-Director of Jewish Studies, was one of the founders this year of the Venice Center for International Jewish Studies (visit the Center’s website at www.venicejewishstudies.org). He also participated in a panel on “Translation and the Art of the Jewish Book” at the Ravenna Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies on July 28, 2010. His talk, entitled “Primo Levi: Thinking in German,” will appear in Hebrew in a new journal published by the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. He combined his interests in Dickens and Italy in another essay; “A Bit of my Brain: Venice as Theater and Dream-Vision in Dickens’s Urban Imagination,” published in Dickens and Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy by Cambridge Scholars Press.

Dorian Bell, Assistant Professor of Literature, has been awarded the Malcolm Bowie Prize for an article entitled “The Jew as Model: Anti-Semitism, Aesthetics, and Epistemology in the Goncourt Brothers’ Manette Salomon,” published in Modern Language Notes 24:4 (2009). The prize is awarded annually by the Society for French Studies for the best article published by an early-career scholar.

In 2009-2010, Nathaniel Deutsch, Professor of History and Literature and Co-Director of Jewish Studies, taught a class on the Hebrew Bible to nearly 150 students, a graduate seminar on the history of the shtetl, as well as other courses on Jewish mysticism and religion and modernity. On campus, he organized and participated in an international conference on the Kabbalah with participants from Israel, France, and the United States; a public dialogue with Professor Courtney Bender of Columbia University on her new book The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination; a public dialogue with Professor Neil Brenner of New York University on the gentrification of Hasidic Williamsburg; and he led “Shtetl Santa Cruz,” a public workshop on how to conduct genealogical and other forms of research on the shtetl. Nathaniel also delivered a talk, “The Right to Remain: Jewish Geographies in Imperial Russia,” for the Center for Cultural Studies Colloquium. Locally, he delivered talks at the Bay Area Academic Consortium of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, and the Jewish Community Center of Silicon Valley. Nathaniel also gave papers at conferences at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, UCLA, and the Association for Jewish Studies annual meeting. In the spring, he delivered two invited lectures in Paris, France, at the Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme and le Centre d’études juives de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales. Nathaniel’s book Inventing America’s Worst Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael, (University of California Press) received an Honorable Mention for the Merle Curti Award, given annually for the best book in American social and/or American intellectual history, and his article, “L’ethnographie ‘par le bas’: An-sky et la pauvreté juive” (Ethnography ‘From Below’: An-sky and the Ethnography of Jewish Poverty) was published in Les Cahiers d’études juives de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales. Nathaniel’s book Inventing America’s Worst Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael, (University of California Press) received an Honorable Mention for the Merle Curti Award, given annually for the best book in American social and/or American intellectual history, and his article, “L’ethnographie ‘par le bas’: An-sky et la pauvreté juive” (Ethnography ‘From Below’: An-sky and the Ethnography of Jewish Poverty) was published in Les Cahiers d’études juives de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Barbara Epstein, Professor in the History of Consciousness Department, has devised a new course entitled “The Bund, Zionism and Communism in Eastern Europe, 1900-1950,” which complements her seminar on “Jewish Social Movements.” Her recently published study of the underground anti-Nazi movement in the Minsk (Belarus) ghetto illuminates a rare example of a multi-ethnic resistance movement in Eastern Europe during the Second World War.

Gildas Hamel, Lecturer in History, published a chapter entitled “Poverty and Charity” in The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine (Oxford University Press, 2010). His article “John 2 (Cana) and Sacraments,” which began as a presentation for the Jewish Studies Research Colloquium, is forthcoming in the Journal of Biblical Literature. Works in progress include a history of the notion of sin, based on a very popular course he teaches for the Department of History at UCSC, a history of early Christianity, and a history of Hellenistic and Roman Palestine. And (in his spare time!) he will prepare a translation of nineteenth-century Breton folktales.

Lee Jaffe has become the official librarian for Jewish Studies. However, Lee is not new to Jewish Studies or to the campus. He began at the University Library in 1987 and has been working in support of our program since 2005, working on grant-funded collection projects, helping faculty with research needs and maintaining a series of in-depth online research guides (http://ucslibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/12874338/Jewish-Studies) and a bulletin board about Jewish studies resources and events (http://jsuscslibrary.blogspot.com/). Lee has a B.A. from McGill University and an M.S. from Drexel University and has worked in libraries at Rutgers, Berkeley, and USC before coming to UCSC. Lee spent most of his professional career managing library technology services and published two books and many articles in that area before changing course in 2005, working in a number of areas including Jewish studies. Beginning Fall 2010, Lee began the process to take on the role of selector for Religion and Philosophy, taking over for Paul Machlis who will be retiring next summer. With the new assignments, Lee becomes the Jewish Studies Librarian and will be our liaison for collections and services. You can contact him at ldjaffe@ucsc.edu or 831-459-3297.

Peter Kenez, Professor of History and co-holder, with Murray Baumgarten, of the Neufeld-Levin Chair in Holocaust Studies, announced his retirement this year after 43 years.
of teaching at UCSC. Fortunately, the University has recalled him to service, so that he will continue to teach courses on European and Jewish history for at least three more years. He is completing a book-length study of the Holocaust, a comparative study of the prerequisites for mass murder in countries occupied by the Nazis during the Second World War.

**Sarah Liu**, an affiliated scholar at the Center for Jewish Studies, has received a Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship for a research project entitled “The Illiterate Reader: Ethical Interpretation after Auschwitz.” The fellowship will enable her to spend seven months in residence at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

**Tammi Rossman-Benjamin**, is best known at UCSC as an extraordinary teacher of Hebrew. But in recent years she has earned a national reputation for another kind of work: she has become one of our country’s leading experts on the problem of campus antisemitism, writing articles and letters on the subject for a variety of publications, and participating in a series of conferences devoted to this alarming phenomenon. Last summer, with CUNY professor Kenneth Marcus, the former staff director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, she co-convened a two-week scholarly workshop on campus antisemitism under the auspices of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Participants included Alvin Rosenfeld, who recently established The Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism at the University of Indiana, Elhanan Yakira, the Schulman Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Gabriel Brahm of the University of Northern Michigan (formerly a Visiting Professor of American Studies at UCSC). This distinguished group of scholars recently issued a formal statement entitled “Contemporary Antisemitism in Higher Education: Manifestations, Sources, and Responses.” The statement describes the nature and scope of antisemitism on North American campuses and offers recommendations to university administrators, legislators, and government officials. For example, it urges campus administrators to develop policies and practices that specifically address antisemitism. It also calls for full enforcement of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in cases of campus antisemitism, as well as for an amendment to Title VI which would explicitly prohibit religious discrimination in federally funded U.S. educational institutions. A copy of the statement can be found on-line at: http://www.jewishresearch.org/v2/cashe.htm. In April 2011, Tammi will participate in an international scholars’ conference, “Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives,” at The Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism at the University of Indiana. The conference will focus on the intellectual and ideological sources of contemporary antisemitism and will feature talks by twenty scholars from ten countries.

**Rachel Scott**, a recent graduate of UCSC, was one of twenty students invited to participate in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s summer seminar, “Introduction to the International Tracing Service Collection,” in Washington, D.C. The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the Museum organized this seminar to acquaint students with the Museum’s collections of digitized documents on the Nazi concentration camp system, forced labor in the German war economy, and war criminals.

**Brenda Sanfillippo**, a graduate student in the Department of Literature, is preparing for her Ph.D. examination and working under the supervision of Murray Baumgarten on the history and literature of the Venice ghetto.

**Daniel Selden**, Professor of Literature, received the John Dizikes Teaching Award in Humanities this year in recognition of his outstanding teaching of courses that range from the literature of the ancient and classical worlds to medieval Kabbalah. His article “Text Networks,” published in Ancient Narrative 8 (2009) is a contribution to the problem of the canonical formation of the Hebrew Bible.

**Avi Tchamni**, Lecturer in Music, was the recipient this year of a fellowship from the Summer Institute for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, sponsored in part by the Schusterman Foundation. SIIS assists faculty in colleges and universities with the design of new courses in the field of Israeli Studies.

**Bruce Thompson**, Lecturer in History and Literature, gave two lectures this year for the Senior Connections Program at Temple Beth-El in Apts: “Jews on Broadway” considered why the sons and daughters of Jewish immigrants dominated the Broadway musical theater composers, librettists, and choreographers for more than half a century. And a lecture in memory of his late colleague Stanley Flatté, entitled “Einstein’s Jewish World,” examined what Einstein thought about the Jews, and what the Jews thought about Einstein, while also pondering the sociological phenomenon of the “over-representation” of Jews in physics over the course of the twentieth century.

**Anika Walke**, a graduate student in the History of Consciousness Department, working under the direction of Barbara Epstein, is completing a dissertation entitled “Jewish Struggle for Survival in Eastern Belorussia: Gendering Resistance, Gendering Memory.” Drawing on oral histories that she gathered in Russia and Belorussia, as well as on the collections of the Oral History Branch of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (where she was a fellow in 2010) and the Shoah Foundation in Los Angeles, the dissertation explores the role of gender in the struggle for survival during the war and the construction of memory in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts.
PAULA DACCARETT

A generous grant from the Foundation for Jewish Culture has enabled the Center for Jewish studies to bring Paula Daccarett to the campus for a two-year term as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of History. The grant is part of the FJC’s Jewish Studies Expansion Program, a new initiative supported by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation. The Jim Joseph Fellowship is awarded, after a national competition, to a small number of Jewish Studies programs that have demonstrated both a record of past excellence and a promise of future growth.

Born in Colombia, educated at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at Brandeis University, Paula Daccarett wrote her dissertation under the direction of Benjamin Ravid, a renowned scholar of Venetian-Jewish history. His pioneering work on the legal, economic and social history of the Jews of Venice served as a model for Paula’s work on the Jewish community of Salonica, one of the principal port cities of the Ottoman Empire, with a rich history of interaction among diverse religious and ethnic communities. Paula recently shared with us some reflections on the Jim Joseph Fellowship, her work on Salonica, and her plans for teaching courses and organizing special events at UCSC.

The Center for Jewish Studies is delighted to welcome you as a Jim Joseph Fellow this year. Could you describe the terms of the fellowship for our readers?

I am honored to have been selected as the Jim Joseph Fellow in Jewish Studies and am excited to be part of the broader UCSC community. The Jim Joseph Fellowship is part of the Jewish Studies Expansion Program, whose aim is to promote and expand Jewish Studies courses and events on university campuses. And the promotion of academic Jewish studies is part of an even broader, forward-looking vision of bringing into conversation scholars, artists and the general public around Jewish history and culture. As for my teaching, I’ll offer four courses during each of the two years of the fellowship. They will be focused, at least this year, on the modern period. In the winter I’ll teach two courses, one on Latin American Jewish history and one on gender and Jewish women. This spring, my two courses will be a broad survey of Jewish history and a more specialized course on Jewish life in eastern Mediterranean port cities. We also have a few events in the works, although they are yet to be finalized. They include a fall quarter lecture—possibly a movie screening—on the Sephardim, or Spanish Jews, of Salonica, an eastern Mediterranean city that was part of the Ottoman Empire for nearly six centuries. In winter quarter, we will host scholars who will discuss Argentinian Jewish life as well as Baghdadi Jewish and Indian Jewish women’s history. And, in the spring, we’ll have an art curator who will present an audio-visual exploration of the history, impact and legacy of Jewish musicians on Iraqi music. Altogether, the Jewish Studies Program has quite an exciting range of courses and events, and I hope that the broader community will join UCSC in the conversation!

You have had a very interesting itinerary thus far: Colombia, Israel, Brandeis, and now California... How did you become a scholar in the field of Jewish Studies?

I came to Jewish history partly out of sheer intellectual curiosity and partly from a desire to explore my Jewish identity that started when I was a teenager. After completing high school in Colombia, I lived in Israel for five years, where I studied political science. After that, I returned to Colombia and then came to the United States to study at Brandeis University. It was there, really, where I was formally introduced to academic Jewish studies, and history in particular. I was hooked. History is truly a beautiful discipline, part art, part science, and I’ve come to appreciate the Jewish experience not only as a way of exploring internal Jewish life, but also as a means of assessing surrounding societies and the cross-fertilization of cultures. Moreover, exploring Jewish civilization is truly a way of engaging in global history. Take, for instance, the case of Iberian/Sephardi Jewries, whose crisscross of the Mediterranean from medieval down to modern times reveals dynamics in and between Christendom and the lands of Islam. Sephardic history in the early modern period also ties in with the changing intellectual climate in western Europe and the global economic shift away from a Mediterranean-based economy towards an Atlantic one. So, I like to encourage students, including those who might otherwise think Jewish Studies is not relevant to them or their interests, to take courses in this exciting field; I really believe they will enrich their perspectives on their own academic concentrations, whichever these might be.

Jewish Studies at UCSC has tended to focus on the Ashkenazi world: the Jews of Europe and North America. You complement those strengths by bringing expertise in Sephardic, Mizrahi, and South American Jewish histories and cultures. How did you come to add so much diversity to your menu of research and teaching?

My courses offer a broad geographic and multicultural scope that includes, but is not limited to, the Ashkenazi experience. Exploring multiple Jewish experiences allows for comparative analysis that results in a more nuanced, fuller understanding of the legal, cultural-ethnic and national elements of Jewish civilization. Take, for instance, commonplace associations made about Jewish culinary culture. In the US, matzoh ball soup, bagels and brisket tend to be regarded as timeless, universal Jewish staples, yet you won’t find these dishes in traditional Sephardic and Syrian Jewish culinary repertoires. Jewish cultures have dishes that, by and large, are similar to those of the peoples around whom they lived. They also reflect tastes and flavors that were acquired through a migratory pattern and thus, differ somewhat from those of their neighbors. Yet it’s the laws of kashrut, and the rhythms and festivities of the Jewish calendar, that create a common denominator to Jewish food and that mark it as distinctive. A comparative approach—whether the subject be food, institutional history, or the legal status of the...
Jews—best illustrates commonalities and differences in Jewish societies across time and place. A comparative approach is also useful in emphasizing the challenge that Jewish history presents to “essentialist, national” modern identities that continue to insist on the correlation of territorial boundary with ethnicity and culture. Take, again, the Ashkenazi and Sephardi experiences: Germany and Iberia might have been the wellsprings for these cultures, but it is Eastern Europe, in the former case, and the Balkans, in the latter, where they achieved some of their richest expressions. All this, in other words, is a tremendous reminder that cultures are not static and isolated but responsive or reactive, consciously or unconsciously, to broader social and historical contexts.

You have written a dissertation, and are preparing a book, on the now-vanished Jewish community of Salonica. How did you become interested in that topic? What kind of research did you do? What are some of the principal challenges and rewards of work on Salonica Jewry?

I initially became interested in Sephardic Jewries because of my upbringing in Latin America. My attraction toward the Mediterranean also owes to family. I grew up in a home of Ashkenazi and Christian Arab background and in a social environment with Levantine qualities. Yet I developed an interest in Salonica after reading that in this, the third most important port city of the late Ottoman Empire, commercial and portuary activity came to a near standstill on Shabbat. While I couldn’t quite articulate why at the time, I somehow knew that Salonica would be a fascinating environment through which to explore processes associated with Jewish modernity. Sephardi Jews settled there in the 15th and 16th centuries, in the aftermath of the Spanish expulsion, and became the preponderant element, demographically, culturally and economically, in the life of the city. In my dissertation I set out to explore the development of a remarkable network of Jewish social, educational and medical services—including a first-rate hospital—in the late Ottoman period. The institutions, the leadership that promoted them, and philanthropy itself contributed to the formation of a modern Salonican Jewish identity. While conducting research, I also began to trace how charitable and philanthropic discourses contributed, with the support of the Ladino press, to the emergence of a modern civic and participatory culture in Jewish society. The exploration of this process, including greater demands for Jewish administrative transparency, is the focus of my current research. The greatest reward in researching Salonica has been, as happens to historians at large, the sheer pleasure of engaging in dialogue with the sources. I’ve been fortunate to find good material to work with, but I am also constantly reminded of all that I won’t get to explore, given the catastrophic loss of centuries worth of Jewish materials in the 1917 fire that razed Salonica to the ground, and the fate of Salonica’s Jews in the Holocaust.

LETTER

Studies major. Your help and financial support have been crucial, showing the way for the campus to do this. We thank you for all your support: individual donors and especially Anne Neufeld-Levin (and her husband Paul) who established the Neufeld-Levin Chair in Holocaust Studies that began the process; the Koret Foundation; the David B. Gold Foundation; the Jewish Community Endowment Fund of the San Francisco Federation; and, for the appointment of Paula Daccarett, the Jim Joseph Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Culture.

And special thanks go, as always, to the Helen Diller Family Foundation, which has played such a vital role in enabling our program to flourish since its inception more than a decade ago.

Murray Baumgarten and Nathaniel Deutsch
Co-directors, Jewish Studies at UCSC

LANGUAGE

One class during each week of instruction emphasizes some aspect of cultural history, from the milieu that produced the poignant narrative of the Book of Ruth to the latest trends in the cinema of modern Israel. Hebrew language instruction at UCSC functions both as a gateway to the University’s rich menu of courses on Jewish cultures, ancient and modern, and as an indispensable prerequisite for advanced students who need the language for independent research in primary sources.

While the tradition of Hebrew language instruction at UCSC is almost as old as the institution itself, the advent of formal instruction in Yiddish is an exciting new development. Jon Levitow, who offered the first class in Yiddish at UCSC last spring, reports that he had a full complement of 25 students and had to turn away others for lack of space. One colleague in the field suggested that such a large number of students for a class in Yiddish might earn an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records. (If only that venerable reference book had a category for Yiddish instruction!)

Yiddish, Isaac Bashevis Singer once observed, “was never spoken by military men, police, people of power... It was the language of the tailor, the storekeeper, the Talmud teacher, the rabbi, the matchmaker, the servant girl”—a language that continues to attract students because of the “magic” of its expressive possibilities. And as Jon Levitow suggests, “Yiddish is German, Hebrew, Polish, Aramaic, and Old French, medieval European and modern Jewish history—it’s seven classes for the price of one!”
The faculty, staff, and students of the Jewish Studies Program at UC Santa Cruz would like to thank all of those who have given so generously. Special thanks go to our major benefactors and sponsors: The Helen Diller Family Endowment, Anne Neufeld-Levin, The Koret Foundation, The David B. Gold Foundation, the Jewish Community Federation Endowment Fund, the Jim Joseph Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Culture. Their leadership and support has made the present and the future achievements of Jewish Studies at UCSC possible.

David and Sarah Altergood
Isaac and Avital Agam
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
Lisa and Ernest Auerbach
Sally Ann Auerbach
Murray and Sheila Baumgarten
Ilan and Tammi Benjamin
Tracy L. Bennet
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