From the Director

Jewish Studies is off to a great start! Over 250 students enrolled in our Fall ’14 courses, and even more have already enrolled for Spring ’15, when we will offer four courses never before taught at SMU, for an annual total of 22 classes. Our faculty also continues to expand as more SMU professors offer courses in Jewish Studies. Our courses provide students of all backgrounds a broad examination of Jewish culture and religion as well as the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Building on this tremendous success, Jewish Studies plans to introduce a minor beginning in Fall 2015.

Beyond its curricular focus, Jewish Studies hosted two lunch and lecture events (story, next column) and the fall Nate and Ann Levine Endowed Lecture Series (story, p.2). The Jewish Studies Interdisciplinary Research Cluster is examining Jewish self-representation in various media (story, p.2).

To help sustain this endeavor, we are seeking significant startup entrepreneurial gifts. Please join our efforts by making your contribution now.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Shira Lander
Director of Jewish Studies

SMU Launches Campus-wide Lunch and Lecture Programs

Gil Hoffman, senior political analyst at the Jerusalem Post, addressed an SMU audience on “Peace, Politics and Plutonium: An Insider’s Look at the Middle East Mayhem” on November 5, 2014. Hoffman summarized the history of the State of Israel, explored the difficulties of living in a terrorist-threatened and war-torn region, and answered questions about the prospects of peace for Israel and the Middle East. He highlighted some of Israel’s remarkable achievements and outlined the country’s challenges. Those who attended left with a deeper understanding of the Middle East context. The program was made possible by The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas.

On December 2, Dan Arbell spoke to an audience of over 50 people at SMU Law School’s Karcher Auditorium. Arbell analyzed the history of the political relationship between Israel, the U.S., and Turkey, followed by a discussion moderated by Prof. Joshua Rovner, John Goodwin Tower Distinguished Chair in International Politics and National Security Policy. The Tower Center co-sponsored the event, which was made possible by the American Jewish Committee of Dallas.

Save the date:

NATE AND ANN LEVINE ENDOWED LECTURE SERIES IN JEWISH STUDIES

Adele Reinhartz, Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada: “Holy Words in Hollywood: The Ten Commandments and American Identity” Wednesday, April 15, 7:30 pm in McCord Auditorium, Dallas Hall
SMU Awards Research Grant to Jewish Studies

The Dedman College Interdisciplinary Institute sponsors research clusters convened by various faculty across campus. These clusters are open to faculty and students from any and all disciplines and departments. The Jewish Studies Research Cluster received a grant to explore how Jews have used a range of media, namely visual culture and written publications, to represent themselves and their socio-political objectives to a non-Jewish public in order to garner sympathy from and create alliances with members of the dominant society in which they were situated.

At the first session, Elena Gittleman, Masters Degree Candidate in Art History, presented her research on the ancient Galilean synagogue of Huqoq, which she helped excavate this past summer. Using the Samson mosaic (pictured above), she explored a key issue for scholars of Late Antique/Early Byzantine Jewish art: how do we understand the similarities between Jewish and Christian depictions of the same motif in this period?

Meghan M. Wadle, Instructor of English and PhD Candidate, will present her research at the next session on Jewish female garment workers’ use of literature in the early twentieth century as a vehicle for political activism. Wadle argues that as these women participated in strikes, unions, and the women’s suffrage movement, literature formed one way for these women to adapt, extend, and examine the concept of American national identity to the Jewish union reformer. Her larger project covers a great deal of historical ground as it looks at how and why New England Protestant factory workers in the antebellum era, and Jewish women in the early twentieth century, turned towards print culture to defend their dignity, while other female factory workers from alternate cultural backgrounds (e.g. Irish, Italian, French Canadian) seem to have taken almost no interest in print.

Nate and Ann Levine Endowed Lecture Draws Over 200

Rabbi Dr. Shai Cherry spoke to an overflow crowd in McCord Auditorium on the topic of “Judaism and Darwinism” on October 28. He traced how various religious groups reacted to the theory of human evolution and proposed that Jewish understandings of Genesis 1-3 were wholly compatible with a scientific understanding of the universe.

Faculty Highlights

Janice Bergman-Carton, Associate Professor of Art History, assisted in curating the Latino Cultural Center exhibit, “Uptown’s Pike Park: Little Jerusalem to Little Mexico, 100 Years of Settlement,” exploring the Dallas immigrant experience.

Mark Chancey, Professor of Religious Studies, co-edited the recently-published volume, The Bible in the Public Square: Its Enduring Influence in American Life. He also published two related articles on the same topic as well as “The Ethnicities of Galilee,” “Capernaum,” and “Jerusalem in the New Testament Period.”


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(as of December 5, 2014)