American public higher education is in economic crisis, trimming faculty, cutting programs. Nearly all university departments and programs are coming under pressures to work smarter and do more with less resources. In Michigan, the public higher education crisis reflects the especially deep recession and structural changes in our state’s economy. At MSU, colleges are currently considering 20% cumulative cuts, including losses of faculty and staff, reorganization of operations, and the possible elimination of some programs.

MSU Jewish Studies is healthy, having recently completed a successful academic review highlighting our strengths. These include student interest and enrollment in the undergraduate specialization, the strength and scholarly accomplishments of our faculty, and the program’s visibility. Yet we too are asked to economize, to do our share, and to raise greater needed funds from external sources.

Our plans include seeking modest support, fiscal and otherwise, from other colleges at MSU. Our student specialists come from many colleges; our faculty and courses are spread in five colleges and nine -ten departments. Our plans also include seeking increased support from friends in Michigan and elsewhere. We will seek a special gift to name the program and several new endowments. A matching gift challenge is already underway to bolster the Serling and Friends Israel Studies endowment and several contributions have been received. Please let us know if you would like to participate in the matching gift challenge.

We will also be undertaking new initiatives to generate higher program visibility. One initiative is a new partnership with the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills to offer a lecture series on “new directions in Holocaust scholarship,” to begin in spring.

Amidst all this, we will continue to recruit new students for the specialization and for our study abroad programs in Israel. Recent letters from students highlight the importance of the specialization and of study abroad in Israel in influencing student learning and careers. Ariana Segal (08) writes below, for example, she is now studying Diplomacy and Conflict at the Interdisciplinary School Herzliya in Israel; Josh Kaplan (08) writes that he is at Cardozo Law School and will spend a semester at Tel Aviv University Law school.

We will also mount an ambitious schedule of events on and off campus in 2009-10. In fall, we will host scholars and artists speaking on the integration of Indian Jews in Israel, on black-white integration in Detroit, and on the place of the Ten Commandments in American culture.

We will sponsor faculty brown-bags and show Israeli films. Finally, we will host Gaylen Ross, the director of Killing Kasztner, a film on the Kasztner train and the crisis of Hungarian Jewry in the Holocaust (and also honor the late Janos Kende, who was aboard the train).

If you are in a position to contribute, please consider giving to MSU Jewish Studies.

~Ken Waltzer, Director

Special Guest Speaker: Indian Israelis

Monday, October 19.

Maina Chawla Singh, Visiting Scholar, American University, will conduct a seminar on “Collecting Migration Narratives of Indian Jewish Women: Reflections.” The seminar will meet in 321 Linton Hall, 12:00-1:30 pm (Bagels served.)

Maina Chawla Singh will lecture that night on “Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Culture and Identity Among Indian Jews in Israel.” The lecture will be held in the MSU Union Green Room, 7:00-8:30 pm. Dr. Singh’s new book Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Homeland (2009), which examines three Jewish communities in Israel from India has just been published.

Kessler Film Event: “Killing Kasztner”

Monday, November 16

Kessler Film Event: - “Killing Kasztner” with Director, Gaylen Ross.

Original documentary film about Israel Kasztner who bargained with the Nazis to allow 1700 Jews to leave Hungary in 1944, among them a child who later became MSU professor Janos Kende. In the 1950s in Israel, Kasztner was tried for collaboration, found guilty, exonerated, on appeal, and then assassinated. What should we make of the Kasztner story? Co-sponsored with the MSU Library.

Discussion to follow with Gaylen Ross. What is the legacy of Kasztner? Was he a hero, a rescuer? Why was he such a tragic figure?

7:00 pm, 4th Floor, MSU Library
Updates from Former Jewish Studies Specialists

I wanted to take the time to thank you for your guidance during my studies at Michigan State University, with specific attention to your dedication to the Jewish Studies specialization... The Jewish Studies program was the perfect supplement to my BA in International Relations.

I gained an overall better perspective of Jewish and Israeli aspects of Middle-Eastern history, Jewish thought, Israeli politics, Jewish literature, and just a greater overall perspective of the world.

I was so inspired that I completed my field experience, a James Madison College requirement, by assisting research about Israeli political thought with Professor Yael Aronoff and by conducting my own research project on antisemitism.

As you know, I was hired out of Undergrad as the Assistant Director of the Michigan region Anti-Defamation League. Now, I am pursuing a higher degree in Diplomacy and Conflict Studies at the Interdisciplinary School Herzliya in Israel.

I cannot thank the faculty of Jewish Studies enough. Yael Aronoff, Ellen Rothfeld, Marc Bernstein, and you have genuinely helped me make my professional and academic choices.

Ariana Segal, Michigan State University, Class of 2008

After working as a Legacy Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, I’ve decided to attend Cardozo Law School in New York. Cardozo is the law school for Yeshiva University, includes a clinical program to represent Holocaust victims, as well as a full semester studying at Tel Aviv University Law School.

As I continue to move forward with my career, I have spent a lot of time looking back at how I got to where I am. I wanted to say thanks to faculty in the Jewish Studies program for all they have done for me. I still look back to freshman year when I took that two semester studying at Tel Aviv University Law School.

and Gregg Kruppa of the Detroit News.

Josh Kaplan, Michigan State University, Class Of 2008

Monday, September 21


7:30 pm, 147 Communication Arts Building

Monday, October 19

Faculty-Student Seminar and Brown Bag - (bagels served)
Maina Chawla Singh, University of Delhi, Visiting Scholar, American University
“Collecting Migration Narratives of Indian Jewish Women: Reflections”
12:00-1:30 pm, 321 Linton Hall

Public Lecture -
“Being Indian, Being Israeli: Migration, Culture and Identity Among Indian Jews in Israel”
7:00-8:30 pm, MSU Union Green Room
Co-sponsored by History, Asian Studies, and Asian Pacific American Studies.

Wednesday, October 28

The MSU Theater Department presents Joanna McClelland Glass’ "Palmer Park."
A play about efforts to create and sustain an integrated multi-racial community in the Palmer Park area of Detroit in the wake of the Detroit riots. Followed by a discussion with the playwright, director, and others. For ticket ($8 admission) and show information please visit: http://theatre.msu.edu/Productions/Shows/FI2009-PalmerPark.
7:30 pm, Auditorium, Arena Theatre

The Wed. showing is co-sponsored by Jewish Studies.

Wednesday, November 4

Guest Speaker: Jenna Weismann Joselit
Professor of Jewish Studies, Princeton University.
“Romancing the Stone: America’s Embrace of the Ten Commandments.”
Jenna Joselit examines how a covenantal relationship with the ancient Hebrews became an American article of faith.
7:00-9:00 pm, MSU Union, Green Room

Jewish Studies Faculty Brown Bags

Wednesday, September 30: Yael Aronoff, Serling & Friends Assistant Professor of Israeli Studies, MSU. “Benjamin Netanyahu: Running to Stand Still.”
12:00-1:30 pm, 321 Linton Hall.

12:00-1:30 pm, 321 Linton Hall.

Friday, November 20: Kirsten Fermaglich, Associate Professor, Department of History, MSU.
“Becoming Someone Else: Jewish Name-Changing, Employment and Class Mobility in Mid-Twentieth Century New York City.”
Co-sponsored by MSU Dept. of History and Jewish Studies.
12:15-1:30 pm, MSU Museum Auditorium.
Hebrew University Faculty Member to Offer Short Course in January 2010

David Mendelsson, who teaches in the Israel Studies Institute at Hebrew University’s Rothberg International School, will visit Michigan State University in January 2010 to offer a collaborative short-study course in James Madison College, January 19-28, 2009, pending course approval. The course, which is open to any interested students, will explore a range of contemporary internal schisms in the Israeli state and society. These divisions include the religious-secular divide, the ethnic gap between Ashkenazi (European) Jews and Mizrachim (Jews from North Africa and Asia), and the national gap between Jews and Arabs in Israel. The class will also focus on conflicting Jewish attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially between religious-settlers and secular Zionists.

Finally, the course will also study post-Zionism and its academic expressions and conflicts over Israeli history. A final class will survey competing future paradigms for the country: a Jewish-democratic state, a bi-national state, or something new based on citizenship and not nationality, ethnicity or religion. The course will meet nightly January 19 - January 28 in 339 Case Hall, 7:00-9:00 pm.

New Hebrew Professor-Ya’acov Sarig

We are pleased to welcome Ya’acov Sarig to Michigan State University, who as a member of the Department of Linguistics and Languages will be teaching students in second level Hebrew this year as well as courses in Israeli culture in IAH and Israeli literature in English. Professor Sarig has extensive teaching experience in the U.S. and Israel and earned his Ph.D. in Jewish folklore at the Hebrew University. His specialty is folk tales, those from Scandinavia to those of Yemenite Jewry.

MSU Jewish Studies Summer Program At Hebrew University, 2009

Six MSU undergraduates participated in this year’s Jewish Studies Summer Program at the Hebrew University led by Professor Marc Bernstein. The support of Levy and Slade scholarships defrayed almost all program costs. Students included Jewish and Christian students. Only one had spent any significant amount of time living in the country, yet all were able to adapt to the culture, absorb huge amounts of knowledge and experience, and also see the country and meet its people on their own.

We began our stay living four days on Nahalal, the first moshav (a form of collective agricultural settlement). We participated in a beautiful kabalat shabat (“welcoming the Sabbath”) service and then each had dinner and a night in a family home. During the next several days we learned about the settlement and toured the full length and breadth of the Jezreel Valley, as the famous pioneering song goes, “From Beit Alfa all the way to Nahalal.”

From Nahalal we continued to Jerusalem to begin our program. Professor Bernstein’s class on the historical and cultural geography of Jerusalem took advantage of the students’ presence in Jerusalem to delve into the city’s rich past, explore its present, and look to possible futures. Field trips to diverse archaeological and cultural treasures, under the guidance of professional guide Barak Zemer, traced the history of Jerusalem from its ancient Canaanite origins to the present. Students learned about the major events in Jerusalem’s history, its place in the human imagination, and its significance over the millennia as a site of tremendous cultural innovation. Central to our considerations was the notion of constructed collective memory and the competition over sacred space. In addition to the myriad sites visited, highlights for the students included private meetings with a Sufi sheikh, a Greek Orthodox monk, a Palestinian community organizer, a couple of members of the ultraorthodox (Haredi) community, and a woman who grew up in a settlement in Judea. Students kept academic response journals, posted detailed and illustrated tour reports, and did final research projects.

Students also studied with Dr. David Mendelsson on the emergence of the modern State of Israel. This class surveyed ideological, political and social developments surrounding the collective identity of the Jewish community in Palestine from the beginnings of political Zionism through the sixty-one years of statehood. As part of this course, students explored the National Cemetery at Mt. Herzl, the Eastern Galilee, as well as important Zionist sites in Tel Aviv during this centennial year of the founding of “the first Jewish city.”

See the program blog (http://2009msujerusalem.blogspot.com/).

Professor Yael Aronoff, the Serling and Friends Assistant Professor of Israel Studies, will lead the Program in 2010. For more details, contact and see: http://studyabroad.msu.edu/programs/israeljewish.html.

Marc, Ben, Halli, Aviva, Amy, Alex, and Jason in the Old City of Jerusalem.


Benjamin Pollock’s first book, Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy, was published by Cambridge University Press in March. His entry on “Franz Rosenzweig” appeared in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and his “Speaking with Isaiah: Franz Rosenzweig’s Redemptive Imperialism” (Hebrew) appeared in the volume God will not Stand Still: Jewish Modernity and Political Theology (Hebrew). Benjamin is currently working on a short book that re-examines Rosenzweig’s near conversion to Christianity and his return to Judaism.

Elen Rothfeld met developers of the Jerusalem based Ulpan-Or in July in Israel, observing and discussing strategies and materials for teaching Hebrew. In Spring, she piloted Ulpan Or’s E-tone, an electronic news digest, making MSU the first American university to use the program. Doing so improved students’ Hebrew proficiency skills and knowledge of Israeli society.


Ken Walter spoke on “The Children of Buchenwald” at the 8th Morris and Doris Rosen Summer Seminar for North Carolina Teachers at Appalachian State in July 2009. He will present on “Schlieben: A Forgotten Concentration Camp” and also chair a panel on “The New Anti-Semitism” at the Association of Jewish Studies meeting in Los Angeles in December. Ken is a contributing editor of the on-line Menorah Journal.

**Academic News**

Yael Aronoff has been reappointed as the Serling and Friends Assistant Professor of Israel Studies. Her article, “From Hawks to Peacemakers: A Comparison of Two Israeli Prime Ministers” was published by Israel Studies Forum 24:1 (Spring 2009). Another article, “From Warfare to Withdrawal: The Legacy of Ariel Sharon” has been accepted for publication in Israel Studies (Spring 2010). Professor Aronoff is completing her book manuscript, When Hard-Liners Opt for Peace.


Marc Bernstein will be on sabbatical during 2009-2010 working on the intersection of Jewish and Muslim traditions surrounding figures central in the scriptural and post-scriptural traditions of each culture. He is preparing a critical edition of the Judeo-Arabic text, The Story of Our Master Joseph, and also an article on the Jewish and Islamic extra-scriptural tradition surrounding Moses. He will also continue study of the use by modern Hebrew authors of traditional motifs in their writings, working toward a collection titled Conversations: Revival, Return, and Revolution in Modern Hebrew Literature.

Ilana Blumberg delivered a paper called “Suicide and Sacrifice: A Tale of Two Cities and Victorian Ethics,” at the Dickens Conference at Hebrew University in Jerusalem (June 2009). In July, she taught a seminar on writing memoir for the Shaindy Rudoff Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan University. Her book, “Houses of Study: A Jewish Woman Among Books” came out in paperback in March 2009. James Madison College has nominated her for the MSU Teacher-Scholar Award 2009-2010.

Kirsten Fermaglich attended the Posen Summer Seminar on Jewish Secularism in Berkeley CA in June and conducted research this summer in NYC under a Milstein Family fellowship. She will present her findings on name-changing in Jewish fraternal organizations at a Milstein conference on the NY Jewish community in November. She will also present on name-changing at the Myth of Silence conference at UCLA in October and the American Studies Association conference in Washington DC in November.


Ken Waltzer spoke on “The Children of Buchenwald” at the 8th Morris and Doris Rosen Summer Seminar for North Carolina Teachers at Appalachian State in July 2009. He will present on “Schlieben: A Forgotten Concentration Camp” and also chair a panel on “The New Anti-Semitism” at the Association of Jewish Studies meeting in Los Angeles in December. Ken is a contributing editor of the on-line Menorah Journal.