

Jewish Studies Summer Program at Hebrew University: 2016 Report

Led by: Professor Yore Kedem



Left to right: Y. Kedem, S. Milroy, K. Waineo, A. Bergman, C. Worley, J. Dresner near the Jaffa gate to the Old City

The 2016 MSU Jewish Studies Summer Program at Hebrew University took place over four weeks, at the Mt. Scopus Campus of Hebrew University. Five students took two classes, studying about the emergence of the State of Israel, and investigating several aspects of immigration and cultural diversity.

The first class, taught by Prof. David Mendelsson, a faculty member at the Hebrew University's Rothberg School, gave students the tools with which they could understand the emergence of the State of Israel from its origins in the late nineteenth century until today. It dealt with the key issues of nation building, the triangular conflict between the Zionists, the British and the Arabs, the emerging religious, ethnic and national tensions and the evolution of the Arab-Israel conflict. The class asked the critical question of how such a diverse society manages its differences. Students visited several historically significant sites, met visiting lecturers, and in Tel Aviv saw some of the locations related to the beginnings of Zionism, and the Rabin Memorial. They also visited Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem and the Ma'ale Film School to see student films and discuss the complexities and variations of Orthodoxy in Israel.

I taught the second class, entitled *Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Israel*. This is an inquiry-based class, in which students design their own research projects. To help students come up with the topics for these projects, we discussed several materials - including academic and literary readings, as well as several videos. These materials dealt with the relationships between Zionism and Israel's Arab minority, immigration, and the way that different groups engage in Israeli society. Our classroom activities also included multiple presentations by students, both of their research in progress and of the readings, cultivating ideas for research and discussing the nature of qualitative field research.



Students at the City Hall in Ashdod

Much of this class was spent out and about, mostly in Jerusalem. On the very first day of class, students and instructor took to central Jerusalem for an observation exercise. For this exercise, students were asked to sit in the Ben Yehuda Street mall, observe for two hours, write down their observations, and talk to at least three people in the street. Students talked to several individuals, including a small group of Jews for Jesus, a first time experience for them. Some students also began asking questions relevant to their project. For example, Siaira Milroy, who wrote about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how it is perceived by Israelis, met an interviewee who told her that the whole land of Israel was promised to the Jews by G-d, and that therefore, she didn't believe in a two-state solution, representing a minority view.

The following week began with a tour of religious communities in Jerusalem. This tour emphasized boundaries - visible and invisible - in the Old City and between modern central Jerusalem and more religious neighborhoods such as Meah Shearim.

"I interned at the International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace, where I conducted research and wrote articles pertaining to counter-terrorism and assisted its president with her own academic writings. I especially enjoyed our discussions about Iran, where much of my family still lives. Through my time there I have developed a very positive view of the State of Israel, of Israeli culture, and most of all the people. I also was able to travel across Israel and see sites which I have long dreamed of visiting. I now more than ever want to schedule a return visit." —Pejman Masrouri, Levy Scholarship Recipient

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K. Waineo contributes to the class mural at Bridge Over the Wadi

Within about five hours, students experienced about 2500 years of history, and at least four distinct cultures. We approached the Old City from the north, entering it from the Lion's Gate. We continued to walk through the Via Dolorosa and ate hummus in the Muslim Quarter. Passing the invisible boundary into the Christian Quarter, students toured the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Leaving the Old City, we went through the Mamila Street mall, to Meah Shearim, where students learned about this insular religious community's plans to protest the light rail system due to its perceived links to immodesty. On the following day, students visited the Western Wall, and went to the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem to conduct their second observation assignment. During this assignment Ariel Bergman, who studied families in major cities in Israel, interviewed a woman with three small children, all under 5 years of age. Ariel interviewed her about her kids and she mentioned that she was a *Ba'alat Teshuva*, that is, a secular Jew who became religious. Ariel learned from this interview about the differences in the values that this woman learned as a child, and those she wants to pass on to her children.

During the second week of class, we transitioned to studying immigration to Israel since the 1980s. We went on an excursion to Ashdod, a port city which has absorbed Jewish immigrants ever since the 1950s. Hosted by the City Hall, we met Aliyah coordinators who help support immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and France. Each of them has made aliyah from these locations, and they told the students about their experiences immigrating and working with immigrants. After a tour of the city, we were invited by the mayor's office to have lunch at one of Ashdod's excellent restaurants. Kaila Waineo, who studied Russian immigrants in Israel and their integration into a multi-cultural society, used this opportunity to ask questions of the coordinators, librarians, and other Immigration Absorption officials we met.



Students with recent immigrants, working as immigration coordinators in Ashdod

The following Friday was spent in Tel Aviv, where we started our visit with a walk around Neve Sha'anun, a neighborhood populated mainly by migrant laborers and refugees from Sudan and Eritrea. Following this tour, we went to the Carmel Market and Nahalat Binyamin, the location of Tel Aviv's main arts and crafts market. Here students engaged in the third observation exercise. During this exercise, Caitlyn Worley, who researched immigration from the Horn of Africa to Israel, interviewed an Ethiopian Oleh about the difference in his experiences living in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv. He told her that he found Tel Aviv to be more accepting of him, and discussed dreaming of Jerusalem in Ethiopia, only to be disappointed that he didn't want to live there.

The following week began with a trip to Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, and ended with a visit to Wadi Ara, an area in Northern Israel, mostly populated by Arab citizens. We visited Bridge over the Wadi, one of Israel's few bi-cultural, bi-lingual schools, and the only one in Israel where Jewish children from the area commute to an Arab town to go to school. We met the school principal, who talked with the students about the vision, daily work, and challenges the school faces. The students had an opportunity to interact, play and make art with the kids who were there for a summer camp. Jordyn Dresner, who studied families from different parts of Israeli society, asked the school's principal about student interactions at the school, and how the values that they bring from home influence these interactions.

Students presented their research in class, and wrote final papers. They will be invited to share their findings at the first annual Jewish Studies Student Research Conference on April 21st. We are hopeful that their growth through the Israel experience will help them enrich their own understanding and that of fellow students, as they continue to study these complex issues in Israel and in other contexts. — *Yore Kedem*.

"One afternoon, we stood in the campus rose garden to discern differences among living conditions among West Bank Palestinians, East Jerusalem Arabs, and Israelis. The small things, like the size and the paving of the roads, serve as stark markers of the socioeconomic disparities. These experiences have impacted me significantly and have inspired me to return to Israel next summer to learn more about how the State of Israel balances its commitment to being both a Jewish and a democratic state through an internship with the Knesset."

—*Kaila Waineo, Levy and Slade Scholarship Recipient*

"I truly enjoyed my experience in Israel and learned more than I expected about the country and also myself. The country is so complex that it seems the more one tries to learn about it the more confused one gets, but it seems also the more I learn the more I want to get confused and I think it will be the same for anyone else." —*Saira Milroy, Levy and Slade Scholarship Recipient*