

ISRAEL STUDY ABROAD REPORT: JEWISH STUDIES SUMMER PROGRAM AT HEBREW UNIVERSITY

During the month of July 2018, 14 students participated in the MSU Jewish Studies Program at Hebrew University. Students from James Madison College, the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, Political Science, the College of Education and other departments took two classes at the Rothberg International School on the Mount Scopus campus. Students were eligible for and received generous funding from the Ed Levy, Jr. and Linda Dresner Levy Endowed Fund for Scholarships for Student Leaders Studying in Israel, which covered their program fees. A few students also received support from the Ed and Dot Slade Israel Study Scholarship and the Albert and Sharie Gladner Study in Israel Scholarship.

This program included two classes: The Emergence of the Modern State of Israel, taught by David Mendelsson (Lecturer, Rothberg International School, Hebrew University), and Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Israel, taught by Yore Kedem (Assistant Professor of Hebrew, Department of Linguistics and Languages, MSU). Students stayed at the Student Village at Hebrew University, and in addition to taking classes on campus, went on several field trips.

Professor Mendelsson's class included a trip to Tel Aviv, where students walked the streets where the Modern State of Israel came into being. They visited the area where the Declaration of Independence was made, and discussed the people who contributed to Israel's creation. Another field trip took the students to Mount Herzl, where students and professor discussed Israel's secular religion.

On the first day of Professor Kedem's class, students went for their first observation assignment in Central Jerusalem. They sat on Ben Yehuda Street, observed passers by, and talked to local people. During this exercise, the students began to think about their research project for this class. Subsequent observation exercises took place in the Old City of Jerusalem and on the Nahalat Binyamin Market in Tel Aviv. As students' engagement with locals increased, so did the depth of their observation and understanding on how cultural diversity and immigration play in Israeli society. In addition to these exercises, students went on a field trip to Yad Vashem, where they reflected on the Holocaust and its relationship to Modern Israel. Another trip was to the Wadi Ara area. On this trip, they observed the human geography of the area, thinking about the way Arabs and Jews lived and interacted there. At the Triangle Research and Development Center, they met a computer scientist from the Arab community who conducts research on machine learning and issues related to his community. Another field trip took them to Ashdod and the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, where they learned about a unique project designed to improve the lives of high school dropouts through science education. They were also privileged to host Siba Awad, the assistant to the Director of Summer Programs at Rothberg International School, who shared her experiences growing up as an Arab in East Jerusalem.

As this is an inquiry-based class, students designed projects to study the issues in its center by integrating their experiences and the readings into small scale qualitative research studies. These projects included topics such as immigration and education in Israel, the relationship between the secular Jews and the religious orthodox / ultra-orthodox Jews of Israel, religious identity expression and construction centered on linguistic manifestations in Modern Day Israel, diversity and education, and comparing Jewish identity in Israel and the

US. Through these projects students challenged their preconceptions of Israel and its society, grew in their understanding of their experiences in Israel, and were challenged to reflect and understand their personal religious and national identity. Students also reflected on how their understanding of cultural diversity and immigration changed both in Israel and in the United States.

For many students this experience changed their self understanding, and they felt encouraged to be involved in social issues in their future at MSU and beyond. As David Warshay wrote: “While I have been here before, I’ve never experienced Israel like this. It was definitely an eye opening experience and one that I will not soon forget.”

- Dr. Yore Kedem, program leader

