



**The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute  
for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel  
Michigan State University  
SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER**

# DIRECTOR NOTES



The Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel celebrates its intellectual community of students, faculty, staff, board members and supporters. We especially appreciate our vibrant community as the pain and stress of ongoing wars continue -- for Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese -- and while

antisemitism continues globally, nationally, and locally.

We are proud that our courses and programming foster education about a wide range of Jewish culture and history, while also teaching campus audiences specifically about the complexities of Israel, and about efforts at building peace. As just one example, we helped organize Israeli and Palestinian representatives of PeaceWorks on campus in November; these speakers modeled respectful dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders' organizations, and they offered pathways toward peace in the midst of a devastating war. We are in the process of organizing a return visit this spring to keep the dialogue moving. Students have remarked on the positive impact.

We continue to educate about antisemitism on campus in and outside the classroom. We are proud to have the Serling Institute publish the *Guide on Antisemitism for the MSU Community 2024*, which has been updated by co-authors Yael Aronoff, Kirsten Fermaglich, Amy Simon, and Ariana Mentzel. This fall we held training sessions on combating antisemitism and Islamophobia for over 500 students, faculty, and staff, and we look forward to continuing our "Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia" this Spring. We also are offering our 1-credit online course on antisemitism for the second time this year, and we will hold our ninth annual student forum on antisemitism this Spring.

We are excited to highlight the research of both our students and our faculty. We are thrilled to have 900 students enrolled in 31 of our courses with Jewish Studies content this academic year. Eight new students registered for the Jewish Studies minor this past fall, and we aim to have another ten register in the spring, to bring our total number of minors to fifty. We will hold our 9th annual Serling Institute Undergraduate Research Conference on April 17th. We also were thrilled to have been able to award 19 student scholarships this fall, covering the in-state

tuition for Jewish Studies courses in the amount of \$38,000 (see list of awardees on pages 12-13). We look forward to Professor Amy Simon and Professor Sherman Garnett leading our inaugural study abroad program in Poland this summer and hope that conditions will allow us to reinstate our long-standing study abroad program in Israel this summer as well.

Our programming is firmly connected to and enriches the courses that we teach, while offering us chances to collaborate with many units across the campus, as well as across the state and country. These events engage the teaching and research interests of our faculty, and the interests of our community. While 510 participants were able to engage our programs in person this past fall semester, the events that we record and post on our website also provide national and international visibility for our Institute. We recorded four of our Fall events, which have garnered 755 views thus far.

We look forward to a rich array of programming this spring. Among the highlights: multiple events in conjunction with a traveling exhibit from the U.S. Holocaust Museum examining Americans' responses to the Holocaust; an innovative exhibit and performance by Israeli visiting artists examining how food shapes our cultural connections as part of the Eli and Edythe Broad museum's theme exploring farmlands and food; and an exploration of Azerbaijan's Jewish heritage, which celebrates Jewish-Muslim cooperation and is itself a collaboration with multiple units on campus. We also are excited to feature four of our own faculty presenting their research in our monthly faculty research seminar. Please see the newsletter for more details about these programs, as well as student and alumnus highlights and awards, and faculty research engagement.

We hope to see you at our exciting events this semester! Wishing you a peaceful 2025.

Professor Yael Aronoff  
Director of the Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel.

If you have any questions about our Institute please email me at [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu) or call me at 517-303-6019.

# ACADEMIC NEWS

**Yael Aronoff** will be participating in the 41st Annual Conference of the Association of Israel Studies (AIS) at Haifa University, Israel, July 6-9, 2025, where she will present research on opposition parties to the current government, and on the political psychology of Benjamin Netanyahu. She will also participate in a roundtable on US-Israeli relations in the wake of 7 October and in the second Trump Administration. Dr. Aronoff serves on the conference program committee and is on the Board of the AIS. She has also been invited by Ghumrawi to participate in a panel discussion at Florida International University on the importance of Jerusalem to the monotheistic religions. Dr. Aronoff will join Dr. Saliba Sarsar and Dr. Mohammad Ghumrawi on that panel, as well as for a book/panel discussion at Coral Gables Congregational Church, "Jerusalem: Reflections of a Sacred Space" on February 2nd. On campus, Dr. Aronoff continues to educate about antisemitism through her participation in the four-part series "Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia" with colleagues Dr. Kirsten Fermaglich, Dr. Mohammad Khalil, Dr. Amy Simon, Dr. Morgan Shipley, Ralph Johnson from the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, and with the assistance of Ariana Mentzel. The "Conversations" are scheduled for this Spring semester.

**Andreas Bouroutis** has had several publications at the end of 2024 and expected in 2025. They include "Israelite members of the Greek Parliament," V. Gounaris (eds.), *Macedonia in the Greek Parliament, Political Discourse and Representation*, Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the Hellenic Parliament Foundation, Athens 2024; "The Abraham Accords and the Palestinian issue", *Journal of the Centre of Middle East Policy*, 2 (2024), Panteion University, Athens; "The Final Solution in Corfu: Implementation and Coordination of Various Agencies," *Yad Vashem Studies*, 52:2 (2024), Jerusalem, Israel; "The Macedonian Front: An Artist-Soldier's Experience of War", in *Balkanistica*, volume 38 (2025), Mississippi, USA; and with the immense support of the MSU library, *The Arab Israeli Conflict: History, Diplomacy and Politics* is expected to be published in Greece by June 2025 (Alexandria publications, Athens).

**Kirsten Fermaglich** will be working this semester to develop a companion exhibit at the Broad Museum, "Americans and the Holocaust: A Michigan Perspective," with help from a History undergraduate research assistant, Harrison Brown, in addition to bringing the exhibit "Americans and the Holocaust" to the Library of Michigan, and organizing programs to accompany the exhibit.

Dr. Fermaglich is also teaching a HST 480 senior seminar this semester, in which students will construct their own digital exhibit to accompany both the Broad and the Library of Michigan exhibits. The Broad exhibit and student exhibits will be displayed at the end of the semester. Dr. Fermaglich will also present her current research on antisemitism and the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 at a colloquium at Yale University this April.

**Matthew Handelman** co-edited the 10th volume *Franz Rosenzweig Yearbook* with Christian Wiese (Frankfurt). This edition of the *Yearbook*, entitled *Bildung, Speech Thinking, Translation*, will be published January 2025.

**Noah Kaye** has two works related to ancient Judaism and Jewish history of the Hellenistic, Roman - or 2nd Temple period. A chapter on kingship in the Hellenistic world that is to be published in January 2025 is based around Jewish reactions to changes in the nature of kingship, in Alexandria and Letter of Aristeas in Judea (Book of Daniel, Heliodoros Stele from Tel Maresha): "The Twilight of Charisma: Hellenistic Kingship in Transition," in *The Same but Different? Monarchical Representation in the Hellenistic World: Between Assimilation and Difference* (Steiner, Stuttgart). He was awarded an Ada Weintraub Finifter Scholarship for the Study of Romaniote Jews in 2024 by the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel at MSU, which helped him finish an article coming out in early 2025, in the *T&T Clark Handbook to Hellenistic Jewish Literature in Greek* (Bloomsbury, London). His article is called "Jewish Inscriptions." It is a synthesis of our knowledge of the 3-4,000 known Jewish inscriptions in Greek, and an investigation of a particular case of Greek as a Jewish language in a late Roman synagogue in Akmonia (Ahat, Turkey).

**Aliza Lambert's** article, coauthored with Conley, A. and Fulton, C, "Enhancing Religious and Spiritual Inclusion," is forthcoming in the journal *Inclusion*, 13(1) in 2025.

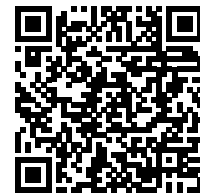
**Amy Simon's** book, *Emotions in Yiddish Ghetto Diaries: Encountering Perpetrators and Questioning Humanity* (Routledge, 2023), was released in paperback on December 19, 2024. In April 2025, Dr. Simon will be giving a public lecture and two teacher training workshops at the University of South Alabama. In June and July, she will co-lead (with Dr. Sherman Garnett) a new MSU study abroad trip to Poland "The Jews of Poland, 1917-1945."

# SPRING EVENTS 2025

Members of the MSU community are encouraged to join in person. Refreshments will be provided at most events.

\* For parking information at the Library of Michigan please see [www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/about/contact-and-visit-us](http://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/about/contact-and-visit-us)

All our events are held in-person. Recorded events will be available on our YouTube Channel: [www.youtube.com/@serlinginstituteforjewish8606](http://www.youtube.com/@serlinginstituteforjewish8606)



## Americans and the Holocaust: Exhibition and Special Events January 11 to February 22, 2025 Library of Michigan



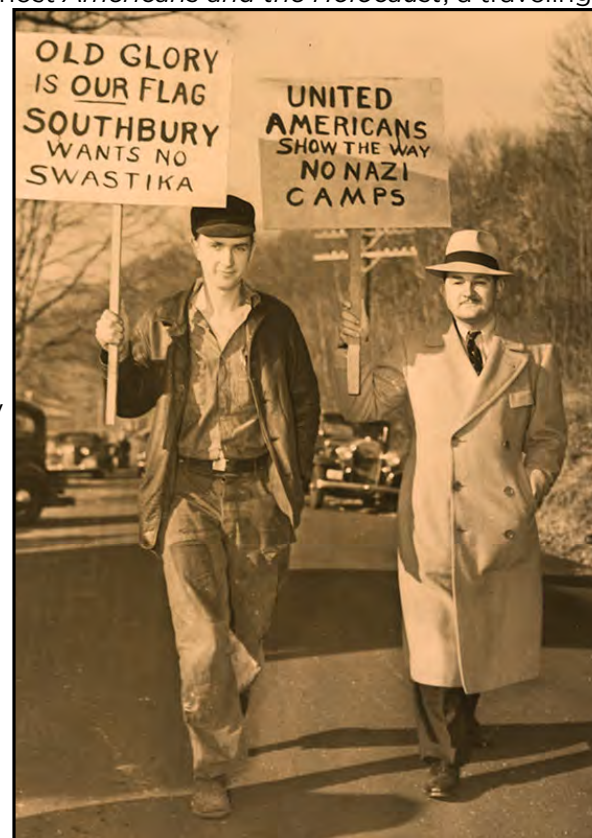
The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel has been working with the Library of Michigan in Lansing for the past year to bring to mid-Michigan a provocative exhibit that considers how Americans responded to the onslaught of Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Library of Michigan is one of 50 U.S. libraries newly selected to host *Americans and the Holocaust*, a traveling exhibition from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Library Association (ALA) that examines the motives, pressures and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism, war and genocide in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s.

Following a highly successful tour to 50 libraries from 2021 to 2023, the touring library exhibition— based on the special exhibition of the same name at the Museum in Washington, D.C. — will travel to an additional 50 U.S. libraries from 2024 to 2026, covering wide distances from Hawaii and Alaska to Texas and New Hampshire.

*Americans and the Holocaust* will be on display at the Library of Michigan, along with a series of related special events, from January 11th, 2025 to February 22nd, 2025.

The 1,100-square-foot exhibition examines various aspects of American society: the government, the military, refugee aid organizations, the media and the general public. Drawing on a remarkable collection of primary sources from the 1930s and '40s, the exhibition tells the stories of Americans who acted in response to Nazism, challenging the commonly held assumptions that Americans knew little and did nothing about the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews as the Holocaust unfolded. It provides a portrait of American society that shows how the Depression, isolationism, xenophobia, racism and antisemitism shaped responses to Nazism and the Holocaust.



**Kirsten Fermaglich**, associate director of the Serling Institute, worked with the Library of Michigan and other partner institutions, to develop four public programs to accompany the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibit.

**On Thursday, January 16**, the Library of Michigan will host an all-day **teachers' workshop** on "Americans and the Holocaust." Middle and high school teachers will participate in lectures on the Holocaust and US immigration policy; hear a talk given by a second-generation survivor; and receive a walk-through of the exhibit. The workshop is free to educators (though it requires registration) and also offers teachers the chance to bring their classes through the exhibit.

**On Monday, January 27, from 6-8 pm**, the Library of Michigan will host a **lecture and exhibit walk-through from Daniel Greene**, the curator of *Americans and the Holocaust*. Greene will discuss the making of the exhibit, as well as the domestic conditions in the United States that shaped Americans' responses to atrocities abroad.

**On Thursday, February 6, from 6-8 pm**, the Library of Michigan will host a panel: "**Red Tape, not Red Carpet: Contemporary Refugees and Bureaucracy in the United States**," featuring local leaders who work with refugees in the mid-Michigan area: Ben Cabanaw, from the Office of Global Michigan; Shirin Kambin, from the Immigrant and Refugee Resource Collaborative; Merkeb Youhannes, of the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence; and Durkshsh Sediqy, of Catholic Charities on Ingham, Eaton and Clinton Counties. As moderator, Kirsten Fermaglich will discuss historical origins of refugee policy in the United States; the panel will connect historical experiences of refugees from the 1930s to the contemporary experiences of newcomers to the United States today.

**On Monday, February 10, from 6-8 pm**, the Library of Michigan will host the panel: "**Rethinking the History of Antisemitism in Michigan**." Michigan has a significant history of prominent antisemitic voices, including Henry Ford, Father Charles Coughlin, and Gerald L.K. Smith. The panel features experts on these subjects—Catherine Cangany of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, Karla Goldman of University of Michigan, John Jackson, Jr. of Michigan State University, Andrew Lapin of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and independent scholar Victoria Saker Woeste—who will discuss the subjects of their research, as well as the significance of historical antisemitism for Michiganders today.

Finally, the Edythe and Eli Broad Museum at Michigan State University will also co-sponsor a companion exhibit: *Americans and the Holocaust: A Michigan Perspective* in conjunction with the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibit. Students in Kirsten Fermaglich's HST 480 senior seminar, on "Americans and the Holocaust" and Amy Simon's HST 392 on the "History of the Holocaust" will work on projects that will complement the physical exhibit at the Broad Museum.

We are thrilled to help bring this important and powerful exhibition to Michigan, and to sponsor all this exciting programming. We hope members of the MSU community will explore this visit and attend these programs. They encourage us all to examine a key aspect of US history and challenges us to not only ask 'what would I have done?' but also, 'what will I do?'

Kirsten Fermaglich

Multiple partners helped to sponsor the exhibits and programming along with the Serling Institute and the Library of Michigan: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute at the University of Michigan; the Zekelman Holocaust Center; the Arts, Cultural Management & Museum Studies program at Michigan State University; the Michigan State University Department of History; the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan; and the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.

For more information about *Americans and the Holocaust* and related programming at the Library of Michigan, visit [Michigan.gov/LMAATH](http://Michigan.gov/LMAATH). To learn more about the exhibition, visit [ushmm.org/americans-ala](http://ushmm.org/americans-ala).

# SPRING EVENTS 2025

Members of the MSU community are encouraged to join in person. Refreshments will be provided at most events.

\* For parking information please visit: <https://maps.msu.edu/interactive/>

## Harmony in Diversity: Exploring Azerbaijan's Jewish Heritage

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 5:45- 7:15 PM  
303 International Center, 427 N. Shaw Lane.

Azerbaijan, located in the South Caucasus region at the intersection of Southwest Asia and Southeastern Europe, was established in 1918, and was the first democratic state in the Muslim world. Throughout its history, Muslims and Jews, as well as Shiites and Sunnis, have lived together with mutual respect. The Jews of Azerbaijan are a deep-rooted Jewish community and are accepted as an integral part of the local Shi'ite Azerbaijani society. Azerbaijan's Jews were divided into two main communities: a native Jewish community that lived hundreds of years in the Caucasus, and Russian-speaking Jews who migrated to the region since the end of the 19th century. In addition, there were small communities of Modern-Aramaic speaking Jews from Iranian Kurdistan and Georgian Jews.

Join us for an engaging evening featuring a panel discussion and a documentary film dedicated to the rich Jewish heritage of Azerbaijan and Georgia. This is a collaboration between the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, the Center for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, the Humphrey Fellowship (a Fulbright Exchange Program), the Muslim Studies Program, the Asian Studies Center, Templeton Religious Trust, James Madison College, International Studies and Programs, and the College of Arts and Letters.

**We will watch the documentary film "Remembering Jewish Heritage in Azerbaijan and Georgia."** This captivating documentary delves into the rich history and enduring legacy of Jewish communities in these two neighboring countries. It highlights their cultural, religious, and social contributions while showcasing a harmonious coexistence with other ethnic and religious groups over centuries. Through personal stories, historical narratives, and breathtaking visuals of synagogues and cultural landmarks, the film preserves the memory of these vibrant communities and their unique traditions, beautifully woven into the broader heritage of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Following the film screening, our distinguished panelists will delve into the peaceful coexistence of Jewish and Muslim communities in Azerbaijan, highlighting their shared history and cultural collaboration. Panelists include:



**Chen Bram** is an anthropologist, educator and organizational psychologist who is a senior lecturer in Hadassah Academic College, and a research fellow at the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Bram conducted field work in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Israel, and among post-Soviet immigrants in NYC, has worked as an engaged anthropologist on multicultural policy, and has served as a Visiting Professor at UPenn; Clark University; MSU, and the University of Florida.

**Gulnara Ismailova** is Fulbright Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow at MSU and an accomplished program management and human resources expert with over two decades of experience spanning Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Germany, and the UK. She holds advanced degrees in Political Science and International Economic Relations and is the Founder and CEO of Resource HUB, leading sustainable development projects and empowering youth and women through education and skill-building.

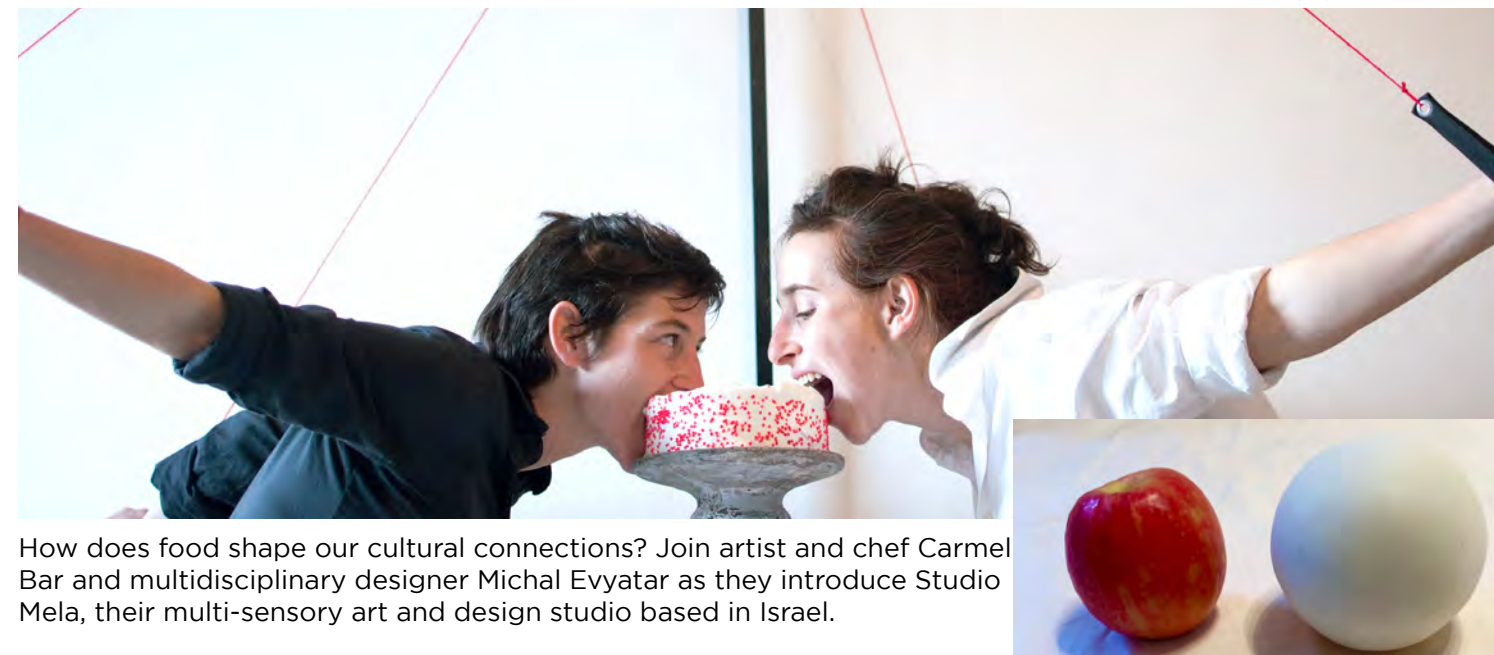


**Matthew Zierler** is an associate professor of international relations at James Madison College who focuses on foreign policy, international security, and international law, and is currently researching the foreign policy of Azerbaijan. He has taught on four separate occasions at ADA University, in Baku, Azerbaijan. He also served as Associate Dean and Interim Dean of the Honors College.



## MELA Studio: "Vanitas: Archive of Arrested Decay"

Tuesday, April 22, 6:00 - 7:30 pm, Alan and Rebecca Ross Education Wing, Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU



How does food shape our cultural connections? Join artist and chef Carmel Bar and multidisciplinary designer Michal Evyatar as they introduce Studio Mela, their multi-sensory art and design studio based in Israel.

**Carmel Bar and Michal Evyatar** transform food into a dynamic artistic medium, exploring its potential beyond mere sustenance. Their innovative installations blend movement, design, and sensory experience, revealing food as a complex language of personal and cultural narratives. Exhibited internationally, their works challenge traditional perceptions, treating culinary ingredients as living materials that carry color, texture, and emotional depth. Through their art, Bar and Evyatar invite viewers to experience art through their entire body.

Bar and Evyatar present "Vanitas: Archive of Arrested Decay." In this delicate dance of decay and conservation, food hardens and shifts, revealing not only its physical substance but a cultural imprint—an unspoken testament of agricultural landscapes, human touch, and collective memory. Mummification becomes a futile attempt to arrest the inevitable, with each preserved specimen testifying to our human desire to resist impermanence. Here, the museum becomes a temple of preservation, extending its sacred duty to safeguard not just artifacts, but culinary heritage. The work invites viewers to witness the ephemeral journey of sustenance: from raw potential to momentary form, then dissolving, leaving behind only memory and meaning.

What Bar and Evyatar produce will be on view in the Alan and Rebecca Ross Education Wing at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum from April 23 to 27th, after their lecture/performance/exhibit on April 22nd.

This program is part of an exciting collaboration between the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel and the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum and is part of one of the museum's themes this semester which is centered around questions of food knowledge, production, scarcity, and consumption against the background of Michigan State University's 170-year history of agricultural tradition.

Michal Evyatar is a multisensorial designer and chef who received her M.des at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Israel. Carmel Beer is an artist, dancer, performer and pastry chef who received her education, directed by Claudia Castellucci, at the Conia School, Cesena, Italy and at the School of Visual Theater, Jerusalem, Israel. Carmel and Michal have had exhibitions in Germany, Israel, Poland, Ukraine, and throughout the United States.

The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Center for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Humphrey Fellowship  
A Fulbright Exchange Program



Muslim Studies Program  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



TEMPLETON RELIGION TRUST

Asian Studies Center  
International Studies & Programs



The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MSU BROAD ART MUSEUM

# SPRING EVENTS 2025

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\* For parking information please visit: <https://maps.msu.edu/interactive/>

## Serling Institute Faculty Research Seminar

Informal gathering for our faculty to present research over a complimentary lunch. It is open to all inside and outside MSU.

### Noah Kaye, “Hebrew and Greek, Roman and Jewish: The case of Akmoneia (Ahat, Turkey)”

Friday, January 24th 1:00-2:30 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall, 842 Chestnut Rd.



The rural interior of the Roman province of Asia Minor, now Turkey’s western highlands, was home to several large Jewish communities famously visited by Paul in the 1st century CE. Demographically, these communities represented a major part of the ancient

Mediterranean diaspora and were large enough to influence the non-Jewish culture around them. Yet scholars have struggled to gain a perspective on their lives outside of the New Testament. The best chance we have to understand these ancient Jews on their own terms is through the inscriptions they carved in stone. I present here a forthcoming study of a rare Hebrew-Greek bilingual inscription from Akmoneia, in Roman Phrygia, which gives us precious information about their names, the way they used Hebrew, and the meaning of Jerusalem for provincial Roman Jews after the destruction of 70 CE.

Noah Kaye is Associate Professor in the Department of History and Serling Institute faculty affiliate.

### Chen Bram, “Proximity, Tensions and Ambiguity: Immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus in ‘Mixed’ Jewish-Arab Israeli Cities”

Friday, February 28th 12:00-1:30 pm, B342 Wells Hall, 619 Red Cedar Rd

This paper presents a comparative study of intergroup relations between Jewish immigrants from Central Eurasia and indigenous Arab-Palestinians in two ‘mixed’ Jewish-Arab cities: Ramle and Acre. Combining anthropological and historical perspectives, the research examines the myriad factors that explain different post-migration intergroup relations in mixed cities. Kavkaz (“Mountain”) Jews and Central Asian (“Bukharan”) Jews lived in



areas with Muslim majorities and 300,000 of them migrated to Israel in the 1990’s. In Ramle, the memory of previous Jewish-Muslim relations creates a moderating effect on Jewish-Arab relations. In Acre, however, positive memories of former Jewish-Muslim relations are understood as a contradiction to current relations with Arab neighbors and has a negative effect on the migrants’ perceptions of Jewish-Arab relations.

Chen Bram is a former visiting scholar at MSU, a senior lecturer at Hadassah Academic College, and research fellow at the Truman Institute for Advancement of Peace, Hebrew University.

### Aliza Lambert, “Enhancing Religious and Spiritual Inclusion”

Friday, March 21st 12:00-1:30 pm, B342 Wells Hall, 619 Red Cedar Rd.



There is a dearth of research surrounding religious minorities regarding religion and spirituality for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, and existing studies often solely explore if youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities can be religious and spiritual. A better understanding of religious minorities can enhance the inclusion of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). In this multiple case study, Jewish youth with I/DD participated in two semi-structured interviews and an observation of a Jewish ritual/practice. Three themes and eight subthemes emerged related to accessing religion and spirituality. The implications from this study can help prepare religious leaders, clergy, and researchers to better support, engage, and include Jewish youth with I/DD.

Aliza Lambert is the STRIDE Services Manager at MSU and supports youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities as they transition into employment and adult life after high school. She is also a faculty affiliate of the Serling Institute.

### Sherman Garnett, “A Shared and Unshared City: Grade and Miłosz on Vilnius”

Friday, April 11, 12:00-1:30 pm James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall, 842 Chestnut Rd.

Chaim Grade’s and Czesław Miłosz’s shared city—Vilnius (Wilno, Vilna)—became a theme in the works

of both writers. Yet in what ways are the writers describing a shared city, and in what ways are they revealing the deep differences between a city named Wilno and the same city named Vilna? Using a selection of works from both writers, especially *My Mother’s Sabbath Days* and *Native Realm*, the presentation will examine both the shared city of both writers but also how the writers explore a city that is radically different and perhaps unsharable.



Sherman W. Garnett is Professor in James Madison College and was previously Dean of the College for more than two decades. He is a faculty affiliate of the Serling Institute.

## Annual Rabin/Brill Lecture: Deciding Who Was Worth Saving: American Universities and the Refugee Scholars of the Nazi Era by Laurel Leff

Thursday, April 24th, 5:45-7:15 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall, 842 Chestnut Rd.

Despite the triumphalist tale that during the Nazi era the United States rescued Europe’s intellectual elite—including Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, Hannah Arendt, and Herbert Marcuse—thousands of European scholars sought to immigrate to the United States and couldn’t. American universities refused to hire them and the State Department erected barriers to letting them in. Many of those scholars lost not only their livelihoods, but also their lives. This lecture will introduce a few of those scholars and describe American universities’ process for deciding who was worth saving.



Laurel Leff is Professor of Journalism and Associate Director of Jewish Studies at Northeastern University. Her book, *Well Worth Saving: American Universities’ Life and Death Decisions on Refugees from Nazi Europe* (Yale University Press) was a finalist for a 2020 National Jewish Book Award. Her previous book, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge University Press) was chosen as the Best Media

History Book of 2005 by the American Journalism Historians’ Association and Best History Book of 2005 by *ForeWord Reviews*. Leff has a master’s in the study of law from Yale University and a master’s in communications from the University of Miami. She received an A.B. from Princeton University with a major in the School of Public and International Affairs. She was formerly a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Miami Herald* and an editor with *American Lawyer Media Inc.* and *The Hartford Courant*.

## 9th Annual Serling Institute Undergraduate Research Conference Thursday, April 17th, 4:00-8:30 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall, 842 Chestnut Rd.

During this annual conference, undergraduate students will present their research papers written for Jewish Studies courses under the guidance of Serling Institute faculty. The conference includes a keynote address by a Jewish Studies alumnus and a complimentary dinner. All are welcome to attend.

## Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Friday, 11:00 am-12:30 pm, Case Hall, 842 Chestnut Road  
January 17th, James Madison College Library, 332 Case  
January 24th, Club Spartan, 338 Case  
February 7th, James Madison College Library, 332 Case  
February 21st, James Madison College Library, 332 Case

Open only to MSU students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees. Complimentary lunch will be provided!

Attendance to all in-person sessions is requested. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and share their observations and experiences, while learning to contribute to the inclusivity of MSU’s campus community. Faculty experts will present on the history and current examples of these prejudices and facilitate group discussion. Student participation may be used as an Honors option, please check with faculty. Faculty and staff attendance may be considered for annual reviews and promotions Register here: <https://forms.gle/X24ycTJXcBnpdL5D6>. Or scan the QR code. Prior registration is required.



# PAST EVENTS FALL 2024



Elaine Serling, Michael Serling, Yael Aronoff and Eric Aronoff- Serling Institute reception for Visiting Scholars 09-29-24



Kirsten Fermaglich and Lynn Wolff- Serling Institute reception for visiting scholars 09-29-24



Laura Yares, Emily Bowen Cohen, and Blaire Morseau "Two Tribes: the Real-Life Story of a Jewish Native American" 09-23-24



"Norms and Breaking Norms in Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel and the USA," by Nechumi Yaffe 09-25-24



Serling Institute reception for Visiting Scholars 09-29-24



Discussion leaders: Ezzeldeen Masri (PeaceWorks), Tehila Wenger (Deputy Director Geneva Initiative) and Nidal Foqaha (Director Palestinian Peace Coalition) 11-13-24



Assaf Gilad and Michael Serling- Serling Institute reception for visiting scholars 09-29-24



Andreas Bouroutis and Michael Serling- Serling Institute reception for visiting scholars 09-29-24



"Coming of Age as a Queer Teenager in the Holocaust- Bringing Margot to the Stage," by Anna Hájková 10-28-24



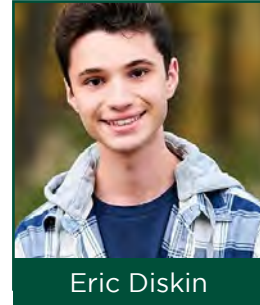
Ellen McCallum, Yehudah Guy, Lynn Wolff, Elizabeth Mittman, Yael Aronoff, Madeleine Lenski, Donald Sosin, and Alicia Svigals "Ancient Law" 11-7-24

# STUDENTS AWARDED SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE SERLING INSTITUTE FALL 2024

## The Barbara and Douglas Bloom Scholarship Awardees

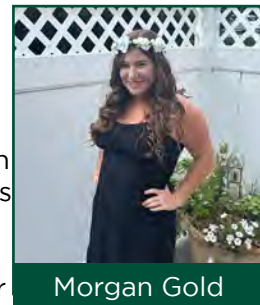
Inaugurated in Fall 2024, the Barbara and Douglas Bloom Scholarship covers the in-state tuition for a Jewish Studies class taken by a Jewish Studies minor.

**Eric Diskin** (Electrical Engineering major, College of Engineering; Jewish Studies minor) used the scholarship for his IAH 210 Middle East and the World: Israeli Literature and Culture course, taught by Professor Vered Weiss. Eric found learning about Israeli cultures through film and literature rewarding and was especially impacted by reading Rachel Bluwstein's poem "To My Country." "The idea of going somewhere brand new, and planting a tree not for yourself, but for your grandchildren is awe inspiring." Eric says that he learned about efforts at Jewish and Palestinian efforts at coexistence in Neve Shalom in Israel through a documentary and a guest lecturer, Mohammad Darawshe. He commented that "learning about this town and its implications for coexistence gave me a brand-new perspective about the conflict that I have never had before." Eric also describes watching "a short film called *The Boy* about a man with PTSD who was living on a Kibbutz near the border of Gaza. The constant rockets from Gaza along with Israel's retaliations caused the man to have so much trauma. It was filmed in 2023, just before October 7th. In real life, the director of the movie was murdered on October 7th."



Eric Diskin

**Morgan Gold** (Music Education major, College of Music; Jewish Studies minor) took three Jewish Studies courses this semester. On HST 411: European Jewish History taught by Professor Andreas Bouroutis (Ada Weintraub Finifter Visiting Scholar), she wrote, "I loved that we got to explore parts of history in places that I may not have thought to dig deeper into. I never knew how much antisemitism there was in Greece. For example, I found it quite fascinating... hearing all our professor's stories about the way life was there for him and for the Jews. My professor was very knowledgeable and passionate about the class materials, and I looked forward to hearing him share what he knew with us."



Morgan Gold

**Lyra Opalinkhin** (International Relations major, James Madison College, Jewish Studies minor) found instances of antisemitism occurring close to home in Michigan especially interesting. From Professor Amy Simon's course MC 387 Jews and Antisemitism, she now understands what stereotypes and methods of hatred are fueling antisemitism and why antisemitism occurs and how to educate others on the dangers of antisemitism. She wrote, "During my time in the class thus far, I have learned about well-known and more unknown antisemitic tropes and their origins, such as blood libel, Jews as sinful in relation to Christianity, and the racialization of Jews. Much of this study has covered the important historical periods of these tropes, such as examining medieval writings in examining blood libel and reading antisemitic pieces written by popular Enlightenment thinkers." Lyra has gained insight on how to combat antisemitism at MSU and beyond.



Lyra Opalinkhin

## The Ed Levy Jr. and Linda Dresner Levy Hebrew Scholarship Awardees

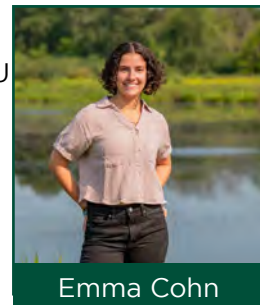
Any student who completes a Hebrew course qualifies for the Levy Hebrew scholarship which covers the in-state tuition cost each semester a Hebrew course is taken.

**Ali Cohn** (Digital Storytelling major)

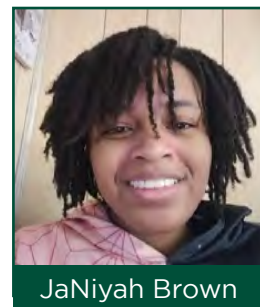
**Emma Cohn** (Arts and Humanities major; Jewish Studies minor)

**Talia Begres** (James Madison College; Jewish Studies minor)

**JaNiyah Brown** (Preveterinary major): "Before registering, I had no connection to Hebrew, Israel, or Judaism. I did, however, have an interest in learning about different languages and cultures around the world. I was able to learn so much, not just about the language, but some history, holidays, and even geology. I can't stress enough how much fun I had learning in that class."



Emma Cohn



JaNiyah Brown

**Elida Hughes-Margolis** (Social Relations and Policy major, James Madison College; Jewish Studies minor)

**Jared Kamin** (Advertising Management major; College of Communication Art and Sciences)

**Fara Kleinman** (James Madison College; Jewish Studies minor)

**Minnaleah Koffron** (Psychology major, College of Social Science; Jewish Studies minor)

**Arthur Lebedinski** (Political Theory & Constitutional Democracy major, James Madison College; Jewish Studies minor): "It engaged me like no other class this semester. I found I woke up each morning feeling invigorated and excited to learn. Professor Yore Kedem continued to teach the language in a unique way, speaking almost exclusively Hebrew."

**Jason Mbonu** (Chemistry major): "I was raised Catholic and learned that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, or at least that Hebrew was one of the original languages used. I personally enjoy learning about history. For me, language is similar to history. I really enjoyed my Hebrew class. I liked how the learning was structured."

**Jonah Miller:** "The overall classroom environment was super welcoming, knowing that I was surrounded by others who shared the same passion for learning Hebrew."

**Adina Peysakhov** (Human Biology major, College of Natural Science; Jewish Studies minor) "I've dedicated significant time to studying for Hebrew 101 because of how much I enjoy learning the language. I am excited and very eager to take three more semesters of Hebrew. I look forward to utilizing my skills to connect more deeply with my Israeli friends and family!"

**Sasha Wade** (Social Relations and Policy major, James Madison College; Jewish Studies minor) "Enrolling in a second-year Hebrew class has been a deeply rewarding experience, both personally and academically. This course has broadened my understanding of the Hebrew language and Israeli culture, while also opening new doors for potential research opportunities and enhancing my career prospects. The skills I have gained from this class are not just linguistic; they represent a gateway to a broader world of knowledge and connection. I look forward to continuing to study Hebrew."

**Samantha Witt** (Human Biology major, College of Natural Science): "I am excited to continue my studies by taking HEB 102 next semester. HEB 101 gave me a strong foundation in the structure and basics of the Hebrew language, and I can't wait to build on that knowledge. The sense of progress I've felt in this course has been motivating, and I am eager to keep learning. Studying Hebrew has not only connected me more deeply to my culture but has also shown me the joy of language learning. This journey has been one of both personal and academic growth, and I look forward to seeing where it will take me."

## The David Hersh Scholarship for Jewish Studies Awardees

Inaugurated in Fall 2023, the David Hersh Scholarship is available to Jewish Studies minors and covers the in-state tuition for a Jewish Studies course.

**Salman Alvi** (Psychology major, College of Social Science; Jewish Studies minor): "I really have enjoyed the Jewish Studies classes I have taken. My favorite class has been Jewish Mysticism. Every class was fascinating, and I connected it to my own life experiences. Additionally, reading into the different accounts and perspectives of Jews has helped me understand them more which is really helpful as I come from a Muslim background."

**Sarah Cumpston** (Religious Studies major, College of Arts and Letters; Jewish Studies minor): "The class [MC 387: Jews and Antisemitism] has really been opening my eyes to just how deep-seated persecution of the Jewish people has been and is helping me to recognize the common tropes and stereotypes in various opinions and media that I would have not noticed before."

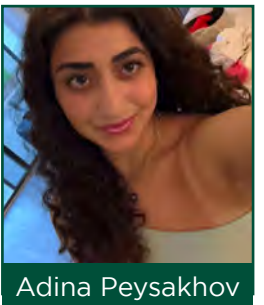
For more information on the Jewish Studies minor and scholarships offered through the Serling Institute please visit [jsp.msu.edu](http://jsp.msu.edu) and see student tab.



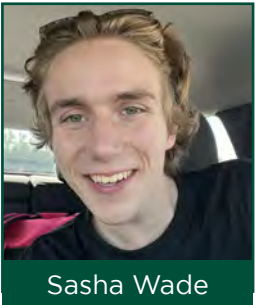
Jared Kamin



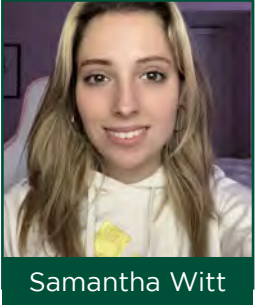
Jonah Miller



Adina Peysakhov



Sasha Wade



Samantha Witt

## ALUMNUS HIGHLIGHT

*Anthony Bartaway*  
*International Relations, James Madison College, 2011*

The Jewish Studies minor was really the first step on a path that led me to where I am now. I took Yael Aronoff's classes more often than any other professor's. I wrote my senior thesis under her guidance on the errors of the First and Second Lebanon Wars, a specialty that became relevant again twelve years later. It was through Jewish Studies that I went on the Serling Institute summer study abroad at the Hebrew University in Israel, which led me to earn an MA in Conflict Resolution and Mediation at Tel Aviv University, and also do human rights work in Israel.



That would eventually lead me to Ukraine in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity in 2015.

In my time in Ukraine, I have worked in the civil society sphere, in marketing, and journalism, which is where my activities are now. As a journalist, in addition to political and other reporting, I have also frequently covered Jewish issues and have visited Jewish communities in nearly every region of the country (Crimea has been unfortunately inaccessible). Prior to 2022, there was little attention on Ukraine outside of how it fits into various presidential scandals and crude stereotyping. That has, unfortunately, improved in some ways but gotten even more dire in others.

In 2022 with the full-scale Russian invasion, everything changed. The places and people I had come to know were destroyed. Mariupol, Melitopol, Kherson, Avdiivka - these are the names of places that may have made an appearance somewhere on the news. For me, they are now painful memories. This has been a tragedy for Jewish Ukraine as well. The community of Mariupol was already heavily made up of refugees from Donetsk. The Russians then massacred the people of

Mariupol and the synagogue was leveled by a Russian shell. Those who survived became refugees for the second time in a decade.

I have spoken to Jews who have survived siege, occupation, and displacement and have covered their stories. The story in every synagogue is about the same. There are a lot of new faces as they are forced out of more conflict-afflicted regions, while the old faces have left for Western Europe, North America, or Israel. The size of the community has been greatly diminished. I have also covered the tens of thousands who have continued to come to the city of Uman every year for a Hasidic Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage. Synagogues became critical centers for distributing aid and seeking shelter from the bombs. Even as the Russian army surrounded the city of Chernihiv, Ukrainian Jews proudly continued construction on their new mikveh.

While that is what Jewish Studies has best prepared me for, I cover the war and the country more broadly. I've been to the front, aided in flood relief after Russia blew up the Khakovka dam, been targeted by Russian artillery, and followed into recently de-occupied territories.

Like many journalists, I am involved in multiple outlets while picking up assorted freelance work on the side. My main job currently is as the Business Development Manager in the English language department at The New Voice of Ukraine, one of Ukraine's premier news outlets ([www.patreon.com/nvua](http://www.patreon.com/nvua)). I also have done audio production and voice work, as well as written, for the *Kyiv Independent*. Then there is my own podcast at Ukraine Without Hype ([www.patreon.com/UkraineWithoutHype](http://www.patreon.com/UkraineWithoutHype)). I also made the mistake of trying to run a tourism company immediately before COVID: Jewish Ukraine Travel.

I have plenty of plans for the new year. One of the lighter ones is that I would really like to do a piece on Shalom Aleichem, of *Fiddler on the Roof* fame, and his relationship with his repeated setting in the Kyiv region. More projects, more war.

## GRADUATING SENIORS HIGHLIGHTS

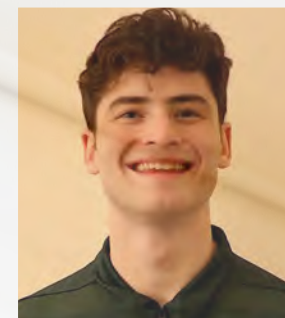
*Morgan Gold*  
*Music Education, College of Music*

I come from a household where my dad grew up Jewish and my mom was raised Catholic, so I was not practicing either religion, but I always took an interest in Judaism. I wanted to learn more about it and added the Jewish Studies minor. The past three semesters I have taken many fun Jewish studies courses including two semesters of Hebrew, Judaism, European Jewish History, Jewish Literature, and the one-credit course on antisemitism. I knew I wanted to learn the language to use it with my family and feel a stronger sense of connection with all of them at any services or events we would attend. I loved calling my dad after class to speak with him in Hebrew and my grandparents were so excited to hear that I was learning so much about the religion as well. I look forward to becoming a band director after I graduate this spring and hope to use what I've learned to educate those around me. This has been so much fun and I have taken so much pride in being a part of this program.



*Aaron Shapo*  
*Economics, College of Social Science*

The Jewish Studies program at MSU has contributed immensely to my education. Starting my sophomore year, when I officially declared my Economics major and Jewish Studies minor, my first classes were in learning the Hebrew language. Spending three semesters with Professor Kedem, the grammar rules of Hebrew were ingrained into my brain and will be very useful in continuing to learn Hebrew to converse with my older sister, Gavriella, who lives in Jerusalem. In my junior year, the classes American Jewish History and History of the Holocaust strengthened my Jewish roots, as learning the history of our people brought me intense feelings of sorrow and pride. The



professors of those classes, Karrin Hanshew (History of the Holocaust) and Kirsten Fermaglich (American Jewish History), ignited a curiosity within me that has led to hours of learning more about the Jewish story, as well as the history of the world. Last semester, I took my favorite class yet: Israeli Politics, Cultures, and Society. Professor Alon Tal, a former Knesset member, masterfully taught both the history of Israel and the workings of the Knesset. It taught me more than I could've possibly imagined about the Jewish homeland and the affairs of modern Israel. The Jewish Studies minor has not only deepened my understanding of Jewish history, culture, and language but has also profoundly enriched my academic journey and personal connection to my heritage.



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