

THE SERLING INSTITUTE SUMMER PROGRAM AT HEBREW UNIVERSITY

By Yore Kedem



In June-July 2021, the Summer Program for the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel took place on the Mount Scopus Campus of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This program, which was extended to 5.5 weeks instead of the usual twenty-five days, included two four-credit courses. Prof. Yore Kedem, who led the program, taught a course titled Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Israel. Prof. David Mendelsson of Hebrew University taught the other course in the program - The Emergence of the State of Israel.

Leading study abroad programs is always challenging. Carrying through the Serling Institute Summer Program in Jerusalem in 2021 has proved to be even more of a challenge than in normal years. Supported by hard work by Serling Institute staff, the Education Abroad Office at MSU, Rothberg School for International Students at Hebrew University, and the Israeli Consulate in Chicago, we recruited ten students, and pushed through administrative challenges, COVID19 regulations, and a conflict with Hamas. On June 14, nine students arrived at the Student Village at Hebrew University, joined by a tenth student two weeks later.

Upon arrival in Israel, students entered quarantine in the dorms, and took serological blood test within a day of arrival. After taking class on Zoom for two days, most students were out of

quarantine on time for the first group outing. This trip to Central Jerusalem included an orientation, followed by the first observation exercise, in which students observed and interviewed people for two hours. Later in the course, students repeated this exercise in the Old City of Jerusalem, and in the Carmel Market area of Tel Aviv.

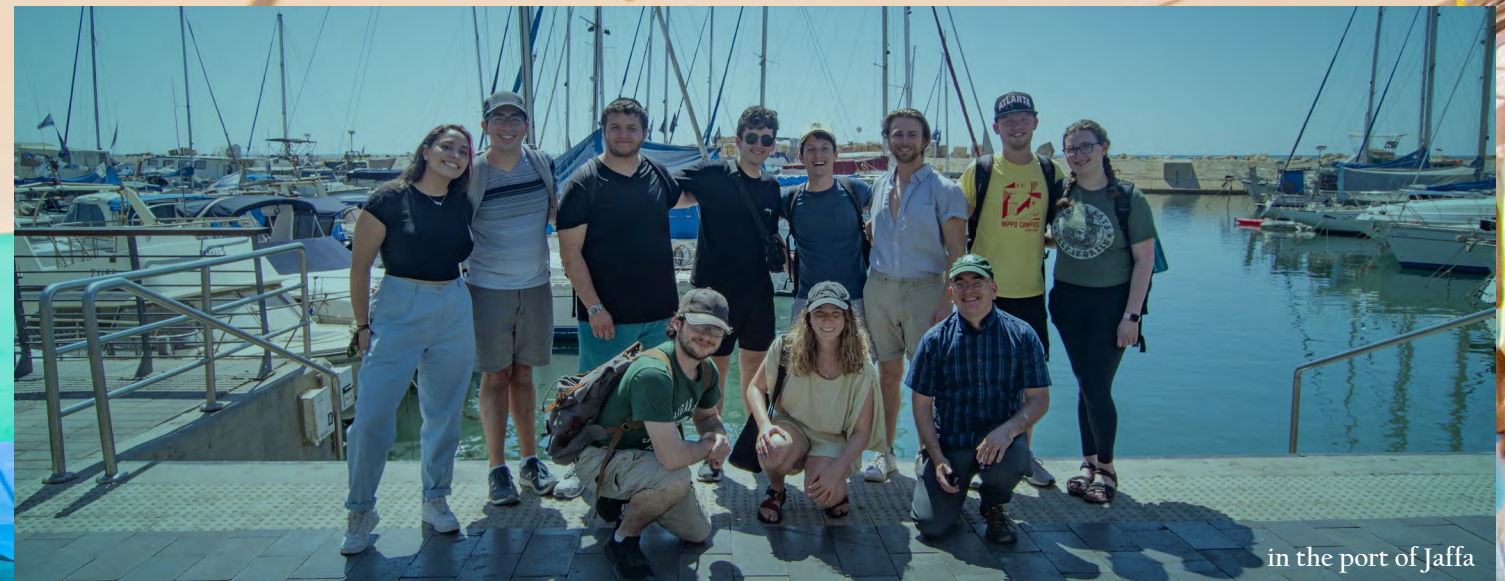
Observations and interviews with locals are central for Prof. Kedem's class. For this class, students develop independent research projects, and integrate their experiences with the academic readings and discussions in the course. This course also included meeting several guest speakers. We met Siba Awad, an East Jerusalem Arab, who told us about her life as a resident of East Jerusalem, married to an Israeli Arab and mother of a child with Israeli citizenship. On a field trip to Ashdod, we met Sharon Eretz, who discussed her conversion and Aliyah story. On another field trip to Kfar Qara, we met with Dr. Muhamad



in the port of Jaffa

Yehia, who told us about the challenges of running a scientific non-profit organization and startup center in the Arab Triangle area in Northern Israel.

A new component in this year's program was a visit to Start-Up Nation Central in Tel Aviv. Organized and hosted by Harry Yuklea, Visiting Professor at the Broad College of Business at MSU, the visit included several presentations on the technology sector in Israel, and meeting members of the center and Harry's company. Part of the discussion was the integration of different parts of Israeli society into the high tech sector, and the efforts that the Israeli government is doing to advance the integration of Ultraorthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs into this industry.



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Dr. Mendelsson's course included two field trips, one to Tel Aviv, to discuss its central role in the building of Israel, and a trip to Mount Herzl, which demonstrated to the students the emergence of a "secular religion" in Israel. Following this trip was a visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's central Holocaust museum.

Students integrated these experiences into independent research projects. Among the topics investigated were the impact of kashrut laws on the restaurant industry, language in Israel, secular women and their life in Jerusalem, and ultraorthodox women and their role in that society. Students also researched the secular and orthodox public educational systems in Israel, studied the autonomy of the ultraorthodox educational system, and compared music education in Israel and the US. Other students investigated different aspects of conflict in Israeli society by looking at uniting factors, the impact of societal conflicts on the human condition, and the political protests for governmental change, which took place over the last year.

All participants in the program learned that Israel is a complex country with compelling issues, and a complicated society. They experienced the many challenges of observing and interviewing people, and finding multiple perspectives on the issues that they investigated. They all grew and changed through this process as Ben Goldstein (Social Relations & Policy, James Madison College) reflected in his final paper:

"Through this process, my interviewing skills, along with my ability to communicate with those around me who come from different cultures and backgrounds, vastly improved. This process was unbelievably beneficial for me and truly opened my eyes to how much more Israel has to offer and ultimately improve compared to what I once understood. My perspective has shifted many times this trip due to conversations in and out of the classroom. Through actively listening and challenging my own original thoughts, I was able to see more than I could

have ever hoped to. I am grateful for the new knowledge and understanding, and look forward to continuing to question and learn about them."

Another Jewish Studies Minor, Sydnie Burnstein (Social Relations & Policy, James Madison College) commented:

"Living in Israel allowed me to grapple with all its complexities and beauty firsthand. My trip abroad has been a crucial moment for me in my academic career. Knowing that my opinions have been formed with validity and significance, I can now engage in informed discussion and understand more-nuanced ideas. I am immensely grateful to the Levy Scholarship for showing me what I am capable of learning, and for allowing me to expand on my critical thinking skills."



Jerusalem pedestrian street

Triangle R&D Center, Kafr Qara