This summer, thanks in part to aid from the Gertrude and Herbert Gettler Scholarship and the Daniel J. Ransohoff Scholarship, I attended the Peer Education Research Internship program in Jerusalem. This program emphasizes study and immersion in Israel. The PERI program was instrumental to my development in the Judaic Studies field.

During the month I spent in Jerusalem, I stayed at the Machon Yaakov school, a yeshiva staffed by prominent teachers involved in both Jewish and secular study. My time was spent learning Jewish thought and performing research on a wide range of sources. I attended classes five days a week and spent the afternoons researching for a presentation I gave at the end of the month.

Being raised in a humanistic reform family, there are many religious aspects of Judaism that I did not grow up with. Having a chance to immerse myself in the religion helped me learn the intricacies of Jewish thought.

I also improved my Hebrew during my stay. Being in a native-speaking environment is crucial for mastering a language, and my time in Israel dramatically improved my Hebrew proficiency. It can be difficult to find a chance to use a foreign language in daily life. Traveling to Israel and being in a setting with native speakers, I was afforded a rare opportunity—definitely not a common occurrence stateside. That opportunity to be immersed in a Hebrew environment significantly helped my speaking and listening skills.

I wish to thank the Gertrude and Herbert Gettler and Ransohoff foundations for enabling me to have an outstanding experience in Israel this year.

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It is my honor to serve as Department Head and Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Chair.

I am happy to let you know that this past month I have secured the approval in the college for a Joint UC-Hebrew Union College graduate program in Judaic Studies. For the first time, our department will benefit from having outstanding graduate students. This will further energize our faculty as well as enable us to work more closely with HUC’s faculty, offer practical experience to HUC’s graduate and rabbinic students and as a result, move our partnership with HUC to the next level. Likewise, the new Certificate in Religious Studies will broaden the spectrum of our curriculum. The joint UC-HUC Interdisciplinary Graduate Program will empower us to pursue our goal to internationalize the department and connect it with outstanding universities in Israel and with other global institutions.

As we celebrate 35 years in existence, we have entered a new phase in our growth. We moved this year into the newly renovated third floor of French Hall and launched the Judaic Studies Center for Jewish Cultures and Ideas, which promises to become a place of excellence in research and teaching in partnerships with other valued institutions of higher learning and with our community. Despite a bad economy and budget cuts, we hired two new tenure-track assistant professors, Matthew Kraus and Ari Finkelstein, and a visiting assistant professor, Ingrid Moen Epstein. We also strengthened our partnerships with the Jewish Federation, the JCC, Cedar Village, Hillel, our campus Chabad and the Rockwern Academy.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Adolf Eichmann trial, we had an outstanding Lichter Lecture Series organized by professor Adi Gordon and underwritten by the JCC, CHIE, the Jewish Federation, the Ohio Humanities Council and the UC Taft Foundation. The series focused on evaluating the trial’s impact on the Jewish population and its worldwide effects.

Professor Steven Bowman was awarded a prestigious Fulbright fellowship, and our entire faculty received merit this year. This means we all far exceeded the norms in teaching, research and service standards. Jason Schapera, one of our juniors, was awarded the Gertrude and Herbert Gettler Scholarship and the Daniel J. Ransohoff Scholarship for outstanding scholarship and traveled to study in Israel during the summer. Our students graduated with high grades and produced excellent senior theses. Now, we are working to increase the number of Judaic Studies majors.

Beatrice Winkler, our “Friends of Judaic Studies” president, sent you a letter. If you haven’t received it, please contact us. We need your help and support to survive and grow. You are our loyal partners, and I thank you for your generous response. Take a look inside our newsletter to learn more about our department and its activities. Contact me by email at Gila.Naveh@uc.edu or by phone at 513-556-2300. If you haven’t seen our departmental Web page, check it out at www.artsci.uc.edu/judaic.

Best wishes,

Gila Safran Naveh, Professor and Head
Judaic Studies Department
Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Chair
Meet the New Faculty

Ani Finkelstein was born in Toronto, where he began his Jewish education at Balak Hebrew Day School and the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in Jewish Studies from York University and two law degrees from McGill University, and following a few years in the practice of law, Finkelstein left Toronto to begin a program in Jewish History of the Second Temple Period at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Finkelstein is a Harry Starr Fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University. He graduated with a PhD in Jewish Studies from Harvard in 2011 after writing a dissertation titled, “Emperor Julian among Jews, Christians and ‘Hellenes’ in Antioch: Jewish Practice as a Guide to ‘Hellenes’ and a Goad to Christians.” His dissertation examines Julian’s use of biblical exegesis to represent Jews and Jewish practice as a model for “Hellenic” practice as well as to undermine Christian creeds and practices in order to create a Neoplatonic, ethnically-ordered Roman empire.

“We are thrilled to have been able to bring someone of the caliber of professor Finkelstein to our department. He is a rising star on the firmament of Jewish studies,” says Naveh. “We are indeed fortunate to have him as one of our tenure-track faculty. He will greatly energize our entire community with his wit and scholarly spark.”

Finkelstein is interested in the representation of Jews and the use of Jewish texts in Christian, Jewish and pagan literature as they are used to define, situate, strengthen and justify the superiority of certain ethnic-religious groups as dictated by the imperial programs of emperors and elites in the Roman Empire. He is currently writing a book on this topic.

Irgd Mom Epstein joined the faculty in fall of 2011 as a one-year Visiting Assistant Professor. Epstein recently received her PhD from Duke University’s Department of Religion where she specialized in Late Second Temple Judaism. Epstein also passed qualifying exams in Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Her dissertation, “Marriage and Divorce in the Herodian Family: A Case Study of Diversity in Late Second Temple Judaism,” explores the marital practices of the Herodians in light of Jewish norms and Roman law.

At UC, subjects on which Epstein teaches include the Bible and Judaism in the Roman era. She also teaches the department’s survey course on Jewish religious practices, “Introduction to Judaism.”

Matthew Kraus

Kraus is planning a travel study trip for students to Israel and Jordan this summer. He published two articles for the forthcoming Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics. He gave a public lecture for Jewish American Heritage Month in Cedar Village. He serves on multiple university committees, including Undergraduate Council, Scholarship Committee and the First-Year community reading committee. He is in the second year serving as an instructor for the Melton Program for Adult Jewish Education, sponsored by the Jewish Community Center. He is a board member for Hillel, Goldman Union Camp Institute Strategic Planning Committee and Jewish Community Education Committee.

Matthew Kraus is a native of Cincinnati and graduated from Walnut Hills High School in 1981 and Harvard-Radcliffe College in 1985. He received his PhD in classics from the University of Michigan in 1996 and was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1991.

His main interests include the history of biblical interpretation and Judaism in the Greek and Roman world. He serves as Editor of "How Should Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World" (2006 Gorgias Press), he has also written on Jerome’s translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Latin and on Philo.

Kraus spent 1999-2000 in Jerusalem on a Yad Hanadiv/Bezalel foundation fellowship and lectured at Hebrew University on “Jesone as an Ethnographer of the Jews.” He founded and chaired the Jewish Studies Program at Williams. From 2006-2007, Kraus was lecturer in the Department of Classics, Religion and Philosophy at Wright State University.

He recently was promoted to assistant professor for the Department of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati where he has been field-service/educator faculty since 2007. In addition to directing the Hebrew Language Program, Kraus serves as undergraduate director for the department.

Kraus is involved in the Cincinnati community, serving on a number of committees and teaching. In 2010 Kraus gave the keynote address for the Global Day of Jewish Learning sponsored by the Mayerson Jewish Community Center on “How to Understand Torah in the Twenty-First Century: Translating the Talmud from Rashi to Steinsaltz.” He is completing a book-length study of Jerome’s translation of the Book of Exodus in relation to Jewish, Christian and Classical interpretive traditions.

“Matt Kraus has been a valuable member of our department,” says Gila Saffran Naveh, Judaic Studies Department head and Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati chair. “We are truly grateful that with the unique help of Dean Valerie Hardcastle we were able to have him on a tenure-track position.”

Ani Finkelstein

Finkelstein was awarded the 2012-13 Department of Athletics Legion of Excellence Student-Athlete Faculty Impact Award. Each Legion of Excellence winner nominates a faculty member who has impacted her/his academic success. Brolley received the award in 2011 thanks to J.K. Schaffer of the football team and received the award this year thanks to Elaine David of the women’s basketball team.

Jennifer Glaser

Glaser was awarded a year-long fellowship at the Franklin Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, and will be in residence from September 2012-March 2013 while she finishes revising her book, “Exceptional Differences.” Last summer, she participated in a summer Posen seminar at Hampshire College and an AAR early faculty in Jewish studies workshop at the University of Pennsylvania. She has completed a number of presentations at MLA, AJS, a symposium on Jewish women and comics, and the American Jewish Historical Society’s Biennial Conference. She has published a chapter in a Continuum volume and anticipates further publications. She was also elected to the MLA executive committee for a second term.

John David Brolley

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Department News

Roger Selva

Selva has a manuscript, “A Geography of Human Rights Abuses,” accepted by the Human Rights Quarterly and has two book reviews accepted—one in Human Rights Quarterly, one in Geography Research Forum.

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Steven Bowman

Bowman returned to Jerusalem as part of the Fullbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Program. The award allowed him to lecture and conduct scholarly work in the United Kingdom and Israel for a manuscript about the Book of Yosippon. The book, a Hebrew rewriting of Josephus’ account of the Persian Wars, was translated by Bowman and will be published by the Harvard University Press this year. Also among his published works was "Surviving in Palestine: Jewish Jews post-1204" in Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures.

Ethan Katz

Katz was awarded yearlong writing fellowships for 2012-13 by the Taft Research Center at UC and the Frankel Institute for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. He accepted the Taft fellowship and declined the Frankel. During his Taft fellowship, Katz will be completing his manuscript on the history of Jewish-Muslim relations in France since World War I. Katz recently published an article titled, “Did the Paris Mosque Save Jews? A Mystery and Its Memory,” in Jewish Quarterly Review, and he gave an invited lecture on the same topic at the University of Kentucky.

Sarah Pogossian Fisher

Fisher will be a Plenary Presenter at the 2012 Israeli Presidential Conference. She is Scholar in Residence for the Young Leadership Cabinet of Jewish Federation of North America, a faculty member of the Wexner Heritage Foundation and was key note speaker at the Montreal Federation Annual Leadership Conference.

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Lichter Lecture: 50 Years after Eichmann

Each year, the Department of Judaic Studies presents the annual Lichter Lecture, made possible by the Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Fund of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. The theme for the latest installment in this three decade long series was “The Eichmann Trial: Fifty Years Later.”

This year’s Lichter Lecture events were held Oct. 24, Nov. 3 and Nov. 14, featuring guest speakers professor David Engel, New York University; professor Deborah Lipstadt, Emory University; and professor Michael R. Marrus, University of Toronto.

“Last year (2011) marked the 50th anniversary of the Eichmann trial. The Judaic Studies department’s Lichter Lecture Series focuses on the long-lasting impact of the Eichmann trial – on the Jewish people and globally. We were fortunate enough to have attracted to our UC campus three experts in the field—professors Engel, Lipstadt and Marrus—who pondered the juridical, historical and ethical dimensions of the trial of one of the most infamous Nazi criminals,” says Gila Safran Naveh, professor and department head.

About the lectures: Fifty years ago in Jerusalem, Nazi officer SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann went on trial for his central role in the Holocaust. From its opening in April until its conclusion in December 1961, the trial of the Nazi criminal by the young Jewish state attracted world attention. This was undoubtedly the most important trial focusing on the Holocaust and continues to impact our understanding of its perpetrators and the ordeal of its victims. Fifty years later the voices heard at the Eichmann trial—the prosecution, defense, witnesses and commentators covering the trial—still resonate in the way the Holocaust is understood and remembered.


Third Lecture: “The Eichmann Trial and Israeli Jurisdiction: Controversies Then and Now,” presented by Michael R. Marrus, professor emeritus of Holocaust studies at the University of Toronto

Judaic Studies collaborates on ‘Hineini’ project

by Hannah Henschel

Cincinnati Hillel hosted a film presentation Oct. 10 to celebrate and raise awareness for National Coming Out Day, a national LGBTQ holiday.

On October 11, the LGBTQ community has a holiday for those willing to come out and be proud of their true selves, along with raising awareness of support systems for those individuals. Hillel—with collaboration from Women’s Center of UC; LGBTQ Center of UC; Judaic Studies Department; Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department; and Binah Jewish Women’s Group—saw the day before this national event as a way to get some of UC’s students and faculty together to show the great support system for LGBTQ students on campus. In addition to many other important projects, professor Shannon Schaffer spearheaded this project in the Department of Judaic Studies.

The movie, “Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School,” was produced by Keshet, an inclusion advocacy group for LGBTQ Jews in their Jewish journeys. The movie is about a Jewish teenage girl's inspiring journey to create a gay-straight alliance in a pluralistic Jewish high school. More information on Keshet can be found at www.keshetonline.org. After the movie there was a panel discussion lead by Rabbi Elana Dellal, the director of Hillel Jewish Student Center. With her thank you to the 75 students and faculty in attendance, she discussed the importance of a support system for queer-identifying students and how UC’s Hillel and the other organizations helping out with the event are among that support system.

After Dellal’s opening remarks, each member of the panel, including Dr. Gila Naveh, department head of Judaic Studies; Leisan Smith, programming director of the LGBTQ Center; and Hebrew Union College Rabbinical students Ariel Naveh and Dana Benson, talked about how it is important for LGBTQ students to feel a sense of community.

Hillel and the supporting organizations for the event understand the need for this community, and by having this film presentation, they have started the building blocks to create this important network. To find out more information on the support systems around the University of Cincinnati, contact any of the organizations that held this event.
Taft Report Status

Judaic Studies has achieved the status of Taft Department and will benefit for the first time from research and travel grants as well as sponsored lectures and events.

Summer Research Fellowships
Adi Gordon, received a Summer 2011 Research Fellowship.

Faculty Release Fellowship
Gordon received an $8,000 Faculty Release Fellowship for his work, “On Jews and Other Nations: The Intellectual Biography of Hans Kohn (1891-1975).”

2010-11 Judaic Studies Guest Lectures
Hizky Shoham, Yale University, “Tel-Aviv: From Jewish Neighborhood to ‘Hebrew’ Metropolis?”

Susan Miller, University of California-Davis, “Between Memory and Extinction: The Moroccan Jewish Quarter in the Twentieth Century”


Erika Hughes, Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin & the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Sept. 26, 2011, “Staging the Holocaust: Three Approaches to Holocaust Performances for Young Audiences in Germany, Israel & the U.S.”

News in Judaic Studies

There are three new curricular developments in the Department of Judaic Studies:

Judaic Studies will offer a Joint UC-Hebrew Union College Graduate Certificate in Judaic Studies.

The McMicken College of Arts & Sciences will offer a Certificate in Religious Studies administered and housed through the Department of Judaic Studies.

Judaic Studies will offer a Certificate in Modern Hebrew.

The Judaic Studies curriculum will align with the University of Cincinnati’s transition to semesters in Fall 2012. The department’s more streamlined curriculum consists of three types of courses: general introductions to Jewish history and culture (1000 level), topics with broad accessibility that meet general education requirements (2000 level), and upper-level electives for Judaic Studies majors, minors and advanced students from other departments (3000 level and above). With its revamped curriculum, the department can continue to offer its popular courses to a broad spectrum of students while creating a superior academic experience for its majors and minors in the advanced courses.

Honor Roll of Donors

We thank the following individuals for their generous donations to the department from January 2011 to March 2012. These gifts fund scholarships, attract and retain the finest faculty, and enrich the experiences of our undergraduate and graduate students.

Mr. Richard H. Allen and Mrs. Barbara B. Allen
Mrs. Miriam G. Bernstein
Mr. Malcolm A. Bernstein
Mrs. Rozelyn Bierzczak
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Mr. and Mrs. Matthew O. Chimsky
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Hon. and Mrs. Burton Perlman
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Dr. and Mrs. Michael S. Porte

For information on making a gift to the Department of Judaic Studies, please contact Deb Plytnski, deborah.plytnski@uc.edu or 513-556-5806

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McMicken College of Arts & Sciences Department of Judaic Studies (www.artsci.uc.edu/updates)