Dear Alumni & Friends,

It is my great honor to write as the Head of UC’s Department of Judaic Studies and Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Endowed Chair, at the end of the academic year 2013-14. Founded forty years ago (1974) as a program with only one faculty member, the program has grown into a full-fledged vibrant department through the generosity of our life-long supporters and the tenacity and scholarly achievements of our faculty. With Professor Michal Raucher, our newly hired tenure-track faculty, the department has now a core faculty of six, six part time adjuncts, and sixteen affiliate faculty. Last year, we taught many hundreds of students in dozens of courses in Judaic Studies. The department sponsored or co-sponsored interdisciplinary and intercollegiate programs. Our faculty participated at national and international conferences, took part in panel discussions and symposia, and engaged in scholarly research and publication. At the same time, we were engaged in the community. And this coming year promises nothing less. The Lichter Lectures series and the partnerships we developed with the Taft Research Center, Catholic Studies, German Studies, History, WGSS, the CHHE, HUC-JIR, JCC, the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, and the Ohio Council for the Humanities will enable us to most preeminent scholars of Judaic Studies. I invite you to look over our calendar and participate in our events!

I am also excited to share with you our commitment to make service learning, community engagement, and social justice defining elements of Judaic Studies. All Judaic Studies faculty will design new courses that address pressing issues in social justice, global politics, and information technologies and provide students with transformative experiences to apply their knowledge in real-world settings.

We are actively seeking partners in these endeavors, as well. Please contact me at the Department Office, 513-556-2300, if you would like more information. With your participation and generous support, we will be able to realize these ambitions and continue to blaze a path to excellence that has defined the Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati over the past forty years.

Sincerely yours,

Gila Safran Naveh, Ph.D. - Professor of Judaic Studies & Comparative Literature, Judaic Studies Department Head and Endowed Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Chair

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Why Study Judaic

“Back in 1984 when I was 18 years old, I decided to drop out of college to enter the world of business. Being that young, I thought I knew everything but it was not until three years ago that I went back to college in my mid forties that I realized how much I missed by not pursuing a bachelors degree when I was a teen. I chose to go back to school on the advice of my best friend and it has been very rewarding to say the least. Although I am Jewish, I knew nothing of the history or the culture of the Jews and thought getting a degree in Judaic Studies and learning Hebrew would be a great experience. The Professors in the Judaic Studies program are some of the nicest and smartest people I have ever known. When I was on the proverbial ledge of quitting Hebrew two weeks into my first semester, Matthew Kraus talked me off the ledge and next semester I will be completing the language requirement for my degree.

At first my goal was to go on to a masters degree in holocaust studies but I have decided instead to pursue an M.A. in counseling, back home in South Florida where February is the nicest month of the year. I am very much looking forward to my capstones in the fall and seeing how all I have learned will come together in my final semester.” - Shai Elias
Faculty Profiles

Dana Gregory Griffith “Dr. G.” is co-coordinator of the Religious Studies Certificate Program. He teaches the courses Introduction to the Study of Religion, Buddhism: History and Thought, and Suffering and Death in World Religions in the certificate, as well as occasional Judaic Studies courses in literature, mythology, and Biblical poetry. He created and taught an Honors Seminar in Religious Intolerance for fall, 2013, which will be offered by the UC Honors program again in 2014. In addition to creating and teaching these courses, he drafted a Biblical Studies Certificate for Judaic Studies, which has just been approved by the administration. His book of poetry, titled Collected Tunes of the Blues Buddha is forthcoming from I-Beam Press.

He is a member of the Gaden Samdrupling Tibetan Buddhist monastery and the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Griffith is also on faculty in the UC Department of English and Comparative Literature and is affiliate faculty in the UC Asian Studies Program. He was nominated for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 University President’s Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Award for excellent teaching.

Shannon E. Schaffer has, twice now, successfully run an online course for the Department of Judaic Studies, our firstforay into online education. She also secured a grant from UC International to prepare a study abroad experience for the department. This faculty-led travel study, planned for summer 2015, will entail participation in a season of archaeological excavation at a biblical site in Israel, with travels across the country to ancient and modern locales. She is creating a course on Biblical Archaeology to run in the spring in preparation for the trip. Prof. Schaffer will also be teaching Mysteries of the Bible, a course that deals with science, pseudo-science, media and the Bible, this upcoming summer term.

Roger Selya Emeritus Professor of Geography, is serving as the director of our new graduate certificate program. His goals for the year are to publicize the program and actively recruit applicants for the 2104-15 academic year.

Steven Bowman presented a paper on Sepher Yosippon in the 19th century at the third workshop in Oxford on Josephus and plans to present another on the 20th century in June. This spring he will be a fellow at the Medici Archive Project in Firenze and then do further research and writing on his Yosippon monograph. Following the Greek publication of his book on the Jews in the Greek Resistance (Athens, 2012), the Hebrew version will appear this spring. His article will appear shortly: “Greek Responses to the Nazis in the Mountains and in the Camps” in Jewish Resistance against the Nazis, published by Catholic University Press; the collection is a major response to the deprecation of Holocaust victims as “sheep to the slaughter.” He has three other articles and five reviews in press.

Michael Porte Right now, professor Porte is teaching a class in Meditation at Cincinnati State, a class in tai chi at the Clifton Cultural Arts Center and Jews in American Film at UC. In December, I led the 47th New York Arts Tour where we saw Falstaff at the Met and Twelfth Night and Richard III on Broadway.

Celebrating 40 years of Judaic Studies at UC
In 2013-2014 Matthew Kraus, and Steven Bowman, Ari Finkelstein co-directed the annual Lichter Lecture Series: Pursuing Justice: Jewish Law in the 21st Century. The series explored issues of the relationship between church and state from the Bible to modern times. The goal of the lecture series was to deepen the understanding of the UC community, the Cincinnati Jewish community and that of the wider public of the dynamic between halakha (Jewish law) and the law of the secular state both in Israel and in the United States. The committee believed this was a timely topic given the advances of the Women of the Wall Movement in Israel.

The lecture series brought in three respected people in their fields. David Flatto, a professor of Law, at Penn State University, spoke about “The Concept of a Separation of Powers: A Novel Doctrine in Early Jewish Jurisprudence and its Analogs in Modern Western Jurisprudence”, on Wednesday, October 23 to a packed room of 96 members of the Jewish community and wider Cincinnati community as well as to UC students at the Taft Center on the University of Cincinnati campus. Flatto expertly and entertainingly presented the principle of a separation of powers between the king, the scribes and the priests in Deuteronomy 17 and traced its development to the modern nation state, demonstrating the similarities but emphasizing the differences between these concepts.

On Monday November 4, 2013 Gary J. Jacobsohn, the Malcolm Macdonald Professor in Constitutional and Comparative Law at The University of Texas at Austin spoke at the UC College of Law on “Constitutions in Divided Societies: the Case of Israel” to an audience of 76 people. Jacobsohn expertly and lyrically presented the complex matrix in which the modern State of Israel finds itself caught between two possibly irreconcilable principles of democracy and religion. He concluded that Israel should not attempt to develop a constitution which would only deepen divisions within the country and which could not ever be resolved successfully.

On Sunday November 17, 2013, as sirens rang and tornado winds blew, 80 members of the Cincinnati Jewish Community came together to hear Rabbi Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, PhD, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Sabath Beit-Halachmi spoke out about the legal and social struggles of the Women of the Wall Movement in Israel who seek to obtain equal rights to pray at the foot of the Western Wall without harassment.
Judaic Studies Brings Students to Israel and Jordan

With so many programs available, it is hard to imagine an innovative approach to experiencing Israel. Innovative, however, most aptly describes the travel-study course for University of Cincinnati students entitled, “Ancient and Modern Encounters: Israel and Jordan.” Sponsored by the Department of Judaic Studies and UC International, the trip was organized and led by Matthew Kraus, assistant professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati. Rarely do a diverse group of students travel the country together. Rarely, does a group compare and contrast how ancient and modern regularly meet in Israel and Jordan: Old City/New City, Tel-Aviv/Yafo, Wadi Rum/Amman, Netanya/Caesarea, poetry/papyri, taxis/camels and Qumran/Eliezer ben Yehudah. For three weeks from the end of April through mid-May, Professor Kraus and the students traversed both countries, visiting antiquities such as Masada, Petra, and Gamla and the contemporary sites of Yad Vashem, Kibbutz Lotan, the heart of Amman, and the Hula Nature reserve, to name a few. One UC student, Maggie Rivera, described the course by saying: “at the end of each of day, it was hard to imagine how the next day could be even more amazing, and yet it was.”

A highlight of the class was studying relevant texts on location—discussing T.E. Lawrence’s description of Wadi Rum, reflecting upon Yehudah Amichai’s poem “Tourists” on the steps of David’s Citadel in Jerusalem, comparing biblical and rabbinic texts on the death of Moses with Rachel’s poem “MiNeged” on Mt. Nebo with its panoramic view of the land of Israel (“in every expectation there is a Mt. Nebo”). Another highlight was a five-night homestay in Cincinnati’s “sister” city of Netanya, organized and sponsored by P2K, a partnership through the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. In addition to spending Shabbat and Shavuot in the vibrant city of Netanya, the group enjoyed a fascinating morning at Netanya Academic College, which included a tour of the beautiful campus and a presentation on the Arab-Israeli conflict from Elie Friedman, Project Manager at NAC’s S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue. In addition, the group attended a seminar on Irish conversos/crypto-Jews introduced by Breifne O’Reilly, the Irish ambassador to Israel and had a study-session on the Jerusalem Talmud with campus rabbi, Moshe Pinchuk. Notes Professor Kraus, “in Netanya, the UC group received an in-depth and authentic understanding of daily life in Israel.” Kraus further explains that each day, students were required to present on relevant topics including mosaic production, Roman baths, the differences between Sunni and Shi’ite Islam, and the story of the Danish rescue of Jews in 1943. Students also took turns blogging about each day’s adventures.
Ari Finkelstein is Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati. His dissertation - “Emperor Julian among Jews, Christians and ‘Hellenes’ in Antioch: Jewish Practice as a Guide to ‘Hellenes’ and a Goad to Christians” (Harvard University, 2011), examined 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 practice in order to create a Neoplatonic ethnically-ordered Roman empire. His research interests involve 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.


Ari has introduced a new course in the Fall 2014 - The Old Testament between Jews and Christians. This course investigates how the Hebrew Bible, through interpretation and re-interpretation, spawned two different cultural systems. He is now planning a second new course: Famous Jewish Legal Cases, which will examine famous Jewish legal cases throughout history by employing legal reading of texts. As a former lawyer trained in multiple legal systems, Dr. Finkelstein is well-suited to develop this course and looks forward to bringing in law specialists to lead certain classes. This spring he taught a graduate level course to the department’s first graduate student in its joint UC-HUC Certificate in Judaic Studies and has also directed the honors thesis work of Rachel Meeks, a Judaic Studies major.

John Brolley (Instructor-Educator) regularly teaches three courses each semester and tries to teach at least one course every summer, with specializations in Bible, demonology/angelology, and creation myth. He also currently directs the department's Religious Studies and Biblical Studies certificates. This past academic year, John received the National Society of Leadership and Success' Excellence in Teaching Award.

Gila Safran Naveh A Fellow of the Academy of Teaching and Learning, Department Head and Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Chair, Professor Gila Safran Naveh continued to lead the department on its path of excellence and created new partnerships and alliances on and off campus. Professor Safran Naveh published “A Semiotic of Retrospection: The Holocaust and Strategies of Desire in T. Rosenbaum’s Elijah Visible and Second Hand Smoke” and “From Performance to a New Perception and Empowerment: Jewish Salons”. She presented a scholarly paper, entitled ‘A Sign of Our Times: From ‘Reading’ to ‘Seeing’ the Holocaust’, at the Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America, where she analyzes the shift in representations of the Shoah from fiction to film as well as its relevance to the current structuring of cultural identity. She also gave several talks in the community.
Scenes from Academic Years 2013 - 2014 in Judaic Studies

Celebrating 40 years of Judaic Studies at UC • Celebrating 40 years of Judaic Studies at UC

Lichter Lecture

2010 2012
The Religious Studies Certificate Program is an interdisciplinary program created by and housed within Judaic Studies. It has courses in eleven other UC departments, including Africana Studies; Anthropology; Classics; English and Comparative Literature; History; and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. It has the largest and most diverse course offerings of any certificate at the University of Cincinnati, with more than 70 courses available to students. Since its inception in the fall of 2012, the program has gone from zero students to sixteen enrolled in a little over a year, and continues to grow in both student numbers and course offerings. In spring 2013, Judaic Studies awarded its first two religious studies certificates and will award several more in spring 2014.

Biblical Studies Certificate: The Department of Judaic Studies will offer a new certificate in Biblical Studies in the 2014-15 school year. The new certificate will be a six course, eighteen credit hour program of study with mandatory courses in the theory and methods of Biblical Studies, Hebrew Scriptures and Women in the Bible. Students will be required to take one course from each of three categories: Historical Background, Texts and Contexts, and Biblical Topics. This rubric will give students a strong background in the discipline while allowing them the flexibility to focus on one area of interest or concentration.

Both certificates are available to community members.

Honor Roll of Donors

We thank the following individuals for their generous donations to the department. These gifts fund scholarships, attract and retain the finest faculty, and enrich the experiences of our undergraduate and graduate students. The following donors who contributed to Judaic Studies from March, 2013 – April 23, 2014

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Student Spotlight: Rachel Meeks

Judaic Studies student Rachel Meeks was awarded Helen Weinberger Prize, which is awarded to the Phi Beta Kappa student with the highest GPA – her GPA is (literally) 4.00.

“Rachel is an ideal student and exemplary citizen who regularly contributes without dominating,” says Matthew Kraus, director of undergraduate studies, Judaic Studies. “She is the complete package: smart, compassionate and talented.”

Rachel is one of the many talented students who make Judaic Studies their academic home.