Shalom Haverim – The 2015-2016 academic year has been an exciting one for all of us in the University of Cincinnati’s Department of Judaic Studies. The College of Arts and Sciences has hired a new dean who actively encourages and supports us as we move forward on a path of excellence, and our department has hired another dynamic faculty member. Assistant Professor Craig Perry, a rising star in Judaic Studies, will replace Professor Steven Bowman, who retired last spring after serving the department for over thirty-four years. We have an ambitious strategic plan to increase the visibility of our department, and we have made our research known nationally and internationally by presenting numerous scholarly papers at conferences and by publishing our research. Our team continues to offer an exciting array of courses, including courses delivered in online and hybrid formats. To strengthen our position on and off campus, we have fostered new partnerships across campus and also have been active in the community. The long-running and popular Jennie L. and Jacob Lichter Lectures were especially exciting this year as we explored the topic, Eco-Judaism: New Jewish Approaches to the Environment. The series was presented in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, the Mayerson JCC, The UC Taft Research Center, and the Cincinnati Hillel Student Foundation. We brought to Cincinnati three speakers, all outstanding in their fields: Professors Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Julia Watts Belser, and Jeremy Benstein.

In the framework of the International Holocaust Day, we invited the Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Mr. Marian Marzynski to present and discuss his latest documentary film, “Never Forger to Lie.” The presentation also featured our retired colleagues and lifelong Judaic Studies supporters, Drs. Edward and Halina Herman.

I am thrilled to announce that, after the success of the event, Mr. Marzynski has accepted our invitation to become an Associate Fellow of the Judaic Studies Department at our Center for Jewish Cultures and Ideas while he undertakes his next original project. During our spring semester, we sponsored a stimulating guest presentation by HUC-JIR Cincinnati Rabbi Dr. Haim O. Rechnitzer, entitled, “Mystical Encounters in Modern Israeli Poetry.”

On the academic front, our department has admitted – and is still admitting – top-notch students to the Joint Graduate Program in Judaic Studies. Likewise, we are growing our certificates in Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, and Modern Hebrew. This enables us to increase further the number of our undergraduate majors and minors. As student evaluations show, our students are excited about the range of courses we offer and praise our faculty for their personalized teaching and the breadth of knowledge they display.

Toda Raba! I wish to thank you so much for being a Friend of Judaic Studies and for your continued support. Without that generous and sustained support, the Judaic Studies Department would not have the strength or the capacity to address the growing level of interest that surrounds it!

We look forward to new opportunities and new challenges. Most importantly, we look forward to a meaningful and mutually enriching partnership with you, our dedicated friends.

Professor Gila Naveh,
Judaic Studies Department Head
Endowed Chair of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati
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The Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Lecture Series 2015-2016

ECO JUDAISM: New Jewish Approaches to the Environment

The Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Lecture Series 2015-2016, Eco-Judaism: New Jewish Approaches to the Environment, was organized by Professors Ari Finkelstein, Matthew Kraus, and Michal Raucher. This year’s series was co-sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, the Taft Research Center, the Cincinnati Hillel Student Foundation, and the Mayerson Jewish Community Center; additional support was granted by the UC Environmental Studies Program, UC Sustainability, and the UC Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department. The 2015-2016 series featured three exceptional scholars who examined regional and global environmental issues from historical, theological, anthropological, and political perspectives. The series opened at UC’s Taft Research Center with, “Jewish Environmentalism: Faith, Scholarship, and Activism,” a lecture in which Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Arizona State University) explored the extensive and profoundly nuanced historical discourse between religion and ecology. Julia Watts Belser’s (Georgetown University) presentation, “Fasting, Prayer, and Protest: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Environmental Crisis,” offered a fresh academic outlook on the multivalent nature of rabbinic Judaism’s approaches to water – or the lack thereof – in late antiquity and beyond. The final 2015-2016 Lichter Lecture was delivered by Jeremy Benstein, deputy director of Tel Aviv’s Heschel Center for Sustainability, and was entitled, “Sustaining Israel: Zionism, the Environment and Peace.” Speaking at the Mayerson Jewish Community Center, Dr. Benstein enlightened the audience as to the complexities and ramifications of environmental policy and action among Israel’s Jewish and Arab communities. Over 150 people enjoyed this year’s Lichter events, and each lecture sparked lively and informative discussion among attendees and speakers!
This spring the Judaic Studies Department was honored to welcome Emmy award-winning filmmaker, Mr. Marian Marzynski, for a presentation and discussion of his most recent film, “Never Forget to Lie.”

The film retraces Marzynski’s experience as a Jewish youngster in Poland who managed to escape the Holocaust and find shelter in the care of, among others, a Catholic monastery. Marzynski tells this remarkable story by also helping to present the stories of others who experienced and survived the Holocaust as children. The film and the discussion captivated all those who attended the event at the Taft Research Center, and Mr. Marzynski has graciously accepted the invitation to visit as an Associate Fellow of the Judaic Studies Department at the Center for Jewish Cultures and Ideas in the near future.

This spring the Judaic Studies Department was delighted to present Rabbi Dr. Haim Rechnitzer, Associate Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at Hebrew Union College-JIR (Cincinnati), affiliate member of the Judaic Studies Department, and published poet. Dr. Rechnitzer’s lecture, entitled, “Mystical Encounters in Modern Hebrew Poetry,” challenged academic and non-academic readers alike to develop awareness of the theological content nested in various forms of modern secular Hebrew poetry, as well as this literary body’s general impact on broader Jewish thought.
John Brolley taught two First Year Topics seminars: Creation Stories and Jesus, Judaism, and History this year; he also taught several Bible courses, a mid-collegiate course on demonology, and his first semester of History of Jewish Civilization I. In addition to his teaching privileges, he coordinated the department’s certificates in Religious Studies and in Biblical Studies, and continues to serve on UC’s Faculty Grievance Committee. However, his proudest moment of the 2015-16 academic year was being featured in the UC Recreation Center’s Member Spotlight.

Ari Finkelstein has published an article, presented a paper at the International Society of Biblical Literature Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and has been writing a manuscript of his book, “Emperor Julian and the Jews: The Place of Jews in the Making of a Pagan Roman Empire.” In his second year as director of the joint UC-HUC Judaic Studies Certificate, Dr. Finkelstein has welcomed another two students into the program and has recruited four others to begin next year. He has also enjoyed teaching Hebrew and biblical studies courses. Next year Dr. Finkelstein will be a Taft Center Fellow.

Craig Perry earned his PhD at Emory University in 2014. His current book project is a history of domestic slavery and the slave trade based on documents from the Geniza and other Arabic sources. Dr. Perry is also co-editor of, “Volume Two of The Cambridge World History of Slavery.”


Gila Safran Naveh has made substantial progress leading the department on its path of excellence. Naveh has hired dynamic new faculty, has strengthened the department’s partnerships and alliances on and off campus, has worked with Judaic Studies alumni and the Friends of Judaic Studies, and has maintained significant fundraising efforts for the department. Professor Safran Naveh is actively engaged in scholarship as well: at the most recent Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America she presented a scholarly paper entitled, “Narcissiating in the Age of the Web: Fantasies of Identity, Love and Self-Knowledge in the Pond of Virtuality.” In this paper, Prof. Naveh suggests that our attempts to decode the surplus of truth that fully delineates human love and desire, reveal that all definitions of “self” rest upon the existence of an imaginary absolute that threatens to reassert itself. Her paper entitled, “Desire and Paradox: Tainted Love of Knowledge and Power in Kafka’s Parable ‘Before the Law,’” is currently in press. During the past academic year Professor Naveh also delivered several lectures in the community, wrote two book reviews, and reviewed the 2015 Holocaust-themed film, “Son of Saul.”

Michal Raucher has had a productive 2015-2016! Professor Raucher presented papers at the annual conferences of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, the American Academy of Religion, and the Association for Jewish Studies. One of her articles on ethnography and Jewish ethics is going to be printed in the Journal of Religious Ethics, and she met with multiple presses interested in publishing her book manuscript, “Birthing Ethics: Reproductive Ethics among Haredi Women in Jerusalem.” She taught Introduction to the Study of Religion for the first time, and thoroughly enjoyed it; and she taught Modern Israel, a course that is always filled with current events. Together with Matthew Kraus, she coordinated the Lichter Lecture Series on Judaism and the environment. Thanks to a summer grant from the Israel Institute, Professor Raucher will begin a new research project this summer on Orthodox female clergy in Israel.
Steven Cahn, PhD (CCM 1997), Associate Professor of Music Theory, is a music theorist and pianist. In October 2015, he spoke in Rome at the conference, “Jewishness and the Arts,” about the composer, Salomon Jadassohn. For the fall 2016 exhibit at the Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme in Paris of paintings by the composer Arnold Schoenberg, he has written a scholarly essay for the exhibition catalogue.

Cynthia Crane, PhD, Assoc. Prof. English, UC BAC is completing work on a historical biography. A number of her book reviews have been published recently, in such places as, “Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal,” and in H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. In fall 2015, Crane gave a talk at the conference, “Re-examining the 1960s: Media, Politics, Culture in Texas;” and in April she was part of a panel, “The Holocaust in American Life,” at the 34th Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide in Pennsylvania.

Ethan Katz, Assistant Professor of History. He is the author of, “The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France,” published in autumn 2015 by Harvard University Press; and the recipient of a 2015 National Jewish Book Award. He is also the co-editor of two books, “Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times” (UPenn Press, 2015); and, “Colonialism in Question” (Indiana University Press, forthcoming). Katz teaches a range of courses in European, Jewish, and Mediterranean history and lectures and teaches frequently in the broader community.

Adrian Parr is Professor of Political Philosophy and Environmental Politics and a UNESCO co-chair of Water Access and Sustainability. She is the author of, “The Wrath of Capital” (Columbia UP, 2013), and “Hijacking Sustainability” (MIT, 2009).

Rabbi Haim Rechnitzer, PhD is Associate Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at the Hebrew Union College-JIR and a poet. He earned his doctorate from the department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University, and his rabbinic ordination from HUC-JIR (Jerusalem). His recent books are, “Prophecy and the Perfect Political Order: The Political Theology of Leo Strauss” (2012), “Songs of the Third Exile” (2014), and “Shibolet (Vortex)” (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2015).

Katherine Sorrels is an Assistant Professor of History. She works in modern Central European cultural and intellectual history. Her research brings together themes from Jewish history, history of nationalism and internationalism, history of the scientific study of race, and history of empires and colonialism. She received her PhD from the University of Pittsburgh in 2009.

Jeff Zalar earned an Honors B.A. in History and Theology from Marquette University and a PhD with Distinction in modern German cultural and intellectual history from Georgetown. His research is in the history of modern German Catholicism, the history of Catholic ideas, and the religious foundations of Western Civilization. He is an assistant professor of History and the inaugural holder of the Ruth J. and Robert A. Conway Endowed Chair in Catholic Studies.
Ingrid Epstein has taught Introduction to Judaism and both Beginning and Intermediate Modern Hebrew in the past year. She has enjoyed teaching a diverse group of students who bring varied perspectives to her classroom. One highlight of the year was the tour of Cincinnati’s Plum Street Temple that her Judaism class took. In addition to her teaching, Ingrid has delivered a number of lectures this year in the Cincinnati area.

Arna Fisher has created and taught this semester an exciting course entitled “Eat, Drink, Pray, Love.”

Dana Gregory Griffith “Dr. G.” co-coordinates the Religious Studies and Biblical Studies Certificates in Judaic Studies. He teaches Introduction to the Study of Religion, Buddhism: History and Thought, and Yoga in its Hindu Matrix in the certificate, as well as occasional Judaic Studies courses in literature, mythology, and Biblical poetry. His honors seminar, Understanding Religious Intolerance, was approved for an unprecedented fourth year for 2016-17. Dr. G. recently received a grant for course development and research in religion and popular culture from the A&S Dean’s office.

Shannon Shaffer taught Introduction to the Bible and Introduction to Judaism. She creates online courses in religious and biblical studies and teaches biblical Hebrew live in an online meeting platform.

Allison (Alley) Schottenstein is currently finishing her dissertation in History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her specialties include American and European Jewish History as well as Ethnic Studies. Allison also holds a certificate in Holocaust Studies from Northwestern University. Her dissertation, which she hopes to finish in the fall of 2016, centers on the Houston Jewish community’s reaction to the Long Civil Rights Movement.

Steven Bowman is an Associate Fellow at the Katz Center for Advanced Hebrew Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and will also be giving a lecture at the city’s oldest synagogue Mikveh Israel.

In fall 2015, he chaired a session and participated at the Spiritual Dimensions Conference at the University of Virginia. Prof. Bowman was invited to join the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jews who Rescued Fellow Jews During the Holocaust (JRJ). He currently has four articles in press; two Memorial volumes in Spain and Italy, an article with De Gruyter’s conference volume on Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust, and a co-authored article on a Genizah fragment discovered in London. He also contributed an article on Sepher Yosippon to the new online Josephus Reception Archive sponsored by Oxford University. Four reviews are in print, including Stefan Ihrig, “Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination” (Cambridge, Mass., 2014) for American Hellenic Institute Foundation Policy Journal (Spring 2016).

Michael Porte, PhD teaches Jews in American Film fall semester and The Bible in Film spring semester at UC. He volunteers teaching tai chi at the Christ Hospital and the Clifton Cultural Arts Center. He was co-editor of Cinema Now and served on the media panel of the Ohio Arts Council. He emcees the Jump ‘n’ Jive Big Band and is listed in the current edition of Who’s Who in American Education.

Roger Selya has been active in the community and generously offered mentorship in the department.
CRAIG PERRY is a social historian of the medieval Near East and earned his PhD at Emory University in 2014. At Princeton University his postdoctoral research was supported by a Collaborative Research Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Dr. Perry has analyzed the evolving formulae used in slave bills of sale to demonstrate how courts served as a privileged site for the incorporation of Islamic legal norms into Jewish legal practice.

His current book project is a history of domestic slavery and the slave trade based on documents from the Geniza and other Arabic sources. He is also co-editor of volume 2 of The Cambridge World History of Slavery on the medieval period.

1. When did you first get “bitten by the bug” regarding college teaching and research?  

It’s hard for me to believe that I’m finally realizing a goal, in becoming a part of the UC faculty, that took root when I was in high school. At that time, I was lucky to have a series of outstanding History and English teachers who profoundly impacted me and who pushed me intellectually and as a writer. When I went to college, I actually had the idea that I wanted to be a high school World History teacher. Perhaps I had a vague notion that graduate school might be in my future, but World History teaching seemed to be the best way for me to keep exploring diverse interests and gain teaching experience at the same time. I went straight from undergrad into a Master of Arts in Teaching program. This program allowed me to do a year of student-teaching and take graduate courses in History. The teaching piece was much harder than I ever imagined it would be—from managing my classroom to preparing multiple lessons on a daily basis. The graduate courses were also challenging, but they gave me the opportunity to learn what graduate coursework entailed and to do historical research.

Well, way led to way and I ended up teaching for a much longer period (six years), but I’m glad that I did. For starters, it took me a couple of years before I began to feel successful as a classroom teacher. Also, though I didn’t realize it at the time, I was initially motivated to teach because I wanted to master my subjects. Yet, the longer I taught, the more I became as focused on what my students were learning and experiencing and my teaching style kept evolving as a result. More-over, teaching new courses and at different kinds of schools allowed me to continually experiment with pedagogy and new content. And so… (See #2)

2. What do you see as your specialties and what got you interested in those areas of study?  

… I had the opportunity to teach a comparative religion elective. This was in 2002-2003. I lived in Washington, D.C., and I knew relatively little of Judaism or Islam beyond what I taught in survey courses. Through teaching and different professional development experiences, I started to go deeper and deeper into the study of religion and especially with regards to Judaism and Islam. These interests led me to pursue a teaching position at the Casablanca American School in Morocco. This was a tremendous opportunity and I began to study Arabic as well as gain first-hand experience of an Islamic culture and society, one with a rich Jewish history to boot. I then moved to Los Angeles to get married (long story) and landed a job at a Jewish day school, Milken Community High School. This is where my interest in Judaic Studies really took off as part of the faculty and as a teacher in a program that sought to integrate World and Jewish History. I wanted to use graduate school to study Arabic and Hebrew and to work on the project of integrating Jewish and World
history. It was my great fortune that Emory University has tremendous resources in medieval Jewish and Islamic History. It was also at Emory that I first studied the history of slavery with an Atlantic historian. Just as I was readying myself into the field of Atlantic Slavery, I realized that there was a fuller history yet to be written about domestic slavery and the slave trade in the Jewish community of medieval Egypt.

3. **What is exciting about the work you do?**

The materials I study, the documents of the Cairo Geniza, are an unusually rich source for both Jewish history and the history of daily life in the medieval Islamic world. Even the story of how these documents were preserved for a thousand years and then “rediscovered” by antiquities collectors in the nineteenth century is fascinating. The Geniza contains documents like deathbed wills that transport us to the most intimate moments of a human being’s life. I find the detail and texture we discover in such documentary sources to have tremendous poignancy. Moreover, we learn things about Jewish family life at these consequential moments that we would never know otherwise. For example, women on their deathbeds often took the opportunity to free their slaves and to declare openly how it was their slave woman who cared for them while they were ill and not their natal kin.

Another exciting aspect of my work is its collaborative nature. Precisely due to the fragmentary nature of Geniza sources, Geniza scholars benefit greatly when they work together on transcribing, translating, and making sense of their sources. I am lucky to have generous and talented colleagues. Our work together in person, and even over Skype, makes the scholarly work even more exciting because we share in each other's discoveries and feel a sense of professional community. It's also a great time to be in Geniza studies because we are launching coordinated digital initiatives and increasingly working with scholars who study medieval Arabic documents contemporary to Geniza records. We are finding all sorts of connections and areas of common purpose.

4. **What are a couple of things you’re looking forward to doing in Cincinnati?**

I have to admit that I knew little about Cincinnati before I applied to the position in Judaic Studies. Yet the more I learn about the city and region, the more excited I am about exploring the place and making it a home for me and my family. What we look forward to most is finding community with colleagues, neighbors, and friends. I enjoy cycling and I am eager to explore new routes on both sides of the river. As a family, we like to spend time outdoors, whether it is at the park or on a camping trip. So if you have any tips for me, please share.
Student Testimonials

Eden Crosset
Starting at the University of Cincinnati, I was lost in terms of what to study. I wanted to find a career path but also learn about subjects I was passionate about. I was taking classes from all over the board with no real direction, but my mom inspired me to take Introduction to Religious Studies. As my first semester came to a close, I found that my religious studies elective was by far the most interesting and engaging class I was taking. My professor was excited about what he was teaching, and it made me want to learn more. Over the next four years, I always made it a point to take a few religious studies electives because they were so interesting to me and gave me an educational “breath of fresh air.” I began my senior year finishing up my Communication major and my Religious Studies Certificate, but still feeling like something was missing from my education; which is why I decided to pursue a graduate certificate in Judaic Studies. I am lucky to have been given this opportunity to learn more about religion and Judaism, but also to have individualized attention from my professors. I look forward to completing the program in the fall.

Chris Patterson
My name is Chris Patterson and I am a senior History major. I will be starting graduate school this coming fall at the University of Cincinnati and hope to (eventually) teach Reformation and German Early-Modern History in a college setting. I decided to pursue certificates in Religious and Biblical Studies because they both interest me and provide great supplemental knowledge to my core studies. It has been incredibly helpful, informative, and fun working with the Judaic Studies faculty. Every class I’ve taken through the department has been an outstanding learning experience and the faculty were always eager to help or clarify the subject matter. The department also gave me the opportunity to be a teaching assistant and gain valuable experience toward my long-term career goals. The department is easily one of the best on campus!

Daniel Kaplan
Religion has always been an important part of my personal identity here at the University of Cincinnati. For many people I encountered, I was the first Jewish person they had met in their lifetime. Being able to properly educate and relate to people about Judaism, especially those who had never met someone Jewish, is one of the main reasons I am part of the Judaic Studies program here and am pursuing my degree in the field. Throughout my life, I have constantly been involved in different Jewish organizations ranging from youth groups to volunteering. I felt it was important to understand Judaism as much as possible, both historically and religiously, so that I could be a better representative of Jewish young adults. In order to better educate, I felt it was important to get a degree in Judaic Studies; it is a degree I am passionate about as well as proud of.

With my Judaic Studies degree, I am hoping to work with teenagers and young adults through education as well as leadership training. I hope to bring experiential Jewish learning to the forefront, educating in new and unique ways in order to have an exuberant and knowledgeable future for the Jewish world. There are so many amazing aspects to Judaism, like its culture and even its language, that are interesting to me. I hope that I can spark other people’s interest in these topics so that they can be inspired by the information and hopefully go on to teach their peers.

The Judaic Studies Department here at the University of Cincinnati has cultivated a greater desire for me to continue my education in Judaic Studies. They have introduced me to new and remarkable topics that can be applied religiously and historically, as well to everyday life within a college atmosphere and after I graduate. Every professor whom I encounter has a different focus and expertise, which allows for continued growth within the Jewish field. I have established personal connections with so many professors who continue to encourage me in my education and beyond. I always feel comfortable going to any of them with questions about both their classwork and even general questions I have relating to Judaism and other topics. It is a warm and inviting department, and I am thrilled to be a part of it.
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 2015–April 2016:

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