PSU Hires Professor of Classical Rabbinic Judaism

PSU Judaic Studies has hired its third tenure-line professor. Loren Spielman, who received his Ph.D. from the Jewish Theology Seminary of America this year, is professor of Classical Rabbinic Judaism and Schusterman Teaching Fellow.

The opportunity to create this new position despite the tough university budget situation came when PSU was awarded a Jewish Studies Expansion Project grant from the Foundation for Jewish Culture. The other universities receiving JSEP grants this year are Oberlin, the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of Arizona, Colgate, and Syracuse. The JSEP grant is funded by the Charles & Lynn Schusterman Foundation, which supports half the cost of the position for two years. PSU is the first recipient university to take this grant and turn it into a permanent professorship.

Loren wrote his dissertation under the guidance of historian Seth Schwartz and Talmudist Richard Kalmin. The dissertation, funded in part by a Beverly and Arnold C. Greenberg Fellowship from the Foundation for Jewish Culture, explores Jewish attitudes towards Roman spectacle entertainment from the reign of Herod the Great (37 BCE) to the Muslim Conquest of Palestine (640 CE). (Continued on page 8...)

“Walking around Kiev today, and seeing how many of its Jewish buildings have survived, one might think that it would be relatively easy to reconstruct the history of the Jewish community here. But revolutions, wars, Stalinism, and genocide have taken their toll... How does one give honor to what once was, to the people who inhabited these spaces and created something meaningful that is worth reconstructing, to the extent possible, and understanding, without sentimentalizing, without claiming that this picture is a complete one, that we can ever truly know this time and place, its smells, tastes, joys, sorrows?”


INSIDE:

- From the Director p. 2
- David Ehrlich and Dara Horn p. 2
- Stampfer Professorship p. 3
- Upcoming Events p. 5
- Meet Our Students p. 6
- A Letter From Israel p. 8

AND MORE
Author, activist, and café owner David Ehrlich spent two months in fall 2009 as the Schusterman Visiting Israeli Artist-in-Residence at PSU. Ehrlich, the author of two collections of short stories and the owner of Jerusalem’s premiere literary café, T’mol Shilshom, taught a course on Israeli literature and gave a series of talks and lectures throughout the city and the region, speaking about topics such as being a gay writer in Israel and running a café during terror attacks. “I really fell in love with Portland,” he says. “It was a wonderful experience.” Judging from student comments—“having David Ehrlich here was an amazing opportunity,” “extraordinarily valuable,” “a treat,” “it was a pleasure to be challenged by him to think differently,” “This class made me want to travel to Israel”—the feeling is mutual! The residency was made possible by the Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Charles & Lynn Schusterman Foundation, and supported by the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies at PSU.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

If you’ve seen our previous newsletters, you’ll notice a change in the banner on page one. Rather than our usual modern-era triptych of Ellis Island, Berlin’s Neue Synagogue, and Tel Aviv’s Azrieli Center, we’ve gone ancient for this issue, reflecting our excitement in welcoming our new colleague, Loren Spielman. Our program will continue to explore the Jewish encounter with modernity, but with the depth and rich connections to pre-modern Jewish history and culture that Loren now provides.

During the last academic year, we taught nearly 450 students, not including our valued community auditors; adding Loren as our third tenure-line professor will increase that number further still. What I am most focused on now is completing fundraising for our fourth position, the Rabbi Joshua Stampfer Professorship in Israel Studies. With four core professors in the program we will not only be able to teach more students in more subject areas, we will also be able to offer a national-quality undergraduate Major Degree in Judaic Studies. Please consider a gift to the Israel Studies fund, knowing that it will only create the Northwest’s only permanent professorship in Israel Studies, but also trigger the launch of a new undergraduate major degree.

You can read about Loren, our wonderful students, faculty news, and recent and forthcoming programming in the pages that follow.

Portland has certainly become a center for Judaic Studies!

With best wishes for a happy New Year,

Michael Weingrad

PSU undergraduate Megan Dyer and graduate student in history Doug Kenck-Crispin were the 2009-2010 recipients of the Sara Glasgow Cogan scholarship. Doug worked with the Oregon Area Jewish Committee to develop teachers’ resources on Judaism and Israel for use in Portland area schools, while Megan interned at the Oregon Jewish Museum, helping prepare an upcoming exhibit about Jewish professionals working in Oregon. “Interning at OJM has given me valuable and fascinating insights into Oregon’s history, Oregon’s Jewish history, and how we have come to understand what Oregon is today,” says Megan. “As a first generation college student from Medford, a smaller, rather non-Jewish town in Southern Oregon, I value the insight this internship has given me into my own academic endeavors and how I would like to use my experience and knowledge, both professionally and personally.”

On April 8, Megan and Doug described their work and thanked the many donors who have helped to fund this unique scholarship program, prior to a talk by award-winning novelist Dara Horn. Horn, listed on the “Forward 50” as one of America’s most prominent young writers, discussed her third book, All Other Nights, a Civil War thriller and profound meditation on the tension between American and Jewish identities. The event was sponsored by Cedar Sinai Park, Congregation Neveh Shalom, Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, PDX Hillel, PSU JSU, MJCC, NCJW-Portland Section, OAJC, Oregon Jewish Community Foundation, and OJM.
HELP MAKE ISRAEL STUDIES A PERMANENT PART OF OREGON’S LARGEST UNIVERSITY

What happens when the media want an expert on Israel? Where do students find a mentor who is also a scholar? How does a student, a community leader, or a political figure find accurate, dispassionate information about Middle East issues? With an endowed professorship in Israel Studies, the wisdom would come from the PSU campus and the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies.

We have the intellectual resources to support this professorship. Now we must gather the financial resources from donors who appreciate the value of scholarship and nationally renowned academic programs.

Harold and Arlene Schnitzer have just offered a $150,000, one-for-one, matching challenge grant toward creating the Rabbi Stampfer Professor of Israel Studies. Our goal is within sight! To make a transformational gift, please contact Jenn Director Knudsen at 503-725-3976 or jenn.d.knudsen@pdx.edu.

The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies thanks the following individuals and families who have donated to the creation of the Rabbi Stampfer Professor of Israel Studies, helping to raise $445,000 toward the program’s $750,000 goal.

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Yossi Klein Halevi, currently a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, is a contributing editor and Israel correspondent of the New Republic, and has been a regular contributor on Israeli affairs to the Los Angeles Times, and an occasional contributor to the New York Times and the Washington Post. He is author of At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land, which novelist Cynthia Ozick called “a permanent masterwork.” The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, called it “extraordinary and heartbreaking, a book full of wonders.”

He will be speaking on the evening of Sunday, November 14 at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies at PSU, the Jewish Student Union at PSU, and the MJCC.

On Monday afternoon, November 15, he will be speaking at PSU on his first book, Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist (Little, Brown, 1995), the story of his teenage attraction to the radical right-wing politics of Rabbi Meir Kahane and his subsequent break with Jewish militancy. The New York Times called Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist “of burning importance. Mr. Halevi’s achievement is to make his own coming of age in marginal Brooklyn seem a drama central to the very soul of Jewish life.”

On Monday evening at 5 pm, he will give a dinner talk in Hebrew to the Café v’Ivrit group at Congregation Neveh Shalom on his forthcoming book about the soldiers who captured the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six Day War and their lives and their country afterwards. This event is open to all Hebrew speakers; advance reservations required.

Café v’Ivrit

It may seem somewhat improbable to find 40 people on a rainy Monday night in Portland listening to an Israeli author speak—in Hebrew—and following up with lively discussion over coffee, wine, and halvah, but such sights, sounds, and tastes are no longer uncommon thanks to the relaunched Café v’Ivrit program that began last year. Featuring two facilitated groups, one for intermediate speakers who have had at least a year of conversational Hebrew, and one for advanced and fluent speakers who come to hear talks and discussions, the program is sponsored by the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies, Congregation Neveh Shalom Israel Affairs Committee, Kochavim & Notz’tzim: Hebrew Immersion Programs for 0-8 year-olds, Greater Portland Hillel, Portland Chapter of Hadassah, and Friends of the IDF.

This year, the program won a Ma’alot grant of $2500 that allows it to fund more visiting guest speakers. This fall’s guests include (in September) Miryam Kavakov, editor of Keep Your Wives Away From Them, 14 stories about Orthodox Jewish women coming out as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender; (October) Keren Barbash-Benedek, visiting Israeli Jewish educator who will speak in October on Holocaust Education in Israel; and Yossi Klein Halevy in November. For more information contact Mel Berwin, michaelvmel@gmail.com, 503-246-8831.
MEET OUR STUDENTS

Marcus Dorsen is majoring in International Studies with a concentration in the Middle East. He has been active in PSU’s Jewish Student Union and Hillel, and recently spent a summer in Jordan studying Arabic. In spring term he took the Judaic Studies course “Cities of Modern Jewish Literature: Baghdad.” “Reading memoirs and novels that dealt with everything from the day to day life of Jews in Baghdad to the social and political changes that were sweeping the Middle East has been invaluable to my understanding of the region,” says Marcus.

Erin Kurtz stumbled upon Judaic Studies when she took Linda Maizels’ History of Antisemitism course by chance one term because it fit her schedule. “It was amazing,” the 26-year-old Liberal Studies major says. “It gave me a totally new perspective, and I was really impressed with the people who took it and the critical thinking that the course demanded.” She went on to take one Judaic Studies course after another, including American Jews & Judaism after 1945, Modern Jewish History, Introduction to Judaism, The Holocaust, and History of Zionism. An accomplished musician who played klezmer music as a child and now plays mostly Bulgarian and Greek folk music, Kurtz has managed to bring her music together with her interest in Judaic Studies, as when she integrated a Balkan folk instrument into a presentation on Jewish history in Bulgaria for her Holocaust course. After graduating in late 2010, she plans to do a Masters degree in teaching at PSU’s Education School.

Congratulations To Our Graduates!


2009-2010 SPEAKERS AND JUDAIC STUDIES EVENTS AT PSU

2009

FEBRUARY: Aomar Boum (University of Arizona) explored the spaces and communities of memory created by Moroccan Jews on the internet.

MARCH: Beth Wenger (University of Pennsylvania) delivered the fourth annual Gus & Libby Solomon Lecture, “In Search of American Jewish Heritage.”


APRIL: Why didn’t Hasidism spread to the West? Shaul Stampfer (Hebrew University) posed answers to this question about religion and social history.

JUNE: Jonathan Dekel-Chen (Hebrew University) inaugurated the annual Lokey lecture with a fascinating exploration of the history of Jewish agriculture in the USSR.

JULY: The Jewish Theatre Collaborative performed staged readings of three recent plays by Israeli women: Naomi Ragen’s Women’s Minyan, Savyon Liebritch’s Banality of Love, and Yael Ronen’s Plonter.

PSU Judaic Studies and the Ernest Bloch Legacy Project commemorated the 50th anniversary of this major composer’s death with a series of lectures on Jew- (Continued on next page...)

Natan Meir published his first book, a social history of the Jews of Kiev. *Kiev: Jewish Metropolis* won a Cahnman Foundation publication grant, and Jeffrey Veidlinger, director of the Jewish Studies Department at the University of Indiana, calls it “meticulously researched, eminently readable, and rich in detail.” Natan has also co-edited the volume *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, to appear in October. In April 2010 he delivered the Bernard Choseed Memorial Lecture at YIVO on “Tales of the Destitute, Orphaned, and Disabled in Jewish Eastern Europe.”

John Ott designed and taught two new courses this year on Jerusalem and the Holy Land from biblical antiquity until the end of the crusader period, both offered as electives within the Judaic Studies minor. He also presented four papers on aspects of his research on medieval bishops at conferences in Los Angeles, Knoxville, Kalamazoo, and Porec, Croatia.

A new Religious Studies program at PSU was launched in 2009 under the direction of Jennifer Schuberth. Jennifer received her Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religions from the University of Chicago in 2008, and her research and teaching interests include history of religions, theories of religion, medieval Christianity and mysticism, philosophy of religions, and gender theory. Judaic Studies and Religious Studies are already working together on joint programming and courses.

Linda Maizels was selected to participate in the 2009 Summer Institute for Israel Studies, run by the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University and in Israel. She developed and taught a new course entitled “Israel in the Eyes of the West,” exploring how the Arab-Israeli conflict is portrayed in Europe and the U.S. She was also invited to participate in a 2010 International Summer Research Workshop for Scholars at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum entitled “Contemporary Antisemitism in Higher Education.”
A LETTER FROM ISRAEL

Andrew Geist, who graduated PSU in 2008 with the minor in Judaic Studies and entered graduate studies in ancient Near East history at Notre Dame, wrote us this summer from Israel about his recent doings:

“I spent the first year at Notre Dame doing work on Biblical Hebrew and Classical Greek (mostly reading Philo of Alexandria). My Biblical Studies courses have focused on topics including the Synoptic Gospels, the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls and their contribution to text criticism, a class on the Temple/Tabernacle (primarily the Exodus account), and a class on the Poetics of the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Literature. I received grants through Notre Dame to take a class on Christian and Muslim visions of the Holy Land, and then to study Modern Hebrew at the Rothberg International School at Hebrew University. I’ve been able to spend plenty of time exploring and experiencing life here, including the fascinating, vibrant cultures. It has been a wonderful experience, from PSU to South Bend to Jerusalem!”

(...Continued from page 1)

“The project,” says Loren, “stems from my passion for demonstrating that Jewish diversity is not just a modern phenomenon. Jewish interaction with other cultures in antiquity, even when antagonistic, produced a rich range of cultural expression.” Over the past year, he brought his interests in Jewish popular culture to Wesleyan University, where he ran a seminar on Jewish Leisure in Antiquity. In the coming year, he will be taking part in the Klutznik Harris symposium on “Jews in the Gym” at Creighton University.

His expertise in Jewish history during antiquity and his interests in Greco-Jewish and Rabbinic literature complement the modern emphases of his colleagues. In his first year he will be teaching courses on Israelite and Second Temple history, rabbinic culture in the Roman world, and early Jewish biblical interpretation. “I’m thrilled to be able to add this new dimension to the Judaic Studies program and to be able to introduce the richness of the ancient Jewish literature and culture to the diverse and vibrant student body at Portland State University,” Loren says. “I look forward to working with such excellent colleagues and to helping build the profile of Jewish Studies on campus and throughout the city of Portland.”

FACULTY AND STAFF

Michael Weingrad, Academic Director
Natan Meir, Lorry I. Lokey Chair in Judaic Studies
Loren Spielman, Schusterman Teaching Fellow and Assistant Professor
Linda Maizels, Adjunct Instructor
Jenn Director Knudsen, Associate Director of Development
Thanh Tran, Office Coordinator
Affiliate Faculty: John Ott, Jennifer Schuberth, Ayal Yariv, Lerom Medovoi, Robert Liebman

WELCOME ABOARD!

We are pleased to welcome PSU alumna Jessica Bettelheim onto the Steering Committee for the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies at PSU, where she joins the following members:

Rabbi Alan Berg
Henry Blauer
Professor Nathan Cogan
Jared Gellert
Judith Kahn
Larry Levy
Professor Robert Liebman
Jim Meyer
Bob Philip
Paul Schlesinger
Jordan Schnitzer
Rob Shlachter
Dick Solomon
Rabbi Joshua Stampfer