



Rice University Jewish Studies Program News from the Rice Campus, Fall 2009

L'Shana Tova! The Jewish Studies Program at Rice University has commenced and the Jewish year 5770 — the Rice University academic year 2009–2010 — will be intellectually stimulating. We are excited to tell you about the fall semester classes being offered, a new lecture series featuring Rice Jewish Studies faculty, and our fund-raising progress. On behalf of the core Jewish Studies faculty, I wish you a sweet New Year.

- Paula Sanders, interim director of the Jewish Studies Program,
dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies, and professor of history

Undergraduate Classes

Eight classes will be offered during the 2009 – 2010 academic year and we anticipate over 100 students enrolling in one or more classes. The following are the Fall semester classes.

Judaism in the Time of Jesus and Hillel examines the history, literature and culture of Judaism during the Second Temple period, an era that produced such great religious leaders as Jesus and Hillel. Participants in this seminar will ponder questions such as: Was Jesus the only first-century Jew hailed as the Messiah? Was ancient Judaism a religion or a national identity? How did the Dead Sea scrolls change our understanding of Christianity and Judaism? Dr. Shira Lander, visiting assistant professor of Religious Studies, is teaching this class.

Jewish Mysticism and Spirituality explores these concepts from Biblical to modern times. Students will deliberate questions such as: What do Jews meditate on? How do women usher in the Sabbath Day? Why do some celebrities wear a red bracelet? What is the difference between Madonna's and Isaac Luria's Kabbalah? The class is taught by Dr. Gregory Kaplan, the Anna Smith Fine Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies.

Landmarks in Israeli Art examines Israel's main movements and styles of painting, sculpture, architecture, crafts, design and popular imagery. Questions to be explored in the class include: Are there Jewish elements in Israeli abstract art? How do Israeli artists relate to their country's political events? What are the symbolic aspects of the olive branches appearing on the State of Texas' seal and that of Israel? Dr. Alec Mishory, the Schusterman Visiting Israeli Professor in Israel Studies, is teaching this class.

Community Outreach

The Jewish Studies Program and the Jewish Community Center have collaborated to create a new annual lecture series that will be held at the JCC. Faculty affiliated with the Rice program are organizing the series and giving the lectures. The topic for the 2009–2010 inaugural lecture series is Contextualizing Moses Maimonides (Rambam). The dates and topics are as follows:

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

Man of Action: Maimonides as Jewish Community Leader

Dr. Paula Sanders, interim director of the Jewish Studies Program, dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies and professor of history

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

Between Athens and Jerusalem: Maimonides as Jewish Philosopher

Dr. Gregory Kaplan, the Anna Smith Fine Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

From Cordoba to Cairo: Maimonides as Jewish Traveler of the Islamic West

Dr. David Cook, associate professor of religious studies

More information on the lecture series can be found at www.jcchouston.org under Jewish Living and Learning.

Fundraising Progress

The Jewish Studies Program has secured just over \$700,000 in support from a variety of sources, including the university, foundations and individuals. This year's funds from Rice will support Dr. Alec Mishory, the Schusterman Visiting Israeli Professor in Israel Studies; Dr. Shira Lander, a visiting assistant professor; and the administrative aspects of the Jewish Studies Program. Three foundations — the American Israel Cooperative Enterprise, The Maurice Amado Foundation and the Posen Foundation — have provided grants to support classes in Jewish Studies. Lastly, a variety of individuals have provided contributions that can be used during this academic year.

Matthias Henze, director of the Jewish Studies Program, and Paula Sanders, interim director and dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies, have identified securing funds to support a permanent postdoctoral fellow position as their top priority. Engaging postdoctoral fellows in teaching and research exposes undergraduates to a wider variety of scholars and academic topics within Jewish Studies and ensures that Houston has on-going access to the best and brightest young minds at the forefront of Jewish Studies. Fellows come to Rice for one or two years, teach classes, engage in research and publishing, interact with student groups and provide scholarly opportunities —such as lectures—for the community. We seek to fund one postdoctoral fellowship to attract scholars from the United States and Israel. The associated cost is \$1.25 million in endowed funds and an additional \$250,000 in funds to support the position over the next five years while the endowment is building. These funds can come from a single donor or from a group of individuals. We have a few gifts committed toward this priority and hope to secure several more over the coming months.

Please contact Debbie Diamond, development liaison to the Jewish Studies Program, if you have questions. Debbie may be reached at (713)348-4619 or ddiamond@rice.edu.

