



JEWISH STUDIES AT RICE UNIVERSITY

Greeting From the Program Director

The Program in Jewish Studies at Rice is only two years old, and already we are seeing some wonderful results. On the Rice campus, a growing number of our undergraduate students are signing up for the interdisciplinary minor in Jewish studies. This semester we are offering eight courses in five different departments. Five of these courses are new courses with strong enrollment numbers. For the first time the program is awarding grants to students to support their Jewish-studies-related summer projects.

Our community outreach program has also grown significantly during these two years. The course “Jewish Perspectives,” which comprises eight evening lectures at the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies, brought together eight world-class speakers from the United States and from Israel. Over 165 adult learners enrolled in the course, which was widely deemed a tremendous success. In the fall, look for our third annual lecture series at the Jewish Community Center (JCC).

I invite you to become involved in our program. Sign up for our email list and follow our events calendar at jewishstudies.rice.edu. Rice University is deeply committed to the continuous growth and success of the Program in Jewish Studies. We are eager to share our knowledge and our resources with you, our friends and supporters in the community. These two years have shown that we can greatly increase the learning opportunities in Jewish education in Houston. I look forward to welcoming you to one of our events in the near future.

Cordially,

Matthias Henze

Watt J. and Lilly G. Jackson Associate Professor in Biblical Studies

Faculty Spotlight

The Program in Jewish Studies is pleased to welcome two of our newest faculty members: Dr. Maya Soifer Irish and Dr. Luisa Kluger.

Maya Soifer Irish joined Rice this fall as assistant professor of history and affiliate of the Program in Jewish Studies. Her research interests focus on medieval Spain, famous for its coexistence of Jews, Christians and Muslims, and for the way this coexistence ended the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Dr. Irish’s research suggests new answers to explain these events.

Luisa Kluger, an alumna of Rice, has returned to teach at her alma mater. Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, she studies Spanish Jewry and their unique language, Ladino. Last spring, she taught a class entitled “The Sephardic Jews and Their Diaspora: A Contribution to Hispanic Culture,” which examined the Jewish social, literary and linguistic influences on Hispanic culture.

Modern Hebrew

This year, Dr. Luisa Kluger offered a “Modern Hebrew” course during fall and spring semesters through the Center for the Study of Languages. In the course, students learn to speak and write modern Hebrew and explore Israeli culture. The class filled its capacity of 20 students in the fall, and 19 returned for a second semester, demonstrating strong student interest in Hebrew.

In response, and to show his commitment to Jewish studies, Dean of Humanities Nick Shumway offered to fund “Modern Hebrew” at both the first- and second-year levels next academic year. Discussions are also underway to partner with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and offer a study abroad opportunity that would be part of a third year of Hebrew language study.

The Way I See It: Jewish Studies Broadened My Worldview

Rice's Program in Jewish Studies gives me the opportunity to connect with multiple dimensions of Jewish culture. Jewish Studies courses that I've taken at Rice have provided much more than just some interesting reading. Each course has led us far beyond the classroom, teaching us the applied role of our studies through special personal experiences within the Houston Jewish community. There are fascinating courses from several different academic departments. I'm able to learn about a broad array of relevant topics in Judaism, ranging from modern Hebrew and Israeli culture to philosophical stances on Jewish religious traditions. Through the Jewish Studies program, I've gained more insight into what it really means to be Jewish, which is an invaluable role in my personal development. As I grow into my place in the world, I have begun to integrate a well-rounded perception of Judaism into my life. Being a Jewish Studies minor continues to shape my future by introducing me to a multitude of perspectives that have broadened my worldview and helped me to develop well-reasoned ideas on the way I live my life.



Hannah Bosley is a sophomore psychology and linguistics major and a Jewish studies minor.

Continuing Studies Course A Success

This spring, the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies offered a course entitled, "Jewish Perspectives: From Ancient History to Modern Israel." The course attracted 165 community members and featured a cadre of internationally known scholars speaking on a kaleidoscope of viewpoints regarding issues that affect the Jewish people and their homeland of Israel, including history, ethics, the media and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Every week I look forward to these incredible lectures given by experts who give me insight into new topics," said Carolyn Karesh, a participant in the course. Speakers included Donniel Hartman, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute; Yoram Peri, former political advisory to Yitzhak Rabin; and Itamar Rabinovich, former Israeli ambassador to the United States. The course was generously underwritten by Max and Deisi Blankfeld.

Fundraising Priority: Jewish Studies Postdoctoral Fellow

Rice University is seeking philanthropic support for a Jewish Studies postdoctoral fellow who will teach classes, engage in research and publishing, interact with student groups and provide scholarly opportunities, such as lectures, for the community. If you would like to discuss making a gift in support of this fundraising priority or other opportunities, please contact your development officer or Grace Wichmann at 713-348-5305 or wichmann@rice.edu.

Rice/JCC 2011 Annual Lecture Series

Rice will cosponsor its third annual lecture series this fall with the JCC's Center for Jewish Living and Learning. This year's series will focus on the Jews of medieval Spain and the unique culture, customs and language surrounding Ladino Judaism. Mark your calendars and look for additional information in the upcoming months.

Monday, September 12, 2011

"The Ladino Speakers: Language and Identity"

by Dr. Luisa Kluger

Monday, September 19, 2011

"Images of Judaic Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Spanish Literature" by Dr. Carl Atlee

Monday, September 26, 2011

"Convivencia between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Spain" by Maya Soifer Irish

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