



Program in Jewish Studies at Rice University

Issue 4 • 2012

From the Director

In January of this year the Program in Jewish Studies celebrated its third birthday. Although still young, the Program has come a long way. In May, Jennifer Phillips will be the first student to graduate from Rice with a minor in Jewish Studies. Half of the students who took the Advanced Modern Hebrew course this year will spend their summer in Israel. In the fall semester 2012, we will again offer well over ten courses, our lecture series at the Jewish Community Center will be held in October, and we will offer another class at the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies on *Jesus and Judaism*.

As we continue to serve our students as well as the greater Houston community, please take advantage of our multiple learning opportunities. We are eager to share our resources with all who want to be part of Jewish Studies – on our beautiful campus and in the community at large. I look forward to welcoming you!



Matthias Henze
Director

Kind regards,
Matthias Henze

First Post-Doctoral Fellow



Dr. Melissa Weininger

This academic year we welcomed Dr. Melissa Weininger as our inaugural Postdoctoral Fellow. Dr. Weininger has a B.A. from Harvard University, where she studied English literature and women's studies, and wrote her senior thesis on gender and Holocaust narratives. She completed her Ph.D. in 2010 at The University of Chicago

with a dissertation on Jesus in Jewish literature. Her scholarly interests include Hebrew and Yiddish literature, gender studies, Holocaust literature, and Jewish nationalism. In the spring semester she taught a survey course in the English department on modern Jewish literature, and in the fall she will teach the first course ever offered at Rice on gender and Jewish culture.

Kabbalah and Cake

Hebrew University scholar Jonathan Garb connected modern Kabbalah to Harry Potter, psychoanalysis, modern Hebrew poetry, American pastoral poetry, Jewish philosophy, and contemporary Israeli politics, taking his audience on a magical mystery tour through the last century of modern culture. Demonstrating the resilience of the notion of the soul in Kabbalistic thought and practice, Garb noted its resurgence in popular culture. He concluded that a concern for social justice underlies conceptions of the soul; the heart of kabbalah is *halakhah* (the Jewish system of normative behavior), and justice is the heart of *halakhah*.

After the talk the audience gathered to celebrate the third birthday of the program in Jewish Studies, launched in January 2009. On behalf of the advisory board, chairman Max Blankfeld presented a seder plate in deep appreciation to founding director, Professor Matthias Henze. Henze remarked how pleased he was to see so many students at the event.



Jewish Studies turns three

Upcoming Events

“Jesus and Judaism” with Rice faculty and visiting scholars, exploring Jesus in Jewish thought, history, literature, and culture. Six consecutive Mondays, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m., starting October 8 on the Rice University campus. For more information and to register, visit gscs.rice.edu.

Rice Jewish Studies lecture series at the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston. Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m., October 3, 10, and 17.

Melton graduate class on Israeli literature at the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston, taught by Dr. Melissa Weininger. Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m.

The Way I See It: Digging into Israel's Past

Through the Jewish Studies Fellowship at Rice, I was able to volunteer on an archaeological dig in a city close to Tiberius along the coast of the Sea of Galilee called Ein Gev. For two weeks in July, I participated in the twelfth season of excavations at Hippos. Hippos was a Roman Decapolis, one of ten cities that was predominantly a center of Greek culture. I was assigned to a new excavation area: the living quarters. Throughout the two weeks we found several walls and reached the floor in a few places. We even found a few really incredible artifacts: lots of pottery shards, a pot, a few coins, a ring, and a door latch. Finding these relics was the highlight of all of the digging. Participating in the excavations was such an amazing experience, not only because I learned so much about archaeology and the history of Hippos, but also because I was able to contribute to the findings and expose a previously covered area of the city. The people I met on this trip were definitely an amazing part of this experience. I was surprised to find that the volunteers were so international and diverse, with people from more than six countries and multiple religions. Overall, going to Israel to work on this archaeological dig was an amazing opportunity and a fantastic experience. I learned a lot about the different cultures in the area, as well as about how archeological digs are performed and what there is to learn from artifacts. This is definitely an experience I would recommend to someone else, and repeat myself.



Michelle Shapiro '13 was a recipient of the Desirée and Max Blankfeld Fellowship.

Spring Courses Offered Something For Everyone

Highlights of this spring's course offerings were two graduate level courses. Dr. Matthias Henze taught a seminar on "Lost Judaisms: The Apocryphal Writings," and Drs. Gregory Kaplan and Mark Kulstad taught "Spinoza's Philosophy." These courses marked the first graduate level courses offered through the Program in Jewish Studies.

Additionally, undergraduates enrolled in thirteen courses spanning eight different departments. A new course, "Rabbinic Interpretation" taught by Hillel Director Rabbi Kenny Weiss, was funded through a generous gift by Mr. Elton Lipnick in honor of Mr. Raymond Brochstein's Gold Medal Award given by the Association of Rice Alumni. Hebrew classes continued to be successful and popular. Half of the students taking Modern Hebrew will be spending the summer in Israel.

Shulchan Ivrit

Modern Hebrew students took their education outside the classroom with the Hebrew Table, a project spearheaded by Max Bricker '14. Wednesdays at 6 p.m., students met at Baker Seryery to discuss the events of the day in Hebrew, practicing their conversation skills and picking up new idioms and slang. Participants honed their language facility in preparation for a summer or semester abroad in Israel, learning about Israeli culture in the process. Students welcomed several native or fluent Hebrew speakers who challenged them to take their skills to the next level, including recent *olah* and Israeli soldier Ilana Diamond, daughter of Debbie and Stuart Diamond.

The Program in Jewish Studies (2011-2012):

Matthias Henze, director and undergraduate advisor
Watt J. & Lilly G. Jackson Chair in Biblical Studies
Professor of Religious Studies

Shira L. Lander, undergraduate advisor
Anna Smith Fine Senior Lecturer of Jewish Studies

Paula Sanders, undergraduate advisor
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Professor of History

Melissa Weininger, postdoctoral fellow

Ryan Bell, program coordinator
Executive Assistant to the Dean of Humanities

Jewish Studies Advisory Board (2011-2012):

Max Blankfeld, chair
B.A. *Tel-Aviv University*
B.A. *Fundacao Getulio Vargas, Brasil*
M.B.A. *Rice University*

Debbie Diamond
B.S. *Indiana University*
M.B.A. *University of Toledo*

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J.D. *University of Texas School of Law*
M.P.Aff. *Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas*

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B.A., J.D. *University of Chicago*

Eli Spector
B.A. *Candidate 2013 Rice University*

Tracy Friedman Stein
B.A., M.A. *Emory University*
J.D. *University of Texas School of Law*

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