

The Questionnaire

What are the three biggest challenges you face as director of a Jewish Studies program?

Robert H. Abzug

Director, Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies, University of Texas at Austin

Defining a Shape and Mission

The Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies was founded in September 2007, intent on building a community that reflects the strengths and unique possibilities of the University of Texas and its broader public. We envisioned expanding an already existing Jewish Studies curriculum but also moving Jewish Studies from a marginal existence into an active and innovative contributor to university life through new hires, public programming, and community outreach. In practice, that has meant a wide range of collaborations—internal and new faculty recruitment, course development, and alliances with departments, archives, and nonacademic units such as Texas Performing Arts and the Austin Jewish Film Festival. And, we have made it a long-term mission to become (among other things) a crossroads for the study of Jewish history and culture in the Western Hemisphere by expanding the university's well-established Latin American interests and pioneering in the integration of Canadian Jewish Studies. We are in the beginning stages of this latter project.

Making the Center Visible to the Jewish Studies World

Texas, despite a fine faculty, extraordinary research facilities, as well as a vigorous and unique statewide Jewish community, does not generally come to mind as an important locus for Jewish Studies. We hope that perception will change as we make more visible our work as scholars and academic citizens and the special resources and opportunities of the university. We immediately joined AJS as institutional sponsors, took over hosting of the Latin American Jewish Studies website, will host the next meeting of the Early Modern Workshop in August 2011, and will hold a research conference on comparative study of Jews in the Americas in 2012. In addition, we

endow a research fellowship for use of the incomparable modern Jewish literary, photographic, and theater arts holdings of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, and will soon establish similar fellowship support for the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

Fundraising

All we have done has been made possible by a bountiful challenge grant provided by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and generous grants of the Gale Foundation of Beaumont, Texas. Matching the Schusterman grant has truly been a challenge in the last three years, especially for a new center, but we have made great progress. The faith and appreciation of our efforts by both foundations and by the College of Liberal Arts has been of immeasurable aid in trying financial times.

Jean Axelrad Cahan

Director, Norman and Bernice Harris Center for Judaic Studies, University of Nebraska at Lincoln

The challenges faced by a Jewish Studies program director no doubt vary greatly according to geographical location, surrounding university culture, available funds, and so on. In the case of my own program, the challenges are not what might seem to the outsider as the most obvious. The Great Plains, with a relatively small Jewish population and distance from large urban cultural centers, might seem to be on the fringes of Jewish life, but in fact the Jewish communities are vibrant and in some cases growing, have no difficulty attracting significant cultural and political figures as interesting speakers, and are very supportive of academic Jewish Studies programs. Political tensions are minimal, compared to other parts of the country; there are various reasons for this, but the general level of civility and non-confrontational patterns of behavior are not to be discounted. It is rare to encounter open, unrestrained prejudice or hostility to ethnic and religious difference.

The biggest challenge for me has been to decide which approach to take in seeking to recruit faculty. Since the Center for Judaic Studies by itself cannot serve as a tenure home for a faculty member (only departments can do that here) we can seek to have FTE (full-time equivalent status) assigned to our center, and with that to pursue joint appointments with other units; or we can let the FTE remain fully in other units, and negotiate with chairs of other units/departments for teaching, research, and service contributions to the center. The advantage of the first approach might be that we would have better control over our curriculum. The disadvantage is that joint appointments tend to become problematic during the tenure process and later during discussions over merit pay increases. So we have opted for the second approach and have generally had little difficulty in obtaining the agreement of other departments to “give up” courses so that a faculty member can teach something for us.

A second challenge involves recruiting Jewish students. Though our classes are filled with non-Jewish students, these students usually lack even the most elementary acquaintance with Jewish religion, history, or culture. This means that time has to be spent in each course providing some background. It also means that our Jewish student organization, though very active, has limited possibilities for growth. With UNL's acceptance into the Big Ten conference, we hope to find connections to larger Jewish communities in the Midwest and enjoy exchanges among both faculty and students in the future.

The third main challenge that I face is staying informed about interfaith as well as current political questions. Although I would like to bury myself in my own teaching and research in philosophy, the somewhat public nature of my position makes it important to remain aware of current events and be able to respond to questions from the community media, the student newspaper, and colleagues on campus.

Samuel Fleischacker

*Director, Jewish Studies Program,
University of Illinois at Chicago*

My three greatest challenges are all versions of one challenge: answering the question, “Why does a secular state university with relatively few Jewish students, like the University of Illinois at Chicago, need a Jewish Studies program at all?” We’ve been around in some form for many years, but always on a rather low level, with little outside funding, a modest profile among other Jewish Studies programs in our area, and an even more modest profile among our own students. I think our main task, if we want a secure place at UIC and especially if we want to grow, is to justify our existence to our various constituencies. Those constituencies can be divided into three, which yields three challenges for me: the administration and students at UIC, the Jewish community in Chicago, and the international community of Jewish Studies scholars. And the answer I would give to all three communities is roughly the same: We can earn our place by providing a Jewish Studies program that has an outward-looking rather than inward-looking focus, that seeks to show what is interesting and distinctive about Jews and Judaism—as well as what represents the universally human—in relationship to Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, and other cultural and religious groups. That would enable us to contribute to the other communities on our very diverse campus, to bring out aspects of Jews and Judaism in the Chicago community that are not much discussed, and to contribute something to Jewish Studies scholarship that has not, as yet, received quite the attention it deserves. But there are a number of political and financial obstacles in our way, and it will be a while before we will have any idea whether we are making headway.

Matt Goldish

*Director, Melton Center for Jewish Studies,
The Ohio State University*

Maintaining a Research Program

I have a lot of material that I want to read and projects I want to carry out, but I do not have time. The job of director involves handling a constant influx of communications about various matters. It also requires planning programs, raising money, keeping various parties informed about our work, meeting with students, and other administrative activities.

A director must constantly weigh how much time and energy to invest in innovative and exciting new programs, and how much of this time and energy he or she should hold back to invest in research and writing. While administration has its rewards, I often feel as if I have changed professions.

Balancing Academic Method with Issues of Jewish Identity

I recognize in myself, many faculty members, and most donors a passion for Jewish Studies that is based largely in Jewish identity values. Many academics in this field entered it at least partly because of these feelings. Most donors who give to Jewish Studies—and even more to Israel Studies—are motivated by identity. How do we maintain an academic approach without losing this passion? How do we explain to donors that many students winning the awards and fellowships they have donated to us are non-Jews? How do we raise money without compromising our mandate?

Creating an Appropriate Niche

Each director must struggle with the question of needs and niche. The Ohio State University is the largest university in the United States. Our Melton Center for Jewish Studies was the first such center at an American public university. We currently boast thirty-two faculty members from a dozen different departments. Despite all this, I had to be realistic about Ohio State’s niche in the world of Jewish Studies when I took on the directorship. Columbus is not a high-draw city for hip, young students. Other schools have more star power among their faculty, more dollars for recruiting undergraduates, and better networks of support. While we actively work on improving these areas, I needed a strategy for making Ohio State special. We have concentrated on specialized academic conferences, which have become less common in recent years, and community programs, in which we have excelled.

Jack Kugelmass

*Director, Center for Jewish Studies,
University of Florida*

Structure

Most faculty in Jewish Studies are organized as programs or centers rather than departments. In theory, the advantage to having faculty distributed throughout a college or colleges, is to maximize impact and prevent insularity. This makes sense, since I believe

that Jewish Studies is not designed to make Jews more Jewish but to make non-Jews less non-Jewish. (I would make the same argument for all ethnic and gender studies.) Distributing faculty through joint appointments, however, creates dual loyalties, not to mention extra service obligations, and, often enough, the primary loyalty and responsibility rests with the tenure home. Furthermore, the need to find suitable tenure homes sometimes prevents programs from hiring according to their own needs. Departments sometimes balk at accepting new lines believing that doing so would come at the expense of their own priorities. The critical role played by departments in hiring and job satisfaction also means that retaining faculty depends very much on the strength of the tenure home. At first-tier institutions, retention and job satisfaction may not be much of a problem but just a bit down the rung, it is. A strong program cannot offset weak departments.

Coherence

Programs typically come about through happenstance. How does one create a program in which fundamentals of religion, history, and language are covered? And what are those fundamentals? What aspect(s) of Judaism? Where? When? And what period(s) in history? In regard to language, most programs privilege Hebrew over Yiddish, but I sometimes suspect the latter might have more success in attracting students whose afternoon school experience with the Hebrew language still makes them shudder. And then there’s the fact that hiring priorities nowadays are set as much by donors’ passion as they are by program needs.

Relevance

There is an increasing need to justify new or replacement lines in accordance with newly emerging critical areas, some of which are determined through centers of excellence within otherwise uneven institutions. For instance, peace studies or creative writing are two areas that come to mind, as well as areas that could be defined regionally such as Latin America for border states, arid and ecological studies in the Southwest. Still other areas may be defined nationally in terms of critical languages and areas of strategic interest. Hebrew has some relevance here, but what is the future of Yiddish in higher education when German and Slavic Studies are almost everywhere in decline and Mandarin and Arabic are in ascendance?

But all this sounds much too negative. The fact is that the most difficult challenge one faces as director of a center of Jewish Studies is pretty much what every administrator now faces: a decline in state revenues, increasing stress on career and outcome, and insufficient funding for higher education to properly support research and libraries as well as a broad curriculum that cannot be justified in practical terms. Fortunately, we have a continuing partnership with the community which sees its own future very much tied with the well-being of our programs. For that reason alone, I wouldn't exchange my directorship for chairing any other unit in the college.

Leah S. Marcus

*Director, Program in Jewish Studies,
Vanderbilt University*

The Program in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt is young, having been founded seven years ago by Jack M. Sasson, the Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible, and then-Provost Nicholas Zeppos, along with an enthusiastic cohort of advisory faculty. We were fortunate to come into the world with adequate funding and ample administrative support. There have been challenges, however:

(1) Before the creation of the Jewish Studies program, there was very little history of institutional involvement in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt. The undergraduate population has grown from 2 percent Jewish in the 1990s to 16–18 percent today. But we are a relatively small university and can't depend on "heritage" students to fill our full range of courses—not only those labeled Holocaust, which are perennially oversubscribed. We also need to ensure that all of our courses appeal to a mixed population of Jewish Studies majors and minors and interested students from outside the Jewish Studies umbrella. I would not describe these as problems because we seem to be successful in addressing them: enrollments are steady and climbing, which is what one hopes for in a young, expanding program.

(2) A major challenge at the moment is to convince the administration that Jewish Studies is an area studies field that draws on many disciplines but is nevertheless deserving of the same respect and autonomy granted other, less diverse, academic fields. This is not a problem for our faculty when working with each other. They share a deep knowledge of

Hebrew language and Jewish culture, and tend to adopt critical approaches that fall under the broad rubric of cultural studies; they have several methodologies in common, such as an interest in manuscript work and expertise in the close reading of texts. Yet the administration wants its Jewish Studies faculty to publish in discipline-focused journals—literature or history or sociology or religious studies—in order to ratify their competence as scholars. Undervaluation from the perspective of more established disciplines is a problem that is to some extent inherent in all interdisciplinary work, and it will exist for us for some time.

(3) A major challenge for the immediate future is to create a successful doctoral program that allows students the flexibility to work across departments to pursue their areas of interest. We currently offer an MA degree, but students wishing to go further must either move to another university or enroll in an existing Vanderbilt PhD program and an additional certificate in Jewish Studies. Our initial goal is to fund fellowships for doctoral candidates so that we can grant our own free-standing PhD in cooperation with other departments at Vanderbilt.

Gilya Gerda Schmidt

*Director, Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in
Judaic Studies, University of Tennessee
at Knoxville*

The Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville has been in existence for seventeen years, since 1993. Tremendous efforts under difficult conditions by courageous and dedicated individuals, primarily the late Arts and Sciences Dean Larry Ratner and Religious Studies Department Head Professor Charles H. Reynolds, in cooperation with the Knoxville Jewish community, made this dream a reality. On the whole, we have experienced support, appreciation, and growth over the years, but there are also some serious challenges.

Perception is Everything

There are twelve Interdisciplinary Programs (IDPs) in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville (UT); the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies is one of them. Since UT is a state institution, the measure of success for the accrediting body, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, is the number of majors in

a given academic program. In terms of majors, Judaic Studies is a fairly small program (in 2009–2010 we had four majors). Compared to some other IDPs that have large numbers of majors, we suffer from the perception that our program is insignificant to the education of our students. Our challenge therefore is to demonstrate constantly the strength of our program to the administration. With a small Jewish population, our full classes clearly include many interested students who are not Jewish. Among them are a few students who take a Jewish Studies class out of curiosity, but most of our students take our courses because they satisfy college requirements (distribution for non-Western foreign culture). Judaic Studies thus provides a service to the college as well as the student population, but this factor is not part of the assessment that matters for state funding support.

The Issue of Identity

The Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies is housed in the Department of Religious Studies. During the founding days of the program, Judaic Studies fared very well. Over time, however, it became clear that IDPs are programs without teeth. Located in academic departments, most of the IDPs own no faculty and are strapped for space and resources. In some ways, Judaic Studies is more fortunate than others. We have solved the problem of programming resources by establishing a number of endowments that allow us to support public lectures, film festivals, Holocaust conferences, and faculty research. Teaching is, however, most sensitive. Most faculty who teach cross-listed courses are paid by their respective departments. Occasionally there may be a faculty member who is paid by an IDP, but that is the exception. Judaic Studies, therefore, is at the mercy of departments who allow their faculty to participate in this program. I am happy to say that we have excellent relations with relevant departments and faculty are willing to teach cross-listed courses and serve on our faculty advisory committee. There is, however, an issue of visibility for participating faculty, because they get little recognition by their home departments for the work they do for Judaic Studies, and the credit for teaching goes to the department, not to the program.

Related to teaching is the issue of recruitment. The primary advocate for an IDP is supposed to be the program director's department. However, in these harsh economic times, departments are fighting for their own

existence. Last year, religious studies at UT was nearly merged or terminated solely on the basis of its own low number of majors. Under such circumstances recruiting for Judaic Studies majors among religious studies students seems suicidal. While there is a link on the religious studies website to the Judaic Studies program and a bulletin board by the department office for Judaic Studies information, it is solely up to the director of Judaic Studies to get out the word—to advertise our major and minor, our courses, our scholarships, our lectures, and other programs through any imaginable venue—the College Advising Center, our colleagues in religious studies and associated departments, and our website (<http://web.utk.edu-judaic>). Still, students regularly complain that they only find out about Judaic Studies by accident and when they have already decided on a major. Thus, being an entity other than a department is tricky. Some students are unsure as to the nature of an IDP.

Funding for Necessary Language Training

At many universities it is a challenge to find funding for basic language training. Challenges, however, are also opportunities. For a very long time, Modern Hebrew at the University of Tennessee was only offered as a taped program in Asian Studies with a tutor in the classroom. Biblical Hebrew was taught in religious studies as an overload until the retirement of Professor Lee Humphreys. Since then it has been taught only once. We pleaded with the administration that an area program without a basis in the relevant language was unthinkable. But since the administration considers our student demand for Modern Hebrew to be too low, our request for an instructor in Hebrew was repeatedly turned down. For several years now we have waged a campaign to raise private funds in order to hire a Hebrew teacher. This initiative was successful and last year we hired a scholar with a PhD in Linguistics in religious studies to teach our beginning and intermediate classes in Modern Hebrew. Last fall, sixteen students completed first-year Hebrew, and the number compares favorably to other Judaic Studies programs. The instructor also maintained a Hebrew conversation table. While the funding is not indefinite, the commitment of the donors will suffice for several years. Complemented by three successive years of a Schusterman Visiting Israel Professor, supported by American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE), UT's College of Arts and Sciences, and the Jewish community, Judaic Studies offerings to students—majors

as well as all those who take our classes to fulfill college requirements—are currently well rounded. However, continuing quality instruction in Modern Hebrew and Israel Studies will remain a challenge. It is, of course, our fervent wish that we might be able to add Biblical Hebrew as a regular course offering in the future as well.

With the uncertainty about the future of government stimulus funds, it is difficult to say what the future holds. We have flourished in large part due to a few large and committed donors and the many collaborations with the College of Arts and Sciences, other departments, colleges, and community organizations and individuals that have cosponsored and supported our programming over the years. We hope that the spirit of cooperation will survive even in difficult economic times and are optimistic for the future.

David Shneer and Jamie Polliard

Director and Assistant Director, Program in Jewish Studies, University of Colorado at Boulder

David Shneer: My biggest challenge is convincing people that Jewish Studies is not only for Jews nor is just about the study of Judaism. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that every faculty member hears from a student: "I'm not Jewish. Can I be in this class?" I hear around campus the presumption that Jewish Studies is an advocacy unit, not an academic unit, and I hear this as often from Jews as from non-Jews. As director, I try to communicate to everyone that Jewish Studies is about the study of Jewish culture, society, life, and religion and is open to everyone.

Jamie Polliard: Our communication is clearly successful, since about 50 percent of the students in our courses are not Jewish. But we're missing something, because nearly all of the students pursuing the certificate in Jewish Studies are Jewish.

David: I also hear frequently that I should be an advocate for all things Jewish. Of course, the assumption is that I, as director, *am* Jewish, a bold assumption, one that I hope is true less often.

Jamie: I have spent the last nine years of my career working in the Jewish community, and I am not Jewish. People are often surprised that a non-Jew would be running a Jewish Studies program. I think this speaks to a subliminal

message that if you aren't Jewish, why would you be interested in this subject matter. We are very deliberate to make sure our communications do not include what we refer to as "we Jews" talk. This can often be alienating, especially when you are working with a student population.

David: A final challenge, but one that I think I'm quite good at navigating, is negotiating the boundaries between the Jewish community, who are usually the financial supporters of Jewish Studies, and the intellectual needs of the campus. Sometimes this comes up around issues related to Israel, although most recently, I had a major issue connected to a program on Jesus as a Jew.

Jamie: This negotiation is very challenging especially working on a campus where issues around Israel have been very divisive in the university and surrounding community and when we are working to communicate a message of inclusiveness and openness and a yearning for a global approach to Jewish Studies.

Laurence J. Silberstein

Director, Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies, Lehigh University

The first challenge that confronted me upon my arrival at Lehigh in 1984 was to establish a serious center for Jewish Studies in an environment that provided very limited resources. Connected to this challenge was a second and unexpected one, the continuing presence of two donors who did not believe in supporting programs from a distance. In the beginning, Phil and Muriel Berman's regular attendance at all center events and programs left some of my colleagues somewhat nervous, and I must admit to my own initial uncertainty. As it turned out, to paraphrase Mark Twain, this was one of the many problems that never happened. Phil and Muriel were exceptional benefactors who believed that academic matters, including speakers and programs, were best left to the judgment of the academicians. Although we had different perspectives on a number of issues, particularly concerning Israel, I cannot recall any instance in which they voiced criticism of a speaker or program along ideological lines.

A serious challenge was the need for additional faculty. The interdisciplinary character of our program and competing demands upon

individual departments resulted in the loss of a number of courses offered by associated faculty over the years. Thanks to the generosity of the Bermans and other donors, we have succeeded in building a group of five full-time Jewish Studies faculty (four tenure track and one professor of practice), with three of the positions fully endowed.

To render a serious contribution of research and publications apart from the writings of our faculty, we initiated a regular series of academic conferences. We also entered into an agreement with a well-known academic press to publish all of the proceedings. In the years between conferences, we convened a series of informal colloquia which created space for colleagues from the United States and Israel to share their work in progress and experiment with new ideas. Unfortunately, the growing reluctance of academic presses to publish multi-author volumes led to the cessation of our publishing series. Our final conference volume, published in 2001, only appeared as a result of a full subvention from a generous donor.

Finally, the overall anti-intellectual climate on campus along with students' reluctance to attend extracurricular lectures and programs presented another challenge. In response, we decided to link all of our lectures and programs to existing courses and require students to attend. Coupled with a core of interested faculty and members of the general community, we have managed to maintain strong attendance at our programs. As to the future, changes on university campuses are already creating new challenges that will require new and different solutions.

Deborah Starr

*Director, Program of Jewish Studies,
Cornell University*

Jewish Studies, like other ethnic, religious, and area studies programs and departments, benefits from the richness afforded by interdisciplinarity. Yet, with interdisciplinarity also come challenges in finding common ground among scholars with diverse interests and scholarly orientations. At Cornell University, the Jewish Studies program grew out of the Department of Near Eastern Studies (formerly the Department of Semitic Languages and Literatures), which continues to serve as the center at Cornell of faculty teaching and research in Judaica and Hebraica. Near

Eastern Studies is also where a core group of the program's faculty hold appointments. Yet, other members of the Jewish Studies faculty are spread over many departments including American Studies, animal science, Classics, comparative literature, English, German, history, linguistics, Romance Studies, and Russian literature. The faculty's research and teaching interests represent a broad array of disciplines and historical periods. One challenge has been to forge a shared sense of an intellectual community that cuts across this diversity of academic interests. Since faculty affiliated with the program are physically spread out across the campus, we have had to work to create venues where we can interact, share ideas, and learn from one another.

The Program of Jewish Studies offers an undergraduate minor. Despite its relatively modest requirements, the minor attracts a small number of students. At the same time, Cornell University has a large and active Jewish student population, supporting dozens of Jewish student organizations. This population of Jewish students represents a significant possible constituency for our academic mission. One ongoing challenge for Jewish Studies has been to translate student energy and interest in Jewish life on campus into an interest in Jewish Studies as an academic field—both by encouraging enrollment in Jewish Studies classes in the minor in Jewish Studies.

Josef Stern

*Director, Chicago Center for Jewish Studies,
University of Chicago*

The challenges of directing a Jewish Studies program range from the sublime to the banal:

- (1) Finding the right questions that will draw faculty and students out of their own research to engage in interactive and collaborative dialogue in workshops and conferences that will intellectually excite them.
- (2) Competing with all the other demands on faculty time and energy to garner active participation in the center.
- (3) Predicting attendance at lectures and events and knowing how much to order for receptions. This challenge has a subsidiary one: how to finish all the leftovers and excess food when you have overestimated the number in attendance.

Jeffrey Veidlinger

*Director, Robert A. and Sandra S. Borns Jewish
Studies Program, Indiana University*

As director of the Robert A. and Sandra S. Borns Jewish Studies Program, I regularly struggle with maintaining a balance between the different ideas of what a Jewish Studies program should be. The three biggest challenges are:

(1) Church/State

As part of a public university, we must always retain a wall of separation between church and state, but we are also obliged to educate our students and our community about Judaism. In reaching this goal, then, is it appropriate for us to conduct outreach activities at a local synagogue? Or participate in a multi-faith educational symposium held at a local church? Should we co-sponsor a conference that holds sessions on Saturday?

(2) Jewish Studies/Israel Studies

As the Jewish state, Israel is obviously of integral importance to Jewish Studies, but is all of Israel Studies relevant to us? Should we cross-list a course taught by a geographer on water management in Israel? What role does the Jewish Studies program play in Middle East Studies on campus? What is our role in monitoring and promoting overseas study programs in Israel that are not directly related to Jewish Studies?

(3) Jewish Studies/Judaic Studies

I believe that no student should be able to complete the Jewish Studies major without having seen a page of Talmud. But how much emphasis should be placed on rabbinic literature in the degree? In many universities today, including my own, Jewish Studies is understood as a study of Jewish society and civilization. The seminal texts of Judaism are an important part of that civilization, but for many Jews in the world today—and for many students in our classrooms—these texts seem less relevant than other aspects of Jewish civilization. Can we truly educate students about Jewish civilization without in-depth study of these texts? Or do we risk providing a distorted picture of the diversity of Jewish life today by overemphasizing the textual tradition?

Beth Wenger

Director, Jewish Studies Program,
University of Pennsylvania

Building Coherence within the Program

By its very nature, Penn's interdisciplinary Jewish Studies program brings together faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students with diverse interests and specialties. While we regard diversity as one of the vital strengths of our program, it also presents a series of challenges. On an administrative level, crafting the Jewish Studies curriculum requires balancing our program's needs with the teaching commitments of faculty members to their home departments. Moreover, faculty often prioritize service to their own departments. In intellectual terms, we must find ways to bring together students and faculty working in disparate fields, encouraging dialogue across disciplines. Through faculty works-in-progress seminars, a graduate student colloquium in Jewish Studies, and regular presentations of undergraduate research, we endeavor to strengthen the sense of cohesion within our program and create a genuine intellectual community.

Penn also houses the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. While the Katz

Center and the Jewish Studies program work together to create a community for Jewish Studies at Penn, they are separate institutions, with distinct missions, though students, faculty, and the wider community do not always grasp the distinctions between the two. Communication and coordination between the directors of the center and the program are essential to creating a successful intellectual community for Jewish Studies at Penn.

Overcoming Student Misperceptions

Students arrive at Penn with a range of misconceptions about the nature and purpose of Jewish Studies in a university. Some students mistakenly believe that Jewish Studies courses represent simply a continuation of the (often) unsatisfying experience that they left behind in Hebrew or Sunday school. Other students, many of them graduates of day schools or yeshivot, sometimes suspect that Jewish Studies courses on the university level invoke heretical approaches or are taught by professors hostile to Judaism, thus potentially undermining traditional beliefs and practices. Some non-Jewish students worry that they might not be sufficiently knowledgeable or might be regarded as outsiders when they enroll in Jewish Studies courses. While these

misconceptions are by no means universal, they do affect at least a portion of students who might otherwise consider exploring Jewish Studies during their college careers.

Fostering an Intellectual Culture for Jewish Studies on Campus

Like most Jewish Studies programs, Penn regularly sponsors an array of lectures, programs, and conferences. We consider such events part of our mandate for creating a culture of engagement with Jewish subjects outside of the classroom. At times, we struggle to attract students to these events without requiring them for our courses, as we compete with Hillel and a range of other student programs. At the same time, we almost always welcome members of the larger community to attend these events, believing that our academic mission includes the broader public. Still, a delicate balancing act is often required to engage student needs and serve community interests at the same time.

Do you have an answer to this question?

E-mail it to ajs@ajs.cjh.org with The Questionnaire in the subject line. The AJS will continue this discussion on its website.

From the Executive Director

(continued from pg 4)

In 2008, the largest number of permanent (i.e., tenure-track or tenured) positions advertised was in history (19). This was followed by: field of specialization open (5); Israel Studies (4); Bible (3); Hebrew (3); Holocaust Studies (2); and Jewish education, literature, and Sephardi/Mizrahi Studies (1 each). Of the permanent positions in 2008, 30 were at the assistant-professor/tenure-track level, and 10 were at the associate- or full-professor level. Also in 2008, 12 temporary (i.e. adjunct, lecturer, visiting) positions were advertised with the field of specialization open, as well as another 11 positions in Hebrew. Other temporary positions were in history (6); antisemitism, comparative/interfaith relations, Bible, and Rabbinics (2 each); and Holocaust Studies, gender studies, Israel Studies, sociology, and modern Jewish thought (1 each).

By 2010, the largest number of permanent (i.e. tenure-track or tenured) positions advertised were in history (10), followed by: field of specialization open (7), Bible (5), and Israel Studies (5). One position was advertised in each of the following fields: modern Jewish thought,

the arts, education, interfaith/multicultural studies, and Holocaust Studies. Of the permanent positions, 25 were at the assistant-professor/tenure-track level, and 7 at the associate- or full-professor level. Twenty-nine temporary (i.e. adjunct, lecturer, visiting) positions were advertised with the field of specialization open (including 10 postdoctoral fellowships for American scholars to teach in Israel), followed by 9 temporary positions in Hebrew, 8 in history, and 1 each in comparative/interfaith relations, gender studies, Israel Studies, Bible, and education.

Again, these are preliminary figures, and the AJS will continue to analyze the data and post more formal findings on its website in the coming months. We know such information is important to members and hope to expand our work collecting data on all aspects of the field.

Rona Sheramy

Association for Jewish Studies