

University Center at Binghamton

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Judaic Studies Program
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JUDAIC STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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The Program Enters its 'Bar Mitzvah' Year

In the Fall of 1973, a full-scale Judaic Studies Program was launched at SUNY-Binghamton. The Program came into being at the combined initiative of students and faculty members. Three years later, the first five Judaic Studies Certificates were awarded, and to date there have been 28 recipients of the Certificate. In 1979, the Judaic Studies Major was established, and as of last semester 33 BA's in Judaic Studies have been awarded. A significant number of our majors and certificate students have gone on to careers in Jewish Community Service, the Rabbinate, and graduate Judaic Studies. No less important than the number of our major and certificate students is the very impressive numbers of students who take Judaic Studies courses as electives. The Judaic Studies Program has begun to achieve visibility and the recognition it deserves. Its faculty enjoys a national and in some cases an international reputation.

The thirteenth year of Judaic Studies at SUNY-Binghamton opens with the Program at a critical juncture in its development. It has been both seriously strengthened and seriously weakened at one and the same time. Hebrew and Yiddish which are essential language components have been greatly augmented with the hiring of Michael Taub (see the biographical sketch below), who also plans to develop new courses in Jewish literature. The Program has been considerably enhanced in American Jewish History with the addition of Lance Sussman (see below), who is also trained in Rabbinical Studies and has been filling in some of the courses taught by David Biale. We have also been fortunate in the arrival of Jerome Rothenberg to the English Department. A distinguished poet, Mr. Rothenberg is the editor of A Big Jewish Book, and includes Jewish literature among his many interests.

But alongside our profits column there is loss. The untimely death of Art Liebman deprived us his popular courses on the Sociology of the Jews. Unfortunately, the Sociology Department has shown no interest in replacing him with someone in the Judaic field. Helen Rivlin's retirement has left us with no one to teach her very important courses on the History of Zionism and modern Israel. The History Department has made it a priority to fill in for her and another recently retired individual with an Ottomanist. And finally, the loss of David Biale, who occupied the only full Judaic line in the Program which began with Stan Isser in 1973 and was occupied successively by Moshe Gottlieb and Biale, has left us with no single faculty member who

teaches Judaica exclusively. For the Program, this is an Achilles heel, a potentially mortal point of weakness, which could jeopardize its longterm health. Filling in this dangerous gap is the major challenge facing the Program today.

Lance Sussman and Michael Taub Join the Faculty

Judaic Studies is delighted to announce the addition of two new professors this year, each of whom brings new areas of specialization to our Program.

Lance Sussman

"The creation of a new position in American Jewish History," according to Professor Lance J. Sussman, "is a very significant development both for my discipline and this university. During the last thirty years," Sussman maintains, "the critical study of the American Jewish experience has 'come of age' and is now a vital part of American and Judaic studies. By committing itself to a position in this area, SUNY-B is demonstrating a pioneer spirit in research and curricular development."

Professor Sussman, who pursued both his rabbinic and doctoral studies at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion (Cincinnati), has published articles on Antebellum Jewish religious life, Jewish-Christian relations in America, synagogue architecture and contemporary demographics in leading scholarly journals including American Jewish Archives, American Jewish History, and Modern Judaism. He is currently completing a biography of Isaac Leeser (1806-1868), the leading American Jewish religious leader in the United States before the Civil War and will serve as the editor of a Biographical Dictionary of Reform Judaism in America (Greenwood Press). The Central Conference of American Rabbis has also retained him to prepare its "Centennial History, 1889-1989."

"I am in complete accord," Sussman adds, "with SUNY-B's goal of combining excellence in historical research with first class pedagogy." In addition to teaching classes in American Jewish History, Professor Sussman will also offer courses in Biblical History, Judaism in Late Antiquity, and Modern Judaism. A member of the History Department, his courses are cross-listed with Judaic Studies.

MICHAEL TAUB

A small village in Transylvania is the birthplace of Michael Taub. From 1962 until 1970, lived in Israel. In the Six Day War, fought in the West Bank. Began his studies in 1970 in New York and in 1982 received a doctorate in Comparative Literature-Drama from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Taught Comparative Literature and Drama at the University of Haifa, and Hebrew at Hofstra University. He is currently teaching Hebrew, Yiddish, and Hebrew Literature at SUNY-Binghamton. In

the future he plans to teach courses on Yiddish Literature, Hebrew Drama and Holocaust Literature.

Michael Taub has written about Romanian poetry, has translated Yiddish poetry, and is currently trying to publish six Israeli plays he translated into English. As a new member of the Judaic Studies Program at Binghamton, he intends to develop a "Jewish Literature" track that would include Hebrew, Yiddish, Holocaust, and other literatures where Jews or Jewish themes are the main topics. Titled "The Jews in World Literature" such a course would focus on The Merchant of Venice, The Jew of Malta, Nathan the Wise, and other works.

Judaic Studies Receives Grants for Southern Tier Jewish History Project

The Judaic Studies Program has received a \$5,000 grant from the Olum Foundation of Binghamton for a research project on the History of the Jewish Community of the Southern Tier. Special thanks are due to Michael Zuckerman of the law firm of Levene, Gouldin & Thompson, Rabbi Elihu Schagrin, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Concord, and Mr. Charles Rosenthal of the SUNY Foundation, all three of whom were instrumental in the realization of this generous grant. Another grant of \$1,250 was awarded the project from the American Council for Judaism of New York.

Already last semester, several undergraduate students and one graduate student began the initial process of collecting materials including oral histories. Direction of the project has been turned over to Professor Lance Sussman, who is a trained specialist in American Jewish History. He will be writing about the scope and the goals of the project in a later issue of the Newsletter.

Community Education Outreach Program Begins its Second Year

The "College of Jewish Studies," a Community Education Outreach Program which was established last year by Judaic Studies in partnership with the Jewish Community Center and the local synagogues began its second year this month. The College is offering two programs at the JCC: A course in Elementary Modern Hebrew and a series of minicourses on the arts (music, literature, theatre, and art). The Hebrew course which runs for the entire semester has 26 people enrolled in two sections and is being taught by Shalom Shoer, who for the past two years has been a teaching assistant in our Hebrew Program. The first minicourse consisted of three lectures on Jewish Music attracting more than 25 students. Two of the three lectures were given by SUNY faculty members Sam Chianis and Phil Friedheim. The next minicourse will be devoted to the subject of Jewish art. Starting with the second minicourse, several outside lecturers will be brought in thanks to a grant obtained by Claire Goldstein, the Director of Programs at the JCC, who has played a major role in making the College of Jewish Studies a success.

For more information on the College of Jewish Studies offerings, call the Judaic Studies Office (777-3070) or the JCC (724-2417).

Judaic Studies Provides Student Interns for the Local Community

This year once again, we are providing student interns who work at important jobs in the local community, earning college credit at the same time. The students under the supervision of a faculty sponsor and a representative of a local communal agency gains important on-site experience in some aspect of community work, while the community gains much-needed assistance. This semester, the interns are: Dana Brum, who is working with the College of Jewish Studies Program and with Hillel Academy; Elizabeth Lush, who is working with The Reporter (the Jewish Federation weekly newspaper), and Naomi Pinchuk, who is working with the Seniors' Program at the JCC.

Guest Speakers: Preliminary Announcements

Some of the guest speakers lined up for this semester are:

October 19, 1986 - Professor Ami Ayalon (Tel Aviv University) on Egyptian Israel Relations

November 16, 1986 - Professor David Menashri (Tel Aviv University) on Khomeini and the Jews of Iran

December, 1986 (date not confirmed) - Professor Shalva Weil (Hebrew University) on the Jews of India

(Details will follow)

Best wishes for the New Year