

HA-KOL

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Program
at SUNY-Binghamton

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IS JEWISH STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT SUNY-B DECLINING?

At first glance, the statistical information recently released by the University on the ethnic and religious composition of the current freshman class suggests that Jewish student enrollment at SUNY-Binghamton is declining rapidly. 30.8% of the new freshman class indicated "Jewish" as their religious preference compared to 39.1% in 1983, a drop of 21.2% or more than one-fifth in five years! Before jumping to conclusions, it is important to consider both the reliability of the information and how to accurately interpret the raw numbers.

Statistics on religion and ethnicity are gathered annually by the Admissions Office as part of summer registration. Approximately 80% of the freshman class attend these sessions and of that group, approximately 80% participate in the information gathering activities of the university. In other words, only 64% of the in-coming class provides the university with information about their personal religion and ethnicity. Whether or not the 64% who participate are religiously and ethnically representative of the whole class is unknown.

The steady growth of the percentage of students declaring no religious preference from 1984 (7.8%) to 1987 (15.9%) greatly complicates the picture. Because the university neither includes "Jewish" as an ethnic category nor correlates information about ethnicity with information about religion, it is impossible to say what percentage of the "unchurched" student population is Jewish. Surveys of synagogue-affiliation by the New York Jewish Federation suggests that synagogue-affiliation in metropolitan New York (the second weakest in the United States after Los Angeles) continues to erode, especially in outlying areas such as Suffolk County where the religious-affiliation rate has dropped below 10%. To complicate matters further, the pattern of synagogue-affiliation in metropolitan New York is skewed with the heaviest rate of affiliation among families with children from 5-13 years old.

The national religious picture also needs to be considered in any explanation of the decline of religious preference among

our students. Although the last decade has witnessed a resurgence of "right wing" religious traditions, mainstream groups have generally declined. Studies indicate that religious right is growing among the "unchurched" and that religious drop-outs from the mainstream are not going to the fundamentalists but are leaving organized religion altogether. In the Jewish community, the Conservative movement (most heavily concentrated in metropolitan New York and Philadelphia) has been hit the hardest by this trend. The transition to a "fourth generation" is also proving to be highly problematic for what is widely viewed as an "ethnic religious institution."

Another factor contributing to the increase in the "no religious preference" is the general rise in exogamy in American society. Unquestionably, the rate of Jewish mixed marriage began to soar in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The children of those marriages are now entering colleges. Many students of mixed-backgrounds have simply not made up their minds as to what their religious identities will be nor are many of them willing to share that information publicly. Privately, however, many of these individuals label themselves as Jewish or part-Jewish.

Local factors also have to be considered which would serve to depress the number of Jewish students attending SUNY-B. First, the university is actively seeking to recruit more students from Upstate where there is a smaller Jewish population than in the Downstate area. Interestingly, the percentage of Protestant students in 1987 freshman class was up to 20.7% from 16.8% the year before. The two largest Protestant groups on campus are Lutheran (assuming Lutherans are Protestant) 3.1% and Baptist, 2.8%. Second, as admissions standards rise, the pool of students available to SUNY-B becomes more selective and the competition with Ivy League Schools becomes more competitive. How many Jewish families decide to go for broke (oi vey!) is, again, unknown. Third, a recent adjustment in the number of new students admitted to the School of Management might have also served to temporarily depress the total number of entering Jewish students at SUNY-Binghamton.

Finally, the demographics of the American Jewish community in general has to be considered. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Jewish birth rate hit its lowest known mark. As that generation approaches college age, there will simply be fewer Jewish students. Moreover, one-child households often have greater options in the private school world as they only have one college tuition to consider.

In conclusion, although the figures released by the University on religion and ethnicity in the 1987 freshmen class are essentially impressionistic and not factual, there is no reason to deny that they do indeed suggest the direction

of enrollment patterns at SUNY-Binghamton. The fact that the Jewish enrollment at SUNY-Binghamton has sustained itself at such high levels for so long is what is remarkable, not evidence of a current downward slide. It is my opinion that the 30% level we are now at is indicative of the high desirability of this campus to Jewish students around the State.

Finally, with thousands of Jewish students already here and a still relatively huge pool of potential applicants available, there is also no reason to worry that the declining Jewish enrollment will impact negatively on Judaic Studies courses. Some shrinkage might, in fact, tend to strengthen Jewish identity on the campus and therefore intensify the selection of Judaic Studies courses by Jewish students.

One final note, it is indeed remarkable that 84.1% of all incoming freshmen (albeit from a limited sample) claim a "religious preference." As De Tocqueville observed over 150 years ago, America is an extraordinarily "religious society."

LJS

A recently completed survey of JUST majors indicates that 30.6% of our graduates work in the field of Communal Service, 26.2% in Jewish Education and 17.5% as rabbis. There are currently 8 students with a JUST major.

JUST is offering the following courses in the Spring '88:

JUST 181D	Intro to Rabbinic Jud.	Morell
JUST 261	Jews and Jud. in U.S.	Sussman
JUST 280A	Pre-Biblical Archaeol.	Kaufman
JUST 280H	Holocaust	Arkush
JUST 280J	The Biblical Period	Arkush
JUST 280K	Zionism	Arkush
JUST 400R	Poetry: C. Reznikoff	Kessler
JUST 460E	Open Concepts/Organic Thinking	Goldstein
JUST 490F	Age of Talmud	Sussman
JUST 397/399	Independent Study/Thesis	
Yiddish 102	Elementary	Taub
Yiddish 204	Intermediate	Taub
Yiddish 391	Advanced	Taub
Hebrew 102	Elementary	Taub and Y. Stillman
Hebrew 204	Readings	Taub
Hebrew 301	Conv. and Comp.	Morell
Hebrew 322	Post Bib. History	Morell
Hebrew 380	Hebrew Folktale	Y. Stillman

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

On Wednesday, March 16, 1988, at 12 noon in LT 1506, there will be an informal discussion on "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Continuity and Change," Part II led by David Becker, a Graduate Student in History. Just bring your lunch --- coffee, tea and donuts will be provided.

Prof. Michael Taub (Classics) is pleased to announce that the famed Israeli writer Aharon Appelfeld will speak on campus on April 14 on the Holocaust in commemoration of Yom Ha-Shoah. Place/time TBA.

Faculty and community individuals who might have books they are willing to donate to the JUST Reading Room Library should contact Prof. Yedida Stillman, x-3070.

FACULTY AND STUDENT NEWS

Peggy Marcus has recently been appointed "Project Coordinator" of the Southern Tier Jewish Historical Project. An April, '89 photo exhibition of 125 years of Jewish life in the Southern Tier is planned.

Prof. Paul Finkelman (History) spoke at Temple Concord on "Jews and the Supreme Court." He gave a public lecture on behalf of the American Jewish Committee of Detroit.

Prof. Lance Sussman (History) recently published articles in the Blackwell Companion to Jewish Culture and Literature and Keeping Posted.

Two graduate students, David Becker and Shalom Shoer, are recipients of the first Scholarship in Judaic Studies established by the local Jewish Federation. Becker is currently studying for an M.A. in Jewish History with a specialization in North Africa and the Middle East. Shoer, an Israeli studying Physics, has also been serving as the adviser and coordinator for the Jewish Student Union.

Prof. Norman Stillman (History and Arabic) spoke at the American Sephardic Federation's national convention in Miami and at the University of Texas at Austin in November. He also published an article in A Way Prepared: Essays on Islamic Culture in Honor of R.B. Winder as well as several book reviews.

Prof. Yedida K. Stillman (Classics and Near East) gave two lectures on Moroccan Jewish Women at the University of Florida, Gainesville, in December. She was a guest curator and researcher for the Generations exhibition at the new wings of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. She also recently published an article on "Qalansuwa" in The Dictionary of the Middle Ages and has been appointed as a consultant to Time-Life Books' The March of Islam.

Prof. Allan Arkush (JUST) and Sandra Sketchley (Graduate Student, History) both gave papers at the Association for Jewish Studies annual convention in Boston in December. Arkush presented a historiographical paper on the work of Alexander Altmann and Sketchley spoke on the "Furrier's Union." In addition, there was an impressive SUNY contingent in attendance including faculty members, Samuel Morell, Norman Stillman, Yedida Stillman, and Michael Taub; Judaic Bibliographer Jeanne Eichelberger; and graduate student Susan Savitch.

COLLEGE OF JEWISH STUDIES WINS AN AWARD

The "JWB" (The National Umbrella organization of all Jewish Community Centers in the U.S.), has awarded College of Jewish Studies, an adult education outreach program initiated by the Judaic Studies Program, and administered by JUST, JCC and other local organizations, a program award for excellence.

The award will be presented on April 29 at the biannual plenary session in St. Louis.

This Spring's College of Jewish Studies theme will be "The Golden Age of German Jewry: The Creation of Modern Judaism." For further information contact Claire Goldstein, Program Director, Jewish Community Center, 724-2417. The program wishes to express a special thanks to Mr. Norbert Adler for all of his help with this spring's program.

COMING EVENTS

JUST will be hosting a one-day symposium of Judaic faculty from throughout the SUNY system on April 24. The purpose of the symposium will be to discuss common concerns and the possibilities for closer cooperation among the different campuses.