

JUST NEWS

VOLUME 1

SPRING 1999

The Official Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Department at the
State University of New York at Binghamton

Harpur College Dean Committed To Judaic Studies

I'm interested in building departments, making them stronger," said Harpur College Dean Sol Polachek. And that includes Judaic Studies. In reaffirming his commitment to Judaic Studies at Binghamton University, the dean pointed to two factors that underlie its strength: 1) its current excellent faculty and 2) the presence on campus of a large number of Jewish students.

Dean Polachek spoke very appreciatively of the work being done by the full-time and adjunct faculty of the Judaic Studies Department. He went on to note that approximately 3,000 Jewish students between the ages of 18 and 22 attend Binghamton University. "I would like Judaic Studies to flourish on this campus," he said, "just as Jewish life does." But Judaic Studies is not just for Jews, the dean hastened to add. "Jewish culture is worth studying in its own right. Everyone can learn a lot from the experience of the Jewish people through the millenia." Judaic Studies, said Polachek, can have a beneficial impact not only on students but on the community as a whole. "Perhaps what we learn can foster a better understanding of how to make the world a safer, more congenial place."



Harpur College Dean
Sol Polachek

The dean acknowledged that the Judaic Studies Department has shrunk in recent years, but he expressed high hopes for future growth. He pointed out that the department is currently authorized to hire another professor and noted also that efforts to locate resources to support additional growth are also under way. Polachek observed that the department already receives significant support from alumni and the local community and is now concentrating its attention on obtaining funds from individual and institutional backers of Judaic Studies in the New York City area. "I intend to do everything I can to help in this effort," said the dean.

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STUDENT PROFILE ERICA MONTAG

Erica Montag will soon graduate from Binghamton University as a Judaic Studies major. After four years at Binghamton, this prospective rabbi has a very strong attachment to the department. "It's a nice, close-knit group of people, and you get to know your classmates well," she said. "Being a Judaic Studies major has given me an edge over many others going into my field because of the great background in Judaism I now have. It really taught me a lot about Jewish history."

Erica says that she has always had an interest in Judaic Studies, but what really got her involved in the department was the class on the Holocaust that she took during her freshman year. After taking this course, which she still considers to be one of the best she has taken at Binghamton, she was inspired to take more and more courses in Judaic Studies, until she finally decided to include it as one of her majors.

Outside of the classroom, Erica has worked very hard to enrich Jewish life on campus. In 1996 and 1997 she was co-president and then president of the Hillel chapter on campus. In the spring of 1997 she orchestrated the merging of Hillel and the Jewish Student Union, a move that brought together the religious and social elements of Jewish life on campus. After the merger, Erica continued as co-president of what was now Hillel-The Jewish Student Union and then, in 1998, became president of the organization. After "retiring" from office this year, she is still active in Jewish life on campus.



Erica Montag

When asked what improvements she would most like to see in Jewish life on campus, Erica said, "I would like to see more liberal and more observant Jews work together on programs of a social and cultural nature that we could all enjoy." She sees the merger of Hillel and JSU as having been the first step toward such a union. She would also like to see the campus Jewish community interact more with the Jewish community in the Binghamton area.

Upon graduating from Binghamton, Erica plans to join the work force for a year or two before undertaking her rabbinic education and becoming a rabbi. She does not know yet which rabbinical school she will attend, but looks forward eagerly to the continuation of her Jewish education and the career that lies before her.

PAULINE PIAKER AWARD ANNOUNCED

Once again the Judaic Studies Department is sponsoring an essay contest on the subject of "Resolving Ethnic Conflicts." Special mention during "Honors Week" and a cash prize will be awarded to an outstanding essay focusing on any area of ethnic tension or cooperation or dealing with a number of conflicts from a comparative perspective. Entries were due on March 5 and are being judged by a committee of faculty and staff representing several different departments. Distinguished Service Professor Philip Piaker of the Binghamton University School of Management established the award in memory of his wife, Pauline Piaker, a lifelong proponent of interethnic harmony.



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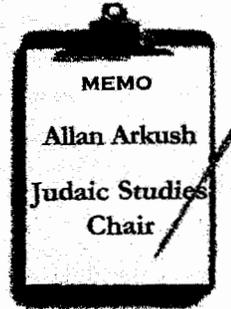
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

This is our first newsletter in a long time, and it is a very different sort of a creature from our previous issues. For one thing, I am not the editor. Working under the supervision of Riva Rittberg, two graduating Binghamton seniors, Seth Eichenholtz and Ben Greenzweig have carried out the difficult task of producing this edition. They have renamed and redesigned Ha-Kol and, as readers with long memories can easily see, have made it much more presentable and attractive than it ever was in the past.

They have done a fine job, too, in making our department sound like a flourishing enterprise. They have highlighted its bright points and a number of recent, promising developments and made it seem as if we are constantly proceeding from strength to strength. We are all very grateful to them for doing so. I have to say, however, that even though the story they have told is a true story, it is not the whole story. These are, in fact, difficult days for us. We are a tiny department, greatly deficient in full-time faculty members. To an extent unmatched, I think, by any other department on campus, we are reliant upon adjuncts to get our work done. In finding the right people to fill in the gaps in our program, we have, of course, been extraordinarily lucky. If we need them, it seems, they will come. Each and every one of our adjuncts listed elsewhere in this newsletter has shown up just when we needed him or her and done a job for which we are deeply grateful. But we cannot go on like this forever. We need more full-time faculty.

This is a need recognized by our administration. We have been authorized to hire another professor. We even had one for a while, a very fine one. But then she left for another job. Our efforts to replace her have run into some temporary difficulties, which need not be discussed here. They will be renewed next year. In the meantime, though, we are woefully short-handed, and will still be understaffed even if we succeed in augmenting our numbers by one.

Our best hopes for expansion on the necessary scale are tied up with the fundraising efforts mentioned elsewhere in this issue by Dean Polachek. With the help of our many friends in the local Jewish community, we are now raising money to hire an expert fundraiser, someone with the know-how to bring us together with the kind of people who have been munificent in their support of Judaic Studies at other American universities. I hope to report in future issues on our success in this endeavor. For the moment, however, we would be more than glad to hear from any of our readers who might have any suggestions as to how we can find what we are seeking.





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A Quiet Revolution

If the twentieth century appears to have resolved anything in Jewish life, it is the struggle over languages with which it began. One hundred years ago, partisans of Hebrew and Yiddish were locked in battle to determine which of these tongues would be the Jewish people's future vernacular. A few zealous proponents of a Hebrew revival had pitted themselves against the



Jack Weinstein

masses of Yiddish speakers in what seemed to many to be a futile effort to turn back the clock. In the course of time, however, as everyone knows, Hebrew unexpectedly won out over Yiddish. The number of Hebrew speakers today dwarfs the number of Yiddish speakers.

Hebrew's current rival would appear to be English, not Yiddish. Even in Israel, there are those who worry about the threat posed by this increasingly universal language. Zohar Shavit, a professor of Hebrew literature at Tel Aviv University, recently proposed that the state try to protect Hebrew from the English menace by banning the use of transliterated English words in public signage throughout the country. What has apparently escaped this professor's notice, however, is the new threat to Hebrew emerging from Binghamton, New York. It goes by the name of Jack

WHAT'S THAT SAY??
"I LOVE YIDDISH STUDENTS."

Weinstein. At first glance, this jovial septuagenarian would hardly seem to present

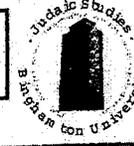
a menace to anything, much less the Hebrew language. Far from being an enemy of Hebrew, Weinstein speaks it fluently and willingly. As he will be quick to remind you, he has an abundance of descendants living in Israel, where they speak Hebrew, not Yiddish. But this estimable contribution to the vitality of Hebrew does not begin to counterbalance the work Weinstein is doing in Binghamton on behalf of Hebrew's old rival. Every year the number of students in Yiddish 101 exceeds not only the number of Weinstein's grandchildren in Israel, but even the number of his grandchildren altogether.

Continued on page 5



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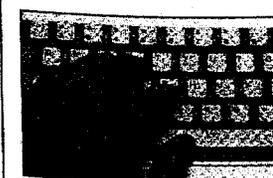
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WEINSTEIN continued from page 3 This year there were 53 students enrolled in the course, almost twice the total number of Weinstein's children's 27 children! There is no place else in the United States or the world, perhaps, where a comparable number of undergraduates are beginning the study of Yiddish. And there may not be any other university where a comparable number of students continue with their studies of Yiddish beyond the first year. Columbia University boasts that it has the country's largest Yiddish program, with 40 students. But Binghamton has a grand total of 65!

In the entire scheme of things, to be sure, the number of Yiddish students in Binghamton may not seem very large. There are, after all, millions of Hebrew speakers in the world today and dwindling numbers of Yiddish speakers. But to look at the whole picture in this light would be shortsighted. A hundred years ago, the situation was precisely the reverse. Then Eliezer Ben Yehudah and a handful of fanatics launched the project that turned things around. When it began, the effort to revive Hebrew did not look much more substantial than Jack Weinstein's operation in Binghamton. And there is no reason to believe that Ben Yehudah's devotion to Hebrew surpassed that of Weinstein to Yiddish, or that the former's disciples were any more enthusiastic in their day than the latter's are now. Jack Weinstein, in short, might seem perfectly innocuous, but if Zohar Shavit and the other guardians of the Hebrew language overlook him, they will do so at their own peril.

Judaic Studies Course Offerings Spring 1999



Students can register online off of the B.U.S.I. system

Core Courses	
JUST 241/HIST 241	Biblical History (Gary Rendsberg)
JUST 243/HIST 243	Medieval Jewish History (Frank Czerwinski)
Topic Courses	
JUST 245A/HIST 245A	The Holocaust (Rosenblum)
JUST 247/HIST 247	Rebirth of Israel (Allan Arkush)
JUST 281B	Jewish Religious Thought (Rabbi Aaron Slonim)
JUST 285 R	The Jews of the Soviet Union (2 credits)
JUST 287L	Fundamentals of Jewish Law (Samuel Morell)
JUST 288D (2 Credits)	Dead Sea Scrolls (Rev. Carl Roemer)
JUST 382T/HIST 381F	Tradition and Modernity (Allan Arkush)
JUST 395	Internship
JUST 397	Independent Study in Judaic Studies
JUST 490/HIST 480E	Judaism in America (Lance Sussman)
JUST 499	Senior Thesis
Language Courses	
HEBREW 102	Elementary Hebrew II (Daniela Cohen)
HEBREW 204	Readings in Hebrew Literature (Samuel Morell)
HEBREW 221	Hebrew Conversation and Composition (Daniela Cohen)
HEBREW 351A	Westernization and Tradition (Samuel Morell)
HEBREW 397	Independent Study in Hebrew
YIDDISH 102	Elementary Yiddish II (Jack Weinstein)
YIDDISH 204	Intermediate Yiddish II (Jack Weinstein)
YIDDISH 397	Independent Study in Yiddish



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YEDIDA K. STILLMAN (1946-1998)

Even before the establishment of our department, Yedida Stillman was, for a long time, the principal mover and shaker in the Judaic Studies Program. Without her ceaseless, behind-the-scenes efforts, the program would never have become a department. Naturally, when the department was created, she became its first chairperson, the Boss. Only those who had the opportunity to witness her in action can understand how fully she merited her nickname. Always thinking, always running, always coming up with new initiatives, and always smiling, Yedida was convinced that she could make anything happen, if only she worked at it hard enough. She achieved things that no one else thought possible. Quite apart from her extensive and remarkable scholarly endeavors and all of the other wonderful things she did in her all-too-short life, she charted the path this department would have to take and moved us a considerable distance down it. Even after she and Norman moved to Oklahoma, she remained concerned with the affairs of our Judaic Studies Department and did quite a few things to help us.



Stillman photo courtesy of the Binghamton Alumni Journal

More people, however, will remember Yedida as a teacher than as an administrator. She was an unforgettable figure in the classroom, a dynamic, warm and inspiring presence. Her door was always open to students and her office was always full of them. Countless Binghamton undergraduates during a period of more than two decades knew her as the professor with whom they had the closest and most meaningful contact. Nor did Yedida's ties to her students cease upon their graduation. She kept an eye on them, and did everything she could to help advance their careers. And their ties to her remain strong. One need only glance at the list of contributors to the Yedida Khalfon Stillman Memorial Fund for the Department of Judaic Studies. The number of graduates from the seventies, eighties and nineties who have contributed to this fund is astonishingly large. To all of them, and to Yedida's innumerable colleagues and friends who have also made donations to this fund, we wish to extend our heartfelt thanks. We promise to use this money in ways that will perpetuate the legacy of a colleague whose untimely demise has left us all deeply saddened. We hope that we can at least some of the time succeed in following in her footsteps.

Just Lunch

Only one JUST Lunch was scheduled for this semester. Since it is supposed to occur at the very time this newsletter is being sent to press, we can neither report on it here nor usefully provide our readers with directions to the room where it is to take place. But we can notify you that on March 29 Dr. Alyssa Seppinwall of California State University at San Marcos will lecture on the subject of "Jews, Blacks, and the French Revolution." Dr. Seppinwall recently received her Ph.D. from Stanford University, where she wrote a dissertation on the Abbe Gregoire, an important, late eighteenth-century advocate of the rights of both blacks and Jews. Her lecture will be co-sponsored by the Departments of Africana Studies and History as well as the Dean's Office. We are looking forward to her arrival next week, and will tell you about it in our next issue.



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FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

DANIELA COHEN



Following in the footsteps of Shmuel Shepkaru and Marc Fogel, Daniela Cohen has become the third incumbent of the Hebrew instructorship inaugurated in the fall of 1995. Born in Israel and educated at Tel Aviv University, Cohen taught Hebrew at Lafayette College and Lehigh University for many years before coming to Binghamton. She is thus by far the most experienced Hebrew teacher to hold this community-supported position.

Before coming to Binghamton this fall, Cohen had seen it only as a city to pass through on the way to visit her son Jacob, who is a professor of accounting at Syracuse University. Now she has come to know it as a wonderful place to live and work. Of her four children, only her youngest daughter Lielle, is still living at home. Ten years old, she has made new friends in Binghamton and is happily enjoying Girl Scouts, Karate, and Hebrew school. Rafi, Daniella's husband, who travels a great deal, represents several Israeli companies in the United States, and several American companies in Israel.

Cohen has had a wonderful experience so far teaching at Binghamton. Of the people in the Judaic Studies Department, Cohen has discovered "they are very nice, cooperative, kind, and friendly." She also enjoys what she sees as a "good class size," large but not overcrowded. Over the years, Cohen has developed a unique method of teaching Hebrew. Instead of relying exclusively on the standard textbooks, which she does not think are consistently interesting, she makes extensive use of short stories that she herself has written. Each of these stories is designed to convey essential grammatical points, transmit vocabulary, and, at the same time, entertain the reader. Cohen constantly alters and improves these stories, which she plans eventually to publish in book form.

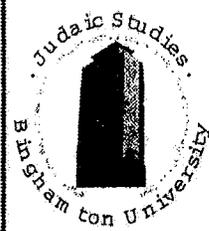
RABBI MOSES MARGOLIS MEMORIAL

The biennial lecture in memory of Rabbi Moses Margolis will be delivered this year by Professor Eric Ziolkowski of Lafayette College's Department of Religion will be speaking on "The Sins of the Sons: The Legacy of 2 Kings: 2, 23-24." Professor Ziolkowski is the author of numerous books and articles, including *The Sanctification of Don Quixote: From Hidalgo to Priest* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

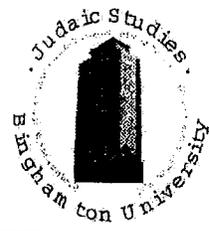


Contact the Anderson Center at (607)-777-ARIS for more information.

He has taught at Lafayette for the past ten years. In 1998 he won the Thomas Roy and Lura Forrest Jonew Award for Superior Teaching and Excellence of Scholarship. The lecture will take place in the Anderson Center Reception Room on Sunday, April 18 at 3 p.m. There will be a reception afterwards.

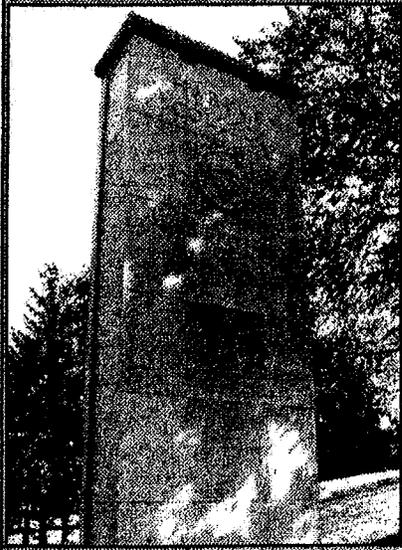


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*JOINT APPOINTMENTS

ADDITIONAL FACULTY FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS TEACH CROSS-LISTED COURSES

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We would like to thank Allan Arkush, Riva Rittberg, Robin Barron, Dean Polachek and the entire Judaic Studies Department.

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