

# News from the center

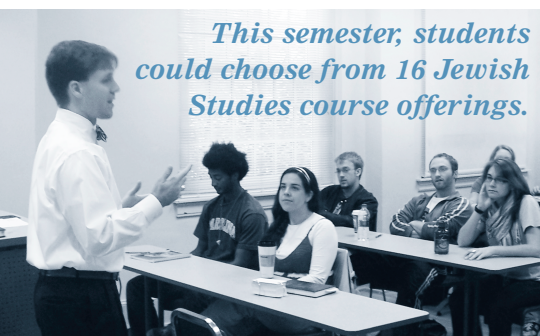
CAROLINA CENTER *for* JEWISH STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL • SPRING 2009 • CCJS.UNC.EDU

## Teaching Jewish studies

Not so long ago, students interested in pursuing Jewish Studies at Carolina had rather limited course choices. But not anymore.

"Thanks in part to the three new faculty members who joined the Carolina community this past fall, we have been able to offer courses that in their breadth and depth surpass anything we might have dreamed up a decade ago, when creating a program in Jewish Studies at Carolina was little more than an idea," said Jonathan Hess, director.



This semester, Carolina students could choose from 16 Jewish Studies course offerings, including six language classes and topics as varied as Jewish Writers in America, Introduction to Modern Judaism, Modes of Jewish Textuality and Holocaust and Genocide.

Professor Jodi Magness is teaching a first-year seminar focusing on "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls." In this seminar, students are learning about the ancient manuscripts found in the caves around the site of Qumran, including early copies of the Hebrew Bible and sectarian works belonging to the local Jewish community.

"I am using the topic of the Dead Sea Scrolls to introduce first-year students more generally to early Judaism (late Second Temple period) and even modern Judaism, including broad issues such as the concepts of canon, sectarianism, purity, messianism, and debates about who is a Jew," said Magness. "The second half of the semester is devoted to archaeology, focusing of course on topics relating to the archaeology of Qumran, including examining the peculiar features of the site such as the cemetery, the large number of miqva'ot, and the animal bone deposits, and what these features tell us about the inhabitants. When we do archaeology we'll have a 'dinner party' during one class to reconstruct an Essene communal meal and a Roman banquet, and during another class, we will have a toga party."

Professor Yaron Shemer, who joined Carolina in the fall as the Levine/Sklut Fellow in Jewish Studies and offered our students "Israeli Cinema: Nation, Gender, and Ethnicity" last semester is now offering another new course this semester: "The Cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa." While the students taking this class are from various academic disciplines, including Comparative Literature, Arabic and Communication Studies, they all share a common interest in learning about the cinematic expression of this region's national, religious, gender, and ethnic identities. Looking ahead, in Fall 2009, Professor Shemer will offer a first-year seminar entitled "Israeli Culture and Society: Collective Memories and Fragmented Identities."

Bennie Reynolds, who also joined Carolina this fall as a lecturer, is helping

undergraduate language scholars refine their Hebrew skills this semester in the "Intermediate Classical Hebrew II: Historical Grammar" course.

"Some students in the higher-level courses are planning to pursue graduate work in fields that require advanced knowledge of ancient Hebrew. There are also students interested in the historical linguistics more generally, and they plan to use Hebrew as part of their larger projects," noted Reynolds.

With new faculty, expanded course listings and vast learning opportunities outside the classroom including lectures from prominent visiting scholars, undergraduate research initiatives and study abroad programs, the Jewish Studies program offers something for everyone, regardless of a student's major, scholarly interests or personal background. For more information on Carolina's Jewish Studies academic program, visit our Web site at: [ccjs.unc.edu](http://ccjs.unc.edu).



This spring, the Center moved to a new home – Coates Hall – located on Franklin Street directly across from Morehead Planetarium. The new space, on the third floor of the historic building, provides faculty and staff offices as well as a meeting room for academic seminars and faculty and student events.



**Dr. Jonathan M. Hess**

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## *from the director's desk*

# Your support of the center's future

This has been another exciting year for the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies. Our academic program provided new course offerings and we brought in major speakers from Israel and across the U.S. to speak to our students, conduct seminars with faculty and graduate students, and lecture and perform to the general public.

Of course, the economic climate in recent months has presented unique challenges for higher education across the nation, and Carolina is not immune to all this.

Fortunately, the Center has many friends who support our efforts, and because of this support, we are forging ahead in our mission to create a Jewish Studies program second to none. Thanks to private funding, we have recruited a promising new faculty member in the history and culture of Rabbinic Judaism, an essential component to a comprehensive Jewish Studies program. And while we are making prudent fiscal adjustments, we will be

maintaining our public outreach program that enriches our extended community.

It has become crystal clear over the past few months that the Center is only as strong as its base of support. Without private donations, the Center's future would be less bright. Over the past five years, private support has been instrumental in enabling us to hire new faculty, maintain a vibrant public events program and create unique opportunities for the diverse students we teach on campus.

Looking ahead, these donations will be even more critical, and even more appreciated. Gifts of all amounts make a tremendous difference in everything we do on campus. If you've not yet renewed your support, I encourage you to do so before the close of our fiscal year on June 30, either by using the gift envelope enclosed in this newsletter or by using the online gift form at our Web site, [ccjs.unc.edu](http://ccjs.unc.edu). And please know how much we appreciate your support!

## *student profile*

# yelena Aleksandrovich '09



## *Hebrew Student Embarks on International Business Career*



Two events in Yelena Aleksandrovich's life helped her find her true identity. First, she moved from Russia to the United States when she was just seven years old.

"In Russia I never really knew much about being Jewish. But after moving to the United States and enrolling at a Jewish Day School, I started to discover my Jewish background and my true self."

Then, during a Birthright trip to Israel in 2006, she decided to do more to reconnect with her Jewish heritage. She returned to Chapel Hill and formed the Jewish *a cappella* group, Sababa, which currently has more than 15 performers. She joined Sigma Rho Lambda, the Jewish sorority, and served as President in 2007. She also decided to learn more Hebrew, ultimately taking the full six-course offering in Modern Hebrew.

"I have a passion for learning languages because it helps you better understand other people and their cultures," says

Aleksandrovich. Her native Russian was soon followed by learning English after moving to the United States and studying Hebrew when in Jewish Day School and again in college. She also speaks some French, which she studied in high school and perfected by listening to French music.

"The Hebrew program here is really great with Professors Friedman and Shemer – they're a great combination. I also knew that having strong language skills would certainly help me when applying for my first job out of college."

Last summer, Aleksandrovich interned in Israel at a start-up high-tech firm and her goal is to have a career in International Business that is based in both Israel and the United States. She will graduate this May with a business major and Modern Hebrew language minor. She plans to spend this summer in Israel before moving to Washington, D.C. to join a consulting firm.

## NEWS BRIEFS

Professor **Yaron Shemer** was recently accepted to the Summer Institute of Brandeis University's Schusterman Center for Israel Studies. The program, which includes a two-week seminar at Brandeis and a one-week study tour in Israel, is for faculty members who are interested in developing new college courses with a focus on Israel.

**Joseph Meeks '10** recently received an award from the Office for Undergraduate Research to help support his project in early modern Yiddish (circa 16th–18th centuries). He is working with Professor Ruth von Bernuth. The duo also won an award at the University Research Day event held on campus this March.

**David M. Rubenstein** (*below, left*) hosted a dinner in Washington D.C. this fall in honor of **Stuart E. Eizenstat** (*below, right*) and the Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat Distinguished Professorship in Jewish History and Culture. The endowed chair will allow the Center to recruit an outstanding scholar in the field of modern Jewish history. For more information about making a gift to the Eizenstat Professorship, please contact Rob Parker (919) 962-6182 or [Rob.Parker@unc.edu](mailto:Rob.Parker@unc.edu).



## *Jewish Studies Graduate Student Network Launched*

Fall 2008 saw the official launch of the Jewish Studies Graduate Student Network, sponsored by the Center. The Network provides a forum for graduate students from across the campus to connect and communicate through their shared interest in Jewish culture. At this first meeting, students representing such disparate departments as History, Germanic Languages and Literatures, Religious Studies and Communication Studies, came together to discuss two chapters of Ph.D. candidate Richard Benson's dissertation, which focused on the stories of Martin Buber.

"The Graduate Student Network has allowed me to hear about the research of students who approach Jewish Studies from diverse fields, and to present my work to a broad scholarly audience," said Benson. "This has not only introduced me to the variety of questions that comprise the field of Jewish Studies, but it has also taught me to make my own work accessible to people who don't specialize in German."

Benson earned his Bachelor's degree in German Literature from New York University in 1999, and in the fall of 2003, he entered the program in German Literature at UNC as a Joseph E. Pogue Fellow. In 2006-2007, he participated in the UNC-CH/Baden-Württemberg teaching exchange program at the University of Mannheim, where he taught English while conducting preliminary dissertation research. Thanks to a generous fellowship from the Stiftung Dialogik, Benson is spending this academic year finishing his dissertation, which explores German-Jewish struggles with identity and tradition in the writings of Karl

Emil Franzos, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Martin Buber, Jakob Wassermann, and Theodor Herzl. Benson will complete his Ph.D. this spring, working under the guidance of Jonathan Hess and Jonathan Boyarin, the Leonard and Tobee Kaplan Distinguished Professor of Modern Jewish Thought. This fall, Benson will join Randolph-Macon College in Virginia as an assistant professor.

Graduate students play an integral role in the success of a research university such as Carolina. The university needs to attract and retain preeminent faculty, and these faculty members expect to have graduate students of the highest quality with whom to work. Without competitive funding packages, the best graduate students will go elsewhere. Moreover, Carolina's reputation as a first class center for Jewish Studies is enhanced as Carolina graduate students go on to become Jewish Studies faculty members at other institutions. For more information about supporting graduate students through Fellowships and other grants, please contact Rob Parker at the Arts and Sciences Foundation at (919) 962-6182 or [Rob.Parker@unc.edu](mailto:Rob.Parker@unc.edu).



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*spring 2009*

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

Our 2008–2009 public events, encompassing seven evening lectures, plus a Klezmer concert, three lunchtime seminars and the two-day Uhlman Family Seminar, have come to a conclusion and we thank all of you who joined us.

We are now busy planning next year's events. Speakers, topics and dates will be listed in the next edition of this newsletter, posted on our Web site and promoted in advance to our listserv members.

If you would like to receive e-mail updates regarding our public events and programs, please send an e-mail to [ccjs@unc.edu](mailto:ccjs@unc.edu) with "subscribe" in the subject line. In the body of the e-mail, please provide your e-mail address and your postal address.

We look forward to seeing you at an event or program next year.

## *donor profile*

### LORI B. WITTLIN, '95



Lori B. Wittlin, '95 no longer lives in North Carolina, but she has found unique opportunities to maintain strong ties to campus. Wittlin, who majored in international studies and minored in Russian at Carolina, went on to Emory University School of Law. She is a partner at Winston & Strawn LLP, where she advises corporations on federal income tax matters and represents clients in controversies with the Internal Revenue Service. She married Bradley Lewis, a naval officer, in early 2009 and resides in Arlington, Virginia.

**The Carolina Experience:** "When I was at Carolina, there was no Center for Jewish Studies and there were very few Jewish Studies courses offered. I took one Religious Studies course – along with everyone else from Hillel – it was the social place to be! So, it's exciting that today's students have so many more opportunities. It's something that I wish I had when I was an undergraduate."

**Maintaining Ties:** "I make annual trips to Chapel Hill for football or basketball games, and of course, for shopping on Franklin Street."

**Giving Back:** "Also on an annual basis, I make gifts to UNC. Through annual giving, it's really exciting to help out the Center as it expands course offerings and programs for today's students."

**Tomorrow's Carolina:** "I was fortunate to be at Carolina and to now be able to help give opportunities to students. In my position, being new in my career, annual giving is the best way for me to make a difference at Carolina. And with the economy in a slump, I know it's more important than ever to support the campus and the Center."