

## Program Retreat Report

**Department/Program** Jewish Studies  
**Co-Directors** Justin Cammy and Joel Kaminsky  
**Retreat Date** August 28, 2008

### Faculty in attendance:

Ilona Ben-Moshe, Ernest Benz, Silvia Berger, Justin Cammy, Lois Dubin, Joel Kaminsky, Ellen Kaplan, and Jocelyne Kolb

### Jewish Studies and a Liberal Arts Education

In fall 2006, the Program in Jewish Studies engaged in intense planning that led to a proposal to CAP in spring 2007 for a major in Jewish Studies. CAP approved the major that same spring. Three students graduated from the major in 2008, and another eight students are in the process of working through the major. As a result of these deliberations that brought one of Smith's newest majors to fruition, we have been engaged with many of the questions related to intellectual capacities and the Smith Design for Learning for some time.

For the information of CAP, we attach below our Major worksheet, Pathways through the Major information sheet (which includes information on sequencing and possible course clusters within the major), links to academic resources, and Study Abroad information sheet, all of which are posted on our Program website.

In many ways, Jewish Studies is a quintessential liberal arts major. By its very definition, it is multidisciplinary, bringing in the perspectives of religious studies, history, literature and the arts, the social sciences, philosophy, history of science, and the study of both Jewish languages (primarily Hebrew and Yiddish, and others such as Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Arabic) and world languages and cultures. Moreover, given that Jewish Studies is decidedly *not* focused solely on the religion of the Jews (the purview of the Religion Department) but on Jewish peoplehood, culture, and civilization, students in our major gain an understanding of what it has meant and does mean for different peoples and cultures to co-exist and challenge one another. Chronologically, Jewish Studies begins in the ancient world and extends to the present moment. Given that Jews, for much of their history, have existed as an exilic people, Jewish Studies by its very definition is global in its concerns. Our courses currently examine Jewish experience in the ancient and modern Middle East; Western, Central and Eastern Europe/Russia; the Mediterranean including Spain and North Africa; the Americas, including North America and Latin America; and the dynamic interrelationships and networks linking disparate areas. As a result of its chronologic and geographic breadth, Jewish Studies prompts students to ask certain questions that go to the heart of Smith's concerns as a socially engaged world college:

What is the relationship between majority and minority cultures?

How have peoples, at various times and in various places, been categorized and excluded by virtue of race, creed, and ethnicity?

What is the relationship between language and identity?

How are nations and peoples defined, and what do they learn through cross-cultural interaction?

What is the relationship between real and imagined homelands and diasporas?

Jewish Studies has also been at the forefront of exploring topics central to the liberal arts, for example, tradition and modernity, plural societies, hybridity, borderlands, and rooted cosmopolitanism. Jewish Studies is as much concerned with how history influences the present as with how the present influences our understanding of history.

The Program in Jewish Studies recognizes that a world college must provide opportunities for students to study beyond Northampton. We have approved study abroad programs in Israel and the Czech Republic, and we also direct students to Smith-approved universities in England, Europe, South Africa and Australia that have Jewish Studies offerings. We prominently highlight summer language and academic courses abroad on our website. With the resources of the Berger Fund we help fund student summer and interterm research and study at universities in Israel (with special attention to students who want to improve their Hebrew language skills, given that our staffing currently allows us to teach only one semester of intermediate Hebrew).

The existence of a Jewish Studies major ultimately depends on the good will and contributions of faculty from multiple departments. Though we only have a single FTE at present (Justin Cammy offers courses on modern Jewish literature and culture, which also contribute to the programs in Comparative Literature, Middle East Studies, and American Studies), we also benefit from a sequence of courses in Hebrew Bible (Joel Kaminsky), Jewish thought and Jewish history (Lois Dubin), Israeli politics and society (Donna Divine), as well as a half-time lecturer (shared with MHC) in modern Hebrew. Colleagues in German, Spanish, and Theater generously offer individual courses to the program as their schedules permit. Each of the areas noted above (literary and cultural studies, thought and history, Hebrew Bible, social science) is absolutely critical to the program. If any one of the individuals teaching in those areas were to leave or retire from Smith without a replacement we would lose fully  $\frac{1}{4}$  of our total course offerings and find ourselves unable to continue to mount a solid major. The teaching of language is a vital necessity of the Program (more on that below), and is in keeping with Smith's goal to integrate the study of a foreign language within the intellectual capacities of the major.

The major in Jewish Studies is an important component in Smith's aim to offer a multicultural curriculum. We see ourselves as intellectual partners with such other multidisciplinary programs as African-American Studies, African Studies, East Asian Studies, Latin American and Latino/a Studies, Middle East Studies, and the Study of Women and Gender; we bring various intellectual interests and methodologies to the study of human civilization and share a desire to enhance our students' understanding and appreciation of difference. We see our primary service to the college through this lens; individual enrolments in the courses we offer (and cross-list) enrich a multicultural Smith education in ways that are not measurable by looking only at the number of majors graduating in any given year. To cite just one example, in Justin Cammy's current course (fall 2008) on Holocaust Literature, over 60 students are investigating the most significant example of racist genocide in modern history, and through this, they address broader issues of race and difference both concretely and critically. In that sense, it anticipated the student curriculum committee recommendations of last spring to address issues of race and difference in the academic program. The vast majority of students in that course are not Jewish Studies majors, but Jewish Studies adds significantly to their academic experience and fulfills desires of students

to analyze race thoughtfully.

**How does the departmental/program plan to integrate the list of intellectual capacities into the major? Of the specific curricular goals identified by the faculty which would be furthered within the major?**

Since its inception, Jewish Studies has been intellectually engaged with the student capacities outlined in the Smith Design for Learning. We pride ourselves in our courses on teaching students how to read, write, and speak critically, deliberately, and responsibly. We believe that a Smith education should teach students how to form their own independent arguments so that they can think critically and be able to resist the temptations of group-think, whether at Smith or in our broader society. The very heart of our major is the expectation that all students develop a sophisticated historical and comparative perspective. Since Jews cannot be studied in isolation but must always be approached in terms of their relationships with co-territorial populations, Jewish Studies is comparative by nature. Given that our major begins in the biblical period and carries through to the present moment, and given that we study the experience of Jews in lands all over the globe, our students develop a deep historical understanding. The ethical, religious, and philosophical questions raised in many of our courses also teach students informed global citizenship. Our major requires students to study a literature and/or a fine art, history, social science, and a foreign language, ensuring that they are exposed to various approaches to understanding human experience. We have not yet figured out a way to include the natural or applied sciences, or quantitative reasoning in our major requirements, but could imagine working with other units in the humanities and social sciences in developing a Q-skills rubric.

**Has the department integrated the development of student research abilities in the structure of the major? For instance, is there an information literacy program in place for students who major in the department? Is there a research methods course recommended for your majors (either in your department or another one)?**

We initiated extensive discussion on these questions and plan for continued discussion. We would like to do more to introduce students in a deliberate and conscious way to the various methodological approaches used within Jewish Studies, and we discussed various possibilities as to how this might be done—at the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels, and both within Jewish Studies courses themselves and through methodology/theory courses in other departments and programs, as appropriate.

A sampling of our thoughts to date:

It remains difficult to offer one methods course for the major, since by definition we employ multiple approaches.

For the same reason, we are hesitant to require students to take a methods course specific to another discipline since it would provide a narrow (even limiting) perspective on what Jewish Studies does.

We have found that students are often well served when they work closely with an adviser who directs them to an appropriate methods course in another department based on their specific area(s) of interest within Jewish Studies. For instance, a student interested in medieval Judaism might best be served by REL 200 Approaches to the Study of Religion. Another focused on modern Jewish literature might benefit from CLT 300 Foundations of Literary Theory, while yet another's interest in American Jewish Women might be well served by SWG 150 Introduction to the Study of Women and Gender and AMS 202 Methods in American Studies. Yet, there are some fields at Smith – for instance, History – for which there is no single introduction to historical methods that would be appropriate to our students.

We agreed to form a sub-committee consisting of Lois Dubin and Justin Cammy in order to discuss how we might more consciously weave a discussion on methods into our own basis course, JUD 225. We believe that early on, it is important not only to cover content but also to address “What is academic Jewish Studies?” and to provide students with a sense of the development and challenges of the field.

There was enthusiasm for the idea in principle of instituting a second capstone course to focus on theory and methodology (in addition to the current seminar/research special studies requirement). We all agreed that design of such a course would be challenging since Jewish Studies employs a variety of methods. Perhaps more importantly, mounting such a course might not be a productive use of college resources given the relatively modest number of majors. We thought that perhaps we could draw students other than our majors to such a course if we constructed it around a particular theme. Alternatively, we remain open to collaboration with other language departments and interdisciplinary programs in a senior capstone course that would engage students from a variety of majors in questions of how one conducts interdisciplinary research. We also imagine that the growth of the Presidential Seminars program might provide opportunities for our majors to come together with students from other departments and programs at the advanced level to tackle complicated questions from a variety of different perspectives.

Regarding information literacy, the above-mentioned subcommittee will also work on an information literacy component for the basis course 225 that would familiarize students with the most central reference works and academic search engines in the field. The Jewish Studies website already includes links to some of these resources (document attached), and we imagine introducing students to some of these links as part of the basis course. In the intermediate stage, we also intend to introduce students to the most important academic journals in the field of Jewish Studies. As a possible next step, and especially if we cannot mount a full-fledged methods course, we spoke about putting together a reading list of core documents and seminal articles pertaining to the field of Jewish Studies (approaches, methods, controversies) that all majors would be required to work through and discuss with their advisers by a certain point in the major.

The Program is working closely with Bruce Sajdak to institute an information literacy webpage on the Library's website that would bring all such materials together in one place so that students would understand what they are expected to know at each level of their course of study.

### **Are the pathways through the major clear for prospective majors?**

In constructing our major a year and a half ago, we made a concerted effort to ensure that pathways through the major would be clearly delineated. Our major worksheet and our information sheet “Pathways through the Major” (both attached) explain various strategies for completing the major. They provide specific focuses for each year in a student’s education, and make sure that there is deliberation in course selection. The major requires not only breadth (both in terms of approaches and chronology) but also depth in a concentration. All students are required to study language, to distribute their courses across various periods of Jewish history, to engage with the variety of approaches to the study of Jewish civilization, to identify a focus within the major, and to engage in a research-intensive capstone experience.

At the same time, we took note of the fact that at present, our only courses offered at the 100 level are in introductory language (elementary modern Hebrew and an experimental interterm course on Yiddish). Our required basis – JUD/REL 225 Jewish Civilization: Text and Tradition – is an introductory course that should be offered at the 100 level. However, it is dual-listed and taught in alternating years by members of the Religion department; since Religion does not allow 100-level courses in individual traditions, we are bound by this awkward numbering.

We also began to discuss the possibility of offering a FYS in Jewish Studies, and a number of preliminary ideas were offered.

### **Is the department satisfied with the level of advanced work accomplished by its majors? What are the culminating or capstone experiences for students in your major?**

Our capstone requirement ensures that all students who graduate as Jewish Studies majors have engaged in an advanced academic course with a substantial research component. At present, all students must take either a seminar listed (or cross-listed) in the major OR enroll in a research-intensive JUD 400 Special Studies. As part of such courses, all students must write a research paper (or equivalent assignment) that forces them to engage with primary sources, use the library, and develop a sustained argument. We also have in place an honors program that serves as an additional capstone research experience for qualified students. Finally, last year we formalized requirements for students wishing to take research-intensive special studies so that such students would be required to meet with a professor on a weekly basis and write a paper that is at least 15 pages in length. We would like to begin instituting a year-end occasion where all honors thesis students *and* students who have completed a seminar or research-intensive special studies have an opportunity to come together with faculty and students to present their research.

Ultimately, since Jewish Studies only has a single FTE, many of our courses are cross-listed from other departments and programs. There is not much we can do about the bunching of our cross-listed courses at the 200 level unless CAP engages the faculty in a redistribution of

course numbering across all departments, perhaps into a more coherent 4 tiered system (introductory, intermediate, advanced, seminar).

### **How does the Program envision its relationship with the new Centers that are part of the Smith Design?**

Jewish Studies imagines substantive collaborations with the Center for International Studies and Cross Cultural Communication, the Center for Community Collaboration, and the Center for the Environment, Ecological Design, and Sustainability.

a. Given our courses on Israel and Jews in the Middle East, our teaching of modern Hebrew, and our program's vital focus on intercultural communication (and conflict), we see ourselves as a fully engaged partner in the Center for International and Cross Cultural Communication.

b. From an ethical and philosophical perspective, Jewish Studies has always been concerned with ways we can engage ourselves, our neighbors, and the world in a process of *tikkun olam* (the repair of the world), *tsedakah* (charity/good deeds), and *derekh eretz* (respect). Many of our majors are deeply involved in issues of social justice, not only intellectually but practically. Jewish Studies at Smith has a history of concern in this area, such as Mickey Glazer's research and courses on Courageous Behavior. We would like to see the mission of this center broadly defined so that the Program can facilitate student work with a number of different constituencies in the area. We imagine relationships between our students and children at local schools, including the area's only Jewish day school and synagogue-affiliated schools, where our students could do student teaching or act as mentors and bring their social justice passions. A recent graduate from the Program has begun work at the organization *Facing History and Ourselves* which trains teachers and students in the examination of racism and prejudice to promote a more informed citizenry. We know that there is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with that organization to bring its message of tolerance to the community.

c. Jewish Studies has, for a number of years, been involved with the goals of the future Center for the Environment, Ecological Design, and Sustainability. We were the academic unit that brought the work of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies to the attention of the Study Abroad Office, leading to its approval as a Smith study abroad destination. The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies is a regional center for environmental leadership in the Middle East. By encouraging environmental cooperation between peoples (its students include Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians, and students from abroad) it works towards peace and sustainable development on a regional and global scale. Since its approval three years ago, Smith has sent several students to study at the institute. We have also partnered with the Program in Environmental Science and Policy to ensure that the Arava Institute's academic program is part of its study abroad options. As in years past, Jewish Studies is coordinating a visit to campus in several weeks by Jewish and Arab alumnae of the program where they will speak about the relationship between environmentalism and peace-making ("The Green Middle East: Environmental Strategies for Peaceful Coexistence"). Justin Cammy, who has visited the Institute in Israel's southern desert and knows its directors, is eager to establish a more formal relationship between

Smith and the Arava Institute, something that could be coordinated under the rubric of CEEDS.

### **Additional Information for CAP**

#### 1. Hebrew language:

Our single most important priority for the healthy development of the major is the stabilization of our offerings in Hebrew. No self-respecting major in Jewish Studies can exist without this language. We are presently at the beginning of the second year of a three year joint lecturer appointment (with Mt Holyoke) in Hebrew language. The current occupant of the position is the result of an international search. She is proof that we can attract professionals in language teaching and pedagogy when we offer a full-time position in the Pioneer Valley to qualified teachers. Prior to her hire, we employed local part-time teachers of Hebrew who were not trained in language pedagogy. The difference between the experience of the past and the current situation is significant in terms of quality and outcome.

At the same time, we have come to the determination that a half position is not sufficient for our curricular goals and the needs of our students. Under the current structure, we offer a year of introductory Hebrew every year (as does Mt. Holyoke), and a single semester of intermediate Hebrew alternates between the two campuses yearly. This means that intermediate Hebrew is offered at Smith only every other year. We believe that it is important – both for Jewish Studies and for the rapidly growing Program in Middle East Studies – to have a full-time lecturer in Hebrew at Smith. Such an individual would be able to teach, every year, a full year sequence in both beginning and intermediate Hebrew, and a single advanced course in Hebrew. This would produce a coherent language program for our majors, and for the minors (and future majors) in Middle East Studies. CAP can expect a request from Jewish Studies for a full-time lectureship in Hebrew, to begin in 2010-11.

We believe that establishing a full-time lectureship in Hebrew would be extremely attractive to potential donors, and we are willing and ready to help fundraise to help realize the position. Though we recognize the importance of a centralized fundraising campaign for the College, we have long believed that Smith is missing out on significant contributions by not making better use of Jewish Studies in appealing to certain donors. We are convinced that there are donors out there who would be interested in providing money to establish a full-time lecturer position in Hebrew who might not otherwise give to the college.

#### 2. Social Science and Jewish Studies

When one looks back at the history of Jewish Studies at Smith we discover that many of its former members were social scientists: Peter Rose and Mickey Glazer (Sociology), Donna Divine and Martha Ackelsberg (Government), and Dan Horowitz (History and American Studies). At the present moment, the only social scientist who regularly offers courses to our program is Donna Divine (on Israeli politics and society). We are worried about the lack courses in anthropology, sociology, and the other social sciences, and especially worried about what might happen after the retirement of Donna Divine when Smith will not have a single social scientist with a research or teaching focus in an area of Jewish Studies. We

would especially welcome hires by other departments and programs in the social sciences and humanities who could make possible contributions to Jewish Studies. For instance, we eagerly await the outcome of the current tenure-track searches in medieval History and in German Studies to learn of possible candidates who might be able to offer a course(s) that fill important lacunae.

### 3. Jewish History

We continue to be eager for increased cooperation with the History Department in the area of Jewish History. Lois Dubin, an internationally recognized historian whose appointment happens to be in the Religion department, regularly teaches two courses that are fully in Jewish history: The Modern Jewish Experience (a broad survey of Jewish history from 1492 to the present), and Jews and Judaism in the Americas. Justin Cammy teaches another Jewish history course, The Jews of Eastern Europe, and he and Ernest Benz have already agreed to co-teach a course on the History of the Holocaust, a course that was offered in the past by the Program in Jewish Studies and remains on its hold list. (We also imagine that there might be interest down the road among members of the History department itself in developing additional new courses on some aspect of Jewish history.) We believe that all students - in Jewish Studies, History, and other majors - would be better served if the variety and richness of current and future offerings in Jewish history across these three academic units were recognized and publicized both by Jewish Studies and by the History Department so that all of the offerings in Jewish history at Smith were transparent to students.

### 4. Five Colleges

We have gone to great lengths to maintain warm relationships with our colleagues in the Five Colleges. They are regularly included in our events, and several of them have recently taught replacement courses at Smith (Larry Fine from Mt. Holyoke in Jewish Mysticism; Ilan Stavans from Amherst in Sephardic Studies). Justin Cammy also has significant relations with the National Yiddish Book Center, where he has taught and where he has piloted a Smith J-Term course co-taught by Rachel Rubinstein of Hampshire College on Yiddish Language and Culture. We strive to publicize the courses of our colleagues from the consortium on our website, especially in areas beyond our expertise or regular teaching rotation. At the same time, we have come to recognize that curricular assistance and coordination has its limits and that distances (and infrequencies of transportation) between campuses limit the ability and willingness of our students to travel to other campuses, especially for language classes that usually meet three or more times per week.

5. Finally, we discussed the ever-present need for any academic program to think of ways to bring new perspectives and colleagues into its fold. We have begun to compile a list of colleagues at the College whose teaching and/or research interests correspond to the intellectual concerns of Jewish Studies, and we hope to engage them in discussion about joining our ranks.

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We thank the Provost's Office for the funds that supported our retreat, and our colleagues on CAP for renewing ongoing reflection and their careful attention to our deliberations. We believe that the retreat provided us with an opportunity to investigate important questions that will help guide our discussions over the coming years.