Thanks in large part to the support of the Sherrerd Center for Teaching and Learning, I was able to attend a 3-day seminar in October 2013 at the University of Denver. The main theme of the seminar was the role of culture in the Hebrew classroom, focusing in particular on the ways in which we can use film, TV, and songs to help our students better learn the language. Compared to my knowledge of the grammar and history of the Hebrew language, my familiarity with Hebrew culture is relatively weak. My hope in attending this seminar was to gain greater exposure to aspects of Hebrew popular culture throughout the history of the State of Israel, and thereby a greater sense of comfort teaching this culture to my students.

Through the sheer multitude of film clips that were shown during the seminar presentations (the full films were made available for participants to stream online as well), I learned a great deal about various genres of Hebrew-language film and the classics of Israeli cinema. My education at this workshop has already had a direct impact on my teaching here at Smith; I am more comfortable now using films, TV shows, and songs in my class, as well as making recommendations for my students outside of class. In particular, I have shown clips from a documentary titled “The Name My Mother Gave Me” in order to enrich my students’ knowledge of the lives and history of Ethiopian Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1980s and 1990s.

Aside from the direct impact that this seminar has had on my teaching, my attendance also had a significant impact on my confidence as a young, nonnative speaker teacher among my colleagues in the field. After the presentations had finished for the day, I was able to make connections with other Hebrew teachers that I would not have been able to make otherwise. I commiserated with my new colleagues about having trouble connecting with students, about the various ways to use technology in the classroom, and about best teaching practices for Hebrew, among many other things. Had I learned nothing from the presentations themselves, this seminar would still have been immensely beneficial to me as a new teacher, just starting out and finding my footing in the profession.