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JEWISH STUDIES



Modern and
Classical Languages
College of Liberal Arts
and Social Sciences

Program Newsletter, Spring 2024

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A Note from the Director

Dear Friends of the University of Houston Jewish Studies Program,

This academic year was shaped by the October 7 attacks, the ensuing war between Israel and Hamas, and turmoil over the war on many college campuses. It has been a challenging time for many. As University of Houston Jewish Studies faculty, we believe our teaching and scholarship are more important than ever, and we have worked hard to continue our educational mission on campus and in the Houston community. Read on to find out more about how we are serving students, what else we have been up to, and how you can get involved.

Since our last newsletter in 2022, there have been many changes to our program. In Fall 2023, I took the reins as director from my dear friend and colleague Dr. Mark Goldberg. Mark, a native Houstonian and scholar of American history, had led the program since 2017. He presided over an expansion in number of students, number of faculty affiliates, courses offered, and events held on campus and in the community. Mark decided to step back from directing Jewish Studies to focus on his scholarship and to serve as interim director of UH's Center for Public History. I was honored to take over from Mark and remain grateful for his continued guidance.

About me: I am a scholar of the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish literature, originally from Long Island, New York, by way of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Tennessee. I have been at UH for eight years and helped to grow the Jewish Studies program through teaching, student recruitment and mentoring, event planning, and public communications. I teach several courses on Jewish topics, from a Jewish history survey to an introduction to the Hebrew Bible to an upper-level seminar on Jews in the Second Temple period. My research focuses on women, gender, and sexuality in the Bible and other ancient literature. In addition to teaching and directing the program, I am hard at work on a new book about time and history in four Second Temple texts.

Another change has been the addition of Dr. Asher Lubotzky to our faculty. Asher, about whom you can learn more in our [Faculty Spotlight](#) feature, is a native of Israel and, last fall, began a three-year term at UH as an Israel Institute fellow. Asher is a scholar of the modern state of Israel, especially Israel's relationships with African nations. He is teaching in the political science department, and his courses on Israel serve Jewish Studies, as well. We are especially grateful to add Israel Studies expertise to our faculty at this critical moment.

Our faculty members have continued to produce valuable scholarship, from Dr. Richard Armstrong's work curating an exhibition on Sigmund Freud and Dr. Leandra Zarnow's appearance in the Bella Abzug documentary *Bella! This Woman's Place Is in the House* to Dr. Christian Eberhart's co-edited volume on covenant in the Bible, ancient Judaism, and ancient Christianity. Read more about what we have published and where else you can see our work in the [Faculty Milestones](#) section.

Our students have continued to do fantastic work in Jewish Studies both in and out of the classroom. Research standouts include 2024 Religious Studies graduate Petra Anazonwu and 2023 Anthropology graduate and Jewish Studies minor Chloe Levy, both of whom did Hebrew Bible-related research projects under my guidance. Another major student research success was Dr. Mark Goldberg's co-taught graduate course on museums. With Dr. Beth Merfish of UH-Clear Lake, Mark led students in a study of objects from the Kaplan Museum of Judaica at Congregation Beth Yeshurun. You can read more about this innovative course, plus Chloe and Petra's work, in our [Standout Student Research](#) section. You can also read about our impressive 2023 and 2024 [Excellence in Jewish Studies award winners](#).

We have held three events this year, all of them focused on Israel. You can read all about these events – from a documentary film screening with Israeli director David Deri, to a meaningful conversation between a Jewish Canadian political scientist and a Palestinian American law professor, to a talk on when anti-Zionism becomes antisemitic – in the [Events](#) section.

Would you like to be the first to find out all about the latest news and events from UH Jewish Studies? Learn how in our [Get Involved!](#) section. And of course, we would be grateful for any monetary support you could provide to help us continue holding impactful events and drawing more students to Jewish Studies. You can find out how to give to our program in Get Involved, as well.

I hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe and well. Thank you for your support, and please stay tuned for UH Jewish Studies events and other news in the 2024-25 academic year. Have a great summer!

Best,

Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, Ph.D.
Director, Program in Jewish Studies
Assistant Professor, Jewish Studies and Religious Studies

Excellence in Jewish Studies Award

Every year, as part of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages' award program, Jewish Studies celebrates our best and brightest with the Excellence in Jewish Studies award. Here are our 2023 and 2024 winners:



Left to right at our 2023 award ceremony: Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Daniel P. O'Connor, then-Jewish Studies Director Mark A. Goldberg, award winners Chloe Levy, Gracie Schwartz, and Angelica Vences, Jewish Studies faculty member Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, and Department of Modern and Classical Languages Chair Emran El-Badawi.



Left to right at our 2024 award ceremony: Jewish Studies Director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, award winners Maya Bouchebl and Valeria González, and Modern and Classical Languages Chair Emran El-Badawi

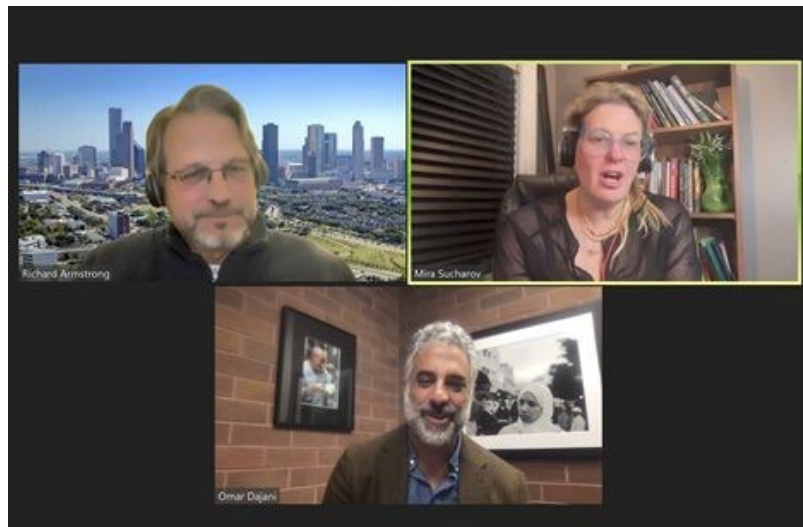
We would love to be able to offer future Excellence in Jewish Studies award winners scholarships to reward them for their contributions to our program and incentivize their future study! Would you like to help us make that possible with a contribution to Jewish Studies or even an endowed scholarship? Contact program director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau at cmtamber@central.uh.edu to discuss how you can help the next generation of Jewish Studies scholars!

UH Jewish Studies held several exciting events, both in-person and virtual, this year:



In February, we partnered with the **Israeli Consulate** and **Houston Hillel** to bring Israeli director **David Deri** to campus for a screening of his documentary *A Tale of Four Minorities*. Mr. Deri is best known in Israel for his film *The Ancestral Sin* (2017). Mr. Deri's latest film follows four families in Israel: one Arab Israeli, one *haredi*, one religious nationalist settler, and Deri's own secular gay family. Students, faculty, and community members gathered at UH to watch the movie, which paints a stark picture of the divisions in Israeli society. Mr. Deri plans to continue following the families in his future work, using the British documentary series *Seven Up!* as a model. Following the film screening, Mr. Deri answered questions from the audience and showed footage of interviews he conducted with the families of October 7 victims just days after the attack.

In March, Jewish Studies organized and co-hosted an online discussion between Jewish-Canadian political scientist **Mira Sucharov** of Carleton University and Palestinian-American law professor **Omar Dajani** of McGeorge School of Law at the University of the Pacific. For the past few years, Dr. Sucharov and Prof. Dajani have been working on a book together, traveling to Israel and the Palestinian territories and talking about their connections to the land. At our event, co-sponsored by the **Center for Public History, Middle Eastern Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality**

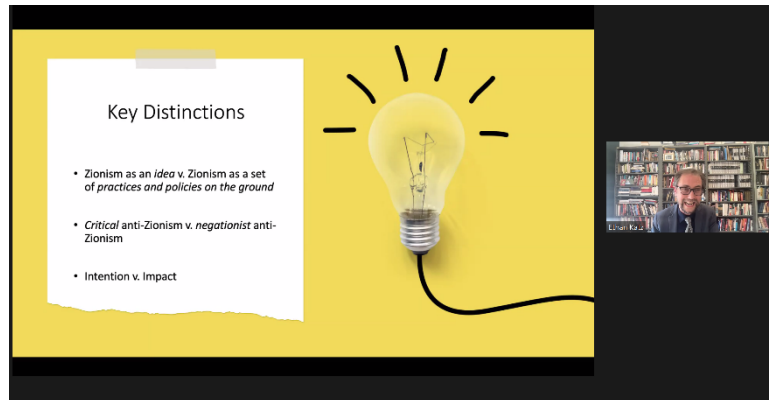


Studies, and Religious Studies, Dr. Sucharov and Prof. Dajani spoke about their work together, their reactions to Oct. 7 and the ensuing war, and their hopes for the future. The event was moderated by UH Classical Studies Dr. Richard Armstrong and drew over 100 students, faculty, staff, and community members.

And in April, we worked with five other universities in Texas to host a virtual talk by Dr. **Ethan Katz** of

the University of California Berkeley called "Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitic? Rethinking the Question." The event was cosponsored by the **Schusterman Center at the University of Texas-Austin, Texas A&M University Jewish Studies, the Jewish Studies Discovery at Trinity University, Rice Humanities Jewish Studies, and St. Edward's University**. In his talk, Dr. Katz suggested that we can classify anti-Zionism as either critical or negationist. Critical anti-Zionism may disagree vociferously with the circumstances of Israel's founding and its policies, but it does not

deny its existence or Jewish connections to it. Negationist anti-Zionism, on the other hand, denies the Jewish history in and connection to the land and is antisemitic. This event was recorded and is available to [view](#) on the Schusterman Center's YouTube channel.



Faculty Milestones

Richard Armstrong, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Classical Studies, won the 2024 College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Distinguished Faculty Award.

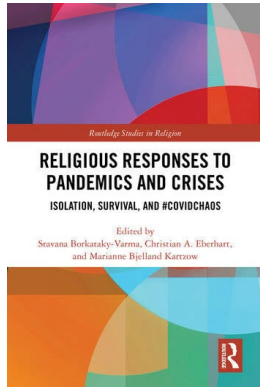
Dr. Armstrong was co-curator of the exhibition *Freud's Antiquity: Object, Idea, Desire* at the Freud Museum London, and online in the [6-part podcast series](#). He gave a lecture at the Freud Museum Vienna, "Theory and Theatricality: Classical Drama and the Early Formation of Psychoanalysis," part of a *Ringvorlesung* on Freud and antiquity organized by the University of Vienna and the Freud Museum.



He has also completed various presentations and work on the [Ladino translator Moshe Ha-Elion](#), including a paper delivered in ha-Elion's home city of Thessaloniki, Greece, at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, which sits on land that was once the largest Jewish necropolis in the world.

Christian A. Eberhart, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Program Director of Religious Studies, co-edited the volume *Covenant – Concepts of Berit, Diatheke, and Testamentum: Proceedings of the Conference at the Lanier Theological Library in Houston, Texas, November 2019*, published by Mohr Siebeck in 2023. (*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 506), Tübingen: The book contains chapters on the topic of covenant in the Torah, other books of the Hebrew Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Dr. Eberhart also wrote the chapter “Halacha,” in Martin Meiser and Florian Wilk’s book *Handbuch zur Septuaginta (LXX.H) – Vol. 6: Die Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Septuaginta*, put out by Gütersloher Verlagshaus in 2022.



Also in 2022, Dr. Eberhart co-edited the timely anthology *Religious Responses to Pandemics and Crises: Isolation, Survival, and #CovidChaos*, published by Routledge. The book contains a chapter by the late Audrey Gale Hall, a 2022 UH graduate, on the rejection of people with skin conditions in Leviticus. Hall compared their exclusion to the large-scale exit of transgender people from mainstream American religious life.

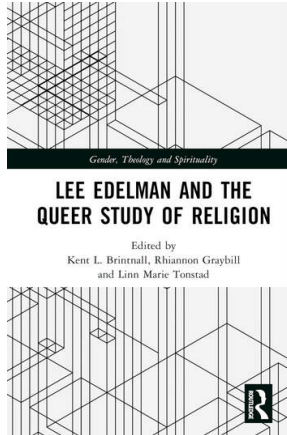
Mark A. Goldberg, Ph.D., co-chaired the 2023 meeting of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, which was held in Houston at Rice University in October. His co-chair was Dr. Joshua Furman, immediate past director of the Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Jewish Archives at Rice University.



Dr. Goldberg, the immediate past director of UH Jewish Studies, spent the 2023-24 academic year as interim director of the UH Center for Public History. According to its mission statement, CPH conducts “collaborative, investigative projects with university and community partners to generate both local and global historical research. Our community-driven projects and graduate training specialize in preparing future public historians, helping Houston reclaim its past, and integrating a sense of history among diverse Houstonians.”

Asher Lubotzky, Ph.D., Israel Institute Teaching Fellow, Department of Political Science, received a three-year grant from the Israel Institute to teach Israel Studies courses at UH. He also published “The Other Radicals: Zionist-Socialist Youth in Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1970” in *Jewish Historical Studies* (January 2024).

Additionally, Dr. Lubotzky authored several commentary pieces about African approaches to the Israel-Hamas war in various international outlets. He spoke about the ongoing war at Texas A&M University and UH-Downtown.



Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies and program director of Jewish Studies, published “He Changes Times and Seasons’: Daniel, *Sinthomosexuality*, and Queer Time,” in the anthology *Lee Edelman and the Queer Study of Religion* (eds. Rhiannon Graybill, Linn M. Tonstad, and Kent Brintnall) in 2023. The book was published by Routledge.

Also in 2023, Dr. Tamber-Rosenau taught a three-session course on the book of Judith and its reception for the Glassell School, timed to coincide with an exhibit of Artemisia Gentileschi and Kehinde Wiley’s Judith paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston.

In 2022, Dr. Tamber-Rosenau published three pieces: “Esther and Agency: Gender, Ethnicity, and Power in the Book of Esther,” for a special issue of the journal *Hebrew Studies* on the theme of drag queens; “The Goddess in the Exodus: Nina Paley’s Seder-Masochism and Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism,” in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*; and a contributing voice essay in the Wisdom Commentary on the book of Judith, authored by Jennifer L. Koosed and Robert Seesengood and published by Liturgical Press.

Leandra Zarnow, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History, appeared in *Bella! This Woman’s Place Is in the House*, a Ken Burns Prize winning documentary film by Jeff Lieberman. This film made its Houston debut in November 2023 at a screening at University of Houston. On this occasion, Zarnow and Lieberman shared their takes on the legacy of Bella Abzug and their different approaches to capturing her energy and impact through film and text. Zarnow also discussed her research on Abzug at two packed screenings of *Bella!* at the Houston Jewish Film Festival this spring, including as the festival’s opening night pick.



Faculty Spotlight: Israel Institute Fellow Asher Lubotzky



When Asher Lubotzky started his doctoral studies in African history at Indiana University, he planned to study German settlers in Namibia during the 1930s. He was interested in how the Germans, many of whom were pro-Nazi, thought about the slaughter of the Herero and Nama people by the German empire, generally regarded as the first genocide of the 20th century.

Dr. Lubotzky, a native of Israel, had started down this path while earning his M.A. at Bar Ilan University. There, he studied

German colonialism in Africa, narrowing his focus to Namibia.

But once he began researching his planned dissertation in Indiana, he discovered that another researcher had published on the exact topic—down to the title. The other book was in German, but still, Dr. Lubotzky had been scooped, and he needed to pivot.

That is what led him to change his focus to the relationships between African nations and Israel, an under-researched topic. He focused especially on South Africa. While South Africa is today anti-Zionist, from the 1940s through the early 1970s, he said, Black South African leaders made common cause with Israel.

“Israel and the apartheid regime were established in the same month,” said Dr. Lubotzky. Black South Africans saw Israel “as an anti-fascist project. [They] saw white South Africans as very pro-Nazi. Israel was the victims of Nazism, just like we were.”

Dr. Lubotzky’s dissertation was called *Before the Apartheid Analogy: South African Radicals and Israel/Palestine, 1940s–1970s*.

As he finished his Ph.D. at Indiana, Dr. Lubotzky received a fellowship from the Israel Institute, which funds three-year positions for Israeli scholars at universities in the United States. Once Dr. Lubotzky was awarded the fellowship, he needed to find a position at a university. He and his family had moved from Indiana to Houston, where his wife is from, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and he wrote most of his dissertation while living here. They wanted to stay in

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Houston, so Dr. Lubotzky focused his attention locally.

Dr. Lubotzky ended up joining the Political Science department at UH, which has been a perfect fit. The department needed more international relations scholars, and Dr. Lubotzky's work deals with international politics. Dr. Lubotzky also contributes to the Jewish Studies program, which until his arrival did not have faculty who could offer courses on Israel.

In the 2023-24 academic year, Dr. Lubotzky offered four courses: African Geopolitics and Intelligence Analysis in the fall, and U.S.-Israel Relations and Comparative Elections in the spring. Just six weeks into Intelligence Analysis, Hamas committed their surprise attack on Israel, massacring more than 1,000 civilians and taking scores of Israelis captive into Gaza.

"October 7th happened during my course and that was like a huge intelligence failure," Dr. said Lubotzky. "So at some point I was like, OK, we have a syllabus. Let's put it aside for a second. What we're going to do is to examine all the mistakes or the errors or the failures that happened."

He said that intelligence failures like those that allowed the Hamas attack are rarely caused by a lack of data.

"It's almost never the information," said Lubotzky, who, before getting his Ph.D., worked as a geopolitical analyst. "It's almost always the interpretation we give to the information and our preconceived conceptions of the enemy or what they can do to us. [It's] us using our own rationale instead of looking at the information."

Despite high-profile tensions over the Israel-Gaza war on campuses nationwide, Dr. Lubotzky said his students have been open-minded and eager to learn.

"Students in these courses really come to deepen their knowledge," he said. "They're clearly curious about these things. Some of the things that they hear are mind-blowing."

Dr. Lubotzky said it is not his job to turn students from anti-Zionist to pro-Zionist. Rather, his goal is to add nuance and facts, giving students the opportunity to understand the Israeli-Arab conflict on a deeper level than chants and social media allow.

In the fall, Dr. Lubotzky will teach Intelligence Analysis and U.S.-Israel Relations again.

In addition to his regular teaching, Dr. Lubotzky has given guest lectures on Israel and the war for colleagues. He has also spoken at UH Downtown and in the community.

He said he is enjoying teaching at UH, a growing university with national aspirations.

"I think that investing in Jewish Studies, and even specifically Israel Studies, is really important to this school because this is something that is super relevant," Lubotzky said. "People want to know about it. It will help create better, more worldly graduates."

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Student Research Spotlight



In 2022, Jewish Studies minor Chloe Levy received a Provost's Undergraduate Research Scholarship (PURS) fellowship to study the Song of Songs. Under the supervision of Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, Chloe researched the expressions of female sexual desire in this unusual book of the Hebrew Bible. Chloe, who graduated in 2023 with an Anthropology major, was also a winner of the 2023 Excellence in Jewish Studies award. She is now pursuing her MA in Anthropology at UH, focusing on archival research, medical anthropology, and feminist anthropology.

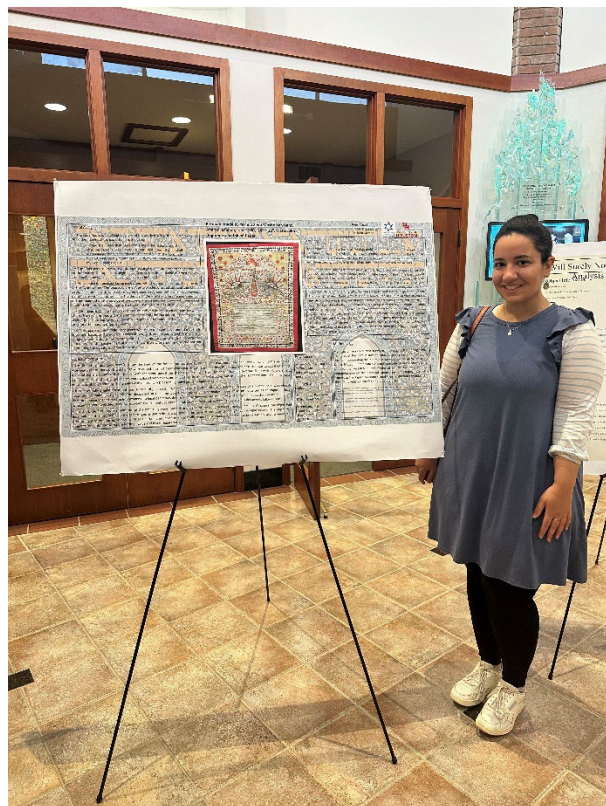
In Summer 2023, Religious Studies major Petra Anazonwu participated in the highly competitive Mellon Scholars Program. The Mellon program offers promising undergraduates guidance and mentorship to produce original scholarship in their discipline. Under the supervision of Dr. Tamber-Rosenau, Petra used monster theory to examine how white Christian nationalists read the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. She focused on how some white Christians have used the Bible to read Black Americans as the ultimate other. Petra graduated from UH in May 2024 and will spend next year working in the Americorps City Year program in Philadelphia. She hopes to attend law school after City Year.





essays for the museum.

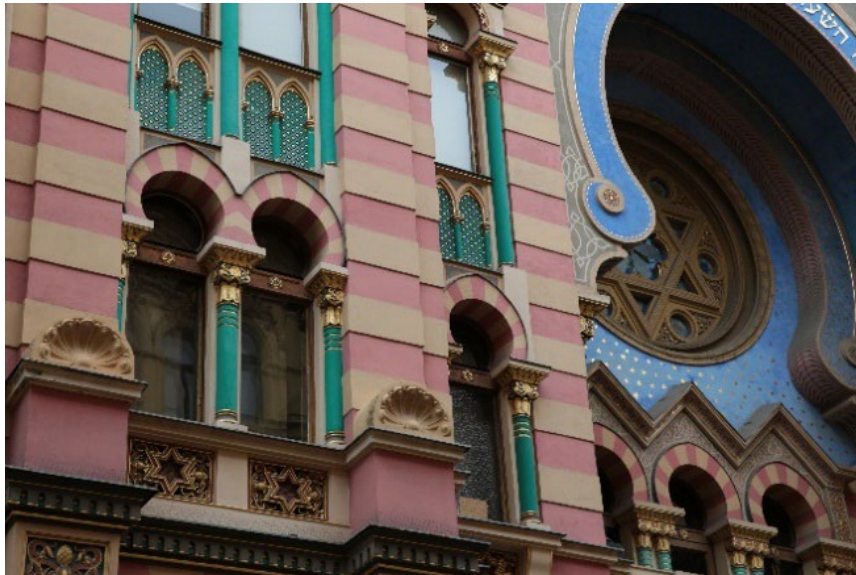
In Fall 2023, Dr. Beth Merfish (UH Clear Lake) and Dr. Mark Goldberg (UH Main) co-taught a Museum Studies course for UHCL and UH Main undergraduate and graduate students. The course partnered with the Mollie and Louis Kaplan Museum of Judaica at Congregation Beth Yeshurun. The students conducted object-based research on a single museum piece of their choice, exploring the object in depth to assist the museum in developing its catalog. Throughout the semester, students engaged in discussions on Jewish history, Jewish art, and the significance of community museums. At the end of the semester, they participated in two community engagement events: the first invited community members to poster and oral presentations of the object-based research, and the second opened the museum to the public to engage in informal conversations with the student researchers. The project was a success, as the students conducted thoughtful and critical research, culminating in catalog



Get Involved!

Want to stay up-to-date with UH Jewish Studies' goings-on? There are two easy ways!

1. [Join our e-mail list](#). We send periodic emails alerting Friends of UH Jewish Studies to upcoming events, sharing program news and extending holiday greetings.
2. Like our page on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) or follow us on [X](#). In addition to sharing all the news you'll see on our email list, our social media accounts post information about our fabulous courses, faculty milestones, student achievements and stories of interest to fans of Jewish studies.



The Jerusalem Synagogue in Prague, Czech Republic. Photo/Chris Waits via Flickr Creative Commons.

You can also get involved by supporting UH Jewish Studies financially. Your gift can support scholarships for students who excel in Jewish Studies, educational events for the campus and the community, and faculty and student research. There are three ways to start the giving process:

1. Contact Program Director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau at cmtamber@central.uh.edu.
2. Contact Hannah Barker, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Senior Director of Advancement at hmbarker@central.uh.edu.
3. Give online using the new [Jewish Studies donation page](#). It's fast, easy, and secure.

Thank you for helping us build the Jewish Studies program at one of America's most diverse universities!