Teaching the Talmud Online
FROM THE DIRECTOR

What Jewish studies can teach

The Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies is unlike any other unit at Northwestern because we invest as much in public outreach as we do in university research. Since the endowment of the Klutznick Lecture Series in the mid-1980s, Jewish Studies has understood that we have a responsibility to make critical academic content about Jews and Judaism available to a larger public. This past year our center hosted five major public speaker events and a multi-day international conference about Israeli writer Sami Michael that also featured an opening night extravaganza with music and an exciting interview of Michael by acclaimed Israeli critic Benny Ziffer.

In addition to these public academic events, the Crown Center was instrumental in producing a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on the Talmud, the first such course on the Talmud anywhere in the world. Over 3,000 students have registered for this course to date.

Our interest in speaking to an off-campus public is not unique to Northwestern. Jewish studies departments and centers at our peer institutions also host such events. The expectation of such events speaks volumes about Jewishness and might potentially hold the key to the future of the humanities.

Jews have long been associated with texts and textual study. Despite the denominational differences that separate contemporary Judaism into disparate groups, the legacy of the rabbis of antiquity and their commitment to study as an existential condition rather than the means to acquiring knowledge lives on. American Jews are disproportionately represented in various adult education settings whether they focus on science, the social sciences or the humanities. This is directly related to the deeply ingrained cultural understanding that learning and living are intertwined—that to be a contributing member of society one can and should always be learning something.

With the humanities under siege in today’s academia, people often ask whether college wouldn’t be better spent on more explicitly pre-professional pursuits. We in Jewish Studies, though, expect our students (regardless of their religious affiliation or identity) to discover within Jewishness an ideal of constantly studying and learning as a way of life. We expect that after their four college years they will continue to turn to literature, film and other cultural production for the ideas and stories that will nourish them intellectually and emotionally. And we hope that they’ll be inspired to transition to our public audience.

Scholars fighting against the pre-professional push in American higher education would be well served to justify American higher education not because it prepares students to have a vocation (which hopefully it also does) but because it gives students a framework for making their lives outside of work purposeful. As educators, we are successful when we inspire our graduates to fill their lives outside of work with meaningful relationships, substantial engagement with important world ideas and nourishing creative outlets. And it wouldn’t hurt if they came to an event or two!

Barry Scott Wimpfheimer
Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Law
Director, the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies
Meet our Faculty

Mira Balberg, assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies

Danny M. Cohen, assistant professor of instruction in the School of Education and Social Policy

Yael Dekel, postdoctoral fellow in Israel studies

Peter Fenves, Joan and Sarepta Harrison Professor of Literature, Department of German and Program in Comparative Literary Studies

Benjamin Frommer, associate professor in the Department of History

Marcia Gealy, associate professor of instruction in the Writing Program

Edna Grad, distinguished senior lecturer in Hebrew language

Peter Hayes, Theodore Zev Weiss Holocaust Educational Foundation Professor in the Department of History

Yael Israel-Cohen, postdoctoral fellow in Israel studies

Lucille Kerr, professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Jacob Lassner, Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor Emeritus of Jewish Civilization in the Department of History and the Department of Religious Studies

Phyllis Lassner, professor of instruction in the Writing Program

Marcus Moseley, associate professor in the Department of German

Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Crown Family Professor of Jewish Studies and professor in the Department of History

Elie Rekhess, Crown Visiting Professor in Israel Studies, associate director for Israel studies, and visiting professor in the Department of History

Kenneth Seeskin, Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor of Jewish Civilization and professor in the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Religious Studies

David Shyovitz, assistant professor in the Department of History

Claire Sufrin, lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies

Eran Tzelgov, visiting lecturer in Hebrew language

Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies and the Pritzker School of Law, and director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies

Laurie Zoloth, professor in the Department of Religious Studies and the Feinberg School of Medicine

How can Northwestern undergraduates study with a dozen Jewish Studies professors in one course?

The answer is easy: Jewish Studies 210: An Overview

This innovative seminar organized by Claire Sufrin, a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, debuted in the Winter and Spring quarters of 2016. Each week, Sufrin and the students welcomed a different professor of religion, history, literature, or Israel studies into the classroom. Students read scholarly articles in advance and then engaged in discussion with professors specializing in different areas of study related to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture. Noted one student, “I really enjoyed having a different instructor each week, as it made each week different and exciting, and I feel like I learned about a range of topics.” The seminar, which will be offered again in Winter 2017, aims to encourage students to pursue additional Jewish studies courses while attending Northwestern.
Faculty Profile: Reflections on teaching a resurrected language

After 37 years as Northwestern’s Hebrew instructor, professor Edna Grad embraces the journey into retirement

To study Hebrew at Northwestern University was to study with Edna Grad, the University’s distinguished senior lecturer in Hebrew language and a celebrated foreign language education specialist.

Over 37 years, Grad taught multiple levels of Hebrew on the Evanston campus. She devised her own curriculum, a course of study that prepared students to achieve verbal and textual fluency, and penned her own textbooks for beginner and intermediate-level college students.

Yet, Grad’s influence extended beyond the classroom. She was an instrumental force in the establishment of Northwestern’s Jewish Studies program in 1984; an accomplished Hebrew language poet; and she led the Hebrew Table at Allison Dining Hall over the last decade, a weekly gathering that afforded current students a space to practice their linguistic craft while also providing the University’s native-born Israelis an earnest taste of their homeland.

Grad, who retired at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, reflects here on her 37-year run carrying the Hebrew language torch at Northwestern.

In a word or phrase, how would you characterize your 37 years at Northwestern?
An accidental diversion. I always planned on going back to Israel and took on the position at Northwestern thinking I’d work here for a year or two and then go back home, but my father’s sudden death during my first year at Northwestern changed my plans irrevocably.

What fueled your passion for the Hebrew language?
Before coming to Northwestern, I wrote poetry, led dance troupes, and worked a number of jobs ranging from a four-language secretary in Europe to a research assistant at the Harvard School of Public Health and a teaching assistant at the University of Texas. I always enjoyed everything I did, but once I started teaching Hebrew, I discovered that it held a special place in my heart.

I’m still awed by the miraculous enterprise of resuscitating a “dead language” after 2,000 years. I feel particularly privileged to be a first-generation native speaker of Hebrew—and of the richest Hebrew at that thanks to my parents’ exquisite command of the language and their insistence on bringing me up in Hebrew only. I was happy to share this knowledge with anyone eager to learn and found great satisfaction in seeing my students grow to appreciate the majesty of the language and the cultural outlook it conveys.

What did you most enjoy about your work in the classroom?
I enjoyed the interaction with bright, interested students and never stopped marveling as I watched them transition from taking their first tentative steps, to suddenly walking, then running, and sometimes even soaring.

Why was Hebrew Table an important element of your work?
Hebrew Table was the idea of then-director of Jewish Studies, Benjamin Sommer, in response to a sudden drop in demand for upper-level Hebrew. Once we established Hebrew Table, I could see how beneficial it was for those attending and I encouraged my students to participate whenever they could. Unlike the classroom setting, Hebrew Table provided a relaxed atmosphere in which students were free to engage with, or simply listen to, various speakers of Hebrew, including fellow students and faculty.

As you reflect on your 37-year career at Northwestern, what efforts provided you the most satisfaction?
It is the knowledge that many of my former students kept up with Hebrew and found ways to incorporate the language into their lives. Some of them are still in touch with me, writing or speaking to me in Hebrew after all these years. I’m also elated to see the development of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, which is stacked high with first-rate scholars without whom our robust Hebrew program would be like a voice in the wilderness.

Edna Grad
**Faculty News**

**Danny M. Cohen** recently published his short story “Dead Ends” in *In the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation* (2015, Vallentine-Mitchell, London). Cohen was the keynote speaker at the 2015 Arkansas Holocaust Education Conference, and his research on marginalized narratives of the Holocaust has led him to launch the Unsilence Project, a new educational nonprofit dedicated to designing learning experiences and supporting teachers in addressing hidden stories and taboo issues of human rights and atrocity.

**Peter Hayes** retired at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year. He gave the annual Holocaust Memorial Lecture at the University of Glasgow in January and a series of lectures at universities in Mexico City in August. In addition, he completed *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*, a book W. W. Norton & Co. will publish in January 2017. A Spanish translation by Editorial Critica of Barcelona is also forthcoming. He continues to serve as the Chair of the Academic Committee at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

**Lucille Kerr** published her essay “Lessons for Reading around the Boom: New Narrative Trends and Traditions” in *Teaching the Latin American Boom* (2015). She co-edited the article with Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola (University of Michigan). Kerr also enhanced her research website, *Latin American Literature & Film Archive*, to support teaching and research on Latin American Jewish literature and film.

**Phyllis Lassner**’s 2015-16 publications included *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh University Press) and the essay “Jewish Exile in Englishness” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*.

**Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern**’s collection of paintings entitled “Folkways and Fantasies” was featured at the Ukrainian Institute of America in New York. He also gave more than 15 public lectures throughout Europe and led 18 Northwestern alumnae on a trip in Spain, where they learned about Jews in Medieval Spain and the Sephardic legacy there.

**Elie Rekhess** invited renowned Israeli author Sami Michael to Northwestern in October 2015 for a conference celebrating Michael’s works and contributions to Hebrew literature. Several international scholars explored the author’s life and work and his unique perspective as an Iraqi immigrant writing about the experience of minorities in Israel. Rekhess also created the NU Israeli Film Club in partnership with the Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema to promote and provide opportunity for academic discussion around Israel’s television and film production.

**Kenneth Seeskin**’s latest book, *Thinking About The Torah: A Philosopher Reads the Bible*, is scheduled to be published by the end of the calendar year.

**David Shyovitz** held an International Fellowship in Jewish Studies and Jewish Culture from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture during the 2015-16 academic year. He was also awarded The Medieval Academy of America’s 2016 Van Courtlandt Elliott Prize for his article “Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Werewolf Renaissance” in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*.

**Claire Sufrin** presented her research on religion and literature at the Association for Jewish Studies conference in December 2015 and at the Rethinking Exile, Center, and Diaspora in Modern Jewish Culture conference at the University of Cambridge in May 2016. She also coordinated our new course, Jewish Studies 210: An Overview, in the 2016 Winter and Spring quarters. This course introduced students to different approaches in the study of Judaism and Jewish culture.

**Barry Scott Wimpfheimer** launched a new massive open online course (MOOC) called “The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction.” He also wrote the article “Purim: A Day Beyond Full Rabbinic Control,” which was featured in TheGemara.com.

**Laurie Zoloth** recently co-edited a book, *Jews and Genes: Jewish Thought and the Genetic Future*, which was a finalist for a National Jewish Book Award.
Undeniably, Matisyahu is one of a kind, a transcendent musical star unafraid to make daring choices and chart his own course of personal enlightenment. “I’m a different kind of creature than most,” the Grammy-nominated Jewish musician confessed to a crowd of more than 600 at Northwestern University’s Pick-Staiger Concert Hall on March 31.

“There are a lot of Jewish cultural producers in the United States who lead with their Jewishness, individuals like Woody Allen and Larry David, but Matisyahu was the first to lead with his ultra Orthodox Jewishness and attain success,” said Barry Wimpfheimer, director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University.

Raised within a liberal Jewish community in Westchester, New York, Matisyahu rose to prominence more than a decade ago as a newly converted Hasidic Jew. His music—and his appearance with orthodox attire and a long beard—reflected that spiritual shift as he imaginatively mixed the mystical content and musical tradition of Hasidism with reggae, hip hop, and rock sounds.
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BARRY WIMPHEIMER, DIRECTOR OF THE CROWN FAMILY CENTER FOR JEWISH AND ISRAEL STUDIES AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

In 2011, however, Matisyahu shaved his Hasidic beard, cut his sidelocks, and renounced his Hasidic identity, later telling the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that no one faith has “a monopoly on the truth in life.” While he continued performing, he remained silent on his personal religious transformation, a reality that sparked added intrigue among followers both in and out of the Jewish faith.

“Frankly, it made him an even more compelling figure,” Wimpfheimer said. During Matisyahu’s March visit to the Northwestern campus, the acclaimed musician discussed his unique spiritual journey. In a moderated question-and-answer session with Wimpfheimer that preceded a three-song, largely improvised performance with a full band and an accompanying psychedelic light show, Matisyahu detailed the evolving and dynamic interplay between his personal religiosity and his art.

“I started opening up to the idea of other possibilities, other ways of living and thinking,” he said, adding that honoring his individuality, even at the expense of distancing himself from group ideology, had pushed his creativity.

It’s a journey reflected in Matisyahu’s most recent album Akeda, the Hebrew word for “binding.” Matisyahu openly grapples with his post-Hasidic life throughout the 15-song album, one the Huffington Post described as the “the kind of album an artist makes when there is no other creative choice but to turn oneself inside-out, to scrape the insides and reveal everything raw.”

In spite of his spiritual turn from Hasidic life, Matisyahu said he remains connected to his Judaic roots and calls his relationship with God an important part of his life. His music, meanwhile, still reverberates with strong elements of the Jewish faith ranging from Yiddish lyrics to rabbinic soundbites.

“I’ve already been through everything and back with the Jews,” he said. “Right now, I want to focus on my music.”

Matisyahu’s visit to Northwestern was part of the Renée and Lester Crown Speaker Series hosted by the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies and the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago. Matisyahu joins the likes of Israeli intellectual Moshe Halbertal and award-winning author Nathan Englander as past presenters.

“We are most accustomed to bringing in academics, so bringing in a musician such as Matisyahu is a different kettle of fish for us, but it was a program that sparked reflection and conversation,” Wimpfheimer said.

Surely, Matisyahu wouldn’t have it any other way.

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Between Baghdad and Haifa: A Tribute to Israeli Author Sami Michael
This three-day conference in October 2015 brought together international scholars to discuss and explore the work and life of Israeli author Sami Michael and to examine the cultural legacy of Iraqi Jewry through Michael’s novels. The opening session featured an interview between Ha’aretz literary editor Benny Ziffer and Sami Michael in addition to a performance of traditional Iraqi-Jewish music by renowned Israeli musician Yair Dalal.

The State of Jewish Studies in the CIC
The directors of Jewish Studies units in the CIC (an academic analogue to the Big Ten in athletics) convened November 15-16, 2015, at Northwestern University to discuss the state of the discipline, share effective program-building measures, and strategize about inter-institutional collaboration. Directors committed to work together in the future on graduate mentoring, public programming, and shared online courses.

Allan and Norma Harris Day of Jewish Study
The Allan and Norma Harris Day of Jewish Study featured eight Northwestern faculty members sharing their research and expertise with the public for a day of education and study on February 14, 2016. This program was named for Allan and Norma Harris who were instrumental in creating a Jewish studies program at Northwestern. The event was free to the public and co-sponsored with JCC Chicago.

“Jewish American World War II Novels: Young Lions”
Leah Garrett, the Loti Smorgon Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life and Culture at Monash University in Australia, discussed her book Young Lions: How Jewish Authors Reinvented the American War Novel. Young Lions, which was published in the Northwestern University Press series “Cultural Expressions of World War II,” edited by Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies faculty member Phyllis Lassner, was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. During the March 1, 2016, program, Garrett examined how Jewish soldiers were portrayed in popular American novels during the 1940s and 1950s.

Renée and Lester Crown Speaker Series
On March 31, 2016, acclaimed Grammy-nominated reggae, hip-hop, and rock artist Matisyahu joined Professor Barry Wimpfheimer for a conversation about his Jewish identity and how it relates to his art. After the talk and questions from the audience, Matisyahu and his band played a sampling of their music for a crowd of more than 600 at Pick-Staiger Concert Hall. (Please see story on page 6.)

“Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947”
Bruce Hoffman, director of the Center for Security Studies and the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, discussed his book Anonymous Soldiers on April 26, 2016. Hoffman’s book, which utilizes original archival research to tell the story of the individuals and groups that employed terrorism in the service of Zionism prior to the founding of the state of Israel, allowed him to draw attention to aspects of Jewish terrorism that are retrospectively shocking and were, in hindsight, surprisingly effective.
Water in Israel and the Middle East: Geopolitical Conflicts, Technological Challenges, and Sustainable Solutions
This half-day symposium on May 18, 2016, capped off a collaboration between the McCormick School of Engineering’s new Center for Water Research and the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies. Four international water authorities described the potential for trans-boundary water cooperation, and how Israel’s unique innovations in water technology might serve as an example for combating water scarcity in the Middle East and around the globe. (Please see story on page 14.)

“Yona Wallach: Deconstructed through Film”
On May 31, 2016, the NU Israeli Film Club hosted a film screening and discussion exploring Israeli beat poet Yona Wallach. Professor of Instruction Phyllis Lassner and Director of the Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema Cindy Stern each offered introductions to the poet and her visual representation through film. Nir Bergman’s Yona was followed by a documentary clip from Hagai Levy’s series The Accursed.

Manfred H. Vogel Lecture in Judaic Studies
At the Manfred H. Vogel Memorial Lecture in Jewish Studies, the Center’s final event of the academic year on June 7, 2016, philosopher Rebecca Newberger Goldstein discussed her book, Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity. Goldstein began by articulating an understanding of Spinoza’s philosophy as radically antithetical to embracing one’s identity. She later “betrayed” this philosophical position with a thesis that Spinoza’s approach was heavily influenced by the traumatic experience of Jewish expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula at the close of the 15th century.

Rebecca Goldstein

Cosponsored events

November 4, 2015
“Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence”
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
Sponsored by Hillel

November 5, 2015
East Jerusalem, West Jerusalem Film Screening at the Music Box Theatre
Sponsored by The Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema

April 8, 2016
“Cultural Criticism through Humor: A Novel Take on Israel-Palestine”
Sayed Kashua
Sponsored by the Medill School of Journalism

May 19, 2016
Michael N. Barnett,
George Washington University
Sponsored by the Department of Political Science

May 23, 2016
“Argentina in the Global Jewish Geography: Books and Jewish Community Formation in Buenos Aires”
Alejandro Dujovne, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas - Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social
Sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

June 6, 2016
“The Missing Chapter: Remarks by an Israeli Anthropologist Who Didn’t Read His Own Book”
Andre Levy, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Sponsored by the Middle East and North African Studies Program
Teaching the Talmud to the world
Massive open online course explores the foundational Jewish text

In recent years, the Talmud, the foundational text of Jewish thought and ritual practice, has generated escalating intrigue, engendering its share of curiosity and fascination from individuals across the globe.

That reality did not go unnoticed by Barry Wimpfheimer, director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University—which has long had an investment in public education.

In April, Wimpfheimer and Northwestern religious studies PhD candidate Sarah Wolf launched a massive open online course (MOOC) examining the terminology, style, and structure of the 1,500-year-old religious text that weaves together law and legend, history and social commentary.

Designed for any global citizen with Internet access and curiosity, the MOOC, which was hosted by leading online educational platform Coursera, covers the Talmud’s unique characteristics, the inherent challenges its study presents, and the deep religious and intellectual analysis it inspires.

Though Northwestern and Coursera first partnered in 2013 and faculty across the campus have offered courses in areas such as engineering and business, Wimpfheimer’s Talmud course represents the first MOOC offering from Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences. It is also the only Talmudic offering currently available on any of the three major MOOC players—Coursera, Udacity, or edX.

“This was an opportunity for me to take a lifetime of learning and study and share it with a wider audience,” said Wimpfheimer, an associate professor of religious studies and law who also authored the forthcoming book, *The Talmud: A Biography*.

**Talmud 101**
The MOOC—“The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction”—features eight modules, each of which hosts up to three short videos alongside associated reading materials and quizzes. Topics covered included the Talmud’s origins, rabbinic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, the construction of Talmudic passages, and rabbinic idealization of the past.

Wimpfheimer and Wolf collaborated on the effort over six months, creating the course syllabus, penning original scripts, producing short videos, and navigating copyright issues to produce an engaging and accessible online course.

Within four months of its debut, more than 3,000 people cutting across geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious lines had participated in the eight-week MOOC, numbers that far exceeded Wimpfheimer’s expectations.
We were hoping we’d get about 500 students, but this shows the widespread and growing interest there is in studying the Talmud,” he said, adding that the MOOC showcases the University’s expertise in rabbinic literature.

Better yet, Coursera data is showing that a high percentage of people are progressing through the course. “That’s proof positive that we’re hitting the audience in the right way,” Wimpfheimer said, adding that participants also formed a discussion group on Facebook to drive added connections. “We are seeing a high level of engagement among students and it’s creating a very positive environment.”

An exciting step
With a longstanding mission to educate the public, the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies has begun to leverage technology to enhance educational opportunities, particularly for those outside of academia. To date, the Center has made endowed events available online and also modified live events for better translation onto digital channels.

The Talmud MOOC represents the latest step in this mission and one Wimpfheimer believes can serve as a model for other Jewish studies and humanities programs eager to cultivate new relationships.

“We can all embrace our educational mission beyond the students on our campus,” Wimpfheimer said.

This, of course, is not to suggest that Wimpfheimer has overlooked his role in the Northwestern classroom. In fact, he believes the MOOC and the traditional classroom environment can complement one another in a “hybrid” format.

During the spring 2016 academic quarter, for instance, Northwestern students in Wimpfheimer’s introductory Talmud course also enrolled in the Coursera MOOC. Prior to arriving at class, students were tasked with completing specific MOOC modules to gain foundational knowledge. Class time, then, was devoted to elaborating on elements covered in the MOOC and rich discussion, efforts that boosted student engagement and subject matter retention.

“This impacted the speed and depth of the course in a positive way and advanced my ability to present a more coherent story for students in the classroom,” Wimpfheimer said. “With the MOOC, there’s an exciting opportunity to bring Talmudic study to a large and diverse number of adult learners, but also an opportunity to deepen students’ understanding as well.”

Sarah Wolf: Reflections on creating a MOOC

Barry Wimpfheimer is quick to point out that the groundbreaking massive open online course (MOOC) on the Talmud that debuted on Coursera this past April would not have been possible without Sarah Wolf, a Northwestern University doctoral student in rabbinic literature.

Wolf was instrumental in both the MOOC’s planning and presentation. Wolf called the planning process invaluable, saying it forced her to reflect on the Talmud’s relevance to a general audience and how the complex spiritual tome could be presented in a digestible manner.

“The MOOC offers individuals a first step to studying the Talmud or more deeply understanding the text and having that responsibility was challenging, but also immensely rewarding,” said Wolf, a native New Yorker who hopes to become a professor of religion or Jewish studies.

Before Wolf can take that leap, however, the fourth-year doctoral student will need to complete her dissertation, a study of unintentional murder and cities of refuge in the Talmud.

“The Talmud’s treatment of manslaughter and vengeance—legal issues that had theoretical but not practical import—provides fertile material for analyzing rabbinic legal hermeneutics and the development of legal interpretation as a religious practice,” Wolf said.
**Undergraduates**

**Adina Goldman wins departmental award**

The 2016 Jill Stacey Harris Prize in Jewish Studies has been awarded to Adina Goldman (WCAS '18) for her essay “From Beyond the Curtain: The Living, the Dead, and Unstable Boundaries in the Talmudic Graveyard.” Written for professor Barry Wimpfheimer’s Talmud class, Goldman’s essay presents a nuanced and sophisticated study of an extended passage in the Babylonian Talmud showing that “in the rabbinic mindset, the dead may not be alive, but on some level they still live.” Goldman’s analysis reveals that the fluid boundaries between the living and the dead impact upon both literary and legal dimensions of the talmudic sugya, and mark out the graveyard in particular as a site of ambivalence and liminality. The Jill Stacey Harris Prize has been awarded annually since 1991 for the best undergraduate essay in Jewish studies.

**Undergraduate Michaela Shapira earns publication**

Undergraduate Michaela Shapira’s paper, “Rivkah bat Meir: Subtle Redefinition of Gender Roles within the Confines of Traditional Jewish Society,” was published in the spring 2016 issue of the *Chicago Journal of History*. Originally submitted for professor Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern’s class in Early Modern Jewish History, Shapira’s paper expands the vision of early modern Jewish women in traditional communities and shows to what extent the female elites were innovative in their understanding of the tradition and how these elites changed patterns of female communal leadership and responsibilities.

**Graduates**

**2015-16 Inter-University Workshop in Jewish Studies: Messianism**

The Midwestern Inter-University Workshop in Jewish Studies brings together graduate students and faculty from Northwestern, the University of Chicago, and Indiana University. At this year’s meeting hosted by Northwestern on January 25, 2016, representatives from the three universities discussed messianism from a variety of angles and sources.

**Crown Graduate Fellowship in Jewish Studies**

The 2016-17 Crown Fellowship has been awarded to Beth Healey, a PhD candidate in the Department of History working on the Royal Warrant war crimes trials in British-occupied Germany. Where the conventional narrative has prioritized the Nuremberg trials, Healey contends that the Royal Warrant trials not only possess a stronger relationship with prior legal precedent, but that they also produce a more effective precedent for war crimes prosecutions. The Crown Center annually awards the fellowship to a Northwestern graduate student or group of students whose work addresses an aspect of Jewish history, culture, or religion.

**Jewish Studies minors Class of 2016**

Joshua Cohen  
Jessica Guenzel  
Leigh Goldstein
The Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, a partnership between the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, Tel Aviv University, and the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, brings two postdoctoral scholars each year as visiting assistant professors at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. The 2015-16 fellows were Yael Israel-Cohen and Yael Dekel.

**Yael Israel-Cohen**
Yael Israel-Cohen is currently working on a number of research projects related to educational achievement and to trauma as a result of terrorism among Israeli adolescents. She taught three classes in the 2015-2016 school year: a first-year seminar titled Israeli Society and Culture: 1990 to the Present; Women in Traditional Religious Movements: Orthodox Feminism in a Comparative Perspective; and Contemporary Jewish Identities: Between Israel and the US. On campus, Israel-Cohen participated in a panel discussion at the Interfaith Club, and also gave a two-part talk at Northwestern Hillel on ethnicity and religion in Israel.

Israel-Cohen was a frequent guest speaker in the Chicago community giving lectures and public talks on the topic of trauma within Israeli society, religion and politics, and ethnicity in Israel. In the 2015-2016 school year, Israel-Cohen published three scholarly papers on adolescents’ risk of posttraumatic stress as a result of terrorism in Israel and presented her work at two conferences focused on the effects of war on civilian populations. Starting this fall, Israel-Cohen will be taking a faculty position at the College of Management Academic Studies in Rishon Lezion, Israel.

**Yael Dekel**
Yael Dekel studies Israeli literature and, specifically, its relationship with discourse, social norms, power dynamics, ideology, and the State. During the 2015-2016 academic year, Dekel taught The Pen and the Sword: Israeli Literature of War as well as Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation: Tales of Love and Darkness alongside fellow faculty member Marcus Moseley.

Dekel was also a featured speaker at two major events hosted by the Crown Family Center this year. During “Between Baghdad and Haifa,” a conference celebrating author Sami Michael, she presented on the novel *The Flight of Swans*. Later, she spoke on H.N. Bialik’s “The City of Slaughter” at the Allan and Norma Harris Day of Jewish Study. Elsewhere on campus, Dekel was a guest speaker for MENA and Hillel programs. In addition, Dekel organized and introduced two film screenings for students and the public.

Dekel attended the Association for Israel Studies Conference, where she participated in a roundtable on a book she edited, *Utopia from Casablanca: the Writings of Makhluf Avitan* (Beer-Sheva: Ra’av Press, 2016), and also gave a lecture on Eitan Notev’s story “Praise the Lord.”
n recent years, the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies has become increasingly interested in broadening the scope of Israel studies at Northwestern University. Conferences, workshops and courses have created fresh interdisciplinary opportunities capable of highlighting Israel’s technological and scientific accomplishments.

This past spring, Elie Rekhess, Crown Visiting Professor in Israel Studies, and Dr. Aaron Packman, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern, accomplished just that, launching a first-of-its-kind seminar exploring water sustainability in Israel and the Middle East.

The seminar, cross-listed between Civil Engineering at the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and Jewish Studies at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, investigated how the availability of water in the Middle East has shaped the development of civilizations, influenced political stability in the region, and fueled innovation in water technologies.

A dozen students across a wide range of major areas including engineering, political science, economics, Jewish studies, and more enrolled in the quarter-long seminar that cut across historical, social, geopolitical, scientific, and technological themes and featured guest lecturers from Northwestern’s Department of Environmental Science and Department of History as well as Argonne National Laboratory.

The course began with an exploration of historical dimensions of water in the Middle East, focusing on ancient civilizations and the water infrastructure essential to the development of these societies. Transitioning into modern times, the seminar focused on the development of water resources needed to support Israel’s burgeoning population and the conversion of barren desert land into cultivated agriculture.

Thereafter, the seminar examined geopolitical conflicts over land and water and the potential for global translation of innovative water technologies developed in Israel, such as drip irrigation and desalination.

“The idea was to create a common academic space where both scholars and students representing different disciplines would be able to meet regularly, exchange information, discuss divergent viewpoints, and enhance research projects pertaining to water issues in the Middle East,” Rekhess said, noting that the multi-disciplinary approach emerged out of conversations between McCormick School Dean Julio Ottino and his Weinberg College counterpart, Dean Adrian Randolph.

To cap off the course, the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies and the Northwestern Center for Water Research
co-hosted an international symposium on May 18 titled “Water in Israel and the Middle East: Geopolitical Conflicts, Technological Challenges, and Sustainable Solutions.”

During the half-day symposium, international experts shared thoughts on how control and access of water play into trans-boundary politics as well as how Israel-led advancements in water technology might serve as a model for water sustainability efforts around the world.

“We wanted to expose our students to recent research findings on water developments in Israel and the Middle East as well as give them the opportunity to engage with researchers and practitioners who work towards improving water quality, access, and policy.” Rekhess said.

At the end of the seminar, Rekhess hoped students left with a more nuanced view of a complex issue with ramifications for Israel, the Middle East, and beyond.

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ELIE REKHESS, CROWN VISITING PROFESSOR IN ISRAEL STUDIES

Left to right: Dean Julio Ottino, Dean Adrian Randolph, Elie Rekhess, Aaron Packman, Stuart Schoenfeld, Jeffrey Sosland, Noam Weisbrod, and Sara Ethanany

Students from the Water in Israel and the Middle East seminar
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