In 2012-2013, the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies sponsored a record number of lectures and other special events. Taken as a whole, they highlighted specific periods of Jewish history, underscored the changing nature of Jewish religious thought, and showcased Jewish participation in the arts. At the same time, each revealed the great impact of Jewish interaction with others – from the influence of Christian theology on medieval rabbis, to the 1,000 year old history of Polish Jewry, to the coming together of the musical worlds of klezmer, funk, and hip-hop, to the reverberations from General Grant’s decision in the middle of the Civil War to expel all Jews from territories under his command. The Bennett Center and Campus Ministry continued to co-sponsor monthly Shabbat services and dinners, with services beautifully led by Rabbi Suri Krieger. Fr. George Collins once again proved invaluable in helping members of KADIMA, Fairfield’s Jewish student organization, erect their sukkah, while Elaine Bowman and I, on behalf of the Bennett Center, continued our tradition of inviting members of the University and general communities to join us for lunch in the sukkah during the week of Sukkot. 

Professor Judy Lerner offered workshops throughout the year on theological concepts underlying the observance of several Jewish holidays, while in early December, adults from my “Lunch and Learn” class (annually co-sponsored by the Bennett Center and the Jewish Community Center of Eastern Fairfield County) joined undergraduate students in my “Jews and Judaism in America” course for a memorable tour of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

My thanks to Professors Gavriel Rosenfeld, Philip Eliasoph, Yohuru Williams, Patricia Behre, and Orin Grossman for their leadership roles in Bennett Center events while I was on leave in the spring, and to our student assistants, Laura Stakey, Rachel Sperry, and Maggie O’Brien for their great help during the academic year. To our many donors and enthusiastic supporters of the Bennett Center: we literally could not do what we do without you. Last, a special thanks to Elaine Bowman, who in addition to being the best Program Manager anyone could ask for, did a superb job of running the day-to-day affairs of the Bennett Center in my absence. Wishing you all a wonderful summer. I look forward to seeing many of you this fall.

~ Ellen M. Umansky, Ph.D.
Fall 2012 – Spring 2013

Highlights and events...

September 19 – Jewish New Year Get-Together – Faculty, staff, and students gathered in the Bennett Center to welcome the Jewish Year 5773. Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld, director of Fairfield’s Judaic Studies undergraduate program, presented a brief explanation of Rosh Hashanah. Everyone enjoyed tasting apples dipped in honey and other foods symbolizing the hope for a sweet and happy new year.

October 1 – 7 Sukkot Experience – For the twelfth consecutive year, members of KADIMA (Fairfield’s Undergraduate Jewish Community) resident halls. Throughout the week, members of the University community enjoyed having lunch, visiting, and holding classes in Donnarumma and Canisius Halls.

October 10 & 11 Annual Judaic Lunch, visiting, and holding classes in University community enjoyed having classes in Donnarumma and Canisius Halls.

October 20 – In celebration of Daniel Pearl World Music Days – “Abrahams Inc.” – David Krakauer, Fred Wesley, and Socalled. This group of Jewish and African-American musicians performed musical numbers that melded numerous styles, including klezmer, hip-hop, spiritual, rap, classical, soul, and rock-and-roll. Two hundred twenty-five people attended this special evening.

November 14 – A Taste of Judaism – Kadima members organized and hosted a table in the Barone Campus Center that featured various “Jewish foods.” Tasty selections included bagels and cream cheese, blintzes, noodle kugel, chopped liver, and halvah.

November 29– “When General Grant Expelled the Jews” – Dr. Jonathan D. Sarna, Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University, and chief historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History, presented an insightful talk that delved into this Order, the only time in American history that Jews as a group were singled out. Over 200 people attended this lecture.

February 21 – “Out of Left Field: Jews and Black Baseball” – Associate Professor of Religion and Women’s Studies, Dr. Rebecca Alpert of Temple University, addressed an audience of 100 as she examined the relationship between Jews and organized baseball in Jim Crow America. This presentation focused on Jewish entrepreneurs, sportswriters, and the integration of teams.

March 4 – The Samuel and Bettie Roberts Memorial Lecture in Jewish Art “Facing Jewish Identity Through Images: Style, Color and Content” – Audrey Flack, photorealist, painter, and sculptor, overviewed an audience of over 300 with her intellect and wit. As Ms. Flack discussed various pieces of her work, she shared her personal involvement and motivation with each piece. The Samuel and Bettie Roberts Endowment Fund in Jewish Art at Fairfield University sponsored Ms. Flack’s appearance.
March 19 – “Peddlers and Modern Jewish Migration” – A staged reading of The Visitor, written by Carol Mock and directed by Dr. Marti LoMonaco, was presented in the Quick Center’s Wien Experimental Theater before a full house of 120 people. The play takes place in New York City in the year 1895 and centers on a group of Jewish policemen assigned to protect a rabbi anti-Semitic member of the German Reichstag who comes to New York City to preach. An on-stage discussion with the playwright followed the reading. The Bennett Center wants to express a special thank you to professor emeritus Osn Grossman for his participation in this event.

March 20 – Passover Seder – Forty students, faculty, and staff enjoyed this year’s “model” Seder, led by Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld. Everyone present enjoyed sampling some traditional Passover foods and reading the Haggadah. Following, a service and candle lighting ceremony led by students, faculty, and staff. Our guest speaker was Mr. Alan Bell, son of Aron Harkins. By developing an understanding of the Hebrew language, I was able to analyze the status of Homosexuality in Judaism. My Judaic Studies courses have been a critical well as the ability to work with primary sources,” states Tom. “I have also come to develop a greater appreciation of my own Christian upbringing, and I believe the Judaic Studies courses have been a critical component of my spiritual and academic education at Fairfield.”

April 4 – Friends of the Bennett Center Donor Reception – Following Bob Simon’s presentation, a lovely champagne and dessert reception was held for Friends of the Bennett Center who gave a minimum of $100 for the 2012-2013 program year. Donors had the special opportunity to personally engage Mr. Simon in conversation and to socialize.

April 23 – Annual Holocaust Commemoration – More than 100 students and members of the University and general communities gathered for a service and candle lighting ceremony led by students, faculty, and staff. Our guest speaker was Mr. Alan Bell, son of Aron (Bielcki) Bell, the last surviving member of the Jewish partisan brothers whose resistance to the Nazis was the subject of the 2008 film, Defiance.

Student Spotlight...

Dr. Patricia Behre has developed a new course, titled “Godless: Atheism and Skeptical Thought in the West,” which will be offered for the first time in Fall 2013. Although not formally part of the Judaic Studies offerings, this course expands Fairfield’s curriculum to consider the work of thinkers, some of whom were of Jewish heritage, outside of a conventional faith tradition.

In addition to teaching at Fairfield, Adjunct Professor Gail Ostrow teaches a Holocaust unit to 6th graders at Black Rock School every year. Gail is a Facing History and Ourselves trained teacher. She also creates and hosts an annual community Yom HaShoah program for the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County.

Dr. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld continued work on a forthcoming edited volume, If Only We Had Died in Egypt! What Ifs? of Jewish History from Abraham to Zionism, which will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2014. He also completed a new article, “Between Memory and Normalcy: Germans, Jews, and The Transnational” (University of Michigan Press). He delivered papers and served as the moderator on panels at two major academic conferences: the German Studies Association Annual Conference and a special conference at UCLA, History Unlimited: Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture.

In Fall 2012, Dr. Ellen M. Umansky was elected to a two-year term as vice-president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society and a three-year term on the Board of Directors of Theta Alpha Kappa, the Religious Studies National Honor Society. Her essay, “Some Are Guilty, All Are Responsible,” appeared in We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism (Ashnumu and Al Qebe). ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, (Uewish Lights). In Spring 2013, Ellen was honored to receive the Lucy Katz Award in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Kabbalat Shabbat Services & Dinners

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Judaic Studies Classes Popular As Ever!

A total of 316 undergraduate students took Judaic Studies classes throughout the 2012-2013 academic year.
Looking Ahead... 2013 - 2014 Programs

For complete details, visit our website at www.fairfield.edu/judaicstudies
Unless noted, lectures are free but reservations requested. Call the Bennett Center (203) 254-4010.

Fall 2013

September 29 at 2 p.m. – “Way to Heaven” a theatrical performance by Juan Mayorga. A Red Cross delegation visits the sham Jewish settlement of Theresienstadt. Discussion led by Ellen Umansky following the performance. $20. For tickets, call (203) 254-4010.

Wien Theater at the Quick Center.

October 7 at 7:30 p.m. – “Tales of the Mystical God: When the sacred appears within the everyday” – Scholar-in-Residence Rabbi and author Lawrence Kushner, Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco. Made possible by a gift from David and Edith Chaifetz.

Charles F. Dolan School of Business.


Regina A. Quick Center.

October 29 at 7:30 p.m. – “American Jews Look at a Changing Israel: Peace, Prosperity, and Religious Pluralism” – Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Lecture Rabbi Eric Yoffie, artist and past president of the Union of Reform Judaism. Made possible by a gift from the Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation.

Charles F. Dolan School of Business.

November 18 at 8 p.m. – “The Long Fight for Freedom” – Jacoby-Lunan Humanitarian Lecture. After 18 years on Death Row, Damien Echols, one of the “West Memphis Three” wrongly convicted of killing three small boys, left prison as a free man. With his wife, Lorri, he will describe his struggle to achieve justice. Co-sponsored with Open Visions Forum. $45 per ticket or as part of Open Visions subscription. Call (203) 254-4010.

Regina A. Quick Center.

December 5 at 7:30 p.m. – Lecture – “The Jewish History of Small Town America.”
Dr. Lee Shai Weissbach, author and professor of history at University of Louisville.
Dolan School of Business.

Spring 2014

(Details mailed in January 2014)

March 4 at 7:30 p.m. – “The Jewish Soul on Fire” – Carl and Dorothy Bennett Lecture in Judaic Studies
Rubberizia Esther Jungreis, Holocaust survivor and founder of Hineni Heritage Center. Made possible by a gift from the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Foundation.
Dolan School of Business.

March 17 at 7:30 p.m. – “The Built Environment at Auschwitz: Between Imperial Ambition and Genocide” – Dr. Paul Jaskot, Department of Art and Art History, DePaul University.
Dolan School of Business.

April 10 at 7:30 p.m. – “Agreeing to Disagree: How Jews and Christians Read Scripture” – Eighth Annual Lecture in Jewish Christian Engagement.
Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, Vanderbilt Department of Religion.
Dolan School of Business.

April 24 at 7 p.m. – “Remembering to Forget: Images of the Holocaust” – Dr. Barbie Zelizer, University of Pennsylvania.
Dolan School of Business.

April 24 at 8:30 p.m. – Bennett Center Donor Reception – for those donors who have contributed a minimum of $100 for the 2013-2014 academic year. By invitation only.

April 28 at 4:30 p.m. – “Life as a Child in Hiding: Grace and Struggle” – Annual Holocaust Remembrance Service. Dr. Ilsa Leeser, Holocaust survivor. Co-sponsored with Campus Ministry and KADIMA.
Egan Chapel.

Undergraduate Courses – Fall 2013

Fairfield students will have the opportunity to select from the following undergraduate courses:

ENGLISH

- Literature of the Holocaust – Prof. Gail Ostrow

HISTORY

- The Third Reich – Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

- Introduction to Judaism – Dr. Ellen Umansky
- Women in Judaism – Dr. Ellen Umansky

A Year in the Making...

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October 7 at 7:30 p.m. – “Tales of the Mystical God: When the sacred appears within the everyday.”

October 15 at 8 p.m. – “Girls in Trouble.”

October 29 at 7:30 p.m. – “American Jews Look at a Changing Israel: Peace, Prosperity, and Religious Pluralism.”

November 18 at 8 p.m. – “The Long Fight for Freedom.”

December 5 at 7:30 p.m. – Lecture – “The Jewish History of Small Town America.”

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Welcome to the Egan Chapel for a Lunch and Learn registration form in November.

“Movers and Shakers: Men and Women Who Made a Difference in American Jewish Life”

This ten-week course in the winter/spring of 2014 will focus on a number of men and women who had a significant impact on American Jewish history. Included will be discussions of religious, cultural, philanthropic, and defense organizations and their creators; educational movements; Zionist leadership, and attempts by rabbis and laypeople to regenerate Jewish religious life.

Dates, times, and fees will be announced in the late fall. Contact the Bennett Center for a Lunch and Learn registration form in November.

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DONOR HONOR ROLL...

July 2012 – June 2013

The Carl and Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies was founded in 1993 by a gift from Carl and the late Dorothy Bennett of Greenwich, Conn. Endowments that have been created to fund Judaic Studies include: The Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Judaic Studies and the Samuel and Bettie Roberts Memorial Endowed Judaic Studies Fund.

We wish to thank the following donors for their generous support of the Bennett Center and the Judaic Studies Program from July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013:

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Helene Lopatin – for her donation of seventeen books to the Bennett Center and the DiMenna-Nyselius Libraries.

Individuals interested in contributing books, documents, or other items related to Judaic Studies may contact the Bennett Center at (203) 254-4000, ext. 2066

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Rabbi James Prosnit, M.A.
Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies:
Classic Rabbinic Texts, Jewish Liturgy

Judith Lerner, M.A.
Guest Lecturer, Bennett Center

Hebrew Language, Traditional Jewish Texts

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Maggie O’Brien ’14
Rachel Sperry ’14
Laura Stacey ’14

Student Assistants

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Help the Bennett Center continue to offer undergraduate student activities, host special lectures and events, and purchase Judaic books, tapes, and DVDs for the DiMenna-Nyselius Library and the Center’s resource room.

Golden Benefactor.........$100,000+
Special Benefactor.........$50,000+
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Special Sponsor...........$15,000+
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* To attend the annual Friends of the Bennett Center Donor Reception, a minimum gift of $100 per person is required. Invitations will be mailed in early Spring 2013.

** Gifts to the Bennett Center are tax-deductible.

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Make checks payable to Bennett Center, Fairfield University and send to:
Bennett Center for Judaic Studies, DMH 245, Fairfield University, 1073 North Benson Road, Fairfield, CT 06824

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