From the Director of the Bennett Center

The 2013-2014 academic year marked the 20th year of the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies and my 20th year as its director. Over the past two decades, the number of our programs has grown and their scope has widened. We now offer at least ten lectures annually, many co-sponsored with other departments, academic centers, and interdisciplinary programs. Several are sponsored by donors or endowed.

For four years, we have held a musical concert in October as part of the international Daniel Pearl World Music Days, and for the past three years we have sponsored a play reading and/or performance on a Jewish-related theme. Since 2011, we have offered monthly Shabbat services and dinners (now co-sponsored with Campus Ministry) and for several years have held academic workshops and informal discussions whose facilitators have included scholars, past and present members of the Israeli Defense Forces, and regional Jewish organizational leaders. In addition to the annual Holocaust Remembrance Service, which we co-sponsor with Campus Ministry, we have helped to create numerous interfaith prayer services on campus. Our mailing list has grown from a handful of individuals to over 1300. And our annual newsletter, which first appeared in 1996 as a four page publication, has long since become an eight-page, color publication that includes greater description of faculty and student achievements, summaries of the past year’s activities and notice of upcoming events.

My thanks to the invaluable Elaine Bowman, program manager of the Bennett Center, and to our many donors, faculty members, administrators and staff. Finally, a special note of thanks to Dr. Robbin Crabtree and Rev. Paul Fitzgerald, S.J., great friends of the Bennett Center, who have just left the University. A professor of communication and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Robbin is moving to Los Angeles to begin a five year term as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University, while after five years as Fairfield’s vice president for Academic Affairs, Paul has begun his tenure as president of the University of San Francisco.

Wishing you all a wonderful summer. I look forward to seeing many of you in the fall.

~ Ellen M. Umansky, PhD
Fall 2014 – Spring 2015
Highlights and events...

September 11 – Remembering 9/11 – The Bennett Center joined with Campus Ministry, Jesuit Mission Initiatives, the Center for Catholic Studies, the Center for Faith & Public Life, and the Muslim Student Association in sponsoring an Interfaith Prayer Service in Egan Chapel for the entire University community.

September 25-29 – A dramatic production of the play Way to Heaven by Juan Mayorga, translated by David Johnston, presented in the Wien Experimental Theatre of the Quick Center, was inspired by the 1944 visit by the International Red Cross to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. Post-performance discussions were led by different members of the University faculty, including Drs. Ellen Umansky and Gavriel Rosenfeld, who raised historical and theological issues brought into question by the play. Sponsors of this event included the Humanities Institute of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Departments of English and Modern Languages and Literatures, the Center for Catholic Studies, and the Bennett Center.

September 25 – Jewish New Year Get-Together – Faculty, staff, and students gathered in the Bennett Center to welcome the Jewish Year 5774.

October 1 – 7 Sukkot Experience – For the 13th year, members of KADIMA (Fairfield’s student Jewish cultural organization) and students in Ellen Umansky’s “Introduction to Judaism” class erected a sukkah on the plaza between Domnarumma and Canisius Halls. Throughout the week, members of the University community had lunch, visited, and held classes in the sukkah.

October 7 & 8. Annual Judaic Studies Scholar in Residence – Rabbi Lawrence Kushner spent two days on campus meeting with members of the University and general communities. Rabbi Kushner’s presentations included:

- “An Ocean of Nothingness: Losing yourself without dying” A Jewish Forum discussion, attended by University faculty and staff.
- “Tales of the Mystical God: When the sacred appears within the everyday” A public lecture, attracting over two hundred students and community members.
- “Who Am I to Go to Pharaoh? Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev on spiritual leadership” Twenty-five Jewish clergy and community leaders participated in a luncheon study session hosted by and held at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in Bridgeport.

October 15 – Daniel Pearl World Music Days Concert – Girls in Trouble – Multi-instrumentalist and composer Alicia Jo Rabins and bassist, Aaron Hartman delighted their audience of 100 with songs by Rabins that expounded upon stories of women in the Hebrew Bible.

October 29 – The 2013 Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Lecture in Judaic Studies – “American Jews Look At a Changing Israel” – Rabbi Eric Yoffie, author and past president of the Union of Reform Judaism, presented an overview of social, political, and cultural changes in Israel and the effects these changes are having upon the ways in which American Jews identify with and support the State of Israel. One hundred twenty people attended this lecture, which is annually sponsored by the Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation.

November 18 – Sixteenth Annual Jacoby-Luin Humanitarian Lecture – “The Long Fight for Freedom” was underwritten by the Frank Jacoby Foundation in collaboration with the Bennett Center and Fairfield’s Open Visions Forum. This program featured a conversation, led by Dr. Ellen Umansky and Dr. Philip Eliasoph, with Aaron Hartman delighted their audience of 100 with songs by Rabins that expounded upon stories of women in the Hebrew Bible.

Dr. Lawrence Kushner (left), Edith Chaifetz, and David Chaifetz.

Alicia Jo Rabins of Girls in Trouble with Aaron Hartman in the background.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie (left) with Dr. Ellen Umansky, Ph.D. Jeffrey von Arx, S.J., and Dr. Ellen Umansky.

Esther Jungreis (center) with Dr. Ellen Umansky and University President Rev. Jeffrey von Arx, S.J.

Kushner’s presentations included:

- “The Impact of Feminism on Ritual, Liturgy, and Jewish Communal Life” A dialogue with Ellen Umansky in her “Women in Judaism” class.
- “Derechut” (mytical attachment to God) – A study session with students in Ellen Umansky’s “Introduction to Judaism” class. The Judaic Studies Scholar in Residence is made possible by a gift from David and Edith Chaifetz of Fairfield.

December 4 – Ya’ara Avraham, one of the Greater Fairfield Israeli emissaries, gave an illustrated talk on “Women in Israel” that was well attended. The presentation included discussion of women in government, the military, and Jewish religious life.

December 5 – Bennett Center Lecture – “The Jewish History of Small-Town America” – Dr. Lee Shai Weissbach, author and professor of history at the University of Louisville. One hundred people attended this illustrated lecture focusing on the development and character of Jewish populations in small towns throughout the United States. The event was co-sponsored by the Bennett Center for Judaic Studies and the undergraduate Judaic Studies Program.

March 4 – Carl and Dorothy Bennett Lecture in Judaic Studies – “The Jewish Soul on Fire” – Rabbi S. Zalman Schachter-Shalkowsky, with Dr. Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation.

Dr. Paul Jaskot sponsored this talk by author and historian Dr. Paul Jaskot of DePaul University in Chicago. The presentation, which attracted an audience of nearly 100, focused on the German architectural plan for the expansion and eventual transformation of Auschwitz.

April 2 – “Learning to TRUST In Hope: From Rwandan Genocide to Community Activism” – The Bennett Center co-sponsored an evening with Daniel Trust, Rwandan genocide survivor, human rights advocate, and founder of the Daniel Trust Foundation, Inc. Other sponsors were The Center for Faith and Public Life; JUHAN, International Studies; Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; Student Diversity Programs; and the Connecticut Writing Project.

April 3 – Celebrating diversity on the Fairfield campus, 40 years of women at Fairfield University, and 20 years since the launch of the Women Studies program (now Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies), the Bennett Center was continued on pg. 4
Highlights and events (continued)...

one of 11 University sponsors of this day-long event, which included a lecture by Sister Simone Campbell, a reception, and a gala dinner.

April 8 – Class trip to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York City – Augmenting their classroom learning, 26 students in Dr. Umansky’s “Faith After the Holocaust” class toured the museum with gallery educators and heard Holocaust survivor Bronia Brandman relate her personal story.

April 8 – “The Historical David – The Real Life of an Invented Hero” – The Bennett Center, along with the Judaic Studies Program, the Department of History, Learning for a Lifetime program, and the Fairfield University Bookstore co-sponsored this event, which featured Dr. Joel Bayden, associate professor of Old Testament at Yale Divinity School.

April 9 – Passover Seder – Sixty students, faculty, and staff enjoyed this year’s “model” Seder, led by Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld.

April 10 – Eighth Annual Lecture in Jewish-Christian Engagement – “Agreeing to Disagree: How Jews and Christians Read Scripture” – Over 150 gathered to hear a lecture by Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, author of The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus; and co-editor of The Jewish Annotated New Testament. Dr. Levine explored how differences in translation, punctuation, definitions, theology, emphasis, and canonical order all lead to differences in self-definition. This event is co-sponsored each year with Fairfield University’s Center for Catholic Studies.

April 28 – Annual Holocaust Commemoration – Sixty-five students and members of the University and general communities gathered for a memorial service and candle lighting ceremony led by students, faculty, and staff. Our guest speaker was Dr. Ilse Leser, a German Jew who survived the war by living in Holland with a Dutch family from 1943 to 1945. A special thank you to Campus Ministry for co-sponsoring this event with the Bennett Center and Campus Minister Jocelyn E. Colleen for helping to bring Dr. Leser to campus.

Kabbalat Shabbat

This is the third year that the Bennett Center for Judaic Studies and Campus Ministry has offered Shabbat services. Rabbi Suri Krieger led an average of 25 students, faculty, staff, and guests in prayer and song. At the April service, recognition was given to graduating seniors Emily Bower, Emily Goodman, Josina James, Jesus Nunez, Laura Stacey, Erin Sullivan, and Aidan Wildes, while Israeli emissaries Ya’ara Avraham and Omer Mashiach were wished a warm farewell.

April 24 – “Remembering to Forget: Images of the Holocaust” – Dr. Barbie Zelizer, Raymond Williams Professor of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, presented an overview of ways in which the Holocaust was represented in the news and what lingering of those depictions remains in reference to contemporary atrocities. One hundred fifty students and community members attended this event, co-sponsored with the Department of Communication.

April 24 – Friends of the Bennett Center Donor Reception – Following Barbie Zelizer’s presentation, a champagne dessert reception was held for Friends of the Bennett Center. Donors had the opportunity to engage Dr. Zelizer in conversation and to socialize with Judaic Studies faculty. Ellen Umansky presented graduating senior Laura Stacey with the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Student Recognition Award. (See Student Spotlight section.)

In November, Dr. Philip Eliasoph was appointed to the State of Connecticut Arts Council. In preparation for his course, “Jewish Art: Moses to Modernity,” (made possible by the Samuel and Bettie Roberts Endowment) Dr. Eliasoph traveled to Jerusalem to study collections at the newly reopened Israel Museum. Later, he visited Petra, an ancient city of rose-colored sandstone monuments, carved out of the living rock from the 3rd century BCE. His “Letter from Jordan” will be published in the summer issue of VENU magazine.

Professor Gail Ostrow taught a four-month Holocaust unit to 6th and 8th graders at Black Rock Elementary School in Bridgeport. She also coordinates the annual community program for the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, at which three students from her fall “Literature of the Holocaust” class presented their memorial projects: an original dance, an adaptation of the theme to Schindler’s List on the piano, and an original poem.

Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld completed work on two book manuscripts which will be published by Cambridge University Press in the coming year: Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture and If Only We Had Died in Egypt? What Ifs of Jewish History from Abraham to Zionism.

Student Spotlight...

The recipient of the 2013-2014 Congregation B’nai Israel Academic Achievement Award in Judaic Studies was sophomore Kayla Kuzniowski, a history, philosophy, and English triple major, who plans to attend law school after she graduates. For the past two years, Kayla has been a member of the Dance Ensemble. This year she helped start Fairfield’s only student-run dance club, Fairfield Dance Fusion, for which she acted as co-president. In fall 2014, she will be attending Florence University of the Arts through Fairfield’s study abroad program. She will return to campus in the spring to continue working on her majors and acting as a choreographer and board member of the two dance clubs.

In April, graduating senior Laura Stacey was awarded the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Student Recognition Award, which is presented to a deserving student for his or her leadership and service to the Bennett Center. Judaic Studies, and/or KADIMA.


Bennett Center Office Assistant Laura Stakey ’14

Kayla Kuzniowski ’16

Ya’ara Avraham and Omer Mashiach
Looking Ahead... Fall 2014 Programs

For details and locations, see www.fairfield.edu/judaicstudies or call the Bennett Center at (203) 254-4000, ext. 2066

Monday, Oct. 6 at 7:30 – “Creativity in the Midst of Catastrophe: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe.” – Dr. Déborah Dwork
    Scholar-in-Residence

Tuesday, Oct. 21 at 7:30 – “Yentl: From Yeshiva Boy to Syndrome.” – Dr. Pamela Nadell
    Adolf and Ruth Schumanwasser Lecture

Monday, Oct. 27 at 7:30 – Golem: a klezmer band
    Daniel Pearl World Music Days concert

Monday, Nov. 10 at 7:30 – “A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide.” – Dr. Alon Confino
    Judaic Studies Lecture

Wednesday, Nov. 19 at 7:30 – “I Believe in Zero: Learning from the World’s Children.” – Caryl Stern
    Tickets required.
    Jacoby-Lunin Humanitarian Lecture with Open VISIONS Forum

    Bennett Center Lecture

    Bennett Center Lecture

Undergraduate Courses – Fall 2014

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

ENGLISH
- Literature of the Holocaust – Prof. Gail Ostrow

HISTORY
- Modern Germany: Reich to Republic – Dr. Gavriel Rosenfeld
- Twentieth Century Russia – Dr. David McFadden

MODERN LANGUAGES
- Elementary Hebrew I – Elaine Chitrit

RELIGIOUS STUDIES
- Introduction to Judaism – Dr. Ellen Umansky
- Jews and Judaism in America – Dr. Ellen Umansky
- Jewish Interpretations of Scriptures – Rabbi James Prosnit
- Common Questions / Traditional Responses – Prof. Maureen Dewan
- Hebrew Bible – Dr. Jason Gaines

A Year in the Making...

Judaic Studies classes continue to be as popular as ever!
Fact: A total of 329 undergraduate students took Judaic Studies classes throughout the 2013-2014 academic year.

For eight consecutive Fridays throughout the winter/spring, 34 adults from the greater Fairfield area studied with Ellen Umansky. This year’s topic, “Movers and Shakers: Men and Women Who Made a Difference in American Jewish Life,” was so popular that Dr. Umansky decided to keep the theme – but focus on different “movers and shakers” in 2015. Those to be discussed include religious leaders, political activists, writers, educators, and communal organizers, such as Gershon Seixas, Lillian Wald, Isaac Harby, Abraham Cahan, and Rabbi Joshua Loth Lieberman.

Diane Feigenson Lectureship

It is a pleasure to announce the establishment of the Diane Feigenson Lectureship in Jewish Literature. Rob and Andrew Feigenson have generously pledged $50,000 to support this biennial lectureship in their mother’s memory.

Professor Feigenson taught in the English Department for 20 years and in the Judaic Studies Program since its inception in 1993. Her courses included “Literature of the Holocaust” and “Jewish American Literature.” She possessed the unique ability to transmit her vitality, intellectual curiosity, and enthusiasm for all forms of literature to her students. As a scholar, educator, and advocate, she firmly believed in enriching the academic offerings in Judaic Studies at Fairfield University.

A fundraising effort is underway to build the endowment for the Feigenson Lectureship. Contributions may be sent to the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies, 245 Donnarumma Hall, Fairfield University, 1073 North Benson Road, Fairfield, CT 06824. Kindly make donations payable to Fairfield University and note “Feigenson Lectureship” on the check. Thank you.

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KADIMA

Members of Fairfield’s Jewish cultural club co-sponsored the annual Jewish New Year gathering, built a sukkah, attended Shabbat services and dinners, hosted the annual Chanukah celebration, hosted a Megillah reading and Purim party, and took part in the annual Student Activities Day and Holocaust Remembrance Service.

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DONOR HONOR ROLL...

July 2013 – June 2014

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 have funded: The Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Judaic Studies, the Samuel and Betty Roberts Memorial Endowment in Judaic Studies Fund, and the Diane Feigenson Lectureship in Jewish Literature.

We wish to thank the following donors for their generous support of the Bennett Center and the Judaic Studies Program from July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014.

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** 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

JUDAIC STUDIES STAFF
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