LEARN. EXPLORE. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN ISRAEL & JEWISH STUDIES.

The Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies is Columbia University’s center for the academic study and discussion of Jewish life, history, and culture. *Explore the length, breadth, and diversity of the Jewish experience with IIJS.*

Visit iijs.columbia.edu for more information.
P: 212-854-2581 | E: iijs@columbia.edu
Dear Friends,

I am pleased to report that the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies at Columbia University is flourishing on many fronts. IIJS is brimming with activity, from lunchtime lectures featuring notable scholars, to lively debate among our faculty, and students joining us for intimate dialogue with renowned experts in their field. If you haven’t visited, come see our beautiful space at the top of Kent Hall. We thank artist Mark Podwal for adding color and warmth to our space by graciously arranging for a selection of his prints to be displayed on our walls. Beyond our physical space, IIJS’ impact can be felt around the Morningside campus.

The role of an Institute within a University is to foster intellectual conversation that transcends departmental and disciplinary lines. This is precisely the aim of all our activities. Large and diverse institutions, with all their intellectual resources, can often feel alienating or cold. Our goals are to foster intellectual community, first and foremost for our students and faculty, to build bridges to other entities on and beyond our campus, and to embrace the larger community around us. At IIJS, we do this by focusing on our students and their scholarship.

- Our undergraduate students flock to classes to study Hebrew and Yiddish language and literatures, Jewish History, Religious Studies, the Middle East, and Jewish Thought, in courses that range from antiquity to contemporary issues.
- Some two dozen graduate students in various departments convene for mutual support and intellectual community under the guidance of Yiddish Dr. Agi Legutko. The M.A. in Jewish Studies program, started in 2014, has been attracting students of high caliber from many corners of the US and the around the world, due in no small part to the caring oversight of Dr. Yitzhak Lewis.

Our Institute is also very fortunate to benefit from the Judaica collection at Columbia, the second largest collection of Hebrew and Jewish language manuscripts in the Americas. Our ever knowledgeable Norman E. Alexander Librarian of Jewish Studies, Michelle Chesner, supports the work of students, faculty, and researchers the world over. This past semester I had the pleasure of co-teaching a graduate seminar on the history of the Jewish book, with Michelle, in the Rare Book and Manuscripts division of Butler Library. The riches that we discover in each session are beyond compare. One student told our colleague—“I wish this course would never end.”

Please continue to show that you care about a flourishing Jewish intellectual life at Columbia: attend our events, drop us a line, and support our students and the Institute as generously as possible.

Sincerely,

Elisheva Carlebach
Director, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies
Salo Wittmayer Baron Professor of Jewish History, Culture and Society
This past summer, undergraduates and graduate students explored the depth and breadth of Jewish culture, literature, and history with support from the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, students were able to take part in unique immersive educational experiences, present papers at conferences, and partake in valuable research that takes part in unique immersive educational experiences, present papers at conferences, and partake in valuable research that serves their own scholarship and the field of Jewish Studies.

The essay below is one student’s reflection on this experience.

By Pamela Brenner, a Manhattan native, is a Yiddish Studies major at Barnard College. She is a YIVO Research Fellow and serves as president of the Yiddish Club of Columbia/Barnard Hillel. In addition to her academic interests, Pamela is involved in various Torah study initiatives. She is an alumna of the Migdal Oz Beit Midrash for Women.

When our journey first began in Krakow, Prof. Agi Lugutko bought a copy of Bashevis’s The Magician of Lublin in the Galicia Museum. Asking us who wants to read it first, I immediately responded, eager to finish as much as I could before our arrival in Lublin. Growing up, Bashevis was a household name, as he lived a few blocks from where my mother grew up, and my grandparents traveled with him to Sweden to accept the Nobel Prize in 1978. While in our bookshelves were stocked with his short stories and novels, the only story I could remember reading was Mayer Tzhevs (A Tale from Tzhevs) for a college course. And thus, I began to read Bashevis in Krakow. By the time we arrived in Lublin, I had only gotten through 30 pages, but was already hooked. Immersed in the world of nineteenth-century Poland, I could envision the interactions between Yasha Mazur, the tightrope-walking Jewish protagonist, and his Jewish and non-Jewish friends and lovers. For Yasha, each home provided a new opportunity for love, adventure and escape. While he was torn between his Jewish identity and the opportunities available if he abandoned his faith, Yasha’s tension arose because of the multicultural context in which he found himself. The Magician of Lublin paints a picture of a world that was written after it was already destroyed.

Even though the Jewish Lublin exists no longer, remnants of its Jewish past are being brought to life in innovative ways. Walking into the town square, the first thing that caught my eye was a tightrope with a statue of a tightrope walker balancing over the buildings. But while that statue to Yasha Mazur is ever-present, right next to the statue was a real tightrope walker! We had come just in time to catch the end of the Carnival of Magicians in Lublin, an exciting time for the town. Overpopulated with visitors, each nook and cranny was filled with magicians, performers, and spectators. After oohing and aahing at some of the performances, we met with Witek Dorobowski, director of the Retracing I.B. Singer Festival. Inspired by Bashevis’ stories that take place in 30 towns across Poland, Witek established the Festival Śladami Singera, as it’s known in Polish, to explore some of the magic and to invite the stories of those stories. The festival provides an opportunity for Poles to learn about the history of their towns, explore the world of pre-Holocaust Jewish Poland, and enjoy performances by world-class artists. Witek is not alone in his mission; he works for the Brama Grodzka (Grodzka Gate) Project, a cultural center in Lublin tasked with preserving the history of the town’s 45,000 Jewish residents prior to World War II. Under the auspices of Tomasz Pietraszwicz, the Project is located on the site of the historic gate that divided the Christian and Jewish quarters of the city, representing a multicultural meeting point. In addition to documenting the history of Jewish Lublin, and its decline, the group, also known as the NN Theatre, puts on performances of Jewish stories in Polish. Entirely run by Poles, the Brama Grodzka represents the fact that there are no Jews left in Lublin to tell their own stories. Tomasz and Witek, inspired by Singer’s portrayal of a multicultural Poland, are doing wonders to restore, in whatever ways possible, the memory of a community in which Jews and Poles lived side-by-side. Bashevis, who was adamant about writing solely in Yiddish, and sharply focused on depicting Jewish Poland, could not have imagined the impact that his works would have on Poles who see his tales as part of their own national history. Now a symbol of the possibility of multicultural unity, Yasha Mazur and the worlds in which he lived provides an opening for Jews and Poles to connect with each other and rebuild with love a world that was destroyed through hate. As long as people like Tomasz and Witek continue working to interweave Jewish and Polish history and culture, I can hope for a brighter future.

Pamela Brenner, a Manhattan native, is a Yiddish Studies major at Barnard College. She is a VIVITF Research Fellow and an ex-officio member of the Yiddish Club of Columbia/Barnard Hillel. In addition to her academic interests, Pamela is involved in various Torah study initiatives. She is an alumna of the Migdal Oz Beit Midrash for Women.
UNDERGRADUATE ISRAEL FELLOWSHIP

In the Summer of 2018, 29 students took part in the IIJS Undergraduate Israel Fellowship. As part of the Fellowship, students take part in pre-professional and academic programs and learning opportunities coordinated by the Institute in Israel and return to campus and take part in informal learning opportunities that range from film screenings to close encounters with renowned scholars. In addition, students create a community of learners engaged in Israel Studies.

195 IIJS Undergraduate Israel Fellows since 2010

2018 Fellows by the numbers:

WHERE THEY WERE BASED

- Jerusalem 38.5%
- Tel Aviv 26.9%
- Other 26.9%
- Internships 11.5%

WHAT THEY DID

- Research 24.9%
- Educational Programs 3.6%
- Study 3.6%

As a result of the fellowship...

- 65% of 2018 Fellows plan to read a book related to Israel and Jewish Studies
- 73% of 2018 Fellows plan to attend a cultural event related to Israel and Jewish Studies
- 85% of 2018 Fellows plan to attend an IIJS public program
- 100% of 2018 participants would recommend the fellowship to a friend

Thank you from the Fellows

I'm really glad this fellowship exists and I'm so glad I got to take part in it! Thank you!

I really had a great summer! Thank you for helping to make it possible.

Student experiences:

- Noah, Columbia College
  "I worked for a Biblical Studies professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was assisting him with his project, editing the standard New Jewish Publication Society’s translation of the Pentateuch in order to reflect his critical source splitting of the text. I became more interested in Pentateuchal studies and source criticism and would be interested in pursuing this field in the future.”

- Rachel, School of General Studies/Jewish Theological Seminary
  "This summer, I was a research assistant at the Insect Ecology Lab at Hebrew University’s campus in Rehovot. This summer and my time at this lab have solidified my desire to continue working in labs, with the eventual goal of doing my own research. My time here has given me a greater understanding and insight into what entomology research involves, which is important to me because I am considering graduate studies in entomology.”

- Shira, School of General Studies/Jewish Theological Seminary
  "I was an intern at the Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Institute’s Documentations Center for North African Jewry During WWII. At the Institute I did research on Jewish life in North Africa during the war… My experience at Ben Zvi enabled me to learn an incredible amount about the topic of Jews in North Africa and the Middle East and reaffirmed my desire to enter this field in the future. Additionally, I made great connections with the staff at the Institute and look forward to being in touch with them in the future.”

- Shoshana, School of General Studies/Jewish Theological Seminary
  "This summer, I was a research assistant at the Insect Ecology Lab at Hebrew University’s campus in Rehovot. This summer and my time at this lab have solidified my desire to continue working in labs, with the eventual goal of doing my own research. My time here has given me a greater understanding and insight into what entomology research involves, which is important to me because I am considering graduate studies in entomology.”

Educational Programs in Israel

- Gershon Gorenberg on Israeli settlements
- Screening of In Her Footsteps with Director Rana Abu-Fraiha
- Asaf Zamir on local Tel Aviv municipality
- African Refugee Development Center Tel Aviv walking tour
- Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz on “Hashgacha Pratit” (Alternative Kosher Supervision Project)
- Jerusalem Graffiti Tour

I interned and conducted research for the Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy headed by Ambassador Ron Prosor.

I gained a better understanding of the Israeli startup ecosystem and entrepreneurship in Israel.

Internship with Ifach Maakei Women Lawyers for Social Justice… I worked on comparative research projects about Gender Mainstreaming and Sexual Assault in the healthcare system.

I was a student at Hebrew University’s Rothberg Summer Program, where I took the Intensive Arabic Course.

I worked as an Analyst at Cukierman & Co. Investment House and Yaffo Capital, where I conducted research of the Israeli AI Industry.

I interned at a startup called GoWith, based in the startup accelerator in the Ariel College of Engineering.

Thank you from the Fellows

I’m really glad this fellowship exists and I’m so glad I got to take part in it! Thank you!

I really had a great summer! Thank you for helping to make it possible.
Dr. Daniel Herskowitz is joining IIJS for the 2018-19 academic year as the Rabin-Shvidler Postdoctoral Fellow. Herskowitz recently graduated from the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford in 2018 and completed his dissertation, titled *Which God will Save Us? Jewish Receptions of Martin Heidegger’s Philosophy*. His articles have been published or accepted for publication in various peer-reviewed journals, including *Modern Theology, Journal of Religion, New German Critique, Jewish Quarterly Review, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, AJS Review*, and *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*.

**How did you get involved with Jewish Studies?**

I guess I was always interested in ‘Jewish studies’, from Tanakh and Talmud to Jewish history, philosophy, and literature. It took me a while to get into ‘Jewish studies’ academically, though. My BA and MA degrees were in history and philosophy, but my master’s thesis, while written in the philosophy department, was finally dedicated to a ‘Jewish’ topic. My dissertation, written in the department of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, was on Jewish receptions of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy.

**What are you currently researching?**

I’m currently writing a little more on Heidegger and Jewish thought and then will start looking into my next research project: the philosophical, theological, and political horizons of a number of modern appropriations of Maimonides. I want to explore how the Rambam was portrayed and utilized in modern contexts, despite structural differences between Aristotelian and post-Kantian thinking.

**What are you most looking forward to teaching in your Spring course?**

I’m looking forward to teaching an introductory seminar on modern Jewish thought, from Spinoza to Levinas and feminist theology. It’ll be great to read all these classical texts again and try to think about them in a fresh way.

**You’re hosting a dinner party – who would you invite from any point in history?**

Well, probably my great-grandchildren or something like that.
On Monday, October 8, IIJS held the inaugural Miron Lecture on Jewish Literature. It was an incredibly special evening where we celebrated the career of the recently-retired Prof. Dan Miron and the scholarship of Prof. Chana Kronfeld in the field of Hebrew Literature. A sold-out audience ranging from the public to professors and students, had the opportunity to hear from Kronfeld on her latest investigation into The Land as Woman: The Afterlife of a Poetic Metaphor in Women’s Modern Hebrew Poetry. Kronfeld explored this metaphor from Biblical to Prophetic literature and into the present with poetry by Esther Raab, Yona Wallach, Adi Keissar and others. The following day, Kronfeld led a group of graduate students in a workshop entitled Queering Gender in Modern Hebrew Poetry. A special thank you to the Knapp Family Foundation for its support of this program.

"I wanted to put in writing how wonderful of an experience it was to have Chana Kronfeld here for both a lecture and a workshop. I’ve been following her work for years and I am always amazed by her sharp analytic skills, original ideas and passion for Jewish literature. Her visit provided an intimate insight to all these and more and allowed us to connect in an informal and friendly manner... During the workshop we got a taste of her new book (in progress) and I am grateful for the IIJS for allowing us to keep up with the forefront of scholarship in the field of Jewish Studies."

MIRON LECTURE ON JEWISH LITERATURE WITH CHANA KRONFELD
Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley

PUBLIC PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

10.17
Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History with Steven J. Zipperstein

10.29
Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-century America with Shari Rabin

11.12
Screening of Azimuth followed by Q & A with Dir. Mike Burstyn

11.29
Salo Baron New Voices in Jewish Studies: A Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Family: Challenging Stereotypes with Liat Maggid-Alon

From upper left corner clockwise: Rebecca Kobrin, Ilana Blumberg and Ari Goldman; Mike Burstyn with students; Steven J. Zipperstein and Jeremy Dauber; Shari Rabin

NOA TSAUSHU
Second Year Ph.D. Student, Germanics

"I wanted to put in writing how wonderful of an experience it was to have Chana Kronfeld here for both a lecture and a workshop. I’ve been following her work for years and I am always amazed by her sharp analytic skills, original ideas and passion for Jewish literature. Her visit provided an intimate insight to all these and more and allowed us to connect in an informal and friendly manner... During the workshop we got a taste of her new book (in progress) and I am grateful for the IIJS for allowing us to keep up with the forefront of scholarship in the field of Jewish Studies. "
GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

IEREZ DEGOLAN

Erez DeGolan is a third year Ph.D. student in Religion, with a concentration in classical rabbinic literature and late antique Mediterranean history. He was recently named the Morton Smith Fellow for 2018-19 through Columbia University’s History Department. With support from IJS, DeGolan presented a paper at the Oxford Symposium for Religious Studies and was selected to present work at the 2018 American Academy for Jewish Research’s Graduate Student Seminar. DeGolan recently published a book review and an essay on the Ancient Jew Review website.

MIRIAM SCHULZ

Miriam Schulz is a fifth year Ph.D. Candidate in Yiddish Studies. Schulz was awarded the 2018-2019 Harman Papa/Co Fellowship and the 2017 Scholarships Award for Ph.D. Students by the Moshe Mirskysha Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, Yad Vashem. Her article “Before the bow that was drawn”: the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, Yad Vashem. the Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on Jewish Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. in “Exiled, Saved: History and Memory of Polish Jewry organized by the Historical Society of Israel in Zichron Yaakov, Israel. Her IUS summer fellowship allowed her to conduct research in the National Library of Israel and the Central Archives for the History of Jewish People in Jerusalem. Currently, as an IUS Bloom Fellow, she is working on her master’s thesis “Protecting the Jewish Daughters: Migration, Trafficking, and the Fears of Jewish Women’s Mobility, 1880-1914” and gathering materials from New York’s archives and libraries for her doctoral dissertation.

ALEKSANDRA JAKUBCZAK

Aleksandra Jakubczak is a second year Ph.D. student of Jewish History based in the History Department. With support from IJS, she participated in a May 2018 workshop for young scholars of Eastern European and Russian Jewry at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Jakubczak presented a paper “Protecting the Jewish Daughters: Moral Panic and the Jewish Anti-Trafficking Campaign, 1880s-1914” in June 2018, she attended another workshop for young scholars of the history and culture of Polish Jewry organized by the Historical Society of Israel in Zichron Yaakov, Israel. Her IUS summer fellowship allowed her to conduct research in the National Library of Israel and the Central Archives for the History of Jewish People in Jerusalem. Currently, as an IUS Bloom Fellow, she is working on her master’s thesis “Protecting the Jewish Daughters: Migration, Trafficking, and the Fears of Jewish Women’s Mobility, 1880-1914” and gathering materials from New York’s archives and libraries for her doctoral dissertation.

SANDRA CHIRITESCU

Sandra Chiritescu is a fifth year Ph.D. candidate in Yiddish Studies. She is currently a Fellow in Academic Administration at Columbia University Press. She recently published a book review on Friedrich Gorenstein’s Redemption (Columbia University Press, 2018) in the Forverts. In addition, Chiritescu published translations of children’s stories in In the Land of Happy Tears (Penguin Random House, 2018). This past summer with the support of IJS, Chiritescu presented papers at various workshops including “Women’s Chairs and Liberation: Sonya, the agune, and Pheylis, the divorcee, in Blume Lampel’s Ballad of a Dream” at the Oxford Summer Institute in Modern and Contemporary Judaism and “Third-generation Graphic Witnessing in Amy Kurzweil’s Flying Couch and Julia Malekseyeva’s Soviet Daughter” at the Leo Baeck Summer University on Jewish Studies and Gender Studies.

ISHAI MISHORY

Ishai Mishory is a second year Ph.D. student and Teaching Fellow in the Department of Religion with a focus on Jewish Studies. In 2018, Mishory received a Summer Study/Research Travel Grant from IJS that allowed him to conduct research in Venice. In addition, he is the recipient of the 2018-2019 Irene C. Fromer Fellowship in Jewish Studies at Columbia University.

NOA TSAUSHU

Noa Tsaushu is a second year Ph.D. student in Yiddish Studies in the Department of Germanic Languages. Her areas of study include Eastern-European Yiddish avant-garde groups, visual and material culture of the Yiddish avant-garde, and Yiddish modernism in Ukraine in the 1920’s. Tsaushu recently presented “The Kultur-Lige Artist Studio: Jewish Art School in the Making, One Hundred Years of Happy Tears” at the Ukrainian and Jewish School in the Making, One Hundred Years of Happy Tears at the Kultur-Lige in the Ukrainian and Jewish Cultural Formation of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is the recipient of the 2018 Irene Kronhill Pletka Research Fellowship, a semester-long research fellowship for students awarded on the basis of academic achievement and Yiddish language aptitude. In addition, she received a 2018 Summer Research Grant from IJS.

GETTING TO KNOW... JORDAN KATZ

Jordan Katz (CC’11, GSAS ’16) is on the road to getting her Ph.D. under the direction of Prof. Elieheva Carlebach. As a Ph.D. candidate, Katz also serves as the IIJS University Seminar Rapporteur. In this role, she coordinates seminars by senior scholars for scholars. Jordan’s academic pursuits have taken her to the Netherlands, Germany, and Israel to research the role of Jewish women in and out of domestic life in early modern Europe.

How did you get involved with Jewish Studies?
I attended Columbia as an undergraduate and took a class with Professor Carlebach. I fell in love with Jewish history, and it was an easy decision to come back to Columbia for graduate school.

What are you currently researching?
I’m currently researching Jewish modernity in early modern Europe. That’s what my dissertation is about.

What books are you reading now?
Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History by Steven Zipperstein, Lake Success by Gary Sinyard, and countless articles and books on early modern medical cultural. I just finished Hen Kimelman’s The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth, which is a graphic biography of Hannah Arendt. So good and so beautifully drawn.

What are you most looking forward to this Spring?
I’m looking forward to completing an entire draft of my dissertation. Hopefully that will happen!

You’re hosting a dinner party – who would you invite from any point in history?
Gill of Hameln – I would love to interview her about her life. And I would serve her medlars (an apple-like fruit). She mentions these in her autobiography.

01
02
03
04
05
Columbia has been collecting Judaica since its founding in 1754. Hebrew was taught at Columbia as one of the classical languages (along with Greek and Latin), and so even in its early days, Hebrew books were part of collecting priorities. The Columbia University Archives contains a copy of the Psalms in Hebrew and Latin that had been owned by Columbia founder, Samuel Johnson, and includes the Greek formula that Johnson would use for the Columbia Convocation in the 18th century.

Hebrew’s prominence at Columbia during the early years is also evidenced by its ownership of the first book printed with Hebrew moveable type in the Americas: a Hebrew grammar printed by Judah Monis in Cambridge, MA, in 1735. A professor of Hebrew in the late 18th century at Columbia could not or would not use the book for his class; instead, Johann Kunze created his own grammar, and students created their own copies from his manuscript edition.

Of all of the colleges in the fledgling American colonies, King’s College (renamed Columbia after the American Revolution to remove any vestige of the monarchy that had just been overthrown) was the only institution to subscribe to the important critical edition of the Hebrew Bible produced by Benjamin Kennicott of England. The only subscribers from the Western Hemisphere (all included under the larger heading for England) were the College itself and two fellows of “Kings College, New York.” However, Columbia was involved in more than just purchasing the monumental volume. As is clear from a letter from Kennicott to then-president Myles Cooper, Columbia was also instrumental in bringing to England an important manuscript for Kennicott’s use. The manuscript was owned by the Simson family, whose son Samson gave a Hebrew address at Columbia’s Commencement in the year 1800, and they loaned the manuscript to Kennicott for his research. The courier was none other than Myles Cooper himself.

Jewish Studies flourished in many ways at Columbia in the following centuries, and the library continued to collect diverse materials relating to the Jewish experience. The rare Judaica collections presently span from the 10th to the 20th centuries, and globally from India to the Caribbean. The collections continue to grow thanks to the generosity of the Norman E. Alexander Foundation and other donors. Students are encouraged to utilize the materials in their research, and the books in the collection have been featured in many of the IIJS’ courses. This semester, a graduate seminar meets weekly in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library to discuss the history of the Jewish Book while turning the pages of centuries’ old Jewish books. The library is very proud of its long history of Judaica collection and research support, and is dedicated to continuing this fine work well into the future.

Michelle Chesner is the Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies.
BETH BERKOWITZ

Beth Berkowitz’s book Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud, was published in Spring 2018 by Cambridge University Press. She will be giving presentations this winter at the Association of Jewish Studies and at a conference on Animals at Antiquity at Brown University. Berkowitz will be presenting a Faculty Book Talk at 8:30 in April 2019.

TINA FRÜHAUF

Tina Frühauf recently published Experiencing Jewish Music in America: A Listener’s Companion.

YINON COHEN

Yinon Cohen published a number of articles including “Israel’s Bispapoliticka Politics: Territory, Demography, and Effective Control” in Public Culture along with Neve Gordon; and “Ethnic origin and identity in the Jewish population of Israel” in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, along with Noah Levin Epstein.

JEREMY DAUBER

Jeremy Dauber’s book Jewish Comedy. A Serious History, is out in paperback.

REBECCA KOBRIN


NAAMA HAREL


01 | How did you get involved with Yiddish Studies?

It’s a long story but I’ll make it short: I wanted to read Bashevis Singer in the original. I first read his works in the Polish translation and was captivated by his writing. I started learning Yiddish at the university - my family stopped speaking Yiddish before the First World War - and I was surprised to realize that Yiddish contained many Polish words. His works can be translated into other languages only by the English translations, which he called “second originals.” So the Polish words made an interesting journey in case of Bashevis’s works: from Polish to Yiddish, from Yiddish to English, and then from English back to Polish. I wanted to explore this phenomenon more deeply. At the time, I was getting a double degree in English Literature and Language and Translation Studies at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, so I wrote my master thesis on one of Bashevis’s stories, “The Last Demon.” I argued that translation is a cross-cultural event and that Bashevis is in fact untranslatable, even though he got the Nobel Prize for his works in translation.

This adventure with Bashevis, who is still my beloved Yiddish writer, made me realize that there is an entire world of Yiddish literature and culture that awaits explorers, researchers, and translators. Only about five percent of Yiddish literary works have been translated into other languages. So I decided to continue with my Yiddish studies. I consider myself very lucky: not only was I able to get my Ph.D. from Columbia University - which houses the oldest Yiddish Studies Program in the United States - but I am now also head of the Yiddish Language Program here at Columbia, where I teach Yiddish language and literature. I am thus fulfilling my life mission: to advance Yiddish studies and share my passion for Yiddish literature and culture with Columbia students.

02 | What are you currently researching?

I am currently completing my first academic book, which explores the motif of the dybbuk (a wandering soul that possesses a living body) in modern Jewish cultures. I was fascinated by the ongoing obsession with a Yiddish play by S. An-sky, The Dybbuk, Or Between Two Worlds (1914). There have been a lot of interpretations of dybbuk-related theater and film productions and adaptations created since the play’s world premiere in 1920. The Dybbuk, which is a hybrid of a Jewish romance and a modernist theatre, is arguably the most famous and most often performed play in Yiddish and Jewish theatre, and has in fact become a classic of world literature.

The questions that became a driving force behind my project included: Where are we still talking about dybbuks in the twenty-first century? What is so poignant in this present moment, emotional motif that speaks to so many in the age of postmodernism and secularization? In my book, Possessed by the Past: The Afterlife of the Dybbuk in Modern Jewish Cultural Imaginaries, I explore the evolution of the dybbuk in prewar classics, Holocaust narratives, feminist fiction, as well as in theater and film productions created in Yiddish, English, Hebrew, French, and Polish, using gender, trauma, memory, and performance as analytical categories.

This has been a very dear project to me and I look forward for the book to being out in the world.

03 | What books are you reading now?

I’m actually re-reading Bashevis in the original Yiddish now; I’m teaching an Advanced Yiddish class this semester, and it’s a dream come true to read Bashevis together with a group of my passionate students dedicated to Yiddish. My shelf is piled up with many wonderful recently published studies, such as Vivi Lachs’ Whitechapel/Noize: Jewish Immigrant Life in Yiddish Song and Verse, London 1884-1914, Susanne Schneider’s Mandatory Separation: Religion, Education, and Mass Politics in Palestine, and Shachar Pinsker’s A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture. Susanne and Vivi recently gave fantastic book talks for the Columbia community and it’s great to continue the conversation by reading their works.

04 | What are some highlights from the recent semesters?

There are quite a few! Firstly, thanks to a very generous support from the Naomi Foundation and the Irene Kronish Pletka Foundation, we are very happy to be able to offer new fellowships for students of Polish and Yiddish language and literature. The Naomi Hall Fellowship, created in 2017, enables students to go abroad to Poland and other Yiddish language speaking countries. This year, we received a Naomi Hall Fellowship which enabled me to participate in the Naomi Prawer Bazar International Yiddish Summer Program at Tel Aviv University, followed by a week-long stay trip to Eastern Europe, which included visits to Prague, Bratislava, Krakow, and Krakow, where I participated in the recently launched Irene Kronish Pletka 1930 Fellowship which brings 45-50 of our students on an intensive 2-year odyssey to Poland to explore Yiddish culture, while reﬁning their research skills. The results of these recent developments are tangible: the full enrollment in Yiddish language courses has increased over 150% since 2013, and we now have four declared majors and one concentrator in Yiddish studies, for the first time in many years! Secondly, I am beyond thrilled to announce that this year, two of my students, Pammy Brenner and Michal Novak, recently reactivated the Columbia/Barnard Hillel Yiddish Club and are actively promoting Yiddish on campus. This Fall, the student club organized a Yiddish workshop and a student Yiddish-speaking Shabbat dinner, which was attended by 30 students. I shop watching seeing their involvement! And finally, during our recent Yiddish event, Vivi Lachs’ talk talk, a newly-wed Yiddish-speaking couple, (the bride is my former Yiddish student), told me that they ﬁrst met during the Yiddish kave-sho she runs monthly at Columbia. It seems I may add another skill to my resume - matchmaking!

05 | You’re hosting a Yiddish dinner party – who would you invite from any point in history? And what would you serve?

What a great question! I’d definitely invite Cala Drapkin, an underappreciated Yiddish poet who revolutionized Yiddish poetry with her bold explorations of gender, sexuality, and the body. Bold erotic motifs in Drapkin’s poetry shocked her contemporaries, while her poems, written mostly in the 1920s and 30s, sound au courant in the twenty-ﬁrst century. I’m writing an article about gender dynamics in her poetry and would love to get some face-to-face time with Drapkin. And if I could invite more guests, I’d love to hang out with Royzl Fishls, the ﬁrst documented Yiddish woman writer, who wrote the preface and set off to print a Yiddish translation of the Book of Psalms, in 1586, in my hometown of Krakow. In terms of food, I’d probably go for modern renditions of traditional Ashkenazi dishes, and for dessert, I’d make ricotta khremtslekh with plum jam. It’s a typical Passover dish, but ever since I learned the recipe during a delightful Pesach cooking workshop Irene Kronish Pletka led for our Yiddish students last spring, it’s been a favorite in my house.

06 | You’re getting to know... Agi Legutko

Dr. Agnieszka Legutko is a lecturer in Yiddish and the Director of the Yiddish Language Program in the Department of Geographical Languages.
SPRING 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

JEWISH STUDIES
CLASSES SAMPLER

- INTRODUCTION TO MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT
- JOURNALIST AS A HISTORIAN
- MAGIC AND MONSTERS IN YIDDISH LITERATURE
- MEDIEVAL JEWISH CULTURES
- MODERN JEWISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
- MODERNISM, NATIONALISM, REVIVAL: READINGS IN MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE
- TOPICS IN ISRAELI CINEMA

SPRING 2019 PUBLIC PROGRAMS

IINSTITUTE FOR ISRAEL AND JEWISH STUDIES
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Programs Relating to Anti-Semitism

IIJS is partnering with various campus constituents to host a series of public programs, conferences, and courses that explore the history, literature, and language of anti-Semitism.

- A panel discussion with Teacher’s College entitled Anti-Semitism Today: How Are Hate Crimes On The Rise In The US?
- A lecture on Heidegger & the Jews with Daniel Herskowitz
- A Book Talk with David Fishman on Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis
- An Anti-Semitism in the Americas conference
- A panel discussion with Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism entitled Don’t Panic, Don’t Ignore: How to Report on Hate

For more details, visit iijs.columbia.edu.

ALL EVENTS ARE FREE TO THE PUBLIC & ADVANCED REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

PLEASE VISIT IIJS.COLUMBIA.EDU FOR THE MOST UP TO DATE EVENT INFORMATION.
Who’s ever heard of Cora Wilburn, the first Jewish novelist in America? At nineteen, she’d traveled the world and disdained its corruption. Clawing her way out of poverty as the Civil War divided the United States, she traded her needle for a pen, fighting for women’s rights, abolition, and her own freedom to rejoin the Jewish people. Hear from Jonathan D. Sarna as he shares the life and literature of this extraordinary woman, whose newly-discovered diary contains some poignant words in Yiddish.

Jonathan D. Sarna is University Professor and the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University, where he directs the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies. He is also the Chief Historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia and chair of the Academic Advisory and Editorial Board of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati. His many books include AMERICAN JUDAISM: A HISTORY, soon to appear in a second edition.
GET INVOLVED

Join us at our public events
Learn more about Friends of the Institute
Give back and support our students and faculty

THANK YOU

Thank you to all our donors for supporting Columbia University’s center for the academic study and discussion of Jewish life, history, and culture.

Your support allows students to explore their interests in Jewish Studies, encourages dialogue and discourse at our events, and allows faculty to conduct research that further nourishes scholarship.

“...everything that it presents to the public are unique and extremely important. The intellectual level of the Institute’s work and programs is on par with that of the rest of Columbia University, which is, of course, top notch. The Institute researches and presents programs about subjects that no other institution addresses—whether in the fields of literature, cinema, history or current events and so much more—and it does so, without political, denominational or other bias. The ILJS is a precious gem that requires and deserves all of the support that the community (whether in NYC or elsewhere) can contribute and I enthusiastically invite others to join me in helping to provide such assistance.”

DAVID P. STONE
Columbia College ’67

“The Undergraduate Israel Fellowship allowed me the opportunity to forge a bond with a place that I previously had little connection to. Happy to report that I am currently back in Israel on a one-year fellowship with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Feels great to be back in a place that now feels like home, and I’m thrilled to be able to support the ILJS that made that possible to begin with.”

DEBORAH SACHARE
Barnard College ’12

Thank you to all our donors for supporting Columbia University’s center for the academic study and discussion of Jewish life, history, and culture.

Your support allows students to explore their interests in Jewish Studies, encourages dialogue and discourse at our events, and allows faculty to conduct research that further nourishes scholarship.

“...everything that it presents to the public are unique and extremely important. The intellectual level of the Institute’s work and programs is on par with that of the rest of Columbia University, which is, of course, top notch. The Institute researches and presents programs about subjects that no other institution addresses—whether in the fields of literature, cinema, history or current events and so much more—and it does so, without political, denominational or other bias. The ILJS is a precious gem that requires and deserves all of the support that the community (whether in NYC or elsewhere) can contribute and I enthusiastically invite others to join me in helping to provide such assistance.”

DAVID P. STONE
Columbia College ’67

“The Undergraduate Israel Fellowship allowed me the opportunity to forge a bond with a place that I previously had little connection to. Happy to report that I am currently back in Israel on a one-year fellowship with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Feels great to be back in a place that now feels like home, and I’m thrilled to be able to support the ILJS that made that possible to begin with.”

DEBORAH SACHARE
Barnard College ’12