

Jewish Studies

The Jewish Studies Program was founded in 1971. It provides Oberlin College students with a curriculum through which they can explore Jewish history and Judaism from antiquity to the present. The program combines rigorous academic education with an innovative social setting. At its core are two full-time faculty members in Jewish Studies. Shulamit Magnus teaches Jewish cultural and social history, including the history of women. Abe Socher teaches Jewish thought and rabbinic texts. In addition, associated faculty in the Religion Department teach courses on Hebrew Bible and early Jewish-Christian relations that may be taken for Jewish Studies credit. The Program offers a two-semester sequence in Modern Hebrew. A full range of introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses, seminars, and private reading courses is offered. An award is offered for Best Paper in Jewish Studies to recognize superior work. In addition to the academic program, students may explore areas of Jewish interest through the JWST program house, Johnson House (see below), by attending programs of Hillel and other student organizations, and by eating at Kosher Co-op.

Majors

The Jewish Studies Program offers both a Major and a Minor. For details please see the College course catalog. Our majors and minors have gone on to academic careers, the rabbinate, Jewish education and communal work, as well as to careers in a host of professional settings, enriched by grounding in Jewish historical experience and texts and instruction in critical thinking, reasoned argumentation, writing, and collegial study gained in the JWST program.

Honors

Qualified students may be admitted to the Honors Program in Jewish Studies, in which students pursue an advanced research project under close supervision of Jewish Studies faculty. Our first honors student, Jessica Montell, received the Leah D. Freed Memorial Prize in 1990 for her honors thesis on "Identity, Nation, Duty: Women in the Military and the Family in Israel," which was subsequently published in the journal *Bridges*. Tamara Cofman's thesis, "Under the Big Tent: Jewish Communal Identification and the Development of Zionism in Cleveland, 1945-1970," received Highest Honors.

Language Study

The Jewish Studies Program offers two semesters of Hebrew and has also been able to offer Intermediate Hebrew and Yiddish as private readings. An award for intensive language study of any Jewish language (Hebrew; Yiddish; Ladino; Judeo-Arabic), taken at approved programs off campus, is also offered.

Johnson House

Johnson House, the Jewish Studies program dormitory, was founded in 1969 by students as a Winter Term Project under the name Hebrew House. Thereafter, it developed into a fully funded and integral part of the program. Situated in a renovated turn-of-the-century Queen Anne style mansion, the House is home to thirty-four students, many of whom are majors in the program. With its library, fireplace and homey lounges, the House provides a comfortable atmosphere for informal discussions, language study, and a variety of cultural, religious, social and academic programs, which supplement the curriculum of Jewish Studies. A weekly "Hebrew Table" and Israeli dancing are some of the events now sponsored by Johnson House.

Kosher-Halal Co-op

Kosher-Halal Co-op is a member of the Oberlin Students Cooperative Association and is run through student funds and labor. It is an intimate cooking and dining facility on campus where students can learn about kashrut as well as the responsibilities involved in ordering, storing, preparing, serving, and cleaning up after their own meals. It provides a setting for socializing and learning, as well as a weekly Shabbat dinner open to the entire campus community. It also provides a setting for Muslim students who require halal food.

Student Organizations and Activities

The largest of Oberlin's Jewish student organizations is Hillel, directed by Rabbi Shimon Brand. Hillel facilitates a broad range of student religious, social, political, cultural and educational activities. Other organizations include the Oberlin Zionists and the Jewish Advocacy Group. Students also gain experience teaching in Hebrew schools in the nearby towns of Lorain and Sandusky.

Lectures and Special Events

The Jewish Studies Program regularly hosts outstanding figures in contemporary Jewish scholarship, as well as significant political and literary figures. Among such visiting faculty were Raul Hilberg, Ross Brann, Nechama Tec, Ilan Stavans, Elliot Ginsburg, Amos Oz, Yehuda Amichai, Arthur Green, Raphael Patai, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Rachel Biale, David Biale, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky.

Over the years, the annual David Hyman B'nai B'rith Lecture in Judaism has brought nationally and internationally prominent speakers to the campus. In 1996, the program inaugurated the annual Lubicki-Rosen lectures on the Holocaust. Students have the opportunity to meet informally with our guests for information and discussion.

Study Away

Students regularly spend a semester or more in Israel, Europe, England, or in other U.S. institutions, taking a variety of Jewish Studies courses, with credits transferable. The Jewish Studies Program at Oberlin provides an academic program of remarkable reach for its size to students wishing to concentrate in this area while also offering Oberlin students from other departments the opportunity to learn about Judaism and Jewish history, society and culture. It forms an integral part of the liberal arts education at Oberlin.

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