

THE HAROLD SCHNITZER FAMILY PROGRAM IN JUDAIC STUDIES AT PSU PRESENTS

The Fourth Annual Gus & Libby Solomon Lecture

Dedicated to exploring the American Jewish experience and the ideals of social justice promoted by the Solomons throughout their lifetime.

In Search of American Jewish Heritage

Beth Wenger is Associate Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania where she serves as Director of the Jewish Studies Program. Wenger's most recent book, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America* (Doubleday, 2007) was named a National Jewish Book Award finalist. The book is a companion volume to the 2008 PBS documentary, *The Jewish Americans*, and Wenger served on the board of distinguished scholars advising the series. She is also the author of *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise*, published by Yale University Press in 1996 and awarded the Salo Baron Prize in Jewish History from the American Academy of Jewish Research.

Monday, March 2, 2009
7 pm, Admission Free

Smith Memorial Student Union Ballroom (3rd Floor)
PSU Campus, 1825 SW Broadway

For more information contact Linda Maizels
at lmaizels@pdx.edu or call 503-725-4023

PSU Collaborations: Jewish Music, Israeli Writing

The **Jewish Theater Collaborative** will return to PSU this summer with a new series of staged readings of contemporary Israeli plays.

In 2009, PSU Judaic Studies is working with the **Ernest Bloch Legacy Project** to commemorate fifty years since the death of this major Jewish composer. British musicologist **Alexander Knapp** will be delivering a series of lectures on Jewish music, and there will be a performance of the Baal Shem Suite.

In Fall 2009, the **Schusterman Foundation** is bringing an Israeli writer-in-residence to PSU. **David Ehrlich** is the author of two collections of short stories. He is also a journalist, an army officer, and the owner of *Tmol Shilshom*, Jerusalem's famous literary café.



Beth Wenger

Upcoming Events

February 19: *Virtual Jews: Reviving Community Memories among Moroccan Jews in Cyberspace*

Professor Aomar Boum
University of Arizona, 7:30 pm

April 26: *Why Chassidism Didn't Spread to the West*

Professor Shaul Stampfer
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

June 1: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the Interwar USSR*

Professor Jonathan Dekel-Chen
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies
Portland State University
PO Box 751
Portland, OR 97207

Academic Programs: 503-725-3085
Community Outreach: 503-725-4023
www.judaic.pdx.edu

Michael Weingrad, *Academic Director*
Aaron Pearlman, *Community Outreach Director*
Linda Maizels, *Community Outreach Coordinator*
Bob Liebman, *Director Emeritus*
Rabbi Joshua Stampfer, *Honorary Chair*



The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies

Focusing on Jews & Judaism in Modernity

FEBRUARY 2009

From the Director

PROFESSOR MICHAEL WEINGRAD



This fall at PSU was exhilarating as we welcomed a wonderful new member of the Judaic Studies faculty to PSU. Professor Natan Meir holds the Lorry I. Lokey Chair in Judaic Studies. A dynamic teacher and first-rate scholar, he demonstrates a passion for Jewish history and culture.

Professor Meir's arrival capped a year of exciting growth for the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies at PSU. We recall highlights from the past year's rich calendar of events, from musician Debbie Friedman's performance to benefit the Sara Glasgow Cogan scholarship, to the third annual Gus & Libby Solomon Lecture delivered by literary scholar Alan Mintz of JTS. We celebrated Israel's 60th birthday with theater performances by the Jewish Theater Collaborative, and we witnessed the much anticipated launch of a Portland Hillel program that is already energizing Jewish student life at PSU and other campuses.

The growth of PSU Judaic Studies has been made possible by your generosity, and we hope you will continue your support, ensuring that Judaic Studies remains a strong and permanent feature of PSU's campus and Portland's intellectual life. Your gifts will help endow a fourth permanent faculty position, the Rabbi Joshua Stampfer Professorship in Israel Studies, and make permanent the annual Gus & Libby Solomon Lecture. As a Friend of Judaic Studies, you can provide scholarships for students concentrating in Judaic Studies, fund new faculty research and courses, and expand library acquisitions.

As always, I want to express my gratitude to this community for its warm support, and to you, our donors, for your pivotal, ongoing role in building this superb program.

Natan Meir Holds Lokey Chair

Natan Meir was born in Jerusalem and raised in New Jersey and Quebec. After a Jewish day school education, he earned a B.A. in History at Columbia University and then spent several years (including one in Israel) working for non-profit organizations before returning to New York to begin a Ph.D. program in Jewish history at Columbia. Meir earned two Master's degrees before completing his dissertation on the history of the Jewish community in imperial Kiev—in the course of which he spent extended periods of time in Ukraine, Russia, and Israel—and receiving his Ph.D. in 2003. He taught briefly at the University of Maryland and Oberlin College before taking up

a full-time position at the University of Southampton in the U.K. There, Meir headed up a new East European initiative within the university's Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations. In 2007–08, Meir spent a sabbatical in Israel as a postdoctoral fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Meir's scholarly interest is modern Jewish history, focusing on the social and cultural history of East European Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His first book, *Kiev: Jewish Metropolis, 1861–1914*, is forthcoming from Indiana University Press, and he is currently at work on a study of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as orphans and the disabled, within nineteenth-century East European Jewish communities. At Portland State, Meir will teach a wide range of courses in modern Jewish history including the Holocaust, Introduction to Judaism, and an upper-level course on East European Jewish history. Possible offerings for the future include an introduction to Jewish political movements (including Zionism) and a course on Hasidism.

Meir first became interested in Eastern Europe after learning Russian as an undergraduate and spending a semester in St. Petersburg. His affinity for the Russian language, as well as for Hebrew and Yiddish; his curiosity about the common, East European roots of American Jewish and Israeli Jewish culture; and his passion for history led him to his decision to do doctoral work in Russian-Jewish history and to devote his career to understanding and investigating the modern Jewish experience in Eastern Europe.

Since his graduate school days, Meir has been involved in community and adult education, and has taught courses and given lectures across a wide range of venues throughout the U.S. and Europe. "While I enjoy the enthusiasm and curiosity of college students, older adults bring a measure of experience and wisdom to the study of history which I find refreshing. Moreover, the Jewish community setting allows me to step out of a purely academic role and to encourage people to use Jewish history to enrich their own connection to Judaism and to Jewish identity." He looks forward to making modern Jewish history accessible and inspiring not only to students at PSU but also to the wider Portland community.



Natan Meir



2008 Events & Highlights

February: Israeli Consul General **David Akov** and his German counterpart **Rolf Schuette** discussed the special relationship between their two countries, in a campus event sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland Community Relations Committee.

March: **Mark Rosenblum**, founder of Americans for Peace Now, analyzed developments in the Middle East in a breakfast talk at Smith Center.

April: The fourth annual Gus and Libby Solomon Lecture was delivered by Professor **Alan Mintz** of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. In a talk titled *Owning Our Culture: How Jews Can Thrive in Twenty-first Century America*, Professor Mintz meditated on the challenges of Jewish continuity in our open society.

May: Musician **Debbie Friedman** performed to a crowd of hundreds at the MJCC while more than one hundred people also heard her in conversation with long-time friend and Judaic Studies supporter Rabbi Alan Berg, in an event that honored the first recipients of the Sara Glasgow Cogan scholarship.

Professor **Shaul Stampfer** of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem returned to his hometown and lectured on *The Economic and Demographic Background of the Hasidic Movement*.

June: **Hannah Pressman**, Hazel Cole Fellow in Jewish Studies at the University of Washington, delivered a talk on Israeli autobiography in honor of Israel's sixtieth birthday.

July: Over 200 people attended a series of staged readings of contemporary Israeli plays performed by members of the **Jewish Theatre Collaborative**, followed by lively talk-back sessions with Dr. **Aart Lovenstein**, Reed professors **Kambiz Ghannibaseri** and **Steven Wasserstrom**, and NPR broadcaster **Emily Harris**.

September: The Northwest Institute for Judaic Studies celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a three-day conference held at PSU on *The Impact of Émigrés from the Former Soviet Union on America and Israel*. Professor **Zvi Gitelman** of the University of Michigan and human rights scholar and activist **William Korey** were the keynote speakers.

October: Israeli writer and filmmaker **Etgar Keret** read and discussed his stories before a group of 60 students and faculty at PSU. In the evening he spoke at the Hollywood Theater to a crowd of more than 150 after a screening of his film *Jellyfish*, which won the Camera d'Or Prize at Cannes. Cosponsors included Portland Hadassah, the Oregon Area Jewish Committee, and Portland Hillel.



Etgar Keret

November: A series of faculty research-in-progress talks commenced, cosponsored by PSU English, PSU History, and Phi Alpha Theta. Presenters included professors **John Ott** and **Lee Medovoi**.

December: Professor **Michael Weingrad** joined a panel to discuss interfaith marriage and the documentary *Out of Faith*, cosponsored by the Mittelman Jewish Community Center and the Portland Kollel.



Debbie Friedman

Faculty Projects

Michael Weingrad is under way on a study of writing by American immigrants to Israel. He is particularly interested in Reuven Ben-Yosef (1937-2001), who was born Robert Reiss to an assimilated New York family and, after immigrating to Israel in 1959, became a superb Hebrew poet. In June Weingrad traveled to Los Angeles to interview members of Ben-Yosef's family.

Professor **John Ott** was invited to participate in the National Endowment of the Humanities Institute on the Holy Land, held in summer 2008 at Oxford University. This program brought together scholars from Israel and the United States and examined the concept of Holy Land in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ott is preparing a new two-course sequence on Holy Land in the major monotheistic traditions, which he will teach as part of both the History and Judaic Studies programs at PSU.

Weingrad's and Ott's summer research were partly funded through the generosity of professor emeritus and long-time Judaic Studies supporter Nathan Cogan.

Adjunct faculty member **Linda Maizels** was invited to participate in a summer 2008 research workshop titled *Studying Antisemitism in the 21st Century: Manifestations, Implications, Consequences* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This two-week program brought together 18 scholars from eight countries to present their research and discuss contemporary issues. Maizels is finishing her doctorate at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Meet Our Students

Born and raised in Portland, **Rumaitha Mohammad** started taking Hebrew at PSU in 2007. She is now in second year Hebrew, one year behind her sister Ihssan, who turned her on to Hebrew by introducing her to PSU Hebrew instructor Ayal Yariv. Growing up in an observant Muslim family, she has always had a strong interest in religion, and as a teenager, she began to read about religion online. She was especially intrigued by Judaism, since Jews, Moses and other Jewish prophets, and the Torah are mentioned in the Qur'an. Was what the bloggers and posters were saying online about Judaism and other religions true? Rumaitha was not satisfied with what other people were telling her, so she decided to go to the source and began to read the Torah on her own. When she discovered that she could study Hebrew at PSU, she was delighted; now she could read the Torah in the original without having to rely on translations, which—as she knows from the translations of the Qur'an that she has read—are often full of inaccuracies. “One of the six articles of faith in Islam is believing in God's holy books, and the Torah is one of those,” she explains. Learning Hebrew has also given her and Ihssan a “secret language” that no one else in their circles understands.

Although Rumaitha's parents have never opposed her study of Hebrew and Judaism, she has encountered some hostility from fellow Muslims at the mosque or online. But she has always been an independent-minded person: “I've never wanted to be a sheep following the herd.” She rejects generalizations and stereotypes. In winter term 2008, she took Modern Jewish History with Professor Natan Meir, and was happy to have the chance to look more deeply into the roots of Jewish culture and politics, including Zionism and the Israeli-Arab conflict. “Learning history teaches you not to make assumptions, but to truly understand the situation...I want to understand everything from start to finish.”

Rumaitha never intended to do the Judaic Studies minor at PSU, but she is now planning on taking more courses in the program, “and if I do the minor along the way, that's fine.” Along with her continuing study of Hebrew, she is registering for Meir's Holocaust course and may also take the new “Introduction to Judaism,” to be offered in Spring 2009.

At 81 years of age, **Otto Szekely** is an avid participant in PSU's senior learning program, which enables community members to audit courses. A retired physician who has lived in Portland for 24 years,



Szekely was born into a Hungarian-Jewish family, survived the Holocaust as a teenager, and built a successful career in Budapest in the decades after World War II. Although his first courses at PSU were in the Art History and English

departments, he found himself attracted to Judaic Studies courses because of his curiosity about his own history. The questions that Judaic Studies asks about all aspects of the Jewish experience: identity,

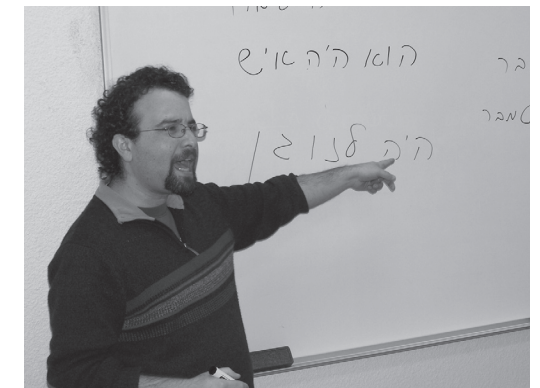
integration, antisemitism—“these are my problems,” says Szekely. “I am part of modern Jewish history.” He is most interested in understanding how contemporary historians comprehend and analyze the events that he witnessed—and suffered through—as a young man. “The further away I get from the Holocaust, the more curious I am about it.” Szekely has been taking Judaic Studies courses since the founding of the program, from Michael Weingrad's Modern Jewish Literature survey to Natan Meir's course in modern Jewish history, and plans to continue doing so in the coming months and years.

Heather Brunner is this year's undergraduate recipient of the Sara Glasgow Cogan Scholarship. Heather has always had an interest in the study of religion. After taking Professor Weingrad's Introduction to Judaism course she was inspired to complete the Judaic Studies Minor. “I came away from that course with my questions answered but also with more questions,” she says.

She is working this term as an intern at the Oregon Jewish Museum, doing research for an upcoming exhibition by examining materials in the OJM's archives and developing ideas for exhibit themes. “I have really enjoyed my experience with the OJM,” she says. “Portland is very lucky to have a resource like the OJM available and the dedicated group of people who make it possible.” The feeling is mutual, as OJM director Judy Margles calls Heather “exceptional...another gifted intern from PSU.”



After completing her BA, Heather plans to continue on to a Master's Degree in Library Science, and hopes to continue working with the OJM and its Oral History Project. “My ultimate goal is to pursue a career in Archives and Preservation Management through a library, within the framework of a museum or historical society.”



Instructor Ayal Yariv's dynamic Hebrew classes have become popular at PSU, and draw community students as well.