American University Welcomes Michael Brenner as First Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies

College of Arts and Sciences Dean Peter Starr has announced the hiring of Dr. Michael Brenner as the first Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies. “Dr. Brenner is a world-renowned historian who brings a prolific record of scholarship to AU,” said Dean Starr. “We are indebted to Lillian and Seymour Abensohn for having the vision to create a permanent chair in this young field which American University helped to create.”

Dr. Brenner built the first and only program in Jewish history and culture in Germany at the Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich. The study of Israel is a large part of this academic program. Dr. Brenner will take an extended leave of absence from the University of Munich in order to build up the Israel Studies program at AU. He has written six books, co-authored many journals and edited major Jewish Studies book series. A revised edition of his book Zionism: A Brief History has just been published.

After studies in Heidelberg and Jerusalem, Dr. Brenner received a Ph.D. in Jewish history from Columbia University. He has taught previously at Indiana University and Brandeis University, and served as visiting professor at Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, University of California, Berkeley, the University of Haifa, the Central European University of Budapest, and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. As Ina Levine Invitational Scholar Fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Professor Brenner conducted research on, “German-Jewish History in Modern Times.” Dr. Brenner will join the AU faculty in 2013.

Vision for Israel Studies
by Michael Brenner

It is an honor to join American University as the Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies. AU was a pioneer in the field of Israel Studies and is positioned to remain a major center in this rapidly expanding academic field. AU’s setting in the capital of the United States allows us to draw upon a diverse political and international community. We will educate the future generation of journalists, politicians, lawyers, and academics with a balanced view of what Israel was, is, and can be.

My vision is that Israel Studies at AU will become an international forum, embracing diverse perspectives, ideas, and cultures—just like Israel itself. I plan to further strengthen AU’s connections with academics and institutions in Israel. We will offer a broad range of classes and will continue to emphasize study in Israel as part of the Israel Studies curriculum.

The program will provide a forum for debate and education. Two conferences are already in the planning stages. This spring we will examine the relationships
WELCOME NEW COLLEAGUES


Copulsky is on leave from his position as Director of Judaic Studies at Goucher College. He was previously Assistant Professor and Director of Judaic Studies at Virginia Tech, and has taught at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) and Indiana University. He holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

DAN ARBELL, Scholar in Residence, is a 25 year veteran of the Israeli Foreign Service, serving in senior posts overseas in the UN, the US and Japan, and holding senior positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Headquarters in Jerusalem. Most recently he was Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC and worked as Ambassador Michael Oren’s second in command for nearly three years (2009-2012). He is teaching Politics and Public Policy in Israel and Arab-Israeli Relations and consulting to the director of the Center for Israel Studies.

DANA HERCBERGS joins the faculty as the Abensohn Postdoctoral Fellow in Israel Studies. She earned her doctorate in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. As a post-doctoral fellow at American University, she will work on a book based on her dissertation research: Narratives in a Divided City: Childhood and Memory in Jerusalem, 1948-2008. She will teach the following courses: History of Israel, The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Historic and Cultural Perspectives, and Divided Cities in the 21st Century.

Holocaust Studies Forum

Inaugurated in fall 2009, the Holocaust Studies Forum connects top scholars in the field of Holocaust research with American University students and the broader public in a series of lectures and discussions. The forum is jointly sponsored by the Jewish Studies Program, Department of History, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.

The 2011-2012 lectures were:

- “Jewish Survivors in Occupied Germany: Close Encounters and Entangled Histories,” Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art), 2011-12 Diane and Howard Wohl Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, USHMM.
- “Jewish Theological Responses to the Holocaust,” Steven Katz (Boston University), 2011-12 J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.
- “Pillage and Killings of Jews by their Neighbors,” Dr. Jan Gross (Princeton University), 2011-2012 Sosland Foundation Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- “Together and Apart: Jewish Studies at Polish Universities Between the Two World Wars,” Natalia Aleksiun (Touro College), 2012 Pearl Resnick Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.
From solar-powered water heaters to hydrogen-fueled cars, the significant impact Israel has made as an innovator in green technology and the push for a more sustainable society is unexpected from a country of Israel’s small physical size. “Israel is unusually good at looking at problems and then taking solutions from lab to venture to commercialization,” says Erran Carmel, a professor in the Kogod School of Business and one of the coordinators, with CIS, for last February’s packed Greener, Cleaner, Better: Israeli Innovation in Greentech symposium. “Israel has had the unusual characteristic of being highly isolated and threatened for over 60 years and has no energy sources in fossil fuels.” This isolation, which was originally characterized as a disadvantage, has spurred a wave of green innovation in Israel by necessity.

The keynote speaker for the all-day symposium was Michael Granoff, head of oil independence policies for Better Place, an Israeli-American company working to produce transportation infrastructure to support electric vehicles. He explained how his firm is overcoming historical objections to all-electric vehicles, such as their limited range and relatively high cost.

An array of distinguished speakers included Eli Groner, Israel’s minister for Economic Affairs to the United States; Jack Gilron and Eilon Adar from the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; and Andrea Yonah, a representative of the U.S.-Israel Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation, which offers up to $1 million to U.S. and Israeli companies that jointly develop and commercialize innovative technologies. Many green entrepreneurs like Brad Dockser of Green Generation Solutions attended, and said they found the Israeli case studies useful.

“There are few nations in the world that are on par with Israel on green innovation and on a per capita basis, Israel may be first,” says Carmel. “Israel has a unique role for government action, in active partnership with universities and the private sector, to take the lead in developing green and alternative energy technology.”

KSB Professor Richard Linowes organized a team of student volunteers who researched and created displays about 45 of the most innovative Israeli Greentech companies.

The symposium, which was scheduled to coincide with the Jewish holiday of Tu B’shevat (the New Year for Trees, Israel’s Earth Day), had several sponsors. At AU they were the College of Arts and Sciences’ Center for Israel Studies and Environmental Science Program, the Kogod School of Business (KSB) and its MS in Sustainability Management Program, the School of International Service Global Environmental Politics Program, the School of Public Affairs Center for Environmental Policy, and the AU Office of Sustainability.

The event was also sponsored by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the Embassy of Israel, as well as Nixon Peabody LLP and Honest Tea.

AU Hosts Greentech Conference on Tu B’shevat

Adapted from AU web article by Josh Halpren

From solar-powered water heaters to hydrogen-fueled cars, the significant impact Israel has made as an innovator in green technology and the push for a more sustainable society is unexpected from a country of Israel’s small physical size. “Israel is unusually good at looking at problems and then taking solutions from lab to venture to commercialization,” says Erran Carmel, a professor in the Kogod School of Business and one of the coordinators, with CIS, for last February’s packed Greener, Cleaner, Better: Israeli Innovation in Greentech symposium. “Israel has had the unusual characteristic of being highly isolated and threatened for over 60 years and has no energy sources in fossil fuels.” This isolation, which was originally characterized as a disadvantage, has spurred a wave of green innovation in Israel by necessity.

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Above: Greentech keynote speaker Michael Granoff in AU’s LEED-certified SIS Building.

Left: Noah Nunez-Gross, SIS ’14, with his research for the Israeli Innovation in Greentech conference. That experience led to a recommendation from CIS for a rewarding summer internship with the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace.

Speakers for January 2012 CIS-hosted event, “The Knowledge Economy Triangle: India, Israel, and the United States”: Dr. Maina Chawla Singh, American University; Nissim Reuben, American Jewish Committee; Stanley Bergman, Chairman and CEO of Henry Schein, Inc. and co-chair, India-Israel Business Forum; Ambassador Arun Singh, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India; Ohad Cohen, Minister for Trade, Embassy of Israel; KSB Dean Michael Ginzburg, moderator. Co-sponsored by CIS, KSB, Embassy of India, Embassy of Israel, American Jewish Committee and the Virginia Israel Advisory Board (Office of the Governor).
FOCUS ON ARTS & CULTURE

Israeli Love Story
Eighty-four year old Israeli actress and playwright Pnina Gary waited 60 years to write An Israeli Love Story, a 70-minute monodrama about coming of age in pre-state Israel. Her personal story of unrequited adolescent love—gained and then lost again—made its Washington debut in front of a capacity crowd at the Abramson Family Recital Hall in the Katzen Arts Center last September, thanks to a collaboration by AU’s Center for Israel Studies and Department of Performing Arts, and the Embassy of Israel.

The monodrama tells the story of how Gary met and fell in love with a young fighter of the Palmach (the unofficial army of the Jewish settlement in pre-state Israel), and how he died a few days before they were to be married. While the play is an adolescent love story that anyone can relate to, the backdrop of the play is the battle of Israeli immigrants idealistically fighting to establish the state of Israel in 1948. “Pnina’s tale is an Israeli one, and like Israel it is strong, beautiful, humorous and tragic. It is our story,” said Adi Bielski, who starred in the play, and participated with Ms. Gary in a talkback moderated by Dept. of Performing Arts Professor Gail Humphries Mardirosian.

Ms. Gary also offered a master class for Performing Arts students on “the process of turning a real life story into a dramatic art.”

Idan Raichel: Inside the Artist’s Studio

Israeli music sensation Idan Raichel came to AU Katzen Arts Center’s Abramson Family Recital Hall last March for an intimate interview and performance arranged by the Center for Israel Studies. The conversation with students was moderated by SIS/WCL 2011 alum Joshua Kaller and CIS director Laura Cutler. The New York Times recently labeled Raichel’s Idan Raichel Project the “soundtrack of Israel” for its incorporation of everything from traditional Orthodox Jewish chants to Caribbean salsa to Ethiopian tribal melodies into its songs.

Raichel sees himself as a bridge between cultures—both within Israel and outside. Raichel said ultra-Orthodox rabbis have attacked him for taking the most sacred texts of Judaism, and setting them to pop music sung by women in front of a mixed audience. “On the other hand, one of the most important cantors in the world came to me backstage and said that I was getting many people to read the Bible!” Said Raichel, “You can write amazing love songs, but the most beautiful song will always be the Song of Songs by King Solomon. This is the bread and sugar and water and salt of everything we do.”

He said his most moving experience ever was when he visited a San Francisco Jewish day school and witnessed a classroom of first-graders learning Hebrew by singing one of his songs, “Bo’i” (Come to me). “I walked into the class and they looked at me, thinking ‘who is this weirdo?’ They couldn’t care less about me, but they were singing my song,” said Raichel, who concluded his talk at AU by playing that iconic song on a Steinway, to the great appreciation of the students.

CIS Hosts AICE Conference
In May 2012 CIS hosted its fourth annual Israel Studies academic conference co-sponsored by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE) and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. This year’s theme, “Israel: Cultural Images and Political Realities” featured morning sessions devoted to Israeli film and media messages and an afternoon roundtable discussion on Fateful Issues in Israeli Politics and Society, chaired by Dr. Ilan Troen, Stoll Family Chair in Israel Studies and Director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University. Fred Lazin, AU Schusterman Visiting Israeli Professor, participated in that discussion with Gerald Steinberg, Bar Ilan University, and Nurit Novis-Deutsch, UC Berkeley.
Robert Pines received CIS’s award for the best paper or poem related to Israel for his paper, “Ancient Societies, Modern Diplomacy: Analyzing the Relationship between the People’s Republic of China and the State of Israel.” “I was inspired to study the history of the relationship between the People’s Republic of China and the State of Israel during my semester abroad at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in fall 2011, when I took a ‘Foreign Policy of Israel’ course taught by Dr. Meron Medzini, a former spokesperson for Prime Minister Golda Meir. As modern incarnations of the world’s two oldest civilizations, I thought it would be interesting to see how these two countries have interacted on the world’s stage. As China’s influence rises worldwide, Israel has much to gain by cultivating friendly relations with Beijing. To understand the dynamics at play today, it is important to see how relations have evolved since both countries gained independence in the late 1940s.” Pines is currently a BA/MA student in the School of International Service and is double majoring in the Kogod School of Business. He has held internships with the Anti-Defamation League and The Israel Project. He had an op-ed published in the Baltimore Sun in August 2012 on the political status of Jerusalem.

Laura Cutler, Robert Pines, and Myra Sklarew
The annual award was established by professor emerita of literature Myra Sklarew in memory of her uncle Benjamin Reinkel and aunt Eva Wolpe Reinkel and in honor of her uncle Harry Rinkel.

Additional Lectures & Programs
Sponsored by the Center for Israel Studies and the Jewish Studies Program

- “Can the Peace Process Be Saved?,” Israeli Major General (ret.) Danny Rothschild, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, cosponsored by CIS and SIS International Politics Program.
- “Israel’s Changing Collective Identity,” Fred Lazin, Schusterman Visiting Israeli Professor.
- “Is Peace Still Possible?,” Gershon Baskin, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), cosponsored by CIS and SIS International Peace and Conflict Resolution program.
- Mom and Dad I Have Something To Tell You, documentary film screening and discussion, actor and screenwriter Assi Azar, cosponsored by AU Students for Israel and CIS.
- “Princess or Prisoner? Jerusalem Maiden book talk by author Talia Carner, cosponsored by CIS, Jewish Studies Program and Tikkun Olam Women’s Foundation.
- “Reflections On the Eve of 9/11,” panel discussion with Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Shana Cohen, Cambridge University’s Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths, moderated by SIS Dean James Goldgeier; cosponsored by CIS and SIS, Inter-cultural Management Institute, Jewish Student Association and Muslim Student Association.
- “Sacrifice, Surrender and Symbolism: Three Faiths Interpret Abraham’s Binding of His Son,” panel discussion with Department of Philosophy and Religion faculty Rabbi Leila Berner, Dr. Martyn Oliver, and Reverend Mark Schaefer.
- Srugim screening and post-show discussion with actor Amos Tamam, translated by AU student, Einar Barr, cosponsored by Washington Jewish Film Festival and CIS.
- “The Arab Spring—Causes and Consequences in the Middle East, Focusing on Egypt, Syria and Libya,” Dr. Josef Olmert, SIS.
- “The Case of the Missing Kiddush Cup?” Jenna Weissman Joselit, George Washington University.
- The Crisis of Zionism, by author Peter Beinart with response by Aaron David Miller, Woodrow Wilson Center, moderated by Joshua Kaller WCL/SIS 2011, cosponsored by CIS, School of Public Affairs and JSP.
- “The Jerusalem Syndrome: How a Tiny Political Network Shapes Israel’s Policies on a Volatile City,” Ami Pedahzur, University of Texas, Austin.
- “Twenty Years Together: The Place of Russian Israelis in Israel’s Social and Cultural Mosaic,” Larissa Remennick, Bar-Ilan University.
- Washington Jewish Film Festival screenings hosted by CIS with discussions: My Australia and Mabul, with Mabul director, Guy Nattiv, and screenwriter, Noa Berman-Herzberg and LIA with documentary film-maker Aviva Kempner.
- “Women Who Make Things Happen – Cultivating Women Entrepreneurs Around the World,” panel discussion with Shelly Porges, U.S. Department of State and Dr. Liara Katzenstein, Institute for the Study of Entrepreneurship and Management of Innovation (ISEMI), Tel Aviv, moderated by KSB Executive-in-Residence Jill Klein; cosponsored by CIS, KSB, Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Kogod Entrepreneurship Club.
NOTES FROM THE FACULTY


RICHARD BREITMAN, Department of History, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), completed work on FDR and the Jews; co-authored with Allan J. Lichtman. Harvard University Press will publish it in the spring of 2013. He also published “The United States and the Holocaust in Hungary,” in the collection, The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary. He continues as editor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

ERRAN CARMEL, Department of Information Technology, Kogod School of Business (KSB), organized and co-chaired the “Greener, Cleaner, Better: Israeli Innovation in Greentech” conference at American University.

CALVIN GOLDSCHEIDER, scholar in residence for CIS and the Jewish Studies Program, presented two papers at conferences, “Ethnicity and Religion in Israeli Society: Why it matters to America” and “Immigration and Population Changes in Israel: Ethnicity, Religion and Family Values.” He also continues his research project with two colleagues at Hebrew University, Dov Friedlander and Barbara Okun, on educational change.

GERSHON GREENBERG, Department of Philosophy and Religion (CAS), has served as visiting professor in the departments of Jewish thought and philosophy at Hebrew, Bar Ilan, Haifa and Tel Aviv Universities and is a consultant to the International Archives Division of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

ALAN KRAUT, Department of History (CAS), is now President-elect of the Organization of American Historians. He continues to chair the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation’s History Advisory Committee. His co-edited volume, Ethnic History and the Mainstream: Shaping America’s Immigration Story is forthcoming.

LISA LEFF, Department of History and Jewish Studies Program (CAS), is publishing an article, “Rescue or Theft? Zosha Szajkowski and the Salvaging of French Jewish History” which will appear in Jewish Social Studies. She is working on a book about the same subject, how a noted historian moved documents from French archives to American Jewish research libraries in the wake of World War II.

ALAN LEVINE, Department of Government, School of Public Affairs (SPA), founded and is Director of the Political Theory Institute, whose mission is to bring the ideas and insights of political theorists to bear on contemporary issues and events. He published a book chapter on “The Idea of Commerce in Enlightenment Political Thought.”

RICHARD LINOWES, Department of Management (KSB), continues to teach Global Entrepreneurship. He supervised a student research team which created displays on the most innovative Israeli green technology companies for the “Israeli Innovation in Greentech” symposium.

ERIC LOHR, Department of History (CAS), has a new book, Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) which includes chapters about policies toward Jewish emigration and denationalization.

GAIL HUMPHRIES MARDIROSIAN, Department of Performing Arts (CAS), continues to teach about the Holocaust through performing arts. She published a book chapter entitled “Giving Voice to the Silenced through Theatre” in The Power of Witnessing: Reflections, Reverberations and Traces of the Holocaust.

PAMELA NADELL, Department of History (CAS), continues as Chair of the Department of History. This year she published “A Tale of Two Stories: The Hadassah Century,” in Hadassah Magazine’s centennial issue; was named a Distinguished Lecturer by the Association for Jewish Studies, lectured in both Austria and Germany, and moderated the panel of the first woman rabbis at the National Museum of American Jewish History.

SAUL NEWMAN, Department of Government (SPA), will have an article, “Between Optimism and Pessimism: Israeli Attitudes Toward Conflict Resolution in the Post-Oslo Era,” published in the journal Nationalism and Ethnic Politics. He was recently elected to his second term as President of the Board of Directors of AU Hillel.

HERMAN SCHWARTZ, Washington College of Law (WCL), continues to oversee the Israel-U.S. Civil Liberties Law program, jointly sponsored by the New Israel Fund, at the Washington College of Law’s Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law.

MYRA SKLAREW, professor emerita, Department of Literature (CAS), published “Leiser’s Song,” a chapter in The Power of Witnessing and co-taught “Poetry as Midrash,” at the Jewish Folk Arts Festival workshop with Merrill Leffler.


HOWARD M. WACHTEL, professor emeritus, Department of Economics (CAS), chairs the Association for Israel Studies Task Force on Israel Studies Centers & Professors. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise’s Israel Scholar Development Fund.

GUY ZIV, SIS, director of the SIS Summer Abroad in Israel program, published “Simple vs Complex Learning Revisited: Israeli Prime Ministers and the Question of a Palestinian State” in Foreign Policy Analysis. He continues to write a blog for the Huffington Post about Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

CENTER FOR ISRAEL STUDIES
American University’s Center for Israel Studies is one of the nation’s premier centers for educating about today’s Israel—its achievements and its challenges. Our approach is multidisciplinary, going beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict to study modern Israel’s history, vibrant society, culture, multiethnic democracy, and complex geopolitical issues. The center’s goal is to enhance scholarship and knowledge in the university and the wider community about a multifaceted Israel. Using AU’s expertise in global education, and its central location in Washington, D.C., CIS seeks to connect Israel to the next generation of young leaders and to serve as a national and international hub for nurturing and catalyzing Israel studies.

JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM
American University’s commitment to the Jewish Studies Program dates back to the early 1970s. Since then, AU’s Jewish Studies Program has included a major and a minor and offered courses across the curriculum, including in our General Education Program, for all AU students. The program takes great pride in being the first in the nation to offer a minor in Israel studies.
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IN APPRECIATION

American University is grateful to Lillian and Seymour Abensohn for their vision to create the Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Endowed Chair in Israel Studies. We would like to thank the following individuals whose major contributions help make the endowment possible.

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Robert P. Kogod ’62, H’00 and Arlene R. Kogod*
David M. Osnos
Jewish Studies Trip to National Museum of American Jewish History

In March, thanks to the generous support of the Jewish Studies Program, AU students, including those enrolled in the Jewish Studies class American Jewish History, accompanied by AU Hillel director Jason Benkendorf, visited the National Museum of American Jewish History. Dr. Pamela Nadell, chair of AU’s Department of History, welcomed the students to the museum. Nadell, a member of the museum’s founding historians’ team and its consulting historian for media, gave an insider’s glimpse into the making of a new museum. She discussed how its location on Philadelphia’s Independence Mall, where the Declaration of Independence was written, influenced how the historians decided to narrate the story of the American Jewish experience. “The trip was extremely fun and interesting. It was nice to learn about my American Jewish heritage with other Jews from American,” said Jewish Student Association President Scott Lorsch, KSB ’14, pictured fourth from left.

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THANKS to our generous donors, these Jewish Studies majors and minors received scholarships this year.

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- Alahna Sergi

Israeli student EINAR BARR (BSBA/KSB ’12, summa cum laude) received the Ben and Esther Rosenbloom Scholarship for an Israeli student studying at AU. A member of Beta Gamma Sigma and the top accounting student at Kogod, she was chosen to give the commencement address at graduation. She is continuing as a M.S. in accounting student at KSB.