From the Directors

Yediat, the newsletter of the Jewish Studies Program and the Center for Israeli Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences at American University, is dedicated to building bridges between countries, among disciplines, and across time. The key links in our bridges are the many programs, courses, and events we sponsor. In future issues, our news and feature articles and profiles will address a wide range of issues in Jewish and Israeli studies. We welcome your ideas as we nurture Yediat, and our programs, from strength to strength.

Howard Wachtel, Director, Center for Israeli Studies
Pamela Nadell, Director, Jewish Studies Program
AU Launches the Center for Israeli Studies

by Howard Wachtel, Director

The center establishes a bridge from Israel to the United States... 

In the fall of 1998, the Cora and John H. Davis Foundation presented American University with a generous grant to mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. Several AU faculty and a representative designated by President Benjamin Ladner decided that the university could best commemorate Israel’s creation by establishing a permanent center dedicated to the scholarly and intellectual exploration of Israeli society and culture. The Center for Israeli Studies has become a unique university-based institution in Washington, D.C., designed to become a national and international hub for the creation and dissemination of knowledge about Israel, including its performing and visual arts, literature and letters, economy, environment, law, and society. The center’s two inaugural events—a reception for the Batsheva Dance Company and the awarding of an honorary degree to former Prime Minister Shimon Peres at the 1998 commencement of the College of Arts and Sciences—as well as 14 other recent programs, indicate this breadth of interest. The center sponsors three primary initiatives: conferences of interest to Americans and Israelis both inside and outside the academy; residence, Israeli scholars, writers, policy makers, and artists, who teach university classes and participate in public programs for the wider community; and AU’s World Capitals study abroad program in Israel. In January 2002, the Association for Israel Studies moved its headquarters to American University and is now housed in the center. We are excited about this bridge to the association.

The Center for Israeli Studies is a new venture, which former Ambassador Ben-Elissar characterized as courageous. I take his statement seriously and add my own description of ambitious. The center establishes a bridge from Israel to the United States, introduces the many contributions of Israeli society—its life and culture—to the public and university communities, and offers a perspective that, in the best tradition of a university, provides an open forum where many ideas and people can be showcased. Our task in the year ahead is to develop the resources appropriate to the center’s courageous and wide-ranging ambitions.

Courses in Jewish Studies at AU

During 1998–1999, in addition to our rich internship opportunities, students chose from more than 16 Jewish studies courses: ancient and modern Jewish history, Hebrew language and Hebrew Bible, Profile of Israel (taught in Jerusalem), and History of Israel, and Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. National Book Award-winning poet Moshe Dor, best known to American audiences as writer of the song “Shine on, OCherubim,” taught undergraduates the General Education course Voices of Modern Jewish Literature. In a 1998 summer model institute, African American–Jewish Relations in the United States, students joined with Prof. Russell Adams, chairman of Howard University’s Department of Afro-American Studies, and Prof. Pamela Nadell in an exploration of the history and current state of African American–Jewish relations.

The Arts and Literature in Jewish and Israeli Studies at AU

In the first year of the Center for Israeli Studies, artist in residence Nahum Tevet installed his exhibition Arrangement for Six Units in AU’s Walkins Art Gallery. Israeli author and writer in residence David Grossman gave a public reading from his work and discussed writing with graduate students in the Department of Literature’s Creative Writing Program (cosponsored by the center, Jewish Studies Program, and Visiting Writers Series). Two choreographers in residence from the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel taught AU dance students a scene from Anaphase, which the students then performed publicly in December 1998 and again during the annual meeting of the Association for Israel Studies the following May.

In addition to these activities, the center mounted an exhibit of historic posters, Zionism and Israel, in the Bender Library and accepted from Eliahu Ben-Elissar, the former Israeli ambassador, a collection of books and videos for the library.
Focus on Our Visiting Faculty at AU

In its inaugural year, the Center for Israeli Studies launched a program of in-residence Israeli scholars and artists. Designed to build bridges, the extended visits of the scholars in residence allow them to share their cultural, artistic, and scientific achievements with students and faculty and our wider community. In 1998-1999, environmental scientist in residence Ben Gannot University professor Pedro Berliner shared his research on agroforestry systems in and zones with the AU community. In 1999-2000 the Center for Israeli Studies is delighted to host Hebrew University professor Yakov Plessner for the academic year. Plessner is associate professor and chair of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Management at Hebrew University and fellow and secretary of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He was formerly deputy governor of the Bank of Israel and economic advisor to the minister of finance of Israel.

AU's World Capitals Program in Jerusalem

By Dani Schydlowsky, Professor of Economics

In spring 1999, the Center for Israeli Studies inaugurated AU's World Capitals Program in Jerusalem. Hosted at the Hebrew University's Rothberg International School, the semester provides participants with access to Israel's prime university's English-language academic offerings in the historic heart of Israel. To ensure an effective start to the program, Daniel Schydlowsky, professor of economics and Center for Israeli Studies faculty associate, was on site for the first semester as program director. He also offered a special Jewish Studies Program seminar in Person: Of Isreal.

Participants were exposed to courses in Hebrew language and modern Arabic, plus Halacha and Mishna. The Modern World, the Defense of Israel, Archaeology of Jerusalem, and Politics of International Terrorism. They also traveled extensively. Throughout their stay they explored Israel's daily life, its national politics and an election, religious and secular demonstrations against and for the Israeli Supreme Court, the intricacies of Christian observance in Israel, and through such simple tasks as collecting their mail and getting telephones installed, the mundane aspects of living in a foreign culture.

By the end of their stay, the participants had become experts at managing in the Mt. Scopus dorms, buying their own food and cooking it, as well as navigating Israeli culture in elementary Hebrew and English. Now they have returned home to American University as ambassadors to the next class of students headed in spring 2000 for AU's World Capitals Program in Jerusalem.

News from the Affiliated Faculty of the Jewish Studies Program


Gershon Greenberg, Department of Philosophy and Religion, has a new book out, "Right and Holocaust as Issues of Jewish Religious Thought in the USA, 1938-1948: An Annotated Listing of Articles and Books" (Bar Ilan University, 1999).

Gregg Breitman, Department of Government, is the author of "Building a Wall: American Jews and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." He has coauthored several articles on public management reform in Israel in English and in Hebrew. In winter 1999-2000 Rosenblum will teach the New Public Management and Administrative Reform course at Hebrew University.

Daniel Schydlowsky, Department of Economics, spent spring semester 1999 in Jerusalem launching AU's first World Capitals semester in Jerusalem at Hebrew University.


Rita Simon, Department of Justice, Law and Society, is a coeditor of Gender Issues and Controversial Issues of Public Policy. She is also the author of "In the Golden Land: A Century of Russian and Soviet Jewish Immigration in America" (Praeger, 1997).

Myra Sklarew, Department of Literature and codirector of its Masters in Fine Arts Program, is the author of "A Lithuania Now and Selected Poems." Russell Stone, Department of Sociology, is the editor of "Critical Essays on Israeli Issues and Society." He also serves as the academic liaison for the Association for Israeli Studies.

Howard Wachtel, Department of Economics and director of the Center for Israeli Studies, is spending fall semester 1999 as a distinguished visiting scholar at the American Academy in Berlin. During spring 2000 he will be an academic visitor at the Truman Institute, Hebrew University, and visiting scholar in the Public Policy Program, Tel Aviv University.
“Israel after Oslo”
By Russell A. Stone, Professor of Sociology and AIS Academic Liaison

To celebrate the new link between AU and the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), the university hosted the association’s 15th annual meeting on May 23–25, 1999. AU’s newly renovated conference facility in the Ward Circle Building presented an ideal setting for the meeting, which featured more than 70 papers, talks, and presentations on the theme “Israel after Oslo.”

Highlights included addresses by Israeli ambassador Zalman Shoval, former ambassador Itamar Rabinovich of Tel Aviv University, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, assistant secretary of state Martin Indyk, Hebrew University professor and president of the New Israel Fund Yoram Peri, and former cabinet secretary Arye Naor. Various conference events were hosted by AU President Benjamin Ladner, Washington College of Law dean Claudius Grosman, and Center for Israel Studies director Howard Wachtel. Evening programs included a reception and concert at the embassy of Israel and a dance program and discussion featuring AU’s Department of Performing Arts dancers in a performance of the Batsheva Dance Company’s controversial piece “Ehad Mi Yodea” from Anaphase.

In the year 2000, the 16th annual conference of AIS will take place in Israel—the first time it has been held outside the United States. This event is tentatively scheduled for June at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba, and at the Desert Research Center at Sde Boker. AU and the Center for Israel Studies look forward to assisting with travel and program arrangements for the large contingent of U.S. association members hoping to participate.

In the year 2000, the 16th annual conference of AIS will take place in Israel—the first time it has been held outside the United States. This event is tentatively scheduled for June at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba, and at the Desert Research Center at Sde Boker. AU and the Center for Israel Studies look forward to assisting with travel and program arrangements for the large contingent of U.S. association members hoping to participate.

Invest in the future of JEWISH STUDIES and ISRAELI STUDIES education.

Help foster Jewish studies and Israeli studies teaching, research, and scholarship at American University. Your gifts guarantee that AU’s Jewish Studies Program and Center for Israeli Studies will move from strength to strength in the coming years. We welcome and very much appreciate gifts of any amount.

Here is my contribution to the Jewish Studies Program, JSP

Here is my contribution to the Center for Israeli Studies, CIS

Name

Address

City __________________________ State ________ Zip __________

[ ] Visa [ ] MasterCard [ ] American Express Card# __________________________ Exp. Date __________

[ ] My (spouse’s) employer will match my gift. _________________________________

[ ] My (spouse’s) employer will match my gift. _________________________________

Signature_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Please make checks payable to American University and return this form and your contribution to Jewish Studies Program, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016-8042.
Jewish History at AU

The conference “The History of American Jewish Political Conservatism,” cosponsored by AU’s Jewish Studies Program and Department of History and Temple University’s Feinstein Center for the Study of American Jewish History, was a highlight of the past year. Over the course of two days, scholars, journalists, and activists traced the historical development of American Jewish political conservatism from its emergence in the 1930s to the “think tanks” of today. The conference brought together critics at large Midge Decter, Charles Krauthammer, Elliott Abrams, and Paul Berman with scholars Jonathan Sarna, George Nash, Richard Gutman, Michael Kagan, and others. Plans to publish these papers are under way.

Other special programs included a symposium, cosponsored by the Department of History, Center for Israel Studies, and U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, exploring key issues raised by Richard Breitman’s new book, Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew, a presentation by Tel Aviv University archaeologist Zvi Lederman showing slides of the excavations at Bet She’emesh, an opportunity for Lilith magazine editor-in-chief Susan Weidman Schneider to join students in the American Jewish Women’s History course for dinner, and a presentation by Lehigh University professor Chava Weissler about her new book, Voices of the Matriarchs.