FROM THE DIRECTORS

We are invigorated being back on campus face to face with our students! Yet even during our “virtual” pandemic year you will see we were intensely engaged with them and our mission to spread knowledge about Jewish civilization and Israel. Together we hosted 37 academics, authors, thought leaders, and public figures, to share their expertise about Israel and the Jewish experience in 18 public programs that were watched by over 8000 people on campus and beyond. Our faculty earned accolades for their scholarship and research. To top it off, the Center for Israel Studies received two major philanthropic gifts to enhance our scholarship and keep AU at the forefront of Israel Studies for years to come.

We chose to focus this edition of YediAUt on the activities of our students and alumni, like RogueShul founder Ellie Klein Goldman ’97, recognized on the 2020 Forward 50 list and Liz Leibowitz ’11, who helped pass the 2020 Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act. We are proud of all our emerging leaders who seek new ways of building bridges, creating community and building a better future for humanity.

PHILANTHROPIC NEWS

P. 8 NEW $1.5 MILLION SONENSHINE PROFESSORSHIP IN ISRAEL AND JEWISH STUDIES

P. 4 MELTZERS AND TRONES GIVE $500,000 TO ENDOW ANNUAL CIS CONFERENCE

REFLECTIONS FROM HEBREW UNIVERSITY

By Maria Papita ’23, CIS intern

November 2021 – Studying in Israel, surrounded by so much history, compels me to take a more active role in the making of a better global future. It is impossible not to be moved to do more with your life for the benefit of humankind in a place where reminders of what is at stake are all around you.

Studying at the Rothberg International School at Hebrew University is invigorating. My classes are all incredibly interesting and compelling. In one class, we’re surveying Israel’s security doctrine and its perception of the region. In another, we’re examining the successes and failures of Israel’s negotiations with its Arab neighbors, and in my class on the Arab-Israeli conflict we’re considering the conflicting views on pivotal events that have shaped the conflict.

Jerusalem is a place of stark contrasts – some days life moves at a brisk pace; on others it seems to stop completely. It is evident, however, that Jerusalemites and Israelis (both Jewish and Arab) love life and have a desire to create a truly shared society. I hope to be among those of my generation to translate this sentiment into a reality that reflects that commonality.

A heartfelt thanks to School of Public Affairs Associate Dean Saul Newman for connecting my academic interests to the Rothberg School and selecting me for the Jane R. Glaser Scholarship, and to the donors who made this incredible first-hand exposure for me possible. Israel needs to be seen to be understood, and I highly encourage U.S. students to come and study here.

Maria Papita
Michael Brenner and Yazan Nusiebeh. Photo credit: Lia Chien

For Yazan Nusiebeh, talking about Palestine has never been easy — until he met professor Michael Brenner.

Nusiebeh, a junior in the School of International Service, published an op-ed last May in The Eagle, AU's student newspaper, calling for more Palestinian voices and a larger diversity in perspectives in American University's Center for Israel Studies.

Brenner, the director of the Center for Israel Studies, responded with another opinion article a few weeks after, sharing some of the center’s efforts to include more Palestinian voices.

The two finally met in person in September, where they sat outside and shared experiences about their perspectives and how each came to be. After chatting about Israel and Palestine, the two found yet another difference between them: soccer.

Brenner told Nusiebeh that he had to leave to attend an important matter: watching a European Soccer Champions League Game where Bayern Munich, Brenner’s favorite team, was playing FC Barcelona. Nusiebeh said he was a Barcelona fan, and the two of them went to watch the game together at local restaurant Chef Geoff’s.

“It’s really important for all of us to build bridges, especially on contested areas like the Middle East conflict,” Brenner said. “I am very much aware we all have our own points of view... but we also want to learn from each other.”

Brenner invited Nusiebeh to speak to his History of Israel class this fall. While he has invited Palestinian speakers to his classes before, this was the first time Brenner has had a student come to speak. Nusiebeh said that he enjoyed speaking to Brenner’s class, despite his initial reservations.

While he disagrees with many of the points that Nusiebeh made in his op-ed, Brenner said he has learned a lot from Nusiebeh. “I always think if we respect each other, and don’t negate the existence of the other, that’s a precondition for every dialogue,” Brenner said. “And I hope we can continue to build bridges.”

Nusiebeh echoed the sentiment. “Just having the understanding about what motivates the other side, helps you one, have empathy for them, and two, helps you understand them.”

MORAD EL SANA IS FIRST CIS MELTZER FELLOW

The first Alan L. Meltzer and Amy Meltzer Fellowship was awarded to Dr. Morad El Sana. During his three-month fellowship at AU Dr. El Sana published op-eds on the end of Israel’s 2003 citizenship law and on Arab political parties as first-time legitimate partners in Israel’s governing coalition. He also wrote an article on the burning issue of increasing violence within Arab communities in Israel. Most important, Dr. El Sana drafted a proposal for a CIS curriculum studying Israel’s Arab citizens.

El Sana holds a doctorate of Juridical Science (S.J.D) from the Washington College of Law and has taught courses in Public International Law, International Human Rights Law, and Israel and the Middle East. Throughout his career he has received several prestigious fellowships, including the Israel Institute Post-doc Fellowship; The Fulbright Outreach fellowship; The New Israel Fund Civil Rights Leadership fellowship; and the McGill University “Middle East Program for Civil Society & Peace Building” fellowship. His most recent book is Indigenous Land Rights in Israel: A Comparative Study of the Bedouin (2020, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics).

COOL JEWISH STUDIES COURSES

Given Lauren Strauss's interdisciplinary interests in history, literature, art, politics, and intergroup relations, it is no surprise that Strauss, scholar in residence and director of undergraduate studies for the Jewish Studies Program, offers some of AU’s coolest classes. This semester she is teaching “New York and the Jews: A Heck of a Town!” Thanks to the generous support of our donors, she took the students in her “Jews and American Popular Culture” class to a concert at the Edlavitch DCJCC featuring the music of George and Ira Gershwin. When she taught “Jews and the American Political Tradition,” Strauss brought to class a lawyer for plaintiffs in the trial against the white supremacists whose “Unite the Right” rally erupted in violence.

Strauss is especially excited about a new opportunity for next year’s “cool” class. Thanks to the generosity of Alan Meltzer, she is developing a new course on Black-Jewish Relations with a professor of African-American studies at George Mason University. A similar course was taught by Pamela Nadell with a professor from Howard University in the mid-1990s. The two faculty plan to offer the course to both campuses in the Fall of 2022, and to visit together museums, restaurants, theaters, and historic sites that are meaningful to both communities – and to Jews of Color, who bridge the two.

“Lauren Strauss is a master teacher. Her creativity in the classroom inspires us,” commented Pamela Nadell, director of AU’s Jewish Studies Program. Senior Jewish Studies major Avi Gold agrees. Dr. Strauss’s “passion” for her subject “gets passed on to her students and creates a very strong classroom environment.”
Thanks to a generous gift by Israel Studies Council members Helen and Daniel Sonenshine, in September 2020 renowned historian Derek Penslar of Harvard University gave the inaugural Helen and Daniel Sonenshine lecture on American Jews’ attitudes towards Israel during the Israeli War of Independence.

During the 1948 war, American Jews provided Israel with unprecedented levels of assistance. They were motivated by a complex blend of emotions: pride in the state’s establishment and fear for its survival, compassion for Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and guilt for having passed World War II on safe ground while two-thirds of European Jewry were murdered. During the 1948 War, American Jews formed a diffuse, informal, yet tightly-bound emotional community. Though they numbered just under five million, they donated approximately $150 million to the United Jewish Appeal, an amount four times greater than the United Way campaign for the entire United States that year. In a lively discussion and audience Q&A moderated by Michael Brenner, Penslar delved into why American Jews were so generous. The talk drew from his current work examining the history of Zionism through the lens of emotions which, according to Penslar, are no less a powerful force in human history, than ideas or institutions.

### DIASPORA JEWS AND ISRAEL

Last fall the Center for Israel Studies and Jewish Studies program hosted a lively discussion on the “Changing Relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel”, featuring Isaac Herzog, then-Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel (and now Israel’s president), David Harris, the American Jewish Committee’s CEO, and French Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur. The engaging program, watched by hundreds of students, faculty and alumni worldwide, was also aired multiple times by the Jewish Broadcasting Service television channel.

### ADDITIONAL LECTURES AND PROGRAMS 2020-2021

- **Antisemitism Since the Holocaust: America, Israel and Europe: Virtual Series**
  - *The Deep Roots of Modern Anti-Judaism* with David Nirenberg (Univ. of Chicago), Paola Tartakoff, (Rutgers Univ.); Lisa Leff, AU and U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
  - *Was America ever the exception?* with Annie Polland, (American Jewish Historical Society) Tony Michels (Univ. of Wisconsin) and Pamela Nadell, AU
  - **Antisemitism in Postwar America** with Kirsten Fermaglich (Michigan State Univ.), Riv-Ellen Prell (Univ. of Minnesota) and Lauren Strauss, AU
  - **Antisemitism and Racism** with Cheryl Greenberg (Trinity College), Marc Dollinger (San Francisco State Univ.) and Lauren Strauss, AU
  - **The Holocaust, Antisemitism and the Memory of the Jewish Past in the Arab World** with Aomar Boum (UCLA), Robert Satloff (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Mehnaz Afridi (Manhattan College), and Elizabeth Thompson, AU
- **Anti-semitism and Anti-Zionism** with Dina Porat (Tel Aviv University), David Myers (UCLA), and Michael Brenner, AU
- **Jewish Responses to Antisemitism from Rabbincic Times to Modern France** with Rabbi Delphine Horvilluer and Michael Brenner, AU
- **Germany’s Responsibility in Facing the Past and Fighting Antisemitism Today** with German Ambassador Emily Haber and Michael Brenner, AU
- **Being Black in Israel Today** with Pnina Agenyahu (Jewish Agency for Israel), Ashager Araro (activist, Battae) and Uri Dorchin (Univ. of Colorado)
- **How Long Will the Next Israeli Government Last? Israeli journalists Discuss the Fourth Elections in Two Years** with David Horovitz (*Times of Israel*), Yaakov Katz (*The Jerusalem Post*) and Noa Landau (*Haaretz*). Co-sponsored by School of Communication and CIS.
- **Indigenous Land Rights in Israel: A Comparative Study of the Bedouin** Book Talk by Morad El Sana with Amal Elsana Alty’ooj (McGill University) and David Hunter, Washington College of Law (WCL)
- **Israel and the United Nations: A Complicated Relationship** with Gilad Ben-Nun (Leipzig University), Co-sponsored by Ludwig Maximilian University Munich and CIS.
- **Jews of Color: American Jews, Race and History** with Laura Leibman (Reed College), Lewis Gordon (Univ. of Connecticut), and Kelly Whitehead (AU ’15 and Hebrew Union College) and Lauren Strauss, AU
- **Rabin Tribute Event- 25 Years: Israel-U.S. Relations Since Rabin** with Ambassadors Dennis Ross and Itamar Rabinovitch and Galia Golan (Hebrew Univ.) and Guy Ziv, AU. Co-sponsored by SIS and CIS.
- **The Ravine: A Family, A Photograph, A Holocaust Massacre** book talk with author Wendy Lower and Pamela Nadell, AU
OUR ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Ellie Klein Goldman ’97, recently reconnected with Black Jewish writer and culinary historian Michael Twitty, a Howard classmate in her Black-Jewish Relations class with American and Howard Universities. In 2020 both were recognized on the Forward 50 list of “Jewish people we needed most this year.” After a successful career working with Jewish teens and as Executive Director of Temple Shalom in West Newton, MA, Goldman is now well known as one of the anonymous creators of RogueShul, a parody Twitter account about the lives of synagogue administrators which went viral in 2019. This year, she partnered to launch a synagogue consulting company called Real Time Strategy, which provides support and advice to congregations throughout the country. Ellie reflected on the impact Dr. Pamela Nadell, the teacher of that class and director of the Jewish Studies Program, had on her career. “Who would have thought all those years ago that two students in your class, one from each school, would be central in the Jewish conversation in 2020?”

“Packing up my bags to head to Israel was the best decision I ever made,” says Merrill Brenner ’21, Israel Studies minor. Merrill spoke to us from Tel Aviv, where after intensive ulpan in Hebrew, she landed her dream job working for ReBlonde, a top high tech PR firm in Israel. “When I studied at Tel Aviv University thanks to a generous gift from CIS, I realized I wanted to move there to jumpstart my career in business and high tech. Minoring in Israel Studies and learning from top professors like Michael Brenner and Dan Arbell provided me a great foundation to understand Israel in all its rich history, depth and complexity.”

Liz Leibowitz ’11 SIS, Israel Studies minor, epitomizes an AU Changemaker. Her public policy jobs since graduation include Program Manager of the Jewish Organization Equality...
Index for the Human Rights Campaign, Director of Government Affairs for Jewish Federations of North America and Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Ben Cardin and Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Liz is perhaps most proud of her role in helping to write and pass the 2020 Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act, which delivered unprecedented levels of funding for peacebuilding in Israel and Palestine. Currently senior advisor for Policy and Engagement, USAID COVID-19 Task Force and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Liz is shown here speaking about the U.S.-Israel relationship to Professor Scott Lasensky’s U.S.-Israel Relations class in November 2021.

MEET OUR STUDENTS

Talia Rasiel ’22, Jewish Studies major/Israel Studies minor, has been passionate about Judaism since she did a pre-college gap year in Israel and spent a semester at the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem. AU’s variety of Jewish Studies courses available prompted her to transfer from Middlebury College as a sophomore. Active in DC Jewish life both in (she is the Religious Education Director of the Jewish Students

Halle Shumate

Halle Shumate ’22, history major and Jewish Studies minor, already has her first assignment post-graduation, as Program Assistant for the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York (while at AU she interned for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington). She will lead the research report on rising antisemitism in the New York area. Originally an international relations major, Halle was hooked on Jewish Studies after she took Voices of Modern Jewish Literature with Dr. Strauss. She is grateful to both Strauss and Professor Pamela Nadell, who have “always been there for me and opened me up to so many opportunities academically and personally.” Halle is currently president of AU’s Israeli Studies minor, as a setter for the Eagles. Team player

Inbal Peleg SIS ’23

Haifa native Inbal Peleg has long been a volleyball powerhouse (winning 16 of 20 Patriot League titles since 2001) and AU Volleyball Coach Barry Goldberg is ecstatic to have Israel National Team player Inbal Peleg SIS ’23, Israel Studies minor, as a setter for the Eagles. Beyond its athletic program, Peleg was sold on AU’s strength in international relations. Since she plans on a diplomatic career representing Israel abroad, Peleg was thrilled when SIS Professor Guy Ziv introduced her to the Israel Studies minor. “Important for my future career, I have gained a much broader perspective on Israel, especially as viewed by the United States, by taking courses such as History of Israel with Professor Michael Brenner,” says Peleg. “He’s the most knowledgeable historian on the topic, but he but doesn’t put a bias or offer his own viewpoint, which I appreciate.”

DECONSTRUCTING ISRAEL-PALESTINE

By Evan DeWitt ’23

In spring 2021, I participated with three other students in the AU Honors Challenge Course independent study, a multidisciplinary group project to assist undergraduates in creating and implementing their own research. In spite of having different majors in SIS and the School of Communications, we were all fascinated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a crossroads of our academic focus areas and passions. For me, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is what has inspired me to major in SIS, focusing on the Middle East, Arabic, and peace. As our project’s mentor, Professor Michael Brenner helped us to synthesize our interests to focus our research on looking at the ‘spin’ of information in the discourse surrounding this conflict by looking at the roles of both national and AU advocacy organizations. Researching this topic with a group that had varying levels of prior knowledge, experiences, and stakes in the conflict itself, we were exposed to the complex nature of what political affiliation in this conflict can mean. We worked together to create a website, “Beyond the Binary: Deconstructing Israel-Palestine,” which provides resources on understanding ‘spin’ through case studies, and for learning more about advocacy organizations. Our goal was to provide a tool for students to be able to understand the nuanced political perspectives as opposed to the binary “Pro-Israel or Pro-Palestinian” and give them a space to begin formulating their own, informed opinions.
**FACULTY NOTES**

Dan Arbell, Israel Studies Scholar in Residence, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), commented on current Israeli affairs for US and international media. He is an associate fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies-Americas.

Boaz Atzili, School of International Service (SIS), received the SIS Outstanding Faculty Administrator Award for his role as director of the SIS doctoral program. He continues to research the territorial status of Jerusalem and international security issues around “buffer zones.”

Michael Brenner, Department of History (CAS), was the first recipient of the University of Vienna’s Salo W. and Jeannette M. Baron Award for Scholarly Excellence in Research of the Jewish Experience. His new book, In Hitler’s Munich: Jews, the Revolution, and the Rise of Nazism will be released in February 2022 by Princeton University Press.

Erran Carmel, Kogod School of Business, published The Dynamics of the Largest Cybersecurity Industrial Clusters: San Francisco Bay area, Washington D.C., and Israel with Tal Hatuka (January 2021), Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center at Tel Aviv University.

Gershon Greenberg, Department of Philosophy and Religion (CAS), was appointed Visiting Professor in the Department of Jewish Philosophy at Bar Ilan University, and Visiting Researcher at the Hebrew University’s Institute for Contemporary Jewry. He presented “Jewish Religious Thought During the Holocaust” in Yeshiva University’s Jewish Responses to the Holocaust (1933-1945) April 2021 lecture series, at the Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.


Aaron Posner, Department of Performing Arts (CAS), was commissioned by Theatre J to write a new play based on Shalom Aleichem’s Teyve stories—the same stories that were adapted into Fiddler on the Roof.

Lauren B. Strauss, Jewish Studies Program (CAS), is Co-Chair of the Greater Washington Forum on Israeli Arab Issues. She is also a Founding Board member of Friends of Yad Tabenkin/Kibbutz Movement Archives, an effort to raise awareness and money for the leading repositories of Kibbutz-oriented materials in Israel.

Guy Ziv, SIS, was promoted to Associate Professor. He received the SIS Dean’s Summer Teaching Award (DSRA) to pursue summer 2021 fieldwork in Israel on young Israelis’ political attitudes. He gave dozens of media interviews to BBC and other media outlets about political developments in Israel.

**WELCOME NEW FACULTY**

**KATHRYN AGNES HUETHER**

This year we welcome Dr. Kathryn Agnes Huether as the AU Jewish Studies Postdoctoral Fellow in Holocaust Studies. Huether earned her PhD in Musicology from the University of Minnesota for her dissertation “Centering the Sonic: Sound Mediation in Holocaust Memory, Memorials, and Museums.” During her fellowship, Huether will teach two Holocaust courses at AU: History of the Holocaust and Popular Culture and the Holocaust and continue her research on USHMM’s First Person program with the aspiration to develop a monograph on the program’s legacy. She hopes for her research to cultivate an awareness of the myriad of Holocaust representations, and representations of mass trauma more generally, that is not only visual, but also sonic. The fellowship was established by American University and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.

**ROY HOROVITZ**

This spring American University is excited to welcome Israeli actor, director, and theatre lecturer Roy Horovitz as the Israel Institute Visiting Professor. Horovitz has been touring the world with Dan Clancy’s The Timekeepers for the past several years, and prior to the Covid crisis, gave a talk about Israeli theatre at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. A senior lecturer at Bar-Ilan University, where he earned his PhD, he has directed on the stages of Israel’s leading theaters, including Cameri Theater of Tel Aviv and the Habima National Theater. Dr. Horovitz will teach “Israeli Theater: Plays and Performance” and serve in an advisory capacity on Israeli arts programming at the Center for Israel Studies. The course seeks to place key plays in Israeli theatre in their historical and theatrical contexts, allowing students to understand some of the fundamental conflicts and tensions that characterize Israeli society and its local theatrical activity.
This represents a list of all gifts of $250 and up ($72 for people 35 and under) made to the Center for Israel Studies and the Jewish Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. Contributions to the Center for Israel Studies include contributions to the Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Endowment Fund and Myra Sklarew Israel Writing Prize as well as to CIS operations.

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JULY 1, 2020–JUNE 30, 2021

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United Jewish Endowment Fund
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Avi Gold
Shayna Goldstein
Talia Rasiel
Kathryn Ross
Haile Shumate
Jane R. Glaser Scholarship
Maria Papita
Margot Heckman Israel Travel Award
Joshua Anthony
Maria Papita

CELEBRATING EXCELLENT WRITING ON ISRAEL

Congratulations to the winners of our 2021 Israel Writing Contest, Jonah Kaufman-Cohen ’21 and Jacob Lewis, 21. Jonah’s award-winning essay, “Women in the Labor Zionist Movement” examined the role that women played in the Labor Zionist movement as well as their quest for full and equal participation in the Jewish state.

Jacob received the prize for his paper “Arab Political Integration in Israel: How Far Has it Come?” In this work, Jacob analyzed Arab representation in Israeli politics, determining that although Arab political integration has come very far, there is still a long way to go.

In recognition of her deep commitment to understanding Israel and her love of writing, Literature Professor Emerita Myra Sklarew established this annual student prize. Entries were judged anonymously by a panel of professors.

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♦ Lifetime members of the President’s Circle (individuals who have made cumulative contributions totaling $100,000)
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Jonah Kaufman-Cohen Jacob Lewis

Yediatu | Fall 2021 7
AU’S CENTER FOR ISRAEL STUDIES RECEIVES $1.5 MILLION GIFT

By Patty Housman, adapted

American University’s Center for Israel Studies (CIS) has received a gift of $1.5 million from Helen and Daniel Sonenshine to endow a permanent faculty position devoted to Israel and Jewish Studies. The Helen and Daniel Sonenshine Professorship Fund will enhance the Center’s role as an international leader in research and education on Israel.

“I am delighted about this generous gift, which will provide our students with the opportunity to further explore the special circumstances that led to the founding of the State of Israel, its diverse cultures, and the complex and ever-changing relations between Jews and Arabs in the region,” says Michael Brenner, the Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies and director of the Center for Israel Studies. “Helen and Daniel Sonenshine’s gift is so precious to us because as academics they profoundly understand the significance of such a meaningful enlargement of our academic program. The envisioned position will help us in our efforts to fight antisemitism, explore the larger Jewish experience, and promote Israeli-Arab understanding through ongoing teaching and research.”

The Sonenshines are both retired professors from Old Dominion University, Dan as an internationally known tick and tick-borne disease researcher and Helen as a professor of economics. They have long and deep family ties to Israel and American University. Their daughter attended AU, Helen’s sister is an AU alumna, and their son Ralph Sonenshine is currently an AU assistant professor in the Department of Economics. Two years ago, Helen and Daniel made a gift of $100,000 to sponsor the Center for Israel Studies’ first named lecture.

The gift was made as part of American University’s $500 million Change Can’t Wait campaign, and reflects the university’s focus on attracting world-class faculty and establishing endowed professorships and chairs who generate knowledge to advance society today and into the future.

Daniel and Helen Sonenshine

Students were happy to be back on campus this fall, like these CIS interns and volunteers tabling for CIS on the quad in October.