



JEWISH STUDIES



Modern and
Classical Languages
College of Liberal Arts
and Social Sciences

Program Newsletter, Spring 2026

In This Issue:

[Director's Note, page 2](#)

Hear from UH Jewish Studies Director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau about what we've been up to.

[Award Winners, page 4](#)

See photos from our 2025 and 2026 award ceremonies.

[Events, page 5](#)

Read about the events we've held lately.

[Faculty Milestones, page 7](#)

Read about our professors' contributions to scholarship in their respective fields.

[Student Spotlight, page 9](#)

Meet Jewish Studies minor Gaile Bondoc.

[Get Involved, page 11](#)

Find out how to keep up with the latest news from UH Jewish Studies and how to support our work.

A Note from the Director

Dear Friends of the University of Houston Jewish Studies Program,

Welcome to the fourth edition of our biennial newsletter. Since our last newsletter, in Spring 2024, we have been busy teaching, mentoring, researching, and holding events to build a locally oriented intellectual community around the Jewish experience. Read on to find out what we've been working on.

The biggest change for Jewish Studies is ahead, and it comes because of SB 37, the sweeping higher education law that passed the Texas legislature in 2025. That law applied an existing rule about minimum size for academic majors to minors, as well—like Jewish Studies. Since our program's inception in the early 2010s, we have been a small minor, graduating one or two students per year but enrolling far more in our courses. However, SB 37 has now dictated that minors like ours must consolidate or close. We are disappointed by this news. While our minors have been few in number, they have benefited substantially from being able to explore Jewish religion, history, and culture in a sustained way during their undergraduate years.

I want to assure you that the Jewish Studies program continues, even without the minor. We will continue to offer courses on the Jewish experience, and we plan to keep holding events with dynamic speakers and thought-provoking films. Especially at this moment of rising antisemitism and polarization, we remain optimistic about the role of education in bringing understanding and bridging divides, and we're not backing away from that goal.

In fact, we have a new initiative debuting in Fall 2026: the [Undergraduate Fellows in Jewish Studies](#) program. This program will bring together students with an interest and aptitude in Jewish Studies for a semester-long term as a fellow. Unlike the minor, the program does not require students to complete a certain number of courses or specific courses, but allows students who demonstrate an affinity to learn more. Fellows will meet with one another and faculty for dinner and programming three times per semester.

Fellows are nominated by faculty who have taught them in any Jewish Studies-related course. Programming will vary by semester, with possibilities including faculty and student research talks, conversations about the Big Questions in the field of Jewish Studies, discussions of Jewish Studies in the news, field trips, and hands-on activities. This initiative gathers a cohort of smart, engaged students to have discussions of Jewish Studies and center the Jewish condition. (Check out our first [cohort](#) here!) We hope this new initiative, modeled on a successful program at the University of Virginia, benefits both students and the larger community. Most UH students stay in the area after graduation. This program can train a future generation of Houston leaders, not just in the Jewish community but beyond it, to care about and talk about Jews and Judaism.

We could use your help making the Undergraduate Fellows program a success! We need to raise money for the dinners, as well as to offer a scholarship for the student who makes the most substantial contribution to the program each semester. Can you help by [making a](#)

[donation](#), or hosting a salon event in your home where a Jewish Studies faculty member will discuss the program? Please contact me if you want to help!

Please read on to find out about faculty achievements, student awards, and event highlights, and to meet Gaile Bondoc, who will graduate this summer with a Jewish Studies minor. Would you like to be the first to find out all about the latest news and events from UH Jewish Studies? Learn how in our [Get Involved!](#) section.

I hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones well. Thank you for your support, and please stay tuned for UH Jewish Studies events and other news in the 2026-27 academic year. Have a great summer!

Best,

Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, Ph.D.
Director, Program in Jewish Studies
Assistant Professor, Jewish Studies and Religious Studies

Excellence in Jewish Studies Award

Every year, as part of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages' award program, Jewish Studies celebrates our best and brightest with the Excellence in Jewish Studies award. Starting in 2025, thanks to donations from supporters like you, we have been able to award a scholarship to our winners.



At our 2025 award ceremony: Jewish Studies director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau and award winner Jammer Darnold.

Left to right at our 2026 award ceremony: Jewish Studies Director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, History faculty member and past Jewish Studies Director Mark Goldberg, award winners Sara Buchsbaum and Maya Chorn, and Modern and Classical Languages Chair Alessandro Carrera.



We would like to continue offering scholarships to our best students! Help us make that possible with a donation to our program. Contact program director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau at cmtamber@central.uh.edu to discuss how you can help the next generation of Jewish Studies scholars!

UH Jewish Studies held several exciting events over the last two academic years:

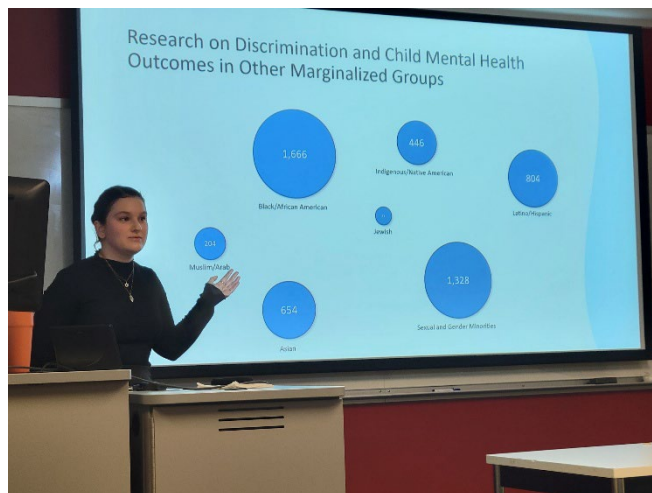
In Fall 2024, we hosted an Israeli documentary and filmmaker Q-and-A about the radical 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. The event ended up being standing room only, as we exceeded the room capacity of 75 and had a few attendees sitting in the aisles to watch the movie. The documentary, *The Excommunication of Spinoza*, is part of filmmaker **Yair Qedar**'s project "Halvrin," a collection of films about literary Jews. We had cosponsorship from Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Liberal Studies, as well as support from Houston Hillel and the Consulate General of Israel in Houston and the Southwest.



In Spring 2025, Jewish Studies cosponsored (with Religious Studies and the Center for Public History) a talk by Dr. **Mark Chancey** of Southern Methodist University, the foremost scholar of uses of the Bible in Texas public schools, for a talk called "Spreading the Bible in Public Schools: How Texas's New Bluebonnet Reading Lessons Play Religious Favorites." There was a packed house for Dr. Chancey's talk on campus, and additional folks livestreaming it from home.

Later that semester, we hosted a lecture by UH Psychology graduate student **Shira Mattuck** on

her groundbreaking study of maternal and child mental health related to antisemitism. Shira (now Dr. Mattuck after her Spring 2026 graduation) began her studies on the childhood mental health effects of anti-Black racism but realized, after October 7th, that no one was studying how children could be affected by their mothers' experiences of antisemitism. Shira's talk in Spring 2025 was both scientifically rigorous and pitched to a general audience. It was cosponsored by the Psychology department.





Also in Spring 2025, we cosponsored (with the Moores School of Music) the world premiere of the composition “Dancers in the Vineyards,” a commemoration of the victims of the October 7 Nova musical festival attack. The piece was composed by Israeli **Alona Epshtein**, on hand for the performance, and performed by UH Prof. **Tali Morgulis**. Dancer-choreographers **Khen Kurulkar** and **Joshua Ponton** performed a moving routine accompanying the

piece. The program also included work by other Jewish composers. L to R: Epshtein, Morgulis, Kurulkar, and Ponton. Photo courtesy of Daniel Bissonet.

In Spring 2026, we were happy to partner with the Hispanic Studies department to cosponsor a lecture on the Ladino language with Dr. **Jacobo Sefami**, professor of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California-Irvine, and journalist, translator, and poet **Myriam Moscona**.



We were thrilled to receive a Local Impact Grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston for a series of three programs on antisemitism and intersectionality. UH and the Holocaust Museum Houston have been collaborating on the events. More than 75 people attended the first event, a Fall 2025 talk by Dr. **Linda Maizels**, managing director of the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism. Her talk was called “Are Jews in the United States White? Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit.” Dr.

Maizels argued that the far right tends to see Jews as not white enough, while the far left often characterizes Jews as representing the worst of whiteness.

Our second grant-funded event was held in Spring 2026, when Dr. **Miriam Eve Mora** spoke about “Reclaiming Respect: Black and Jewish Masculinity in the Face of Discrimination.” Dr. Mora is managing director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute at the University of Houston and a historian of 20th century American Jews and masculinity. She argued that leftist Jewish men in the 1960s and 1970s used Black radical masculinity, such as that of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, as a model for fighting stereotypes of Jewish men as weak and bookish.

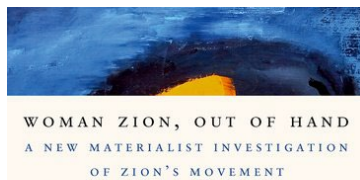


Stay tuned for news about our third event, to be held in Fall 2026!

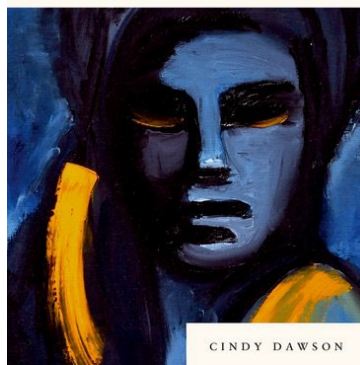
Faculty Milestones

Dr. **Richard Armstrong**, Associate Professor of Classics, continued his research into both Sigmund Freud and Moshe Ha-Elion. Ha-Elion was a Greek Holocaust survivor, poet, memoirist, and translator. In 2025, Dr. Armstrong published a book chapter called “Translating for the Dead: Moshe Ha-Elion's Homeric Translations into Salonican Ladino” in the volume *Parentheses of Reception* and another called “*Ay de mi Alhama*: Impossible Chronologies of Love, Loss and Learning in Freud and Moshe Ha-Elion” in the book *Classics Transformed: Jewish, Israeli, and Palestinian Receptions*. Dr. Armstrong also co-authored, with Dan Orrells and Miriam Leonard, a “Commentary” Essay on *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) by Sigmund Freud in *Classics and Race: A Historical Reader*.

Dr. Armstrong has three more book chapters forthcoming and is contributing to a new exhibition at the Freud Museum London on Freud and visual technology.



Dr. **Cindy Dawson**, Assistant Instructional Professor in the Honors College, published her first book, *Woman Zion, Out of Hand: A New Materialist Investigation of Zion's Movement*, in 2025 with Oxford University Press.



Dr. **Mark Goldberg**, Associate Professor of History, received the 2025-26 Herbert R. Bloch Jr. Memorial Fellowship from the American Jewish Archives. As an AJA fellow, he will travel to the archives in summer 2026 to conduct research for my book project, “Double Diaspora: Cuban Jewish Migration to Greater Miami.” In his exploration of how Cuban Jews developed community and forged a new diaspora, this research trip will focus on Miami’s resident Jewish community on the eve of Cuban arrivals.

Dr. Goldberg also won a 2025 Project Completion Grant from the Southern Jewish Historical Society, for his public-history project, the “Latino Jewish Digital Archive.” This grant will fund oral history transcriptions, a key part of this digital archive project. The award will allow for the archiving of many of the project’s English- and Spanish-language interviews.

Dr. Goldberg has two journal articles forthcoming later this year.

Dr. **Asher Lubotzky**, Israel Institute Fellow in the Department of Political Science, published his first book, *Shifting Solidarities: The South African Anti-Apartheid Movement's Perceptions of Zionism*, this spring with University of Virginia Press. The anti-apartheid movement, led by the African National Congress, has been strongly anti-Zionist for decades. However, this position only solidified in the early 1970s. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the movement held diverse and fluid views on the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Zionism. Some prominent figures even viewed Israel as a potential ally in the struggle against apartheid and, in some cases, received material support from it. The book traces the history of these decades and explains how the anti-apartheid movement ultimately adopted its anti-Zionist position—an outcome that was far from inevitable. The history of Israel's relationship with South Africa has largely overlooked this previously untold chapter, which the book reconstructs through a wide range of rarely used historical sources.



Dr. **Caryn Tamber-Rosenau**, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies and Director of the Jewish Studies program, published a book chapter, “Naked Women and Creepy Men: Voyeurism in the Bible,” in the *T&T Clark Handbook of Sexualities in the Bible and its Reception* in 2026.

In 2024, she published the article “Embracing the Jewess: Reading Gender and Ethnicity in Judith with the Belle Juive,” in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. In 2025, she co-authored, with Lynn R. Huber, Eric A. Thomas, Gwynn Kessler, Rafael Neis, and Erin Runions, a roundtable discussion about the future of queer biblical studies in *QTR: A Journal of Trans and Queer Studies in Religion*.

Dr. Tamber-Rosenau's second book, *Queering History in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, is due out with Oxford University Press later this year.

Dr. **Leandra Zarnow** appeared in the award-winning documentary *Bella! This Woman's Place is in the House*, which premiered on “American Masters” on PBS in March 2026. Dr. Zarnow also [wrote a piece](#) for PBS about Abzug's significance and legacy. Additionally, NY1 recently produced a [podcast on Abzug](#) as a special feature of *You Decide with Errol Louis*. Dr. Zarnow's interview with them is prominently featured.

Dr. Zarnow also published the article, “*Gender Gap: Bella Abzug and Mim Kelber's Labor Feminist Critique of American Politics in the Late Twentieth Century*,” in *Work, Capitalism, & Democracy: The United States Since the New Deal*, out with University of Pennsylvania Press in 2026.

Student Spotlight

A conversation with graduating Jewish Studies minor Gaile Bondoc



What led you to minor in Jewish Studies?

In my first semester at UH (Fall '23), I took Introduction to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament to fulfill the diversity requirement for my CLASS degree plan. There, I fell in love with studying the Hebrew Bible. Dr. Cindy Dawson—who taught the class at the time—recognized my talents for writing and biblical interpretation, and I was encouraged to major in Religious Studies. I began to learn more about Judaism as a religion, people, and culture, and after taking Women in the Hebrew Bible with Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, I made the decision to minor in Jewish Studies after some more encouragement.

Which classes did you take to fulfill the minor?

To fulfill the minor, I've taken Jewish Civilization: Ancient to Modern, Women in the Hebrew Bible, US-Israel Relations, American Jewish Culture,

Jewish-Christian Continuities, Hebrew Bible History/Politics, and History of Jewish Food.

Which class do you feel was the most impactful for you? Why?

Though I did not take it to fulfill the minor, the course that was most impactful on me was Bible and Modern Pop Culture, which is crosslisted as both a Religious Studies and a Jewish Studies course. That class really opened my eyes to the ways in which we've received and interpreted the Bible over time, for better or for worse. Discovering how the Bible's reception has influenced modern pop culture continues to fascinate me.

What is one thing you learned in a Jewish Studies class that surprised you?

As someone who was not raised Jewish, it was a surprise to learn in my Jewish Civilization class just how diverse the Jewish population is in terms of language, culture, belief, etc. Outside of university, my previous education on Jews was largely about the Holocaust, so it was an honor to learn more about the ways in which Jews and Judaism have thrived rather than how they've suffered.

Can you talk about a discussion you had with other students in one of your Jewish Studies classes that changed your thinking on something?

In my History of Jewish Food class, we got into a discussion about how the local Jewish community life resembles a shtetl (a small, tightknit Jewish town, usually in Eastern Europe). While I thought that was obvious, my Jewish peers who grew up in Houston area had never thought of it that way. I found it fascinating that those within the community had never previously conceived their upbringing that way, and hearing them discuss their experiences within the Houston Jewish community helped me to understand the variety of Jewish life experiences.

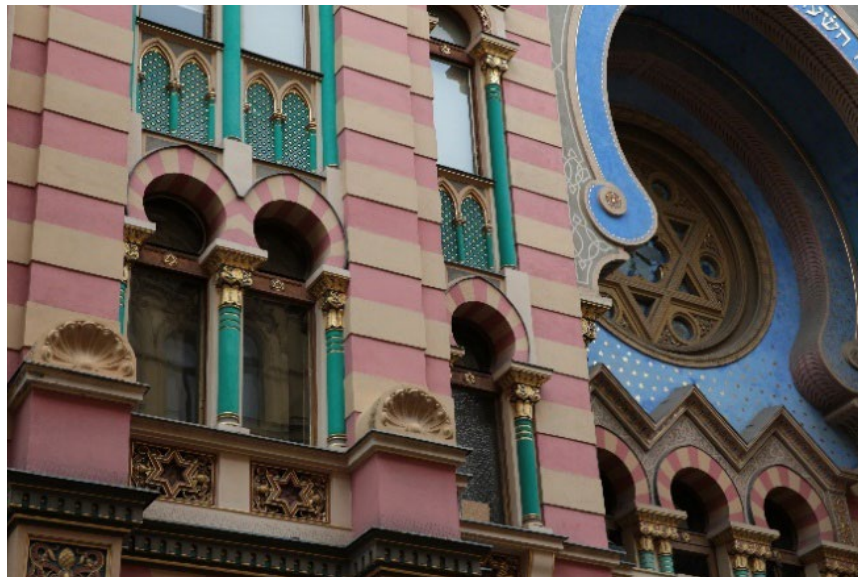
What is your planned career? Do you think what you've learned in your Jewish Studies classes might come in handy in any way? How?

My planned career is to eventually become a professor of religion, although I plan to make some stops on the rabbinic path along the way. What I've learned in my Jewish Studies classes has been tremendously useful to not only my future career, but my understanding of the world. *Tikkun olam*, or world repair, is a central tenet of Judaism. I've come to interpret this as a commitment to the ongoing efforts to repair the world, as the ebb and flow of existence calls for the constant improvement of our living conditions. To exist is to constantly strive for a better world! And the work to achieve that will never truly be finished, but it is wonderful to think of the Earth as something that is constantly worth fighting for. That is the biggest lesson I've learned from being a Jewish Studies minor.

Get Involved!

Want to stay up-to-date with UH Jewish Studies' goings-on? There are two easy ways!

1. [Join our e-mail list](#). We send periodic emails alerting Friends of UH Jewish Studies to upcoming events, sharing program news and extending holiday greetings.
2. Like our page on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#). In addition to sharing all the news you'll see on our email list, our social media accounts post information about our fabulous courses, faculty milestones, student achievements and stories of interest to fans of Jewish studies.



The Jerusalem Synagogue in Prague, Czech Republic. Photo/Chris Waits via Flickr Creative Commons.

You can also get involved by supporting UH Jewish Studies financially. Your gift can support scholarships for students who excel in Jewish Studies, educational events for the campus and the community, faculty and student research, and the new Undergraduate Fellows program. There are three ways to start the giving process:

1. Contact Program Director Caryn Tamber-Rosenau at cmtamber@central.uh.edu.
2. Contact Hannah Barker, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Senior Director of Advancement at hmbarker@central.uh.edu.
3. Give online using the [Jewish Studies donation page](#). It's fast, easy, and secure.

Thank you for helping us build the Jewish Studies program at one of America's most diverse universities!