A Renaissance of Jewish Life at Northeastern

from James Ross, Director

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The renewal of Jewish life on campus is reflected in the continued growth of our Jewish Studies program, founded in 1994 as an interdisciplinary minor in the College of Arts and Sciences. Our course offerings and enrollments have risen dramatically; this year, more than 150 students enrolled in four sections of our gateway course, “Introduction to Jewish Religion and Culture.” As you will read in this newsletter, we now offer a Dual Major in Jewish Studies and Religion. Our faculty has expanded, too; a gift from Mort and Marcia Ruderman established an endowed chair in Jewish Studies, and this year Northeastern was one of six universities to receive a grant from the Schusterman Foundation to hire a post-doctoral fellow in Jewish Studies.

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In years to come, the Jewish Studies Program will continue to attract many Jewish students to Northeastern, and promote the importance of Jewish history, religion, and culture as an essential part of the University’s academic curriculum. For more information, I encourage you to visit our website at www.neu.edu/jewishstudies

A Newsletter for Friends of the Northeastern University Jewish Studies Program

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Northeastern University’s Jewish Studies Program provides students the opportunity to explore the history, culture, and religion of the Jewish people.

HAVERIM

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James Ross, Director

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Expanded Partnership with Hebrew College

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New Dual Major in Jewish Studies and Religion

We are pleased to announce a new Dual Major in Jewish Studies and Religion, offered for the first time in the 2007–2008 academic year. Until this year, the Jewish Studies Program offered only a minor. Recently, however, increasing student interest, together with the steady growth of the Jewish Studies faculty, has made it possible to create new classes and offer existing classes more regularly. With both the demand and the resources, the time was ripe for the Jewish Studies Program to offer a major.

Partnering with the Department of Philosophy and Religion and using Northeastern’s innovative Dual Major framework, we crafted a unique program that integrates two naturally complementary fields of study. Familiarity with the world’s religious traditions enhances the study of Judaism as a religion; at the same time, in-depth knowledge of Jewish history, identity, and culture provides students of Religion with valuable insight into how religion interacts with other forces to shape the experiences of members of a particular faith.

The Dual Major in Jewish Studies and Religion is ideal for students interested in graduate work in Jewish Studies or Religious Studies, or in careers as rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, or Jewish communal service workers. We look forward to welcoming increasing numbers of students to the Major as the Program continues to develop.

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allow students to earn two degrees concurrently: a BA from Northeastern University and either a Master of Arts in Jewish Studies (MAJS) or a Master of Jewish Education (MJE) from Hebrew College. A Graduate Certificate in Jewish Leadership Studies, offered through Northeastern’s School of Professional and Continuing Studies, is also in development.

Possible future plans include a joint undergraduate program leading to a bachelor’s degree from each institution, a joint program leading to a master of arts in teaching (MAT) from Northeastern and an MJE or MAJS from Hebrew College, and professional-development programs for Jewish educators and community leaders.

Jewish Studies Scholars Take an Interdisciplinary Approach

The excellence of the Jewish Studies Program is exemplified by our diverse and talented students. We have recognized some of our best students by naming them Ruderman Scholars. Thanks to the generosity of Mort and Marcia Ruderman, we have offered a scholarship to one student each year since 2004.

Our first Ruderman Scholar, Nancy Levinson (2004–2005), was an ASL/English Language Interpreter major and Jewish Studies minor. Nancy combined her academic interests in her outstanding senior project, “The Experiences of the Deaf Population in Europe Before and During the Holocaust, 1933–1945,” which she shared in a presentation to Northeastern’s Jewish Studies and Deaf communities. After graduation, Nancy worked for one year at the Delaware School for the Deaf. She is now a freelance ASL/English interpreter: Continuing her interest in Jewish Studies, she also teaches Hebrew School three times a week at the Main Line Reform Temple in Wynnewood, PA.

Elyse Sklar, a Behavioral Neuroscience major and a Jewish Studies minor, held the Ruderman Scholarship from 2005 through 2007. Her senior project, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Holocaust Survivors: Avoidance as a Controversial Coping Mechanism,” built upon her behavioral neuroscience research on PTSD. Elyse is currently doing neuroscience research at NIH on a two-year fellowship, after which she plans to pursue a career in mind-body medicine.

Reflecting on her experience as a Jewish Studies minor, Elyse writes, “It held a profound impact upon my development both academically and personally. Studying beyond the scope of my career path has helped me develop a more philosophic understanding of the world. I am certain this will help me connect and understand individuals from all backgrounds – an important value, especially in medicine. Furthermore, on a more personal level, I have always had a strong connection to my background. Coming from a family that embraces the Jewish faith, learning about the religion and culture from an academic standpoint was a new experience for me that enriched my understanding and gave me insights I never got in Hebrew school. Needless to say, the Jewish studies minor is something that enhanced my Northeastern experience, and to all the incoming freshmen, I’d highly recommend it.”

Our two most recent Scholars, Bryanne Mahoney (selected 2006) and Lauren Steingold (selected 2007) are still at Northeastern. A double major in Jewish Studies and History, Bryanne has conducted significant research on the experiences of women during the Holocaust. She is interested in pursuing a career in the Jewish community, perhaps in Holocaust education or as a social worker for interfamilial families.

Lauren, a Communication Studies major and a Jewish Studies minor, is strongly committed to working as a lay leader within the Jewish community. As she has written, “Study provokes action, so the greater my study of Jewish sources, the greater my potential for effective community activism.” She sees her major and minor fields together as providing invaluable background for lay leadership, combining her comprehension of inter-personal, group, and managerial communication with a deep familiarity with Judaism.

In May 2007, ten Northeastern students landed in Tel Aviv.

They looked out the window as the plane touched down, eagerly anticipating five edifying weeks of study and travel through Northeastern’s Dialogue of Civilizations program. Their journey, in particular, was a meaningful one – it marked the first time since the second intifada that Northeastern had sponsored a student trip to Israel and signaled a renewed commitment to the University’s longstanding ties with Israel.

The ten students, along with two graduate students and a Northeastern faculty leader, experienced Israel through a powerful combination of specialized classroom instruction and expertly guided travel. At Ben Gurion University in Be’er Sheva, for example, students completed courses in Hebrew language, Israeli Politics, and Middle Eastern Studies. These classes were supplemented by travel through Jerusalem, Haifa and other parts of Israel. These activities were an extension of Northeastern’s longstanding active faculty exchange program with Ben Gurion University. In addition to their studies, the students worked as volunteers with high school students and Ethiopian immigrants.

This summer, the University will sponsor another Dialogue of Civilizations program in Israel, offering this transformative experience to an expanded group of twenty students.

The upcoming program will encourage students to take an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing social conflict, integrating sociology, political science, gender studies, education, and history. Taught by both Northeastern and Ben Gurion faculty, students will incorporate material from these various disciplines to analyze the nature of the conflict and conflict resolution.

Following a seminar at Ben Gurion, the students will participate in a Druze Society workshop, staying with Bedouins and learning of the conflict from their perspective. Their travels will continue through an extensive tour of the north of Israel, stays in two kibbutzim, and several days in Tel Aviv.

Northeastern will continue to expand opportunities for students in Israel, not only through study abroad programs and international co-op placements, but also through the greatly expanded Birthright Program, an opportunity for Jewish students to visit Israel for ten days.

A full-time Birthright officer, funded by Combined Jewish Philanthropies, brought a busload of 40 students to Israel in December (the first Northeastern-only bus in the school’s history) and is planning additional trips this summer and next fall. Translating the experience on Northeastern’s campus, the Birthright Program also includes social events and volunteer opportunities that are helping to create a more vibrant Jewish community on campus.

-Israel has now become a focal point of our Jewish Studies Program. Our goal is to offer not only an annual Dialogues trip but also a semester in Israel that combines work, study, and experiential education." —DIRECTOR JAMES ROSS

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.northeastern.edu/cas/programs/Dual.html

www.northeastern.edu/jewishstudies/curriculum/
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