



PERSPECTIVES  
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## FROM THE PRESIDENT



The emergence of Jewish Studies programs in the American university underscores the importance of Jewish history, thought, and culture to Western civilization. This relatively recent development offers opportunity to Jewish and non-Jewish students alike and enhances academic inquiry. We are pleased to fund Jewish Studies programs at campuses across Northern California.

As Prof. Murray Baumgarten writes in the following essay, it is hardly possible to be an educated human being at the dawn of the 21st century without knowledge of the history and culture of the Jewish people. Even if students have no direct exposure to the Jewish Studies curriculum, its very presence in the course catalogue sends a strong message about the importance and influence of Jewish culture in shaping the modern world.

The impact of Jewish Studies programs are not confined only to the campus arena. As Prof. Marc Dollinger writes, quoting U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Louis Brandeis, "Civic engagement as an American citizen demand(s) strong Jewish values as well."

When communities and universities collaborate to support Jewish Studies programs they serve to reaffirm the immense contributions of Jews to history and to contemporary society.

— *Tad Taube, President*

# Jewish Studies: Attesting to the importance of the Jewish imagination in shaping the modern world



by Prof. Murray Baumgarten  
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I do not think it possible to be an educated human being at the beginning of the 21st century without some knowledge of the history and culture of the Jewish people.

Unlike previous eras when Jews and Judaism were subsumed under and sublimated into the “Judeo-Christian tradition,” it is now evident that Jewish people and Jewish achievements, Jewish tradition, history, and culture have profoundly altered the course of the modern world. I could at this point recount the panoply of the Jewish thinkers and actors who have done this, beginning of course with Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, David Ben-Gurion, Rosalind Franklin, and Golda Meir. I leave it to you to add your own overachievers to this list, from Milton Friedman and Isaiah Berlin, HaRav Cook and Saul Lieberman, to Steven Spielberg and Barbra Streisand.

Whoever makes your list simply underlines the fact that the repertory and educational treasure house of these role models, values, meanings, and habits is the substance of the university curriculum of Jewish Studies. A word of warning is in order, however: Like the Jewish people, this is a wide-ranging group—messy, argumentative, divided—but whatever you think of individual cases, this is one of the most vital, alert, smart groups of people in the world.

Try this thought-experiment: Imagine the century just past without Jewish achievements. There goes relativity theory, modern medicine, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurial economic theory. Then we must also add the charting of the human psyche by the practitioners of “the Jewish science” and not omit the evocation of the intricacies of human feeling, under the conditions of terror that the 20th century has specialized in, by great Jewish poets like Dan Pagis and Yehuda Amichai, novelists like Saul Bellow and A. B. Yehoshua, and writers like Primo Levi. And can we manage without Jewish performers, filmmakers, comedians? Without the Marx Brothers and Eddie Cantor? I think not.

Can you imagine how this cast of characters behaves in the archive that is Jewish history? They're an unruly lot, always trying to upstage each other like Groucho on *You Bet Your Life*. Because that's what they and we have always done—reached for the ring. And often seized it. So the achievement of the Jews in our time included the making of a revolution in the Middle East called the State of Israel. And it changed everything. When you think of it, what other national liberation movement succeeded like Zionism? And continues to reveal the tenacity and steadfastness of a people determined to repel terror.

Jewish Studies is not a passive archive. While drawing on the resources of the magnificent library of human experience that Jews have articulated through the millennia in our books and journals, the varied courses sponsored by Jewish Studies serve as beacons that light up the recesses and the values of Western civilization as they enlighten the corners of other world civilizations, including those of Asia. And they even bring understanding through the discourse of difference to the world views and practices of Christianity and Islam. As a minority culture, Jews have been outsiders. Living within the majority culture and interacting with it, Jews have been insiders. As Thorstein Veblen noted, when Jews become “naturalized ... hyphenated ... citizen[s] in the gentile republic of learning ... [they] come into their own as creative leaders in the world's intellectual enterprise.”

Just as the presence of physics courses at the university reminds us of the impact of modern science, whether or not we take courses in the subject, so too Jewish Studies attests to the power and importance of the Jewish imagination in shaping the modern world.

In supporting and nourishing Jewish Studies, the Koret Foundation has created the conditions for the contemporary marketplace of ideas to flourish. It has opened up the university curriculum to the cultural competition without which it atrophies. It has made it possible to ask fundamental questions—of community and fate, choice and identity-formation, ethical assessments and moral questioning from perspectives outside a conventional majority view.

Koret's support for Jewish Studies has made an enormous difference for teachers and students, and has thus helped them to question previously unchallenged assumptions; that is, the impact of Jewish Studies in the university curriculum is to make possible independent thinking. In this way, Koret funding for Jewish Studies supports fundamental conditions for 21st-century education.

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## Jewish Studies' influence on the Jewish community



by Prof. Marc Dollinger  
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For most of Jewish history, responsibility for education belonged to the Jewish community. *Yeshivot*, funded with philanthropic dollars from Jewish leaders, trained future rabbis. *Talmud Torahs* and synagogue religious schools taught Jewish belief, ritual, and customs to their students. Jews, most often excluded from the university systems by anti-Semitic admissions policies, turned inward to advance their own knowledge.

In the early 19th century, German intellectual Leopold Zunz proposed a radically new approach to university-level Jewish Studies, *Wissenschaft Des Judenthums*, the science of Judaism. Zunz wanted Jewish textual study introduced at Europe's universities and he pressed for a scientific or critical approach to understanding Judaism. His was an ambitious attempt to bring Jewish Studies into the university and to approach the subject as a student would any other discipline. While Jewish community-supported educational centers would teach rabbinic students and press for stronger Jewish identity, universities would approach Jewish Studies with the academic detachment and third-person perspective of a scientist.

Zunz's ambitious plans for the integration of Jewish Studies into the university took over a century and a half to achieve. Anti-Semitism within European society precluded most Jews from ever receiving a university appointment, and most of the interest in Jewish Studies grew from Christian theologians studying the roots of their own faith tradition.

While the birth of the Zionist movement and the destruction of European Jews in the *Shoah* ignited renewed interest in university-level Jewish Studies, programs and departments in Jewish Studies did not enjoy dramatic growth until the 1970s. Two factors contributed to this surge: the end of anti-Semitic quotas in higher education during the 1950s and the African-American-inspired ethnic revival of the late 1960s. By the early 1970s, American Jewish intellectuals were enjoying widespread access to the university at the same time that Jews across the country were searching for ways to discover their "roots." Just as African-American and other

ethnic studies programs grew, Jewish faculty, students, and community leaders demanded creation of new programs in Jewish Studies.

The effort was buoyed by the renewed interest in multicultural approaches to university education. Through interdisciplinary breadth requirements, college administrators encouraged undergraduates of all backgrounds to explore the history, culture, and beliefs of different peoples, including the Jews. Whether in less formal interdepartmental programs or full-fledged academic departments, Jewish Studies courses welcomed students from across the religious spectrum. Students can now earn an undergraduate degree in Jewish Studies, and several universities offer graduate training as well.

Most powerfully, the rise of Jewish Studies programs in the last generation has been made possible by the financial support of Jewish community foundations, agencies, and philanthropists. What Zunz originally envisioned as a departure from Jewish community support has developed into a vital “town-gown” partnership. In both private colleges and cash-strapped public universities, Jewish Studies programs have relied upon Jewish community support to ensure that department chairs and directors have the resources necessary to offer a rigorous Jewish Studies curriculum.

At San Francisco State University, community funding is even more critical. In a university political culture that often denigrates Israel and Zionism, the Jewish Studies Program serves as an academic home for high-level scholarship and teaching. With community support, including support from Koret, for example, the San Francisco State Jewish Studies Program has been able to launch a brand-new course this semester on Israeli cinema, part of our expanding academic focus on Israel Studies.

In the broadest sense, community support helps the San Francisco State Jewish Studies Program achieve its three core objectives:

1. Provide university-level Jewish Studies education to undergraduates of all religious and ethnic backgrounds;
2. Raise the intellectual level of campus discourse on Jews, Judaism, Israel, and Zionism by offering rigorous, academic courses on these subjects;
3. Serve the surrounding Bay Area community with university-level Jewish Studies research, teaching, and outreach.

As part of a growing national movement that combines community service with classroom education, the San Francisco State Jewish Studies Program will launch the Bay Area Jewish Service Learning Project this winter, the first graduate certificate program in Jewish service learning. In partnership with the Bureau of Jewish Education and in collaboration with Spark: Partnership for Service, funded by the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund, the project will train Jewish community professionals

in the mechanics of creating and running service-learning programs in their respective agencies, offer university-level education in Jewish texts related to community service, and provide participants with opportunities to meet and interact with similar-minded colleagues.

Jewish service-learning students gain by becoming better-informed workers, while the Jewish community benefits from more knowledgeable and engaged volunteers. As the graduate certificate program develops, people of all ages and interests will have the opportunity to serve the Jewish community, learn about the Jewish origins of their service, and achieve, simultaneously, the goals of both the university and the Jewish community.

The strong relationship between Jewish Studies programs and the community echoes the wisdom of former Supreme Court Associate Justice Louis Brandeis, who built his own intellectual career on the notion that civic engagement as an American citizen demanded strong Jewish values as well. Two community funders, the Koret Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, employed Brandeis' quote, "To be better Americans, we must become better Jews," in a recent essay contest run by the Jewish Community Federation's Endowment Fund. These funders and others are helping to develop a university-community relationship that, like Brandeis himself, affirms the importance of both.

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