Phillip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies
Lehigh University

Celebrating 25 Years
1984 - 2009
Beginnings

In 1984, a dramatic chain of events was set in motion by Lehigh President Peter Likins when he asked philanthropists Philip and Muriel Berman of Allentown, Pa., to help to create the first full-time position in Jewish Studies in the Lehigh Valley area. The Bermans agreed, and after consulting with Jewish Studies scholars throughout the world, they took the initiative one step further by endowing a chair in Jewish Studies and establishing a center for Jewish Studies at Lehigh. Laurence J. Silberstein, selected as the Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies in Lehigh’s Religion Studies Department, was also chosen to direct the new center, a position that he still holds today.

Although there were Jewish Studies course offerings on Lehigh Valley campuses prior to 1984, the new Lehigh Valley Center for Jewish Studies, as it was originally called, created possibilities for students and faculty that were unavailable before its inception. Its aim was to provide curricular and co-curricular programming in Jewish Studies at the schools of the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges (Lehigh University, Lafayette College, Moravian College, Muhlenberg College, Cedar Crest College, and Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales). During that first year of operation the Center sponsored lectures, concerts, and films on the LVAIC campuses. In keeping with the Center’s goals of serving both the general and academic communities, these events were widely publicized and open to students, faculty, and the public.

The program soon expanded to include other initiatives funded by the Bermans: additional Jewish Studies faculty at Lehigh and Lafayette, visiting Israeli scholars, study in Israel programs, scholarship assistance for students going to Israel, the publication of an annual newsletter, and two LVAIC trips to Israel for faculty and administration. Through their many contacts, the Bermans facilitated the Center’s relationships with the Gregorian University in Rome, the Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Biblical Archaeology at the Hebrew University, and the Tel Miqune archaeological dig in Israel. They also provided funding for several conferences and special projects, and provided a yearly stipend to support the Berman Center’s expenses. Following the death of Philip (1997) and Muriel (2004), the Center received a gift from the estate that helped to ensure its continued operation.

It is a distinct pleasure to share with you this brief review of twenty-five exciting and fulfilling years in the life of the Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies. This center, founded in 1984, was the dream of Philip and Muriel Berman, two imaginative, generous, and highly energetic people. They, in turn, inspired many others to support the effort, which has provided several generations of Lehigh students and members of the wider community with extraordinary educational and cultural opportunities. Phil and Muriel’s dream has become our reality. We can only imagine what the seeds that they have planted will yield over the next twenty-five years. Let us continue to grow from strength to strength.

— Laurence J. Silberstein, Director
Installation of Lawrence Silberstein as the Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies (1984): (left to right) Lawrence Silberstein, Alan Dershowitz, Muriel Berman, Lehigh President Peter Likins, and Philip Berman.

Itamar Rabinovich, Israeli ambassador to the United States (left), and Philip Berman (right) at the event renaming the Center in honor of Philip and Muriel Berman (1989). In the background are Muriel Berman and Professor Chava Weisler.

Jewish Studies faculty (1990): Elie Rehess, Berman Visiting Scholar from Israel; Larry Silberstein; Robert Cohn, Berman Professor at Lafayette; Chava Weisler, Berman Professor at Lehigh; Myra Rosenbaum, Center administrator; and Alan Mittleman, Muhlenberg.

LVAIC deans, faculty, and spouses on a two-week trip to Israel led by Larry Silberstein (1985), which set the stage for the establishment of semester- and year-long study programs for LVAIC students.
Berman Center Faculty

The Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies, so named in 1990 to honor the Bermans, has grown over the years so that it now includes five full-time Jewish Studies positions at Lehigh and one at Lafayette College. At Lehigh, the Bermans endowed the Philip and Muriel Berman Chair of Jewish Studies held by Professor Silberstein, and the Philip and Muriel Berman Chair of Jewish Civilization held by Professor Chava Weissler. The Bermans also endowed a chair in Jewish Studies at Lafayette College. Following the example set by the Bermans, other friends and alumni have stepped forward to support new faculty positions at the Berman Center. In 2001, Susan Ballenzweig created the position of Writer in Residence at the Berman Center. Most recently, in 2008 with the support of the College of Arts and Sciences, Helene and Allen Apter established the Apter Chair of Holocaust Studies and Ethical Values.

Faculty

Laurence J. Silberstein, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Religion Studies Dept., and Director of the Berman Center, modern Jewish thought and culture

Chava Weissler, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Civilization, Religion Studies Dept., Jewish folklore, early modern Judaism, contemporary American Judaism

Robert L. Cohn, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Religious Studies Dept., Lafayette College, Hebrew Bible, history of Judaism, comparative religion, Jews in Poland

Benjamin Wright, III, Professor and Chair, Religion Studies Dept., Hebrew Bible, history and literature of early Judaism and Christianity

Bunnie Piltch, Adjunct, Modern Languages and Literatures, Hebrew language

Ruth Knafo Setton, Berman Center Writer-in-Residence and Professor of Practice, Department of English, Jewish literature

Roslyn Weiss, Dept. of Philosophy, Jewish philosophy

Helene and Allen Apter Chair of Holocaust Studies and Ethical Values, Holocaust studies (search in progress)
Course Offerings

Lehigh's Jewish Studies minor now offers thirty courses that explore the history, religion, literature, language, and culture of the Jewish people. Five to seven courses are taught each semester, with new courses being added regularly. For many years, courses offered by Israeli visiting professors expanded the Jewish Studies course offerings, providing an important international dimension to the Center’s curriculum.

- Elementary Modern Hebrew I and II
- Intermediate Modern Hebrew I and II
- Hebrew Special Topics I and II
- American Jewish Literature
- Contemporary Israeli Literature
- Immigrant Jewish Writers
- Israeli Women Writers
- Jewish Women Writers
- Philip Roth's Complaint
- Middle East in World Affairs Since 1945
- Jewish Philosophy
- Medieval Philosophy
- The Jewish Tradition
- Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament
- The Beginnings of Judaism and Jewish Origins: Jewish Diversity in the Greco-Roman World
- Sources for the Life of Jesus: Jewish and Christian Context
- Hasidic Tales
- Women in Jewish History
- Jewish Folklore
- Judaism in the Modern World
- American Judaism
- The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Jewish Life
- The Holocaust: History and Meaning
- Responses to the Holocaust
- Sex and Gender in Judaism
- Israel: Religion, Culture, National Identity
- Judaism in Israel and the United States
- Kabbalah: The Jewish Mystical Tradition
- Classic Jewish Texts
Author Steve Stern (center) talks with students in Ruth Setton's class on American Jewish literature (2003).

Students in Chava Weissler's class on Jewish Tradition observe the celebration of the holiday of Sukkot in the Boro Park area of Brooklyn occupied by Hasidic Jews (2008).

Ruth Setton and her class on Immigrant Women's Literature visit Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty (2008).
Co-curricular Programming

At Lehigh, the classroom experience is regularly enhanced by lectures, films, seminars, exhibits, trips, and cultural events sponsored by the Berman Center. Throughout the year, highly regarded academicians and writers offer public lectures to complement course offerings, often visiting classes to interact with students on a personal level. Since its inception, the Berman Center has sponsored more than 250 educational programs, which are also open to the public. Speakers brought to the Center include such well known personalities as Dennis Ross, Judy Chicago, Art Spiegelman, Arthur Hertzberg, Itamar Rabinovich, Meron Benvenisti, Peter Novick, and Trude Dothan.

The Center has organized several cooperative special events such as “The City of David: Discoveries from the Excavations” cosponsored by the Berman Center and LU Art Galleries. This extraordinary archaeological exhibit brought 6,000 visitors to Lehigh’s campus from eastern Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Two other cooperative projects between the Berman Center and the LU Art Galleries were “The Holocaust: Critical Reflections on Modernity” and “Diaspora: Re-Imagining Cultural Space.” Besides art exhibits, gallery lectures, conferences, films, and discussions, numerous courses throughout the College of Arts and Sciences incorporated modules on the relevant topics.
Speaker Ellen Frankel, editor of the Jewish Publication Society, discusses "Women's Voices in the Bible" (1997).

Artist Judy Chicago talks to Larry Silberstein's class on Responses to the Holocaust about her art exhibit "The Holocaust Project" (2000).

Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University in China, speaks with students after his lecture on the Jews of China to approximately 120 students and friends (2005).

Bent Melchior, Chief Rabbi of Denmark, recounted the rescue of the Danish Jews in a talk at Lehigh, where he met two students in the audience who believed they were his distant relatives (1997).
Interdisciplinary Conferences

Seeking to explore the ways in which Jewish cultural identity is shaped by interaction with other societies and cultures, the Center has developed a highly regarded series of international conferences and publications. To date, the Berman Center has sponsored the eight academic conferences and symposiums listed below, each of which has drawn to Lehigh an international group of scholars in Jewish Studies and related fields:

Fundamentalism as a Political Force in the Middle East (1989)

New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State (1990)

The Other in Jewish Thought and History (1992)

The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past/Interpreting the Present (1994)

Mapping Jewish Identities (1998)


Imagining Jews: Contemporary Explorations (2004)

No Direction Home: Re-imagineing Jewish Geography (2007)
Professors Elie KedHomeController (Berman Visiting Scholar), James Piscatored (Johns Hopkins), Ian Lustick (Dartmouth), Aaron Kirschenbaum (Tel Aviv Univ.), and Larry Silberman at the Center's first conference, "Fundamentalism as a Political Force in the Middle East" (1989).

Laurence Silberman, Colin Jones (NYU Press), Sander Gilman (Cornell Univ.), and Peter Likins (Lehigh President) at the opening reception for the Center's 1992 conference, "The Other in Jewish Thought and History."

Adi Ophir (Tel Aviv Univ.), Laura Levitt (Temple), and Daniel Boyarin (Univ. of California) at the Center's conference "Mapping Jewish Identities" (1998).

Authors Dana Horn (2nd from left) and Gerald Stern (center) join students during the morning break at the BCJS conference on "Imagining Jews: Contemporary Explorations" (2004).
Visiting Israeli Faculty

Beginning in 1988, owing to the generosity of Philip and Muriel Berman, a visiting faculty program provided Lehigh students with the opportunity to study with noted Israeli professors. The visiting faculty members, housed at the Berman Center, taught courses in departments throughout the University. It is our hope to reinstate this valuable program at some point in the future. The Israeli faculty who taught at Lehigh through this program are listed below along with their home institutions, area of specialization, and the names of the courses that they taught at Lehigh:

Philip and Muriel Berman Visiting Scholars

1988 - Dr. Gad Gilbar, Dept. of Middle Eastern History, University of Haifa, and Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, *Mid-East in World Affairs since 1945*

1988-90 - Dr. Elie Rekhess, Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, *Contemporary Islam in the Middle East; Israeli-Arab Conflict; Between Arab and Jew in the Middle East*

1990-91 - Dr. Ella Belfer, Dept. of Political Science, Bar Ilan University, *Politics and Religion; Literature and Politics*

1991-92 - Dr. Gabriel Weimann, Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, *Terrorism and the Mass Media; Mass Communication and Society*

1992-93 - Dr. Gad Barzilai, Dept. of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, *War and Politics in the Middle East; Politics of National Security and Law*

1993-94 - Dr. Theodore H. Friedgut, Dept. of Russian and Slavic Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *Soviet Collapse and World Politics; From USSR to Commonwealth; Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics*
1994-95 - Dr. Zvi Jagendorf, Dept. of English and Theater, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *Stranger in Renaissance Drama; Politics and Violence in Contemporary Drama; Modern Drama; Outsider in Renaissance Drama*

1995-96 - Dr. Ilai Alon, Dept. of Philosophy, Tel Aviv University, *Islamic Culture and the Middle East Conflict; Medieval Philosophy*

1996-97 - Dr. Devora Carmil, Center for Psychological Stress, University of Haifa, *Xenophobia in Israel, Germany, and the United States; Extreme Stress in the Israel Experience*

1997-98 - Dr. Ron Kazar, Dept. of English, University of Haifa, *Language, Gender, and Power; Language and Nation Building*

*Russell Berrie Visiting Professor*

2007-2008 - Dr. Yechiel Klar, Dept. of Psychology, Tel Aviv University, *Social Psychological Perspectives on Intractable Intergroup Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as a Case Study; Social Psychological and Societal Impact of the Holocaust on Israeli Society*

*Berman Visiting Berman Scholar Ron Kazar of the University of Haifa (left) chats with Hannah Haver of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem at the "Mapping Jewish Identities" conference (1998).*
Visiting Professorship at the Pontifical Gregorian University

In 1995 through the efforts and support of Muriel and Philip Berman, a new visiting faculty program was established at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Over the years, stimulated by this program, the Gregorian, one of the world's leading Catholic institutions of higher learning, expanded its Jewish Studies offerings. Today, the Cardinal Bea Center for Judaic Studies offers a regular program of courses, conferences, and lectures in Jewish Studies. In 1995, Dr. Silberman served as the first visiting Jewish Studies scholar.

After a hiatus of two years, through the generosity of Richard and Susan Master of Bethlehem, Pa., the Richard and Susan Master Visiting Professorship was initiated at the Gregorian. This position continues to this day. Following is a list of faculty who, through the Berman Center, taught an annual course at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Philip and Muriel Berman Visiting Professors

1995 Laurence J. Silberman, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Lehigh University

1996 David Blumenthal, Jay and Leslie Cohen Professor of Judaic Studies, Emory University

Richard and Susan Master Visiting Professors

1999 Manfred Vogel, Professor of Religion, Northwestern University

2000 Laurence J. Silberman, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Lehigh University

2002 Daniel Boyarin, Hermann P. and Sophia Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture, Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric, University of California at Berkeley
2004  Laurence J. Silberstein, Lehigh University

2005  Michael A. Signer, Abrams Professor in the Department of Theology and a Senior Fellow of the Medieval Institute, University of Notre Dame

2006  Deborah Lipstadt, Director of the Rabbi Donald A. Tam Institute for Jewish Studies and Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, Emory University

2007  Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky, Nathan and Janet Appleman Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies, Jewish Theological Society

2008  Susan E. Shapiro, Associate Professor, Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

2009  Shaye J. D. Cohen, Littauer Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature; Director, Center for Jewish Studies, Harvard University

2010  Kenneth Stow, Professor of Jewish History Emeritus, University of Haifa

Study in Israel

Over the years, many Lehigh students have had the opportunity to study in Israeli universities. Conditions permitting, Study in Israel has constituted an important part of the Jewish Studies program at Lehigh. In 1999 the Center offered a summer Lehigh-in-Israel course taught by Lehigh faculty. After two successful seasons, the program was curtailed owing to the violence in Israel. Scholarship support for students wishing to study in Israel is available thanks to a generous subvention from scholarship funds provided by the Howard Ballenzweig Memorial Fund for Study in Israel. Students also receive credit for semester, year, and summer programs at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University.
Publication Series

As a lasting contribution to the study of Jewish culture and religion, the center has published eight academic volumes, seven of which appear in the series New Perspectives on Jewish Studies, published by New York University Press. These books, listed below, seek to provide a theoretically informed, interdisciplinary perspective on the field of Jewish Studies.

New Perspectives on Jewish Studies, New York University Press
Laurence J. Silberstein, Series Editor

*Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*
edited by Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein

*Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse*
by Hannan Hever

*Mapping Jewish Identities*
edited by Laurence J. Silberstein

*Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*
edited by Steven Kepnes

*The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*
edited by Robert Cohn and Laurence J. Silberstein

*Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*
edited by Laurence J. Silberstein

*New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State*
edited by Laurence J. Silberstein

Published by Sheffield Academic Press (Continuum)
*The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*
edited by David Small and Neil Asher Silberman