

Jewish Studies Program Review 2019 Florida Atlantic University

Review Team and FAU contacts

The Jewish Studies Program review team visited FAU on February 10-12, 2019 and included Drs. Judith Baskin (University of Oregon), David Shneer (University of Colorado, Boulder), and William O'Brien (FAU Honors College).

The review team met with the following individuals during the visit to the Boca Raton Campus: Dr. Russell Ivy, Sr. Associate Provost for Academic Affairs; Dr. Edward Pratt, Dean of Undergraduate Studies; Dr. Linda Johnson, Director of the Program in Jewish Studies and Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Letters; Dr. Karin Scarpinato, Executive Associate Vice President for Research; Dr. Michael Horswell, Dean of the College of Arts & Letters; Laurie Carney, Sr. Director of Development and Outreach; the Jewish Studies core faculty: Professor Alan Berger, who occupies the Raddock Family Eminent Scholar Chair for Holocaust Studies and directs the Center for the Study of Values and Violence After Auschwitz, Professor Miriam Dalin, and Associate Professor Kristen Lindbeck; and five undergraduate students majoring in Jewish Studies.

Program Overview and Its Strengths

The Jewish Studies Program (JST) educates students about Jewish history and culture and its ongoing major role in the emergence and development of Western civilization. Students in the program are expected to develop as critical thinkers, aware of the diversity and complexity of the field. The program promotes a broad and comprehensive approach to JST that includes the arts, politics, and religion with a curriculum that emphasizes historical transformations and comparative frameworks among various Jewish communities and relationships with other groups. It enables students to develop a deeper understanding of American and world Jewry while training for opportunities for Jewish public service. The core faculty's research productivity is impressive, suggesting that students benefit significantly from the high level of faculty expertise in their fields. The program is fortunate in having scholarship funds available for its students, including incoming freshmen as well as upperclassmen.

Engaging with the large and vital South Florida Jewish community and also segments of the non-Jewish community, the JST faculty supports the University's commitment to building international, cross-cultural competence while fostering inclusiveness and promoting mutual understanding.

An FAU undergraduate degree in JST emphasizes knowledge and awareness of:

1. Jewish history from the Hebrew Bible to the present
2. The diversity of Jewish texts and their relationship to social and historical contexts
3. The diversity of Jewish cultures and traditions

4. The modern Hebrew language

The program offers a major (35 credits) and a recently-approved minor (18 credits) that will soon appear in the undergraduate catalog, the latter supplementing an existing certificate in JST. Required gateway courses include 6 credits in classical and modern Jewish civilization and 8 credits of intermediate Hebrew language study (i.e., two years of language with prerequisites included). Additionally, students must complete 21 hours of upper division coursework drawing from at least two of four areas: history, arts and culture, politics and social issues, and religion. The new minor in JST follows the guidelines of the program's certificate, requiring 6 gateway credits in classical and modern Jewish civilization and 12 credits from any of those four areas of study. Despite the addition of the minor, the review team recommends maintaining the present JST certificate. This option could be a valuable credential for individuals already involved in careers including Jewish education, social work, and communal service of various kinds.

In addition to its academic offerings, the JST program contributes greatly to the local Jewish and non-Jewish communities through speaking engagements by FAU faculty and visiting scholars, as well as through JST events on campus that are open to the public.

Opportunities:

While outreach to the community has been a significant highlight of JST, enrollment statistics suggest that there is much room for growth to achieve the program's optimal contribution to undergraduate education at FAU. Enrollment in the JST major has been consistently low, between 7 and 12 students during the current program review period and between 8 and 12 during the years covered by the 2012 program review (going back to 2005). The review team notes that the number of majors is not out of line with those at comparable large state universities, but the general enrollments for courses in JST are far lower than would be expected. Jewish studies programs generally are service units that offer general education courses to large numbers of undergraduates; the JST courses at FAU at this time do not fulfill a significant service role.

Questions for the Review Team

1. What role should the Hebrew Language have in the JST program?

The review team recognizes that modern Hebrew has traditionally been the core language taught in JST programs across the nation. At the same time, we also recognize the diversity of Jewish languages, both past and present, including Aramaic, Ladino, and especially Yiddish, among others.

We are also aware that the study of modern Hebrew is notoriously challenging, especially in a program, such as at FAU, which only offers two years of modern Hebrew. The challenges were highlighted in our conversation with JST students, who reported that after two years of coursework, they could decode Hebrew but did not generally understand what they were

reading. They also noted that the benefits of Hebrew study for JST majors can be limited by the mix of student language abilities in a given classroom. They report that instructors tend to teach to students at the lowest skill level, rendering the experience redundant and frustrating to students with greater prior exposure to Hebrew. Such issues are not limited to FAU but are commonly observed in university Hebrew instruction. While offering Hebrew is justifiable, the review team notes that other institutions offer a range of options for the Jewish studies language requirement. JST at the University of Colorado (CU), Boulder, for instance, has a three-year language requirement, but it can be taken in any language (recognizing the diversity of Jewish languages) as long as the student uses that language in the capstone project, done independently under the direction of a faculty member, a requirement that FAU JST may want to revive. Although most CU majors have indeed chosen Hebrew as their language, some students choose Spanish, Arabic, French, and even Yiddish, which they study through intensive summer programs and on-going year-round Yiddish language engagement. Importantly, despite this flexibility, CU JST did not see a drop in the number of students enrolled in the Hebrew language program, which remains the biggest recruiter for the major in JST.

The review team recognizes that the JST faculty and the Dean of Arts & Letters at FAU currently prioritizes the hiring of a Hebrew instructor, and that a proposal has been submitted for a two-year grant to help fund this position. While the program review team supports this attempt, we also assert that the opportunities for studying Jewish languages are often better done *in situ* (i.e., in immersion environments). Toward this end, and given the significant scholarship support within FAU that is already available to JST majors, we recommend that JST and the College explore the idea of providing JST majors with summer grants to go abroad to study Hebrew in Israel.¹ To supplement these intensive summer programs, students could also be supported by FAU to participate in online learning opportunities at other institutions (<https://biblicalhebrew.huji.ac.il/>) in a variety of languages throughout the year. Ultimately, even if the submitted grant is awarded and a Hebrew instructor is hired, we would encourage these or similar supplemental activities to encourage students to experience a foreign language at an appropriate level and to continue pushing themselves to advance in whatever language they choose.

2. What is the most appropriate administrative structure for JST?

JST at FAU has significant potential for increased success and is universally viewed within the university and in the local community as an important program. The self-study, however, notes that the program's growth and effectiveness has been hampered by changing leadership over

¹ For example, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (<https://overseas.huji.ac.il/academics/hebrew-and-other-languages/study-hebrew-language-at-the-hebrew-university-of-jerusalem/summer-programs/>) or Tel Aviv University (https://international.tau.ac.il/Intensive_Hebrew_Ulpan), or in an immersive environment in the U.S. (e.g. University of Nebraska-Lincoln <https://judaic.unl.edu/summer-programs-us>) or Yiddish in an immersion environment in Amherst, Vilna, Strasbourg, or Tel Aviv (<https://ingeveb.org/pedagogy/yiddish-summer-2019>).

time, the lack of adequate staff support, and having no dedicated office space. These issues have been long-standing and were also noted in the preceding program review in 2012. During our visit, the review team learned that encouraging changes are currently in process that could effectively address these concerns. First, the College of Arts & Letters will conduct an Eminent Scholar search in 2019-20 for a JST program Director. This person will supervise the program, coordinate and schedule course offerings, oversee outreach activities, and conduct additional tasks on behalf of the program. The stability to the program provided by this hire can provide the ongoing leadership and direction that the program needs for enhanced success. The review team suggests that the Director should report to the Dean and that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) be written to clarify the arrangement between the Director's home department and the College. Second, the Dean of Arts & Letters indicated to the review team that a School of Interdisciplinary Studies is being created to house the College's various small academic programs, including JST. This new administrative structure will include staff support as well as dedicated office space. The review team highlights the positive importance of these changes for JST at FAU.

After hearing from all parties and taking these significant developments into account, the review team also recommends that the new Director integrate affiliate faculty into the program's administrative operations (for example, Dr. Andrew Furman, who teaches AML 4663 Jewish American Literature, Dr. Myriam Ruthenberg, who could teach Jewish literature classes, and Dr. Patricia Kollander, who teaches EUH 4465 Hitler and Nazi Germany). One suggestion is that the Director form an Executive Committee including core faculty permanently and some affiliated faculty on rotating terms. Faculty meetings that include JST core and affiliate faculty should be held at least once per semester. The Director should also clarify with the affiliates' chairpersons their assignment commitments to ensure regularly available cross-listed courses for JST, perhaps formalized with MOUs. The goal is to foster a stronger sense of investment in the JST program beyond the core faculty and to ensure more reliable and timely course offerings that meet students' needs in both the major and minor. Similarly, it would be desirable to establish shared responsibility for evaluation of the core JST faculty by the relevant department chair and the JST Director. This arrangement would assure that the full range of activities of the core faculty, who teach three out of their contracted five annual courses in JST, as well as provide service to the JST program, are not overlooked.

3. What are creative ways of enhancing student enrollments and the number of majors and minors in JST?

At this time, student enrollments in JST courses are lower than they should be, given the large pool of potential students and the high quality of instruction. Suggestions for changing this situation include the following:

(i) JST courses are all at the 3000 or 4000 level; this should definitely be changed. The gateway courses that are required for the major, JST 3403 Classical Jewish Civilization and JST 3404 Modern Jewish Civilization, should be reorganized at the 1000 or 2000-level and be made

available for General Education credit. This action would bring more students into JST courses early in their academic careers, enhancing the JST service contribution to FAU while potentially attracting larger numbers of students to the major and minor. For similar reasons, there should be a General Education Holocaust course taught at the 2000-level. Other courses might also be candidates for lower-level designation, including JST 3102 Jewish Literature Through the Centuries, JST 3513 Jewish Wisdom: An Introduction to Classical Jewish Thought, JST 4510 Women and Judaism, JST 4415 American Jewish History, and JST 4415 History of Zionism and the State of Israel. Additionally, some courses that remain at the upper levels could be revised as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Some thought should also be given to the creation of a 1000-level "Introduction to Judaism" course. The program should consider hiring qualified adjuncts to teach some of these Gen Ed courses. In addition, the graduate seminar taught by the Raddock Chair might be better sustained by offering it as an upper division undergraduate/graduate course. Since the program does not have graduate students, it would provide an opportunity for JST majors to experience the course and the Raddock Chair's teaching in a small seminar setting.

(ii) The review team suggests renaming courses with short and enticing titles that would attract more students and potentially grow the major and minor. The two required gateway courses, JST 3403 and JST 3404, for instance, could be retitled "The Jewish People I" and "The Jewish People II," or "Jewish Lives I" and "Jewish Lives II"; or "Jewish Civilizations I and Jewish Civilizations II"; or other possibilities along these lines. JST 3102 might be retitled "Jewish Storytelling," while JST 4415 could become "American Jewish Lives," and JST 4415 might be "Israel Past and Present." JST 3513 could be changed to something brief like "Jewish Thinkers."

(iii) Elective courses in JST are already cross-listed with relevant departments, but in several cases there are additional cross-listing opportunities that would alert more students to these offerings. For instance, JST 4430 Medieval Jewish History should be cross-listed with History in addition to Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature (LLCL).

(iv) JST should encourage the development of new courses that are relevant to emerging student interests, including those in STEM. One excellent possibility suggested by a faculty member is "Jewish Medical Ethics." In addition, interest was expressed in developing Latin American Jewish studies, and we noticed that Dr. Nora Erro-Peralta teaches courses on Latin American women writers and film. Perhaps someone in JST might reach out to Dr. Erro-Peralta and the chair of LLCL to see if she might be interested in developing a course for the JST program.

(v) The large southeastern Florida population provides a large pool of potential students, including a significant number of individuals involved in Jewish educational and communal activities. Outreach efforts should be extended through the local Jewish press and through social media communications to increase awareness of the JST Program and courses at FAU, along with information on how students can register. Offering some of the courses in the evenings and developing online courses could significantly expand enrollments. Moreover, we

heard from students that they would particularly welcome JST online courses delivered in the summer term, especially since they need to fulfill the State of Florida's requirement of 9 summer credits over their four years at FAU.

(vi) The review team recommends expanding efforts to enhance and publicize study abroad opportunities in accredited programs that focus on JST. These programs include universities in Israel as well as a range of possibilities in the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and Latin America. Students who take advantage of these opportunities could accumulate credits that would count for the major or minor. While we are aware that FAU has a relationship with Haifa University in Israel and Anglo American University in the Czech Republic, the students who met with the review team all suggested their preference for an official relationship with the Rothberg School at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI).

4. Should JST keep its major or cancel it and instead focus its energies on enrollments in the minor?

As discussed above, the JST major has struggled with low enrollment for over a decade. The consistently small numbers and lack of growth have logically led to questions about whether or not maintaining the major is worth the effort. The review team had considered this question seriously and we strongly recommend keeping the JST major. The changes already in progress regarding JST (i.e., the Director hire, adding support staff, and establishing office space) signal strong potential for an upward trajectory for the program, including enrollment growth. Additionally, the review team met with five JST majors who convinced us of the importance of keeping that opportunity intact. The students included two seniors, a junior, a sophomore, and a freshman. All were strongly committed to the major and four of the five were looking forward to careers for which the JST major would provide a strong foundation. These included the rabbinate and Jewish social work or communal service. Interestingly, all five of these students had double majors and were not experiencing difficulties in completing two majors in four years. The relatively low number of credits (35) required for the JST major helps facilitate double-major opportunities. Of course, maintaining the major does not preclude an emphasis on growing enrollments in the new minor. The enhancements and recommendations that would facilitate enrollment growth in the major could bring even faster growth in the 18 credit JST minor as students seek to combine their primary academic and career interests with their interest in JST.

5. What strategies have other JST programs employed to enhance their visibility and prominence in the university and community?

Communication is the key to being more visible on campus and in the community. There is currently good communication between JST and the community regarding speaking events that are consistently well-attended. These events are currently the most significant contribution of JST. To further enhance communication and to enlist additional student attendance at events, the review team recommends hiring a work-study student or intern with course credit to manage a JST social media presence on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. In addition, all public events

should be video recorded and then posted to the website. This approach allows people not able to attend the event the opportunity to see what took place and perhaps more importantly is a resource to show off all of the great events FAU's JST program has brought to campus.

6. How could the role of the Eminent Faculty in JST be better coordinated with the program?

The four core faculty members in JST provide the central teaching and service support for the program. Among the core members there are differentiated workload levels. The two Eminent Scholars by contract are assigned a lighter teaching load than the others but have no obligation to take on the JST Director's role. The current configuration of the core faculty thus creates the appearance of two tiers within the program: one where historically two senior men occupied the Eminent Scholar positions and focused on research and outreach; the other with two women serving the students, the program, and doing most of the teaching. Furthermore, because none of the core faculty are inclined at this time to take on the role, the JST program is currently administered by an interim Director with no academic connection to Jewish studies. While this situation is workable but not ideal, the retirement of one Eminent Scholar at the end of Fall 2018 has created an opportunity to hire a JST Director. The review team strongly recommends rewriting the contract of the Gimelstob Eminent Scholar to include not only the obligation to direct the program for a contracted length of time, specified in new bylaws, and manage community relations, but also to contribute two courses per year to the JST major.

7. How can JST enhance placement in jobs/grad school after graduation?

The review team suggests that JST move away from focusing primarily on envisioning careers in Jewish service fields for its graduates and instead also emphasize the fact that the program provides preparation and credentials to its students and graduates that position them to compete successfully as global citizens in today's international, socially engaged, multi-lingual economy. These include:

- (i) A high level of liberal arts training in critical thinking, effective communication skills in writing and speaking, and close reading and analysis of various forms of human expression.
- (ii) Experience in a global/international context via study abroad programs, FAU faculty-led education abroad programs, and language training.
- (iii) Specific applied skills and knowledges related to JST (via core courses in the major, study abroad, language training, service learning, internships, and a capstone experience).

With the addition of a minor, JST needs to imagine how to reach pre-med, pre-law, business, and other students outside the Arts & Letters orbit. The review team has already suggested the addition of courses that bridge JST and STEM fields, for instance, and also the feasibility of double-majoring and promotion of the minor. In this manner, JST can be shaped to connect to intersect with the various Pillars and Platforms of FAU's Strategic Plan for the Race to

Excellence. JST should make efforts to establish connections with programs in the College of Business, School of Social Work, and departments of biology, political science, history, and other majors (both outside and within the College of Arts & Letters), to encourage students interested in pre-med, pre-law, business, etc., to add a minor in JST in order to acquire the critical thinking, research, and writing skills emphasized in a strong liberal arts program.

Overall Recommendations

1. Director: The university should conduct a broad search, with open field and open rank (associate or full), for a Gimelstob Eminent Scholar who will serve as the Director of the program and contribute two courses to JST each year. Both of these courses should be open to undergraduates; one could be a shared resource course for graduate students and advanced undergraduates.
2. Faculty: The program should increase the number of faculty affiliated with JST by incentivizing faculty who are currently teaching an occasional course for JST or who might be encouraged to teach a course not currently being offered. These incentives could be research funds, course buyouts, or other such inducements, all of which would be coordinated with the home unit of said faculty members.
3. Space and Support: The forthcoming School of Interdisciplinary Studies (SIS) will house the new Director along with an administrative support staff dedicated to the programs housed in the SIS, effectively providing JST with a campus home.
4. Curriculum: To attract more undergraduate students, we suggest a thorough curricular review based on recommendations outlined above including: i) revising course titles; ii) redesigning and proposing existing courses for General Education (down to the 1000/2000 level), and adding Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) designations to more advanced existing courses; iii) pursuing additional cross-listing opportunities for courses (e.g., JST 4430 with both LLCL and History, as noted above), which would alert more students to these offerings; and iv) creating new courses in areas of interest to students, some of which could be taught by credentialed adjunct instructors.
5. Experiential Learning: Improved study abroad opportunities and internship opportunities as described above. Guidelines for participating in these experiential learning opportunities must be vetted by all necessary parties and be clearly outlined on the JST program website.
6. Online Courses: The review team recommends the development and implementation of increased JST online course offerings both during the academic year and summer terms.
7. Languages: The review team supports the Dean's efforts to secure funding for a Hebrew instructor, who will also contribute to community outreach. At the same time, we believe that opportunities for studying Jewish languages are often better accomplished *in situ* (i.e., in immersion environments). Therefore, we also recommend supporting JST majors to participate in accredited summer abroad intensive language programs and to undertake online language training throughout the year. The program has ample scholarship funds to assist majors in these endeavors.

8. Administrative Structure: Bylaws for JST should clearly articulate both the decision making process and the various roles and responsibilities for running JST's affairs. We also recommend including a rotating presence of "affiliated faculty" in an executive committee within JST, which would be collectively responsible for governing the program. The bylaws will state the terms of appointment for the Director (three years seems sensible), as well as the rotating executive committee members, and also indicate the possibility of reappointment in both cases.
9. Outreach to Internal and External Constituents: We recommend developing a social media presence, perhaps relying on a JST work-study student or paid intern working for the Director. We also recommend that the Office of Undergraduate Admissions expand outreach efforts to high schools both locally and out-of-state, particularly in the Northeast, to attract students with potential interest in JST. In our conversation with the five students majoring in JST, two of them came from the NJ/NY area, and they specifically said they chose FAU because they wanted to pursue JST (and in one case to live with a grandmother to save money). Moreover, we recommend that the future Director connect with the Florida Israel Institute; the Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education, housed in the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights Initiative (which will also be housed in SIS); and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in both Boca Raton and Jupiter to enhance academic connections and reach the largest number of potential students and interested community members. Similarly, we recommend sharing information about courses and programs with local synagogues and Hebrew day schools, since staff members may wish to pursue the JST certificate option.