



THE GEORGE L. MOSSE / LAURENCE A. WEINSTEIN
CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



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From the Director



Nina Caputo, Director



On the cover:

A page from Moses Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Written originally in Judeo-Arabic, the text shown here is Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, authorized by Maimonides himself. Handwritten on parchment in ink, and illuminated in tempera and gold leaf, the manuscript was created in Barcelona in 1347 or 1348. (The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, cod. Heb. 37)

Maimonides makes an appearance in two articles in this issue. See pp. 8–9 and p. 10.

Newsletter Editor:
Gwen Walker

I recently had the pleasure of attending the Center for Jewish Studies Pre-Commencement Celebration. It was a lovely event, in which we bade farewell to a class of incredibly impressive graduating seniors and honored extraordinary students just embarking on their Jewish Studies coursework. Each year, we spend some time introducing the students and describing their academic interests, accomplishments, and post-graduation plans. The diversity of paths that bring students to Jewish Studies is remarkable.

Reflecting those diverse backgrounds and interests, the students featured in this newsletter intend to pursue varied careers, including healthcare, academe, and the rabbinate. Whatever their individual plans, all of our students find value in the way that CJS courses immerse them in the study of human society and culture. Offering rich examples of human achievements and struggles, Jewish Studies provides an invaluable ethical and cultural foundation that will help inform students' decisions as they enter the professional world.

I am very excited that the Center for Jewish Studies has various resources to help students reach their goals. For example, thanks to the generous support of Meg and James Wiviott, the recently established Maimonides Scholarship provides substantial tuition assistance for Jewish Studies majors. The inaugural awards went to two exceptional students, Bridget Stern and Sophia Adelman, who describe their very different paths to the Jewish Studies major on pp. 8–9 of this issue. Other CJS scholarships support instruction in Hebrew and Yiddish, independent undergraduate research, or exceptional writing—skills that help students navigate their way through college and into the increasingly complex professional world.

It is both humbling and inspiring to see these students use the skills and knowledge they acquired in the Jewish Studies program to reach their long-term goals.

Nina Caputo
Director, Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies
Lipton Professor of Jewish Studies



PLEASE GIVE TO JEWISH STUDIES AT UW-MADISON

Support is crucial to sustain and grow the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated.

There are two ways to make a donation:

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ONLINE

Visit supportuw.org/giveto/cjsnews

To learn about other ways of making a gift, such as through a charitable fund, an estate fund, or securities, please contact Director of Development Rebekah Sherman at the UW Foundation (rebekah.sherman@supportuw.org).

Thank you for considering us in your giving plans this summer!

Built to Last

A New Home for Jewish Studies

Starting this July, the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies will have a new home. Thanks to the generosity of UW alumni Jeffrey and Marvin Levy, CJS and 7 other academic units will move into an elegantly designed, thoroughly modern new building at the corner of Johnson and Park Streets.

Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall, named after Jeff and Marv's parents, was created for programs in the humanities. To serve that purpose, it offers inviting study spaces for reading and writing, as well as areas for students, faculty, and staff to gather.

In addition to CJS, Levy Hall will be the home of African American Studies, American Indian and Indigenous Studies, Asian American Studies, Chicanx/e and Latinx/e Studies, Gender and Women's Studies, History, and Religious Studies. While offering each unit its own space, the building's open layout also encourages the kind of spontaneous conversations that can lead to collaborations across the different departments and programs.

The five-floor building features two large lecture halls, 11 smaller classrooms, a café, a terrace, and a rooftop garden. Three entrances lead into an expansive central atrium several stories high, traversed by a suspended catwalk and surrounded by floor-to-ceiling glass windows.

This open atmosphere creates quite a different effect than the academic buildings that greeted the Levys when they arrived at UW–Madison in the 1960s. Jeff and Marv's older brother, Phillip (1942–2021), came first, earning a BS in 1964. Marv earned his BS in 1968 and a JD in 1971. Jeff earned his BS in 1972. In honor of Phillip, Marv and Jeff have recently provided the funds for another new building, the Phillip A. Levy Engineering Center, with a grand opening planned for early 2029.



Over the years the Levys have supported dozens of university and community needs, including Jewish organizations such as Hillel and Chabad and synagogues such as Temple Beth El and Beth Israel Center. This philanthropy reflects the family's deep commitment

The Julie & Peter Weil Study & Event Space in Levy Hall
(Bora Architecture & Interiors)



Levy Hall was designed by Bora Architecture & Interiors, with interior design by Ramlow/Stein Architecture + Interiors.

to the communities and projects they support. "For us," Jeff explains, "it was never about writing checks from afar. It was about rolling up our sleeves, engaging with the causes we believed in, and being part of the work." As Marv remarked at the building's 2024 groundbreaking ceremony: "At some point in your life, hopefully, you realize that it is not about you, but what you can do to help others."

Throughout Irving and Dorothy's 61 years of marriage, the couple worked hard, creating the means to help many others, both in their own lifetime and beyond. While living in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in the post-World War II years, Irving started working in the restaurant supply business. Eventually he purchased Phillips Distributing Corporation, which is now operated by Marv and Jeff.

The building that bears their parents' name is built to last. In addition to the durability of its construction, Levy Hall offers state-of-the-art technology and accessibility, with stairless entrances, wide stairwells inside, and spacious elevators. Among other environmentally prudent measures, Levy Hall has a system for collecting rainwater from the roof and storing it in an off-site cistern to cover the building's irrigation needs.

The Levys' gift of \$20 million supplemented the state's allocation for the building. As the blueprints continued to unfold, other UW supporters pitched in to make possible a building of exceptional quality. These include CJS Board of Visitors members Julie and Peter Weil ('70, JD'74), who provided the funds for a two-story student lounge—a spot they picked, says Julie, because it's "a unifying space," "where faculty and students can congregate."

Interim Chancellor Eric M. Wilcots, who was the Dean of L&S throughout planning and construction, has described Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall as a testament to support for the humanities.

As Jeff explains, "We want buildings to last a hundred years." In this first year of Levy Hall's long life, we in CJS are grateful for the opportunity to be part of it.

HEBREW BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

From Cincinnati to Jerusalem, Students Use Language Skills in Many Ways

Jewish Studies certificate student Carl Knaack (BA '26) had an unexpected opportunity to stretch his knowledge of biblical Hebrew when he was invited last fall to read aloud from a treasured Torah, housed in a Cincinnati synagogue.

Carl's unique path to the Jewish Studies program began with his upbringing as a Sabbatarian Christian, a denomination whose members keep Sabbath on Saturday and observe the seven annual festivals described in Leviticus 23. A triple major in Anthropology, Classical Humanities, and Religious Studies, Carl has drawn on the strengths of multiple departments in the humanities to reach a level of knowledge unusual at the undergraduate level. In our program, his coursework has included intensive biblical Hebrew with Professor Jeremy M. Hutton (Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies).

Impressed by the depth and breadth of Carl's education, we asked him to join us last fall in a meeting of the CJS Board of Visitors to talk about his experiences in Jewish Studies. When he mentioned to the board that he was planning to attend a conference in Cincinnati, BOV member and Cincinnati resident Jim Hilb (BA '68) invited Carl to join him and his wife Barbara for a day in the city that would include a visit to the Issac M. Wise Synagogue, which holds a Hilb family Torah dating to the late 19th century.

Carl's visit with the Hilbs began at the Nancy and David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center, where they spent several hours in an exhibit called "Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away." He describes the experience as both sobering and inspiring, with "stories of persecution and resistance, loss and love, death and rebuilding life." Some of the highlights, he says, included "a shofar that someone had either smuggled in or made in Auschwitz, that was blown in the camp on Yom Kippur in 1944. This shofar survived the war, but its maker likely did not." The exhibit ended with a section on Auschwitz survivors who eventually built new lives in the Cincinnati area.

Later in the day, the Hilbs took Carl to the Wise Temple so that he could read from the family's Torah. Originating in or near Moravia, the Torah was brought by Jim's ancestors to Hessdorf, Germany, where it was kept in the town's only synagogue. As the Nazis gained power, the family moved the Torah to their home, and when they immigrated to the United States in 1936–37, they brought it with them. After it was passed down to Jim, he and Barbara decided to loan it to the Wise Temple, where it is now available for congregants and visitors to view and study. Among these are the Hilbs' five grandchildren, who each read from it at their bar and bat mitzvahs. Made of calfskin *klaf* with intensely black lettering, the scrolls are protected by intricately decorated wooden finials, enhancing the Torah's beauty as well as its longevity.

At the Wise Temple, Rabbi Zachary Goodman removed the Torah and allowed Carl to hold it. "I was able to read a passage out of Leviticus," Carl explains, "and it was a deeply moving experience. It crowned the day, as it showed the resistance and vitality of the Jewish people. The Nazis tried to exterminate them and extinguish their way of life. But the Torah has survived. The Jewish people have survived."

In addition to his triple major and certificate in Jewish Studies, Carl has certificates in Archaeology and Material Culture Studies. After graduation, he will attend the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he plans to pursue an MA with a focus on the Hebrew Bible and Anthropology.



Carl Knaack examining the Hilb family's Torah
For Carl's firsthand account of his experience and a video of him reading from the Torah, visit cjs.wisc.edu/2026/04/10/cincinnati/

With first-rate instruction in Hebrew, our students can develop skills that take them in surprising directions. The Class of 2026 is no exception, with seniors using both biblical and modern Hebrew to advance their educational and professional opportunities.

While Carl has focused on biblical Hebrew, Maya Foonberg (BA '26) has immersed herself in modern Hebrew. A double major in Kinesiology and Jewish Studies, Maya has combined her skills in each of these areas by serving as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in Israel.

Growing up in Los Angeles, California, Maya attended Jewish day school and spent a semester of 10th grade in Hod Hasharon, Israel. Soon after she came to UW, an advisor noted her proficiency in Hebrew and suggested that she take an advanced-level course. Before long, Maya had completed the requirements for a Jewish Studies certificate and realized that she needed only a few more courses for a major.

One of her favorite Jewish Studies courses was "Anne Frank," in which students undertake a close reading of Anne Frank's diary. Maya took the class in the fall of 2023. After the October 7 attacks, she recalls, Professor Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor (German, Nordic, and Slavic+) "went out of her way to make us feel safe." The experience in this class, Maya explains, "taught me about community at UW." Although it was a very difficult semester, it reinforced her understanding that there are "a lot of people here who care."

Viewing her Jewish Studies major as "a way to stay connected to my roots," Maya has made it a goal to take one course in the program each semester "to remind me who I am."

Serving Jewish communities is an important part of who she is. Since elementary school, Maya has performed volunteer work through a variety of social programs that help people across all age groups, from children to senior adults. She has volunteered at an orphanage for special-needs children; Leket Israel, a food rescue organization; Yad LaKashish, serving elderly Israelis who live below the poverty line; the Michael Levin base, which supports "lone soldiers"; and Shuva Achim, a station outside of Gaza that provides soldiers with free meals, clothing, toiletries, and other amenities. Here at UW-Madison, Maya has served on the board of Chabad since her freshman year.

In addition to her double major, Maya has earned a certificate in Athletic Healthcare. On campus, she has worked in the Wisconsin Injury in Sport Laboratory and has shadowed employees in Badger Athletics to learn more about the field of athletic healthcare. Since earning her EMT certificate in the first semester of her sophomore year, Maya has been working for local medical transport companies to provide emergency care



Maya Foonberg as an EMT for Magen David Adom

in ambulances. She also works for UW Health's Med Flight, which focuses on emergency transport of children and infants by means of ambulances and helicopters.

Last summer Maya put her unique skill set to work by volunteering as an EMT in Israel with Magen David Adom from May to July. Among other steps to prepare for this work, she had to pass a test of 300 medical terms in Hebrew. After completing her training in Jerusalem, she moved to Tel Aviv where she lived with other volunteers and was stationed to serve at Ramat Gan, a city in the Tel Aviv District. While caring for patients, communicating with nurses, and reading medical reports, she used her Hebrew daily.

As an EMT in Tel Aviv, Maya responded not only to car crashes and other routine accidents, but also to bomb explosions that required treatment of shrapnel wounds. Despite these conditions, she says, working as an EMT in Israel was "the best experience of my life, because it allowed me to help my people in a time of challenge."

Maya intends to return to Israel to continue to volunteer with Magen David Adom in the coming summer before going on to graduate school. Eventually, she plans on earning her master's as a physician's assistant, specializing in sports medicine.

UW's Historically Jewish Sororities

Developing Leadership Skills in a Community of Women

In the first half of the 20th century, when Greek-letter organizations routinely excluded Jewish students, some responded by forming sororities and fraternities of their own. Our 2023 issue of this newsletter featured Jewish fraternities at UW–Madison. Here, we take a retrospective look at UW's Jewish sororities from their origins to the present.

To the uninitiated, Jewish sororities may seem like a lighthearted diversion from academic coursework. As the memories of UW alumnae show, however, these organizations serve not only as points of social connection, but also as "safe spaces" and springboards for professional development.

The first two Jewish sororities at UW–Madison were Alpha Epsilon Phi and Phi Sigma Sigma, which started chapters here in 1921 and 1930, respectively. In 1958 another Jewish sorority, Sigma Delta Tau, also established a Madison chapter. By that time, Jewish Greek-letter organizations had begun admitting non-Jews, and vice versa. Yet, even as these sororities at UW have continued to evolve, their Jewish members stress the value of that shared identity.

When Susie Greenwood (née Grossman) arrived on campus in 1964, the Madison chapter of Phi Sigma Sigma had just been revived after a period of dormancy. "I wasn't the sorority type," she recalls, "but I loved the fact that Phi Sigma Sigma was new." While pursuing a major in math and a minor in French, she participated avidly and eventually served as chapter president. "Most of my friends at UW weren't Jewish," Susie adds, "so the sorority was a great way to meet other Jewish students." After graduating in 1967, she completed several higher degrees,

including an MA and MBA at Columbia University, and went on to a career in banking. In 1990, the skills that she first began to develop in the sorority served her well when she became the president of the International Women's Forum, an invitation-only women's leadership organization with approximately 7,800 members, in 78 forums in 37 countries.

One of the lifelong friends that Susie made in Phi Sigma Sigma was Bonne Slavitt, who pledged in the Spring of 1965. As a member of Phi Sig, Bonnie ran meetings, organized events, managed budgets, and planned activities to raise money for non-profit organizations like the National Kidney Foundation. Through these experiences, she honed leadership skills that she also applied at Hillel, which she credits with helping her find her Jewish identity. In time, she developed a range of skills that helped her both professionally and personally throughout her life. Among these, she mentions the ability to assess "what works and what needs to be tweaked or not done again." Equally important, she recalls, "I learned when to shut my mouth and delegate."

Bonnie's commitment to the sorority also motivated her academically. To move from "pledge" to "active" status, she would need to raise her GPA for two consecutive semesters. By teaching herself "to study in a different way," she achieved that goal, and by her senior year, she was serving as the chapter's president. "My 'do not quit' attitude has carried me through many difficult situations," she reflects, including two battles with breast cancer.

After graduating in 1968 with a major in Political Science, Bonnie gravitated toward teaching, earning an MA in Education from Rutgers University in 1973, followed by an MA and MAT in Jewish Education from the University of Judaism (now known as American Jewish University) in 1983. In all, she has taught in 10 different synagogues throughout the country. For 10 years, she was the founding principal of Yavneh Day School in Los Gatos, California. Drawing on her early experience in the sorority, she eventually built a second career in development. Thanks in large part to her time in Phi Sig, she reflects, "I have spent my career working in the Jewish community, first as a Jewish educator and then as philanthropy director—two careers I have absolutely loved."



Bonnie Slavitt (second from left) at the 1967 national convention of Phi Sigma Sigma in Washington, D.C.

At the end of the 1960s, after Susie and Bonnie graduated, Greek-letter organizations receded amid the Vietnam War and the rise of countercultural movements. Many sororities at UW, including Phi Sig, closed their doors.

The experience of Fran Cey (née Fishbein, BA '70) reflects that change. Fran, a major in Social Work, belonged to Sigma Delta Tau from 1966-70. From the start, Fran says, she and her SDT sisters were "bound together by our Jewish identity." As students at UW during the late sixties, they also lived through what she calls "a unique experience of political activism." By the time they graduated, she explains, "we felt that the Greek system wasn't relevant or responsive to the times." But the women from Fran's cohort remain in close contact. "The friendships I made during those college years were enduring and most memorable," she says.

In the 1980s, interest in Greek-letter organizations began to rebound. From 1986 to 1989, Wendy Rosen (BA '89) and Tracey Mandel Sachs (BS '89) were in Sigma Delta Tau, which by that time had been reactivated. Tracey was drawn to SDT, she says, because that was where she was most comfortable, "in a home with Jewish girls from every other state." Wendy, who was friends with Tracey at their Illinois high school, found that sorority life "made a big campus manageable."

Today, Sigma Delta Tau and Alpha Epsilon Phi still have chapters at UW. And since 1991, when CJS was founded, some of their members have received majors or certificates in Jewish Studies.

The most recent is SDT alumna Lilly Polakoff, who graduated this past May with a BBA and certificates in Jewish Studies and International Business. Like Wendy Rosen in the 1980s, Lilly found that "Being a member of SDT makes being on a big campus like Wisconsin feel a little smaller and gives me a taste of home in a community of women with values and beliefs similar to my own." Her favorite courses, she says, included Hebrew, because it widened her circle of Jewish acquaintances in her freshman year. The size of the class also provided students with numerous opportunities for interaction, which "made adjusting to college life and college-level courses easier."

Lilly grew up in a tight-knit Jewish community. "My Jewish identity is extremely important to me," she says, "and I knew I wanted to keep that connection strong in college." Her membership in SDT, combined with her coursework in Jewish Studies, helped her to do so. Among other cherished memories of the sorority, she counts "SDT Shabbat dinners and challah bakes, which gave me an opportunity to thoughtfully connect with my Judaism on campus with my sisters."



Lilly (center) with roommates Jillian Garber and Tali Brown at a formal recruitment gathering

In her junior year, Lilly served as chapter president. In that role, she says, "I oversaw creating our calendar, helping to plan events, assisting with the budget, representing the chapter to the wider UW community, facilitating social events and fundraisers, running meetings, overseeing my board to make sure they were completing their roles, and managing the chapter overall to make sure everyone was happy, safe, and fulfilled in their sorority experience." Through these activities, Lilly adds, "I learned a lot about how to be a good leader and delegate work." She is proud of SDT's accomplishments, which included a 5k run supporting Jewish Women International and an annual "Eat Late" fundraiser for Prevent Child Abuse America.

"Beyond personal and professional growth," Lilly adds, "my role as president helped me grow into a leader in the Jewish community, because I gained experience representing a group bigger than myself and supported members through difficult and confusing times for our community on campus."

Under Lilly's presidency, SDT recruited its largest class to date. As she embarks on the next chapter of her life, she finds it fulfilling to see the chapter thriving. "I know this growth will be sustained," she says, "for many years to come."

NEW SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTS JEWISH STUDIES MAJORS

This year, through the generous support of Jim Wiviott (BBA '81) and Meg Wiviott (BA '80), CJS initiated the Maimonides Scholarship in Jewish Studies, which offers substantial support for Jewish Studies majors. Here, the first two recipients of the Maimonides Scholarship, Bridget Stern and Sophia Adelman, reflect on the value of their Jewish Studies majors.

A School Within a School

By Bridget Stern (BA '28)



Growing up in the Los Angeles area, I spent ten years as a camper at Camp Ramah in Ojai, California, surrounded by kids who went to Jewish day school, traveled to Israel, and had an education centered on their Jewish identity. From a young age, I envied them because they had opportunities to learn that I lacked

but knew I wanted. Fortunately, I had incredibly supportive Camp Ramah directors who inspired me and a wonderful director at United Synagogue Youth who taught me so much. From them, I believed that I too could have a successful career in Jewish education. When applying to UW-Madison, I had no doubt that I would pursue a Jewish Studies major.

During my first two years in the Jewish Studies program, not only have I been able to learn about what Jews believe, but I have also been able to study the Jewish people and their rich history. The highly accomplished professors, paired with small class sizes, made the Jewish Studies program feel like its own school within a school. Learning from professors like Jordan Rosenblum, Sunny Yudkoff, and Judith Sone gave me further perspective on higher Jewish education, namely, how to learn about Judaics and Hebrew in both a theological and non-theological way.

I believe it is extremely valuable to learn about Judaics through a historical lens that is accessible to *all* learners, no matter their religious background or understanding. Through classes such as *The Holocaust*, taught by Professor Ofer Ashkenazi, and *Jews and Race*, taught by Professor Adam Stern, I was able to gain a much deeper understanding of Jewish history, without a heavy reliance on background knowledge. In these and other classes, we learn aspects of Judaics through literature, economics, artifacts, and film media.

Outside of UW-Madison, I have enjoyed involving myself in Jewish programs that will help further my education and future career. This semester, I was selected to be a fellow in The Nachshon Project, a fellowship guiding students to explore

careers within the Jewish workforce. Being a Nachshon Project Fellow has helped me meet Jews all over the country from different backgrounds and denominations. As both a student in the Jewish Studies program and a fellow within the Nachshon Project, I have realized that one of my favorite Jewish values is learning for the sake of learning. In Hebrew, this concept is known as *torah lishmah*, which roughly means "study for its own sake." I am privileged to be able to spend time outside of the classroom learning about Jewish texts, history, and culture through Hillel, Chabad, Nachshon, and *hevrutot* (study partners). As both a teacher at Madison's Beth Israel Center religious school and as its USY advisor, I am already passing on what I am learning to Jewish children.

Above all, I feel fortunate to carry my passion for Jewish learning into my classrooms at UW-Madison. I rarely feel the normal college emotions of exhaustion or apprehension when walking into my Jewish Studies classes, as my professors and fellow students give me the encouragement to learn for the sake of learning.

The educational opportunities I am receiving at UW-Madison are undoubtedly opening a door to my future educational goals, namely, rabbinical school and an eventual career in the world of Jewish education and non-profits. I can proudly say that I am not taking any classes within the Jewish Studies program purely for credit. All of the courses I have and will take strengthen my academic understanding of Jewish thought, and have molded the way I am able to connect and engage with my surrounding Jewish communities. I am grateful for the education and guidance I have received through the Jewish Studies program, and for the ability to practice *torah lishmah* throughout my undergraduate education.

To learn about our new Maimonides Scholarship, visit cjs.wisc.edu/maimonides-scholarship/

For more on the 12th-century Jewish rabbi, philosopher, and Torah scholar Maimonides, see p. 10.

Examining Complex Histories with Sensitivity and Rigor

Sophia Adelman (BS '28)



On a Friday night in New York City, it isn't unusual for a stranger to wish me "Good Shabbos"—and for me to answer without hesitation, as if we've known each other for years. There's no introduction, no explanation, just an immediate understanding. This was the world I grew up in—what I recognize as the heart of

Yiddishkeit, a term whose depth I only came to fully appreciate in Professor Sunny Yudkoff's course, Yiddish Literature and Culture in America. It was not simply a place, but a way of life—one in which Judaism extended beyond ritual moments and into everyday interactions.

My life in New York City was shaped by rhythm and community. Every Friday night, I walked to *shul* through streets filled with familiarity—small exchanges, shared patterns, and an unspoken sense of belonging. Judaism was the way I moved through the world, something I absorbed without needing to name or question it.

When I arrived at college, that environment faded. The rhythm and familiarity I had taken for granted were gone. In that absence, I was confronted with a question I had never needed to ask: what does it mean to *study* something that has always been part of who you are?

At first, majoring in Jewish Studies felt contradictory. Judaism, to me, was not an academic subject—it was my identity and lived experience. I worried that analyzing it might distance me from it, turning something deeply personal into coursework. I believed I already understood what it meant to be Jewish—I had grown up immersed in it.

Over time, I came to understand that familiarity is not the same as comprehension. In my family, conversations about Jewish history—especially the Holocaust—often remained quiet or unspoken. I grew up aware of its weight, but without the language or framework to engage with it directly. Jewish Studies gave me that framework. It allowed me to approach difficult questions with clarity, and to examine complex histories with both sensitivity and rigor.

Through my coursework, I came to see Jewish tradition as something continually shaped through interpretation rather than fixed in the past. In Professor Jeremy Hutton's course, The Bible and Film: Literature and Media, I analyzed how biblical texts omit emotional detail and internal motivation, creating space for interpretation—an absence that invites generations to question, expand, and reinterpret. This shifted my understanding of Judaism from something inherited to something actively engaged. Studying Hebrew language with Professor Judith Sone made this shift tangible: as I learned the language, the texts and prayers I had recited became newly legible. I moved from repetition to understanding, approaching prayer with greater attention and intention.

What I find valuable about Jewish Studies is its insistence on complexity. Rather than resolving ambiguity, it teaches how to work within it. I learned to approach texts and traditions as layered and open to interpretation, where meaning is not fixed but continuously examined. This has required me to sit with uncertainty—even when it resists easy answers—and to engage with it thoughtfully rather than avoid it. In doing so, it has reshaped how I understand Jewish tradition and my own place within it.

Jewish Studies also informs my future career in healthcare. Medicine requires more than scientific knowledge—it demands an understanding of patients as individuals shaped by their values and experiences. Jewish teachings, particularly *pikuach nefesh*, emphasize preserving life alongside dignity and compassion, shaping how I approach care and the responsibility to treat the whole person. I was drawn to Jewish Studies because it challenged the assumption that living something is the same as understanding it. What once felt automatic now requires interpretation. Rather than resolving that tension, Jewish Studies has made it impossible to ignore, leaving me with a different question than the one I began with: not what it means to study Judaism, but what it means to take responsibility for it.

For a full list of this year's CJS scholarship winners, visit cjs.wisc.edu/awards25-26

A Meeting of the Minds

Steve Nadler Publishes New Books on Two Great Jewish Thinkers

In two books published this year, Professor Steven Nadler shows the continuing relevance of two major Jewish philosophers: the 12th-century rabbi Moses Maimonides, whom Nadler calls “one of the greatest, most capacious minds of the High Middle Ages, indeed of all time,” and the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, “the most radical thinker of his century.”

Nadler (Vilas Research Professor, William H. Hay II Professor of Philosophy, and a member of the Center for Jewish Studies) has written extensively on medieval and early modern Jewish philosophy. Reading his most recent contributions—*Why Read Maimonides Today?* (Cambridge University Press) and *Spinoza, Atheist* (Princeton University Press)—brings these two great thinkers into conversation with each other.

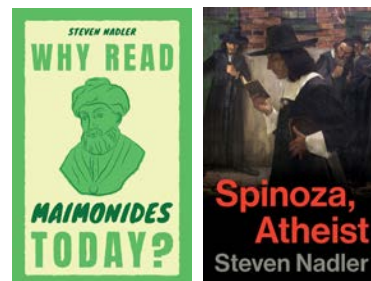
The works of both Maimonides and Spinoza reflect a process of reasoning, and a valuation of reason itself, that is often in tension with religious doctrine. As a result, Maimonides was denounced by some later rabbinic authorities, and Spinoza was excommunicated by the Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish community for heresy during his lifetime.

Maimonides articulates his philosophical views most thoroughly in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, where his chief goal is to reconcile articles of faith with the truths of philosophy and science. The result, says Nadler, is “a Judaism grounded not in divine power but divine reasonableness.” Spinoza, a close reader of Maimonides’ *Guide*, went even further in his own

work. In effect, Spinoza reduced the divine to nature itself, Nadler explains, “in the hope of diminishing the power of the passions and superstitious beliefs to which the traditional conceptions of God gave rise.”

In analyzing the works of these two thinkers, Nadler also draws out the moral implications of their respective positions. “For Maimonides,” he says, “a good person is one whose beliefs, desires and engagements are all under the guidance of reason; he is in constant critical reflection upon his actions and upon the values that inform those actions.” For Spinoza, “Scripture is special (or ‘divine’) only in the sense that its inspirational stories are especially good at motivating people to treat other human beings with justice and loving-kindness.”

While dealing with complex themes, Nadler’s books are written with a clarity that makes them accessible to non-specialists as well as specialists. Taken together, *Why Read Maimonides Today?* and *Spinoza, Atheist* make a powerful case for reading *both* of these great Jewish thinkers.



Covers of *Why Read Maimonides Today?* (Cambridge University Press) and *Spinoza, Atheist* (Princeton University Press)

Faculty Updates

Nina Caputo (CJS Director and Lipton Professor of Jewish Studies) published an essay entitled “Community and Context: Rabbinic Interpretation and Leadership in the Crown of Aragon in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries” in *A Cultural History of Higher Learning in the Medieval Age*, ed. Clare Monagle (Bloomsbury, 2025).

Chad Alan Goldberg (Martindale-Bascom Professor of Sociology) was awarded an intramural grant to study the relationship between populist and antisemitic attitudes in Wisconsin in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. In addition, Goldberg started a joint appointment with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, beginning this academic year (2025–2026) and continuing indefinitely. Under this arrangement, he will split his time, spending every fall semester in Madison and every spring semester in Jerusalem. He will continue to teach courses for CJS on antisemitism and modern Jewish thought.

Tony Michels organized a symposium at UW on the theme of “Jewish Studies after October 7” and delivered the annual Rudolph Lecture at Syracuse University. This year his teaching included courses on American Jews and American popular culture, African Americans and Jews, and Zionism and its critics, as well as online courses for the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and the organization Judaism Unbound. His next book, which focuses on the Russian Revolution and its impact on the United States, will be published by Yale University Press in 2027.

Sunny Yudkoff (Max and Frieda Weinstein Bascom Associate Professor in Jewish Studies) presented work from her monograph in progress, *On Yiddish Joy*, at the University of Pennsylvania and the 2025 Association for Jewish Studies annual conference. Her writing on the Yiddish poet H. Leyvik also appeared in *100 Objects from the Collections of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research*.

Food and Drink in Jewish Culture

Join Us for Madison's Greenfield Summer Institute, July 20–23

Reflecting the Center's commitment to lifelong learning, the Greenfield Summer Institute takes place each July, with adult learners from around the country gathering in Madison for four days of lectures by leading scholars in Jewish studies. This year's theme, "Food and Drink in Jewish Culture," will take up broad questions about *kashrut*, family and community traditions, and Jewish interactions with non-Jews. Taking place July 20–23 at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, the conference will feature speakers on a wide range of topics. Here's a sampling:

"Diasporic Kitchens:

Jewish-Mexican Recipes and Stories"

- Margaret E. Boyle (Bowdoin College)

"Kosher Crossroads:

Food, Trade, and Identity in the Colonial Caribbean"

- Hilit Surowitz-Israel (Rutgers University)

"Speaking Yiddish to Chickens:

Holocaust Survivors Turned Poultry Farmers"

- Seth Stern (Journalist and Author)

"Jews, Liquor, and Life in Poland"

- Glenn Dynner (University of Virginia)

**"Kosher USA: How Coke Became Kosher
and Other Tales of Modern Food"**

- Roger Horowitz (Hagley Museum and Library)

Among the highlights this year will be an interview with the owners of Russ & Daughters, New York's legendary appetizing store, who will share their thoughts on the challenges and rewards of ushering their iconic establishment into the 21st century. As a special treat, Russ & Daughters pastries will be served during one of our coffee breaks.



Mahneh Yehudah Market in Jerusalem (photo by Emilio Garcia)



A Russ & Daughters classic

The Greenfield Institute allows attendees to expand their knowledge of Jewish history, culture, and society, while meeting others who share these same interests. To register and find out more about the program, visit cjs.wisc.edu/greenfield. We hope to see you there!

The Greenfield Institute is made possible through the generosity of Larry and Roslyn Greenfield.



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OUR NEW HOME

For more on our upcoming move to Levy Hall,
see p. 3 inside.

Starting in mid-July, the Mosse/Weinstein Center
for Jewish Studies will be at a new address:

4165 Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall
232 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53715



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