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IMPACT REPORT 2024-2025



**STROUM CENTER
FOR JEWISH STUDIES**

HENRY M. JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

BY THE NUMBERS

Current Students



699 students took Jewish Studies classes in the 2024-2025 academic year

\$77,400 provided to students in scholarships, stipends, and fellowships during the 2024-2025 academic year



35 Jewish Studies courses offered

2 graduate fellows were selected to attend AAJR's prestigious residential seminar



Current Faculty



34 faculty across **11** departments



Engagement



169,299 JewishStudies.Washington.edu visitors from **191** countries

45,354 YouTube views from **18+** countries



3,704 podcast plays from **50+** countries



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



When people ask me about campus climate and the role of Jewish Studies in addressing important concerns about antisemitism, I think of a comment shared last year by Stroum Center Graduate Fellow Martin Schwartz:

“To have a safe and thoughtful place to go, to speak with people informed about the history of Judaism and the Israel-Palestine conflict has meant the world to me. It has given me hope that through thoughtful scholarship and careful exploration we can find shared ground for conversation—and that means everything moving forward.”

Martin, an Anti-Defamation League fellow before beginning his Ph.D. at UW to study antisemitism, captures perfectly the role Jewish Studies plays in helping students navigate today’s complex political moment. (Read more about Martin on page 4.)

Students value the chance to learn from experts dedicated to the global Jewish experience. In Jewish Studies courses, students from diverse backgrounds—and with very different political beliefs—find an increasingly rare opportunity to ask questions, listen deeply, and engage with facts and sources on issues of lasting importance.

As I begin my three-year term as Director of the Stroum Center, I am inspired to support faculty and students in building an intellectual home committed to the study of Judaism and Jewish life within a university invested in free inquiry and open exchange.

At a time when antisemitism is rising in the U.S. and globally—and when we have felt its presence here on our own UW campus—I know this work can be challenging, even uncomfortable. But it is essential.

Centers like ours matter. We foster informed dialogue, lower tensions on campus, and encourage respectful, evidence-based conversations on contentious issues. Jewish Studies remains one of the most important incubators for Jewish education today. Where else can students study Ladino, read Medieval Yiddish literature, or debate the impact of artificial intelligence on Holocaust education? Our work trains future global citizens and empowers the next generation of Jewish leaders (like Estie, featured on page 3).

I look forward to meeting the growing needs of our campus community by supporting pluralistic spaces where students can engage face-to-face with the study of Jews and Judaism—past, present, and future.

Noam Pianko

Noam Pianko
Samuel N. Stroum Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies
Professor, Jackson School of International Studies

Cover and director images courtesy of Meryl Schenker Photography

SPOTLIGHTING OUR STUDENTS

FROM JEWISH STUDIES MAJOR TO RABBINICAL STUDENT

Estie Spike-Neaman

Estie Spike-Neaman transferred to UW specifically to major in Jewish Studies with the Stroum Center – and immediately made a mark on campus. Taking courses that ranged from Archeology of Biblical Israel to Russian Jewish Experience – and every course offered by Hebrew

instructor Hadar Khazzam-Horovitz! Estie brought her signature enthusiasm, academic rigor, and community engagement to each class. Originally from California, Estie’s Jewish learning extended beyond campus; she attended Hillel, taught religious school at Temple De Hirsch Sinai, and was a recipient of Hebrew Union College’s (HUC) selective Teaching Impact Fellowship. Now attending HUC’s rabbinical school in Israel, we look forward to watching her share her enthusiasm for life and Judaism in her future rabbinate.



DREAMING IN YIDDISH, HEBREW, AND CHINESE

Xuye (Gerrard) Song

Xuye Song, a Jewish Studies major at University College London, chose to spend his study abroad year at UW specifically to learn from our Jewish Studies faculty, taking an unprecedented 11 Jewish Studies courses over the year. This included

Prof. Liora Halperin’s “Diasporas and Homelands” class where Xuye, originally from Nanjing, China, built a website that explores the lives of Jews in the Chinese city of Harbin during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Especially interested in Jewish poetry, his work from Prof. Naomi Sokoloff’s class was published by JewishGen this summer. After leaving Seattle, Xuye participated in the Yiddish Book Center’s Steiner Summer Yiddish Program, which was made possible by a Stroum Center grant.



FINDING COMMUNITY WHILE CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM

Martin H. Schwartz, 2024-2025 Mickey & Leo Sreebny Memorial Fellow

A self-proclaimed “nontraditional student,” Martin’s path to a Ph.D. included many years in theater, serving as an arts curator in the non-profit and government worlds, and holding a Glass Leadership Institute Fellowship at the Anti-Defamation League. Shock and concern over the regrowth of “the oldest hatred” led him back to academia; he’s now pursuing a Ph.D. in German Studies, where he researches antisemitism and what Judaism and Jews have come to represent for different societies over the ages. A 2024-2025 Sreebny graduate fellow, Martin calls the Stroum Center his intellectual home

at UW. He took Prof. Devin Naar’s antisemitism class in the spring of 2024 and described it as one of the most meaningful intellectual experience of his life. Martin explains “we represented a very broad range of age, experience, and ideological allegiance, and every student left each session feeling heard, respected, and more knowledgeable, I very much hope one day to teach this material myself with even a portion of the grace, energy, and intellectual probity that Prof. Naar brought to it.” This year, Martin was granted a prestigious SCJS dissertation writing grant, which will allow him to focus on his research for “Framing the ‘Rich Jew’: Cultural Antisemitism and Scandal in West Germany.”



RESEARCH INCUBATED AT THE STROUM CENTER LEADS TO EXHIBIT AT HOLOCAUST CENTER FOR HUMANITY

Joana Bürger, 2024-2025 Ina & Richard Willner Memorial Fellow

After completing an M.A. in Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University in 2020, Joana Bürger, of German and Greek descent, gravitated to Seattle to pursue research with our faculty in Sephardic Studies, Jewish Studies, and History. A Ph.D. candidate in UW’s Department of History, Joana studies Jewish refugees in the eastern Mediterranean during the interwar period. This past summer, her remarkable discovery of a local family’s history during WWII resulted in an exhibit at

the Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle. Following through on research she conducted as an SCJS graduate fellow, the exhibit tells the story of a Turkish Jew in Nazi Germany. Joana explains that the Stroum Center’s support made this exhibit possible: from Prof. Devin Naar encouraging her to approach the Holocaust Center in the first place, to Stroum Center grants that allowed her to conduct research and hire a designer and copyeditor, to the strong showing of supporters who attended the exhibit’s opening event in July, which was moderated by Prof. Naar. Joana, who chose to come to UW to study under Prof. Naar, explains that the Stroum Center makes her feel that deciding to move across the globe to study at UW as an international student worth it.



FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

Professor Ben Lee on AI and the Holocaust



As our world is being rapidly reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI), Stroum Center faculty Ben Lee studies how AI is impacting how Holocaust memory is preserved and shared. This May, the assistant professor at UW's iSchool brought together 15 scholars from around the world for a three-day symposium on "AI and the Future of the Holocaust Research and Memory." The first of its kind, the symposium was cosponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Stroum Center for Jewish Studies, and UW's Simpson Center for the Humanities and the iSchool's Center

for the Advancement of Libraries, Museums and Archives.

"I would encourage people to take a step back and ask: why is AI being used in [Holocaust studies]?" said Lee. "On the one hand, applications of AI such as handwriting transcription have the capacity to unlock archives. On the other hand, AI chatbots in the style of Anne Frank are problematic for many reasons. Asking why AI is being used, and who the technology serves, is a great first step in understanding impacts we may see—and for educators to understand what to use in the classroom."

The grandson of a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Lee first became interested in Holocaust studies while in college and

continues this work in his newly launched Lab for Computing Cultural Heritage. "I anticipate that the emphasis of applying AI in the context of Holocaust research and memory will only continue to grow—for better and for worse," he said. "Five years from now, I hope that we are able to look back and see this [symposium] as a place for cultivating conversations that remain relevant."

Prior to joining UW as faculty, Lee held fellowships at the Library of Congress, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Harvard University. He received his Ph.D. in Computer Science & Engineering from the UW, where he served as a Stroum Center graduate fellow, using machine learning to extract and study the visual content of historic Ladino newspapers.

"In an ever-changing world, our Center has endured, grown, and become a prominent and sought-after voice on campus, our community, and globally through our digital presences."

— **Terry Azose, Stroum Center Advisory Board Member**

SAVE THE DATES! 2025-2026 FACULTY BOOK LAUNCH SERIES

We are pleased to announce our series celebrating new publications by Jewish Studies faculty. Please visit jewishstudies.washington.edu/events for more information.



Photo credit: RPK

October 29, 2025

Gilah Kletenik

"Sovereignty Disrupted: Spinoza and the Disparity of Reality"

Through a fresh reading of Spinoza's Ethics, Kletenik thinks *with* Spinoza to present an alternative to dominant "Western" theories about the nature of reality, the promise of reason, and the status of humans.



January 22, 2026

Mark Letteney

"Ancient Mediterranean Incarceration"

Foregrounding voices of those imprisoned in the ancient Mediterranean, Letteney and his co-author Matthew D.C. Larsen argue that prisons were integral to the social, political, and economic fabric of ancient societies.



March 10, 2026

Sasha Senderovich

"In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Short Fiction by Jewish Writers from the Soviet Union"

Edited and translated by Sasha Senderovich and Harriet Murav, this first-of-its kind collection of short stories provides an unappreciated perspective on the Shoah, as it was experienced and remembered in former Soviet territories.



SEPHARDIC STUDIES

Ladino Day 2024: "The Familiar" with NYTimes Best-Selling Author Leigh Bardugo

The 12th Annual Ladino Day event last December packed Kane Hall with 275 people—standing room only—while more than 700 registrants worldwide tuned in to see acclaimed fantasy author, Leigh Bardugo, in conversation with Prof. Canan Bolel, on Bardugo's latest novel "The Familiar."

The story follows the struggles of a *conversa* heroine—from a family forced to convert to Christianity and keep its Jewish heritage secret in 16th century Spain—who draws magic from her family's secret language, Ladino, and the *refranes* (sayings) that preserve Sephardic Jewish wit and wisdom across time. Bardugo consulted Prof. Bolel on the sayings, translations, sources, and pronunciations used in "The Familiar," Bardugo's first-

ever work of historical fiction, which was selected as one of the New York Times 2024 100 Notable Books. Bardugo, author of the internationally acclaimed "Shadow & Bone" trilogy (adapted into a Netflix series), drew students from across campus and disciplines, who spilled into the aisles of Kane Hall with arms loaded with their favorite 'Grishaverse' novels. They were mesmerized as Bardugo discussed the family history that inspired her to write "The Familiar" and how her collaboration with Prof. Bolel led to the selection of *refranes* included in the book. Members of Seattle's Sephardic community sat side-by-side with students, many of whom were hearing this language spoken for the first time, for a memorable morning of learning, language and a little bit of magic.

SHARING SEPHARDIC CULTURE, HISTORY AND LADINO REFRANES WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

Community Outreach & Education

The 2024-2025 academic year saw Sephardic Studies go beyond the classroom and across communities. With Prof. Devin Naar on sabbatical for the year, Prof. Canan Bolel led a variety of workshops and presentations, starting off the school year by hosting fifth graders from Seattle Jewish Community School, Jewish Day School of Seattle, and Seattle Hebrew Academy for a visit to UW's Seattle campus to learn about Sephardic history and culture. Students got a special look at one-of-a-kind Ladino texts and artifacts from the Sephardic Studies Collection archive.

In November, Prof. Bolel was invited to present as part of the programming for Los Muevos Ladineros: the Seattle-based Ladino language group revitalized this last year in partnership with the American Ladino League, the Seattle Sephardic Network, and UW's Sephardic Studies Program. Winter quarter kicked off with Prof.

Bolel welcoming high-school seniors from the Yeshiva of Flatbush in Brooklyn, New York. All the students were members of the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn, who traveled to Seattle to further their studies of the cultural and linguistic traditions of Sephardic communities. The year's community engagement culminated in Sephardic Studies hosting a group of rabbinical and cantorial students participating in the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) Entwine program as they looked to broaden their knowledge and understanding of diverse Jewish heritages and experiences. As part of their three-day Sephardic history intensive trip to Seattle, Prof. Bolel provided a lecture on the history of Ottoman Jewry and the early Sephardic experience in the US, and led the group in a Ladino translation activity. Prof. Bolel holds the only publicly-funded Sephardic Studies professorship in the country and, with this last year marking just three years of teaching, she continues to establish herself as a rising star in the field.



Images courtesy of Meryl Schenker Photography

50 YEARS OF IMPACT ON CAMPUS, IN THE COMMUNITY, AND AROUND THE GLOBE

Community Outreach & Education

Last March, hundreds came together to celebrate the Stroum Center’s impact on the UW campus and beyond. Those in attendance included current and former faculty, fellows, and students as well as community members. The day started with a series of morning panels where many former faculty and fellows regaled listeners with stories from years past. The evening concluded with a conversation between faculty members Gilah Kletenik and Devin Naar on “Today’s campus conflicts and the future of Jewish Studies.” The lively event led to a full house of longtime Stroum Center supporters and other community members eager to engage with the timely topic.



“I have to say, this series of lectures and the book that came out of it was literally—and I’m not exaggerating here—the most productive experience I have had as an academic.”
— Anita Norich, Former Stroum Lecturer



“You welcomed us as basically faculty in training, and you learn a lot. The number one thing I learned is that everyone, in terms of their own research was still following their curiosity. It was a good place to be, a good place to think, and there was a lot of mutual support.”
— Michael Alexander, Former Stroum Center Cole Fellow

“As far as the trail Sephardic Studies has blazed in public programming, I absolutely think UW Sephardic Studies and its public programing and engagement have changed the conversation about Jewish identity in the US and globally, and have fed and led the resurgence of public interest in Ladino in recent years.”
— Hannah Pressman, Co-Director, American Ladino League



“Many of our graduate fellows have gone on to make a huge impact in the field of Jewish Studies, and indeed they represent the next generation of public scholars globally.”
— Sonny Gorasht, Stroum Center Advisory Board Member



Images courtesy of Meryl Schenker Photography



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“The [Stroum] Center’s work is more important now than ever... it creates the space for courageous, fact-based conversations. We talk about creating safe spaces, but we also need brave spaces for our students because the challenges of the world requires you to have courage... That starts right here.”

**— Ana Mari Cauce, President Emerita,
University of Washington**