Located in the heart of Montreal and founded first as a program and two decades later as a full-fledged department within the Faculty of Arts, McGill’s Jewish Studies celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. It is among the oldest departments of Jewish Studies and one of the best kept secrets of an affordable high quality education on the East Coast.

To teach Jewish Studies in a multi-cultural and multilingual city like Montreal—at an English institution within a cosmopolitan environment anchored in a francophone province—is to constantly build living bridges between communities—Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Jewish and non-Jewish—in ways that enhance our academic interests in the multilingual and multicultural histories of the materials we study.

Since the days of Ruth Wisse, Jewish Studies at McGill has been recognized as a haven for Yiddishists. After the retirement of Eugene Orenstein and Anna Gonshor, we enlisted Yuri Vedenyapin to reinvigorate Yiddish on campus. His work has enriched Gershon Hundert, Dan Heller and Esther Frank’s focus on Eastern European history, literature and culture.

Last year we broadened the range of our coverage through the arrival of Chris Silver, an expert in the history and music of Jews from Arab lands. Silver’s work complements Carlos Fraenkel, Larry Kaplan, David Aberbach and Yael Halevi-Wise’s interests in medieval and modern Hebrew, Arabic and Sephardic history, literatures and philosophy.

Hebrew language and Israeli culture remain a vibrant part of our curriculum; each year we fill two introductory Hebrew classes leading to advanced courses taught by Lea Fima. We also offer a graduate specialization in History of Jewish Interpretation of the Bible, directed by Barry Levy, while Eric Caplan, among his many endeavors, guides future Jewish Day School teachers through a degree in the Faculty of Education with a focus in Jewish Studies.

Since the summer of 2011, we have cooperated with KlezKanada to develop an extraordinary new course on Klezmer music and ethnomusicology taught by Hankus Netsky at KlezKanada’s annual festival in Quebec’s Laurentian mountains.

Our interest in music is maintained throughout the year by programs and courses dedicated to Jewish music.

When we moved three years ago from our quaint old house on Rue McTavish to a new administrative “hub” in the center of campus, we learnt that being neighbours of Anthropology, Sociology, History and Classical Studies is good company for a department that approaches Judaism as a civilization comprised of history, religion, philosophy, languages, and literatures, from antiquity to the present. In our new surroundings we enjoy stimulating conversations across the hallways, though we remain a cohesive unit that often feels like a second family.

If Jewish Studies is our academic home, Montreal’s Jewish communities have been our extended family. The tradition of commemorating loved ones and marking legacies by investing in education has bolstered this department from its onset fifty years ago, while others stepped in at critical moments to ensure our thriving future. The support of our donors has enhanced and nourished all parts of what we do.

Most of all, we have been empowered by wonderful students who come to us from across Canada, the United States and the world, surprising us every year anew by their determination to live up to the highest standards. We send them out into the world again with the hope that interests awakened here will continue to flourish.

With warmest best wishes from Montreal,

Yael Halevi-Wise
Chair of the Department of Jewish Studies
Associate Professor of English and Jewish Studies
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Yuri Vedenyapin (bottom right) with students (2018)
Our Faculty

David Aberbach
Professor
Hebrew and Comparative Studies

Liane Alitowski
Course Lecturer
Jewish music

Garry Beitel
Course Lecturer
Film

Jeremy Brown
Flegg Postdoc Fellow
Jewish mysticism and philosophy

Yael Halevi-Wise
Associate Professor
Israeli literature; history and theory of the novel

Daniel Heller
Adjunct Professor
Eastern European history; modern Jewish history

Gershon Hundert
Leanor Segal Professor
European Jewish history; Jews in Poland (1000–2000)

Lawrence Kaplan
Associate Professor
Rabbinics; Jewish law and philosophy
Eric Caplan
Associate Professor
Jewish education and social justice; Reconstructionist movement

Lea Fima
Faculty Lecturer
Hebrew language and Israeli culture

Carlos Fraenkel
Professor
Philosophy and Jewish thought

Esther Frank
Faculty Lecturer
Yiddish and American Jewish literature

Barry Levy
Professor
Bible and the history of Jewish interpretation of the Bible

Rina Michaeli
Course Lecturer
Hebrew language and Israeli culture

Christopher Silver
Segal Family Assistant Professor
Modern Middle Eastern Jewish history; North African popular culture and music

Yuri Vedenyapin
Faculty Lecturer
Yiddish language and culture
Recent Faculty Achievements

**GERSHON HUNDERT**
Alongside co-investigators Adam Teller and Israel Bartal, Gershon Hundert was awarded prestigious grant from Rothschild Foundation Europe for “Recovering the Records of European Jewry: The Pinkassim Project,” 2017.

**CARLOS FRAENKEL**

**DANIEL K. HELLER**

**DANIEL K. HELLER**
Wins Principal’s Prize for Excellence in Teaching, McGill University, 2017.

**YAELE HALEVI-WISE**


**LAWRENCE KAPLAN**
“Did Freud really think Moses was an Egyptian?” in Jewish Review of Books, Spring 2018.

**DAVID ABERBACH**
The Bible and the ‘Holy Poor’ From the Tanakh to Les Misérables Routledge 2018

**DAVID ABERBACH**

**CHRIS SILVER AND DAVID ABERBACH**
Acknowledged for their teaching through McGill’s “Thank a Prof” program, 2017-2018.
Over the past few years, our undergraduate program has undergone exciting new developments. The recent hire of three faculty members has greatly expanded the range of Jewish Studies courses offered to McGill students. Alongside cutting-edge courses in Eastern European history and history of Zionism, Jewish life in the Middle East and North Africa, and Yiddish language, literature and culture, our core classes in Jewish literatures, history, philosophy, bible and rabbinic studies attract students from across the university, including a dedicated group of majors, minors and honors students.

Smaller class size enables a deeper learning experience highly valued by students from all backgrounds. Alongside these formal classes, we also promote internship opportunities and extracurricular experiences such as the Flegg Student Fellowship in partnership with local Jewish organizations.
NEW COURSES DESIGNED IN 2017-2018

Fall 2017
JWST 334:
Jews and Muslims: A Modern History
Prof. Chris Silver

Winter 2018
JWST 252:
Jewish Montreal
Prof. Jessica Roda
JWST 381:
God and Devil in Yiddish Literature
Prof. Yuri Vedenyapin
JWST 501:
Jewish Life and Culture in Algeria
Prof. Chris Silver

NEW COURSES OFFERED IN 2018-2019

Fall 2018
JWST 245:
Jewish Life in the Islamic World
Prof. Chris Silver
JWST 252:
Forgiveness and Repentance in Medieval Jewish Thought (and Beyond)
Prof. Jeremy Brown
JWST 346:
Introduction to the Zohar
Prof. Jeremy Brown

Winter 2019
JWST 348:
Practical Skills for Working with Yiddish Sources
Prof. Yuri Vedenyapin
JWST 501:
Between Empire and State: Sephardi Jews and the Ottoman 20th Century
Prof. Chris Silver

For our ongoing list of courses see:
http://www.mcgill.ca/jewishstudies/undergraduates

Dorot
The McGill Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies

Dorot released its 16th annual volume in 2017. The journal is published by McGill’s Jewish Studies Students’ Association and includes some of the best undergraduate writing to come out of the Department of Jewish Studies.

JSSA
The Jewish Studies Students’ Association

The JSSA represents all undergraduate Jewish Studies students at McGill enrolled in either a major or minor program. The association hosts events, liaises with professors in Jewish Studies, other departments, and external organizations, and ensures that the needs of students are always foremost in the minds of the decision makers of the department.

Since 2017, the JSSA has been led by Hannah Srour. In February 2018, thanks to a travel grant from the Department of Jewish Studies, Srour presented a paper entitled, “Jewish Women and Personal Prayer in Eastern Europe: A Case Study on Jewish Reading Experiences,” at the Undergraduate Judaic Studies Conference at Yale University.

Hannah Srour,
JSSA President 2017-2018
(photo: Owen Egan)
Since 2011, McGill’s Department of Jewish Studies has partnered with KlezKanada, an organization dedicated to Jewish music and culture in Montreal, to offer a 3-credit course anchored in KlezKanada’s week-long summer festival.

Coordinated by Prof. Eric Caplan and taught by Prof. Hankus Netsky from the New England Conservatory, this course is based on lectures, essays, ethnographic experiences and a final project. This partnership is generously supported by the Segal Family Endowment, KlezKanada and McGill’s Faculty of Arts.

For more information on KlezKanada visit: http://klezkanada.org

Flegg Student Fellowship

Since 2013, the Flegg Student Fellowship, a partnership of McGill’s Department of Jewish Studies, Hillel Montreal, and Federation CJA GenMTL, has offered Jewish students at McGill and Concordia the opportunity to participate in a six-week learning program exploring Jewish texts.

Made possible through the generosity of the Flegg family estate, Flegg Student Fellows engage in discussion with Jewish Studies scholars and educators across Montreal while also planning their own events for other students.
Graduate Spotlight

I was a PhD candidate in the Department of Jewish Studies from 2009 until 2015. My stay in Montreal was delightful thanks to the warm people in the department who made me feel at home. I am especially thankful to Prof. Yael Halevi-Wise who welcomed me on campus and off. I have no doubt that my experience at McGill prepared me for my academic career.

My supervisors, Professors Carlos Fraenkel and Lawrence Kaplan, supported and continue to support me. Thanks to their commitment, I was able to apply for positions at the best universities and institutions around the world. Since my graduation, I have served as a Junior Professor at the Institute of Jewish Philosophy and Religion and the co-director of the Maimonides Centre for Advances Studies–Jewish Skepticism in Hamburg, Germany. And since moving to Germany, I have maintained my connection to Jewish Studies at McGill.

I hope that such cooperation will continue well into the future.

Racheli Haliva (PhD, Jewish Studies, 2015)
Junior Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Religion; Co-Director of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies, University of Hamburg

McGill’s Department of Jewish Studies is home in the best sense of the word. From the Jewish Teacher Training Program, to an M.A., through my Ph.D, it is where I was educated and nurtured for eleven formative years.

The faculty encouraged my curiosity and harnessed it for learning. I was granted the opportunity to learn from the best and to teach wonderful students. The people who I continue to go to for support and intellectual inspiration I met at McGill. My wife, Dana Herman (M.A, Ph.D., McGill), and I met in the mailroom when the department was on McTavish and the largest contingent at our wedding were faculty and students from the department.

Since graduation in 2005, I have been a faculty member at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati and a research fellow at the University of the Free State, South Africa. I have served as the co-director of HUC Press and am a board member of the Association for Jewish Studies. Dana serves as the academic associate and managing editor of the American Jewish Archives. Together we are the proud parents of Charlie (8) and recent arrivals Harry and Libby.

Jason Kalman (PhD, Jewish Studies, 2005)
Professor of Classical Hebrew Literature and Interpretation; Gottschalk-Slade Chair in Jewish Intellectual History, HUC-JIR/Cincinnati
Postdoctoral Track Record
Simon and Ethel Flegg Postdocs Land Prestigious Tenure-Track Jobs

The Flegg Postdoctoral Fellowship, endowed by a generous gift from the Simon and Ethel Flegg estate, has brought some of the finest up-and-coming scholars to the Department of Jewish Studies since 2012. The 2016-2018 cohort of Dr. Ofer Dynes and Dr. Jessica Roda was no exception. Both Dynes and Roda introduced new courses during their tenure, innovated in the classroom, gained a following among students, and published widely. This winter, both landed tenure-track positions at world-class institutions. This fall, Dr. Dynes began serving as Assistant Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Dr. Roda as Assistant Professor at Georgetown University’s Center for Jewish Civilization in the School of Foreign Service.

For more information about our graduate programs visit: http://www.mcgill.ca/jewishstudies/graduates

Event Highlights

2017

NOVEMBER 2

Dan Miron delivered 2017 Levites Lecture on Shalem Aleichem to packed house

Before an overflow audience of McGill students and faculty and members of the community, Professor Dan Miron of Columbia University delivered a captivating lecture entitled, “How did the Fiddler ascend to the roof or: What made Sholem Aleichem the quintessential internationally-known Yiddish writer?” Offering a sweeping overview of the transformation of Sholem Aleichem in the century after his death, Miron asked how characters like Tevye the dairyman can still define our image of Jewish life.

2018

MAY 14

Flegg Family Lecture: “Performing Jewishness: Issues and Challenges Across Time and Cultures”

This roundtable, part of the annual gathering of the Association of Canadian Jewish Studies, engaged scholars, Professors Erica Lehrer (Concordia), Jessica Roda (McGill), Christopher Silver (McGill), and Anna Shternshis (University of Toronto) in a discussion of the intersection of performance and Jewishness past and present.

2019

Annual Levites Lecture with Professor Devin Naar, University of Washington

Details to be announced on mcgill.ca/jewishstudies.
Thank you Donors!

McGill’s Department of Jewish Studies is as successful as it is thanks to the generosity of our donors:

Jack Cummings Memorial Fund
The Alvin Segal Family Endowment
The Ethel and Simon Flegg Programs
Jack and Kay Wolofsky

- Louis and Bessie Batist Prize
- Norman Berman Memorial Prize
- Polly and David Binder Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Blacher and Glasrot Families Memorial Award for Holocaust Research
- C.A. Brodie Brockwell Prize
- Fiszel (Philip) Cola Prize
- Chaim Maizel Memorial Scholarship in Hebrew Studies
- Sadie Polatshek Memorial Award in Jewish Studies
- Dr. and Mrs. Hirsh Rosenfeld Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Sara Rosenfeld Prize in Yiddish
- Rose and Harry Rothman Memorial Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Max and Jennie Schwartz Award in Jewish Studies
- Dora Wasserman Prize for Excellence in Jewish Studies
- Shloime Wiseman Memorial Book Prize
- Betty Workman Yaffe Prize in Yiddish Studies
- Sheila Becker Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Jack Schoel Scholarships
- Dr. Oscar and Sally Schickler Scholarship for Jewish Studies
- Jack Gitlitz Memorial Scholarships
- Bernard Michael Tarshis Memorial Fund
- Nettie Zuckerman Vininsky Gordon Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Elca and Tom Taras Scholarship
- Andre and Huguette Veres Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Rosa and David z’l Finestone Scholarship
- Sarah and Joseph Lazarus Graduate Prize in Jewish Studies
- Dr. Oscar and Sally Schickler Scholarship for Jewish Studies
- Jack Gitlitz Memorial Scholarship
- Bernard Michael Tarshis Memorial Fund
- Nettie Zuckerman Vininsky Gordon Scholarship in Jewish Studies
- Elca and Tom Taras Scholarship
- Gisia Kiselvsky Graduate Fellowship in Jewish Studies
- Henriette and Marcel Korner Scholarship