

PROGRAM IN JEWISH STUDIES
2025-2026

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

STUDENTS • ALUMNI • FACULTY • EVENTS



Program in Jewish Studies
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

MESSAGE FROM PROFESSOR SAMIRA K. MEHTA

DIRECTOR

Hello, from the Program in Jewish Studies, who is in full swing for the 2025-2026 academic year. We are delighted to welcome you all to an exciting spring semester. We would also like to welcome Sarit Bar-Or, who has joined us as a lecturer teaching second year Hebrew. We are proud to see PJS faculty succeeding around the university and in the broader world. You can find a more fulsome introduction to Sarit and more about our faculty activities later in the newsletter.

So far this year, we have been delighted to co-host guest artists Anthony Mordechai Zvi Russell, Dmitri Gaskin, Zoë Aqua, and Raffi Boden for a Yiddish song and Klezmer Residency at the College of Music. The residency included a concert, "Sounds of Ashkenaz," a public workshop, "Wade in the Water: The Possibilities of Black Music in Jewish Spaces," a colloquium talk, "A Klezmer Fiddler in Transylvania," and workshops and presentations for classes throughout the College of Music and Program in Jewish Studies. Funding came from the College of Music's Roser Visiting Artist Program, with additional support from PJS, Jews of Color: Histories and Futures, and other units on campus. Kudos to College of Music and PJS Associate Professor Yonatan Malin, whose work and passion made the event possible!

We also had an extremely successful program for Holocaust Remembrance Day. Jordanna Gessler, the Chief Impact Officer of Holocaust Museum LA spoke to an in-person and Zoom audience on "Museums as Memory Keepers," which told the story of how Holocaust Museum LA came to be, how it has changed over the years, and what their example can tell us about the role of Holocaust museums today and in the future. We were delighted that the CU Art Museum hosted her talk—it was wonderful to talk about museums while in a museum. At lunch, Jordanna Gessler was joined by Megan Freidel, Assistant Professor and Head of Collections Management and Stewardship Section at the University Libraries and Hope Saska, Director of the CU Art Museum for a panel discussion with students called "So You Want a Glamorous Career." GLAM stands for Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums, and students were able to ask questions about developing portfolios for such careers; to think about the differences between libraries and museums, art museums and cultural museums; to ask questions about professional ethics, and to ask about "a day in the life" as a library or museum professional. I am very proud to report that both my CU colleagues and our visitor were very impressed with our students and their questions. We talked for two hours, but clearly could have gone on all afternoon.

We, in the Program in Jewish Studies, continue to work to provide an education that is grounded in Jewish history, culture, and texts while also meeting the needs of the moment. We have been excited to increase the number of classes offered, and also to add a new instructor, so that students can have increased language exposure. We also continue to provide community for our students. The Student Advisory Board, under the leadership of Sam Boyd (Fall 2025) and Yonatan Malin (Spring 2026) and some truly spectacular students, has put together a range of events, including Pickleball with Professors. Yonatan Malin (Fall 2025) and Hilary Kalisman (Spring 2026) continue to lead the graduate students in a regular colloquium, where they share and workshop each other's work.

On the subject of meeting people, we look forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming events, which you can find below!

Best,





SPRING CONFERENCE HONORING DAVID SHNEER Z"l

In April 2025, a group of scholars from the United States, Canada, and Europe gathered at CU to share works-in-progress that were in some way inspired by David Shneer's body of academic and communal work. Over the course of three days, projects centered on photography, visual studies, Soviet cultural history, Yiddish studies, performance studies, and queer studies were discussed, highlighting the wide range of scholarship that David embraced and produced during his career.

There was also a public event that sought to both act as a memorial to David and his work as well as a celebration of what his life and scholarship meant to the variety of communities he touched. The hope is that these works will ultimately lead to a publication dedicated to his memory.



WARM WELCOME



Sarit Bar-Or

During the Fall 2025 semester, the Program in Jewish Studies welcomed **Sarit Bar-Or** to the Hebrew language faculty. Sarit brings extensive experience in Ulpan-style Hebrew instruction and will be teaching the program's second-year Hebrew courses.

Student Testimonial

When I started at CU Boulder, I didn't expect my minor in Jewish Studies to become one of the most important parts of my college experience. The classes feel different from a lot of others I've taken. They're discussion-based and really focus on understanding culture, history, and identity in a way that feels relevant to today. Professors actually want to hear your thoughts, and it's a space where students feel comfortable speaking up and learning from each other. The program also consistently offers programming beyond the classroom. There are guest speaker events, social brunches, and opportunities to connect with both faculty and other students that help to make our community more comfortable engaging with the Program in Jewish Studies. Because of the close-knit nature of the program, it was so easy for me to get involved and step into leadership opportunities I probably wouldn't have tried otherwise. The professors are approachable and genuinely supportive, and they make an effort to help students find opportunities that match their interests. Jewish Studies ended up giving me a community I never expected on campus. I've met people I wouldn't have otherwise met through my studies, built lasting relationships with professors that I admire, and gained confidence in sharing my ideas. It's become a place where I feel comfortable, supported, and excited to keep learning about the topics that matter most to me.



Jess Hall
Class of 2026

SPRING 2026 EVENTS

Programs are free and open to the public.
To learn more and view recordings of past events, visit www.colorado.edu/jewishstudies/events.

FEBRUARY

2026 Holocaust Remembrance Day Lecture

"Museums as Memory Keepers: Representing the Holocaust Responsibly"

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Jordanna Gessler, Chief Impact Officer of Holocaust Museum LA

MARCH

2026 Schmooze-a-Palooza

Thursday, March 5, 2026

A fun and festive evening featuring Hebrew songs of hope and joy, performed by the CU Hebrew students, faculty, and larger community

2026 Sondra & Howard Bender Visiting Scholar

"Forbidden: A 3,000-Year History of Jews and the Pig "

Wednesday, March 25, 2026 | 7:00 PM | In-Person at the Norlin Library and via Zoom

Jordan D. Rosenblum, Belzer Prof. of Classical Judaism

and Dir. of Religious Studies at the UW Madison

(Register to attend via Zoom on the Program in Jewish Studies Website)

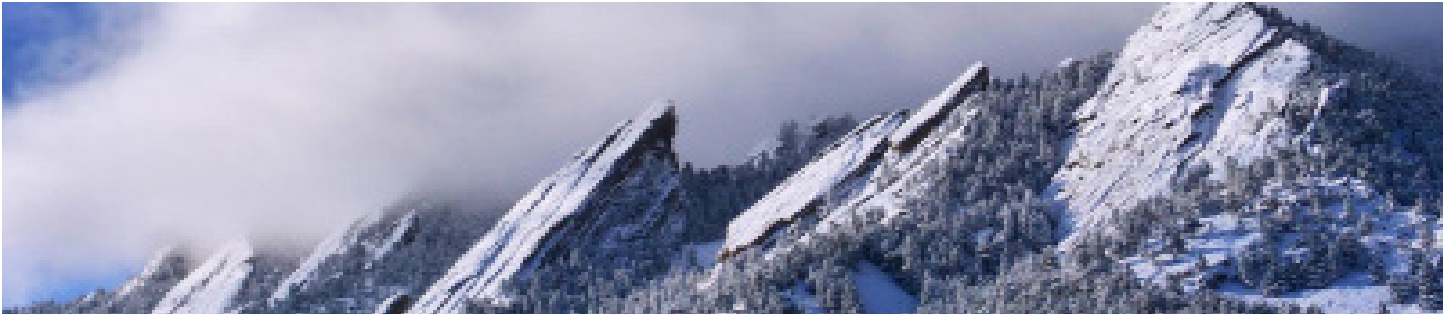
APRIL

2026 Student Research Showcase

Wednesday, April 22, 2026 | 5PM

CBIS Room on 5th Floor, Norlin Library and via Zoom

CU Boulder students present on research assistantships, capstone projects, awarded fellowships for summer study, and other research and creative work in Jewish Studies
(Register to attend via Zoom on the Program in Jewish Studies Website)



VISITING FELLOWS IN INNOVATIONS IN JEWISH LIFE

Martin Kavka is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Florida State University. He is the author of *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), which won the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association of Jewish Studies in 2008 for the best book in philosophy and Jewish thought published between 2004 and 2008. He remains most proud of his editing work, including (with Aline Kalbian) a decade as coeditor of the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, and five volumes, most recently (with Anne Dailey and Lital Levy) the volume *Unsettling Jewish Knowledge: Text, Contingency, Desire* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).



Natalie Bloch is a researcher in Hebrew Bible Exegesis at Lund University, Sweden. Her work spans Second Temple Judaism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic literature, Jewish mysticism, the intersections of psychedelics and religion/spirituality, and contemporary Hebrew literature. As a research fellow in the program *At the End of the World: A Transdisciplinary Approach to the Apocalyptic Imaginary in the Past and Present*, Bloch investigates the diachronic development of apocalyptic temple imaginaries as discursive arenas for negotiating Jewish identities and socio-cultural and political dynamics—from the Hebrew Bible through their reinterpretations in contemporary Jewish cultural expressions.

Sondra & Howard Bender Visiting Scholar



Jordan Rosenblum

Forbidden: A 3,000-Year History of Jews and the Pig

Jews do not eat pig. This (not always true) observation has been made by both Jews and non-Jews for three thousand years. Over time, the pig becomes a popular metaphor for Jewish/non-Jewish identity. In this talk, Professor Rosenblum explores this historical development. Starting in the Hebrew Bible, where the pig is tabooed but not necessarily singled out more than other food prohibitions, we see the emergence of the pig as a symbol of Jewish identity in the Second Temple period and beyond. From ancient Canaan to modern Colorado, and all points inbetween, we follow the pig as it forages through Jewish history.

Student Testimonial

The Program in Jewish Studies has been a vital source of community, scholarship, and resources during my doctoral study. The Graduate Student Colloquium's consistent work-sharing schedule and constructive feedback has helped me to develop my work and turn class papers into conference talks, outlines into dissertation chapters, and drafts into published articles. The program's events enrich my study of contemporary Jewish Studies as a field, and its generous funding has enabled me to present at major conferences.



Sarah Ramsey
PhD Candidate

FACULTY UPDATES

As is always the case, our Program in Jewish Studies Faculty has been very busy and we are happy to share these highlights of their 2025 with you:



Nan Goodman starts the year with the announcement of her highly anticipated forthcoming book, *Jewish Messiahs Abroad: American Encounters with the Sabbatian Past*, which is slated for publication with Oxford University Press in 2026. **Thomas Pegelow Kaplan** also saw a great year of scholarship, most notably with the successful launch of a new research initiative in Holocaust Studies and German-Jewish History. This collaborative partnership between CU Boulder, the Open University of Israel, and the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University Berlin culminated in an intensive eight-day research trip in November 2025. Professor Pegelow Kaplan was also awarded a prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Fellowship, which will enable him to conduct archival work in Europe throughout 2026 for his new book project on a global history of the Shoah. His publication record this year was equally significant, including the co-edited volumes *Rethinking Modern Jewish History and Memory Through Photography* and *Holocaust Testimonies: Reassessing Survivors' Voices and their Future in Challenging Times*. **Hilary Kalisman** reached a major career milestone this year with the award of tenure. Her research continues to receive top-tier support, including a General Research Grant from the Gerda Henkel Foundation for work in Jordan and the United Kingdom, and a Hoover Institution Library & Archives Scholar Research Support Grant to investigate the history of standardized testing in Iraq. Along with a CHA fellowship for Spring 2026, Professor Kalisman presented two talks related to her second book project: "Testing and the Middle East: Nation-Building, Development, and the Enduring Importance of Standardized Examinations," at Brown University's Center for Middle East Studies and "Gender, Development and Standardized Testing in the Middle East" at Stanford University. **Yonatan Malin** also had a significant year in musicology, publishing "Modes in Klezmer Music: A Corpus Study Based on Beregovski's Jewish Instrumental Folk Music" in *Music Theory Online* and "Timing in Klezmier Performance" in *Analytical Approaches to World Music*. He hosted a vibrant Yiddish song and Klezmer Residency featuring guest artists Anthony Mordechai Zvi Russell, Dmitri Gaskin, Zoë Aqua, and Raffi Boden. The residency featured a public workshop titled "Wade in the Water: The Possibilities of Black Music in Jewish Spaces" and the "Sounds of Ashkenaz" concert. Under the leadership of **Elias Sacks**, CU Boulder secured a \$299,000 Mellon Foundation grant to explore the intersection of the humanities, higher education leadership, and the future of democracy. In addition to publishing articles on Hebrew commentary on the gospels and Jewish readings of the apostle Paul, Professor Sacks spoke at the University of Vienna, the University of Toronto, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, and the University at Buffalo. He also joined the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Program and, at the request of the Chancellor's Office, led campus-wide programs on the relationship between higher education and the federal government. **Samira Mehta** expanded her public engagement as an academic consultant for the Henry Louis Gates Jr. documentary series *Black and Jewish America: An Interwoven History*, airing this February. This April, she publishes her third book, *God Bless the Pill: The Surprising History of Contraception and Sexuality in American Religion*, and has been commissioned to write for the Smithsonian Museum of American History's *Under Gods* series. **Sam Boyd** edited an edition of *English Language Notes* from Duke University Press and published a new interdisciplinary article on bird domestication and fowl imagery in biblical Wisdom literature. He also has a forthcoming piece in *Hebrew Bible Ancient Israel* regarding ancient multilingualism. In November, he presented two papers at the Society of Biblical Literature—one on economic topics in rabbinic literature and another from his forthcoming book—all while continuing to lead Faculty SPACE through the Office of Faculty Affairs. Finally, **Eyal Rivlin** continues to merge his musical background with pedagogical work, presenting Hebrew Chanting programs at the Boulder JCC and Denver's Hebrew Educational Alliance. The Nonbinary Hebrew Project, which he co-founded with Lior Gross, received an additional Rise Up Initiative grant to further develop online inclusive Hebrew language materials.

SCHMOOZE-A-PALOOZA HEBREW CONCERT



This year's Schmooze-A-Palooza concert featured Hebrew songs of peace and hope, performed by the CU Hebrew students, faculty, and larger community. Backed by a live band, students took their language knowledge beyond the classroom and offered a participatory, communal celebration of Hebrew learning. CU students, along with the general public, were invited to come sing along, and listen to fellow classmates rock out in Hebrew.

This event is always free and open to the public!

CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2025!

MINOR IN HEBREW & ISRAEL STUDIES

Oliver Lewis
Damian Sonsino

MINORS IN JEWISH STUDIES

Zuri Rose
Autumn Starr Lucas

MAJOR IN JEWISH STUDIES

Jacqueline Frances Herman

BARRY & SUE BAER GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Emily Swertfeger

ULRICH GOLDSMITH MEMORIAL PRIZE IN GERMAN-JEWISH STUDIES

Elisa Riga

RABBI DANIEL & IDA GOLDBERG GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Emily Swertfeger

AY2025-2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS

BARRY & SUE BAER UNDERGRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Jess Hall
Sophie Klepner

RABBI DANIEL & IDA GOLDBERG GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Augusto Rocha
Sarah Ramsey

HISTORY-JEWISH STUDIES ARCHIVES SUMMER FELLOW

Lucienne Brown

GLOBAL INITIATIVES SCHOLARSHIP

Augusto Rocha

INNOVATIONS IN JEWISH LIFE COLLECTION UNDERGRAD SCHOLARSHIP

Joni Lukavich
Skyler McCabe

BARRY & SUE BAER GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Emily Swertfeger
Augusto Rocha

Student Testimonial

Since 2022, the Jewish Studies Program at CU Boulder has been a marvelous space for my academic development. The Graduate Colloquium became the space in which I organized and honed my research on Early Modern Jewish-Portuguese history, preparing me for my comprehensive exams and the progression of my prospectus. The friendly environment is fundamental to the development of my work and its necessary revision along the way. The Jewish Studies plural scholarships and fellowships enable me to build up my research, since I was able to work with and explore archives in the Netherlands and England that are fundamental for my research. Through the Ets Haim, in Amsterdam, I was able to start work on examining the first Jewish texts written on the American continent, in the Dutch Colony of Recife, Brazil. At the same time, other documents in Amsterdam City Archives and the Netherlands National Archives will provide me with enough information and narratives on the transatlantic experience of Jewish-Portuguese communities, presenting a new narrative for the Early Modern period. The support and the environment provided by the Jewish Studies Department have been unique for my development, but also impacted several other undergraduate and graduate studies students.



Augusto Rocha
Class of 2027



Program in Jewish Studies
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

122 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309-0122

YOUR GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Alumni, donors, friends and community supporters bring the Program in Jewish Studies to life! Because of your commitment to PJS, we are able to provide students with the critical thinking and communication skills they need to navigate a diverse world and become leaders in their communities. Your gifts also help foster community education, support faculty research and staff professional development, and cultivate archival resources.

Thank you for your commitment to expanding the boundaries of academic learning.
Please support Jewish Studies by making a donation through the enclosed envelope or online at:
www.colorado.edu/jewishstudies/giving

COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

The Program in Jewish Studies Advisory Board is comprised of strong supporters of Jewish Studies. The mission of the board is to help the Program obtain resources for maintenance and growth, enhance the Program's reputation within CU and beyond, and help the Program facilitate community engagement and development within Colorado. We are grateful for the board's dedicated work to expand the reach of Jewish Studies on campus and in the wider community. Thank you for all you do.