



A journal published by The Judaic Studies Program & the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies.

Featured Faculty

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Professor Judith Neulander

Prof. Judith Neulander interrupted her college career at Columbia University to move to Cleveland. Here, she raised a family and finished her undergraduate degree at Ursuline College. She went on to complete a Master degree in Folklore and Mythology in the World Arts and Cultures Program at U.C.L.A. In 2001 she earned her Ph.D. in Folklore, with a specialty in Judaics, at The Institute of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her award-winning doctoral dissertation dealt with the claims of a "secret-" or crypto-Jewish survival in New Mexico, claims she was able to disprove through study of the claimants' folk-culture and the genetic characteristics of the Hispanic population. Her primary research interests are in folklore and religion, science and religion, traditional arts and architectures, and popular culture.

As a grad student she became an associate producer of folklore segments for PBS in Indianapolis, and won an Emmy nomination for that work. While at the Folklore Institute, she was co-curator of an exhibition on *Turkish Traditional Art Today* with her dissertation chair, Henry Glassie; the installation was later commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution. Upon graduation in 2001 she returned to Ohio and worked as an adjunct professor at local universities and colleges.



Professor Judith Neulander

In 2003 she joined the faculty in the Department of Religious Studies at Case Western Reserve University. With Peter Haas, Director of Religious Studies, she helped found the Judaic Studies Program, and soon afterward became its co-director.

As Co-Director of the Program, Professor Neulander continues to teach and guide students, to publish widely, and to lecture in the United States and abroad. She designed the brochure for the Judaic Studies Program, is the editor of the new *JDST e-journal*, and was a 2008 nominee for the Carl Wittke Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. But, according to Prof. Neulander, her greatest accolades are rarely known to anyone but herself, and tend to arrive by e-mail: "You may not know it" a student wrote at the end of this year, "but your passion for what you do has been an inspiration for me to push through a lot of problems I've been having this semester, and not give up on the things I love. Thank you so much!" "It doesn't get much better than that," says Prof. Neulander.

Student Awards and Honors

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize



Hometown:
Fairbury, Illinois

Academic Interests :
Double Major:
French and Francophone Studies &
Pre-Architecture
Minor: Judaic Studies

Extracurricular Activities:
MSASS Harris Library Circulation
Assistant
Case VOX Vice President

Mark Augustine

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize:

To a student who has done outstanding work in the area of Jewish Studies.

The Eudese and Elmer Paul Prizes:

To one or several undergraduate or graduate students who demonstrate an interest in Jewish Studies or Jewish contemporary life.

Outstanding Achievement:

Chris Hernandez and Zach Rubin have been recognized for outstanding achievement.

Chris is recognized for his final research paper, which was admitted to the archive of The Western Reserve Historical Society, and to the archive of The Temple/Tifereth Israel.

Zach is recognized for his short theme paper, "A Modern Mohel's Mitzvot," for *Introduction to Jewish Folklore – JDST 233* (Prof. Neulander). Zach later developed this material into a final research paper; his final paper will be the first student project to be entered on Digital Case, the electronic archive of the Kelvin Smith Library. His short paper appears in this edition of the JDST e-journal.

The Eudese and Elmer Paul Prizes

Extracurricular Activities:
I am a member of Alpha Phi (a social sorority), Psi Chi (a national honor society for Psychology students), and Gamma Sigma Alpha (an honor fraternity). I volunteer at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital and I enjoy watching movies, shopping, cooking, and yoga.

Hometown:
Steubenville, Ohio

Academic Interests :
Psychology and Anthropology with the goal of a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology.



Tessa Turnbaugh



Hometown:
East Rochester, New York

Academic Interests:
Religious plurality: religious commitment and inter-religious engagement in a multi-religious world

Extracurricular Activities:
Case Cooperation Circle, Case Rock Monkeys Climbing Club, United Protestant Campus Ministries, theater enthusiast and knitting extraordinaire

Toni Sacco

Additional Recipients:

Stephanie Camglia
Stephanie Crawley

Hometown:
West Bloomfield, Michigan

Academic Interests : International Law

Extracurricular Activities: Sports, Movies, and Politics



Justin Gruenberg

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement



Chris Hernandez

Chris did his final research paper, "Temple Tifereth Israel: Evolution and Reform" for *Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture, JDST 220* (Prof. Neulander). He studied parallels between the changing ideology of Cleveland's Tifereth Israel congregation and changes to their synagogue architecture from 1850 to 1924, culminating with The Temple at East 105th Street near University Circle. Chris contextualized his findings in ancient Israelite synagogue traditions, in European and American liturgical patterns, and in subsequent American-Jewish developments. Chris's paper was admitted to the archive of The Western Reserve Historical Society by Sean Martin, Associate Curator for Jewish History, and to the archive of The Temple/Tifereth Israel congregation by Sue Koletsky, Curator of Collections.

A Modern Mohel's Mitzvot

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement Zachary Rubin

In the Torah, it is written, "For all generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised" (Gen. 17:12). For thousands of years, the Jewish people have performed a ritual circumcision called a *brit milah*, or *bris*, as a means to satisfy the covenant made between God and Abraham. This sacred ceremony is usually performed by a specially trained *mohel*, or ritual circumciser. About 15 years ago, my rabbi was concerned that a growing number of rural families were not performing the ceremony. He approached my father, Dr. Ira Rubin, who is a pediatrician. My Dad subsequently underwent special training, and he now serves as a mohel for rural communi-



In rural Illinois many babies wear elaborate gowns, sometimes inherited from earlier generations

ties outside of Chicago. To investigate the folkloric aspects of the ritual, I interviewed him about his training, and how people learn about his services; about any practices that constitute his own tradition, and about family traditions he has encountered in modern, rural Illinois.

According to my Dad, the Orthodox and Conservative movements train mohels through apprenticeships, and trainees are ordained by a local Brit Milah Board. By contrast, his training consisted of a special mohel class sponsored by the Reform branch of Judaism. "It was only the second time it was

done in Chicago history, with a class size of 10. The course met weekly for 3 months to learn the religious aspects, but everyone in the class was a physician who already knew how to perform the circumcision, and to take the class you had to prove that you had hospital privi-

"The entire Jewish community of Dixon, all 40 of them, came to a barn where the brit milah was held."

leges, accordingly. At the end of the program, I completed a series of questions that were submitted to the Reform Board of Brit Milah, and after that one test, I was ordained in a Chicago synagogue."

When a baby boy is born to Jewish parents, some have a physician perform the circumcision, and hire a rabbi to perform the ritual. Parents who prefer to hire a mohel usually look for one who is affiliated with their own synagogue, or their own branch of Judaism. In big cities unaffiliated Jews can find a mohel through hospital registries, or through newspaper advertisements. But according to my Dad, rural communities search differently: "Usually a mohel is hired because someone knows someone, or a person who attended a bris knew the mohel. For me, most parents come through word of mouth."

For Jewish families, the duties of a mohel satisfy a very important *mitzvah* (pl. *mitzvot*), a word meaning both a "commandment" and a "blessing." Therefore, my Dad does not accept money for his services. Instead, he asks that parents make a donation to their synagogue. The typical ceremony is usually brief, lasting about ten minutes. The basic

requirement involves saying a prayer and performing the circumcision.

Then the *Kiddush* prayer is recited over wine, and another prayer is

said to name the baby. But within this framework my Dad has developed his own practices: "I explain the ritual to all before I start. I offer handouts for the family and friends to follow along. I pass the baby around the room to welcome him to the community, and I repeat everything I say in Hebrew, and in English, for all to understand."

Traditionally, the baby was held on the lap of the *sandak*, an honored position awarded to a godfather, but in modern times the sandak is usually the baby's grandfather. What still persists is preparation of an empty chair to seat the Prophet Elijah; in Jewish folk belief Elijah acts as a guardian angel for babies being circumcised (Sherman 1992:35). Most families like to add a speech about the significance of the baby's Hebrew name, which is usually given to memorialize a deceased family member. My Dad also noticed that "many families want to use their own *Kiddush* cups, used during their wedding, and many families want the baby dressed in the gown used for the father when he had a bris." Use of heirloom christening gowns is well documented in Christian tradition, but there is a need for further research on material culture at the brit milah. According to my Dad, some practices are unique to each family: "One family had a sing-along, one family wanted to take shots of vodka. In one family the father



Zach Rubin

played a guitar.”

Only a handful of mohels serve rural Illinois, and it is remarkable how far some must travel. One of my Dad’s most memorable brit milahs took place three hours away from home in a farming town called Dixon, the birthplace of Ronald Reagan. He was asked to do this brit milah because he was the mohel in closest proximity to them. The entire Jewish community of Dixon, all 40 of them, came to a barn where the bris was held. My Dad was struck by how tight-



The baby is held by the sandak, beside an empty chair prepared for the Prophet Elijah; the mohel, Dr. Ira Rubin, is on the left.

knit the community was, and how they held their traditions more closely than anywhere else he had been. This seems to support Anderson’s paradoxical finding of “archaism at the fringes,” showing that people hold onto traditions more steadfastly, the more distant they are from their place of origin, or from the broader community (1923).

My research shows that the mohel’s duties persist through special training and certification within the different branches of Judaism. In rural areas especially, mohels are located by word of mouth. Modern mohels, and the families they serve, retain much of the ancient tradition and also develop their own practices within the ritual. Failure of rural communities to perform the ceremony does not necessarily indicate disinterest, but more clearly reflects a lack of opportunity, since rural communities seem to hold their traditions more closely, the greater their distance from more populated centers of Jewish life.

References Cited

Anderson, Walter. 1923. *Kaiser und Apt: Die Geschichte Eines Schwanks*. Copenhagen: Folklore Fellows Communications 42 (qtd. by Neulander, class lecture, 2008).

Sherman, Josepha. 1992. *A Sampler of Jewish-American Folklore*. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc.

Courses of Interest for Fall 2008

JDST 201:

Introduction to Judaic Studies

Peter J. Haas (T/R 1:15-2:30)

An introduction to the academic study of Judaic religion and culture, this course does not presuppose any previous study, or experience with, Judaism. Through a variety of methods used in the Social Sciences and Humanities, students will examine the diverse issues and questions that are driving the current field of Judaic Studies and come to conclusions about the state of the questions. There will be some “field” experience including a visit to a synagogue and to a Jewish museum. The course is required for the minor in Judaic Studies.

JDST 268:

Women in the Bible—Ethnographic Approaches to Rite and Ritual, Story, Song and Art

Judith S. Neulander (T/R 10:00-11:15)

From Ishtar to Esther, from the Christian Marys to the Muslim Mary, we will explore the strategic and creative ways that women in sacred history have reflected and reinforced changing values over time and across space, through rite and ritual, story, song and art. Using folkloristic theory and ethnographic method we will come to understand how these various views of women inform, reflect and challenge gender roles in modern society.

HBRW 101:

Elementary Modern Hebrew I

Yoram Daon (MWF 10:30-11:20)

Emphasis on basic communicative skills in standard modern Hebrew.

HBRW 102:

Intermediate Modern Hebrew I

Yoram Daon (MWF 11:30-12:20)

Emphasis on modern conversational Hebrew: reading and writing skills.

HBRW 301:

Advanced Modern Hebrew I

Yoram Daon (MW 12:30-1:45)

Class conducted in Hebrew. Emphasis on advanced language skills; active, creative use of Hebrew.

A Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in *Jewish Folklore 233* reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom:

- The Role of Elijah in Jewish Folklore
John Hill
- No Laughing Matter: Interpreting Jewish Humor
Jordan Silver
- Klezmer!: Jewish Folk Music
Ernest Durbin
- Food for Thought: the Relationship between Jewish Food and Identity
Tessa Turnbaugh
- The World to Come: The Afterlife in Jewish Folklore
Joe Smetona
- Joha the Sephardic Trickster
Lila Robinson
- Temple Tifereth Israel: Creating a Jewish-American Identity
Toni Sacco
- The Wedding Canopy: A Study of the 'Chuppa'
Jaclyn Danoff
- Poland's Wooden Synagogues: Ongoing Life in American Fine and Folk Art
Shawn White
- The Passover Festival: Tradition and Transformation
Avanti Jakatdar

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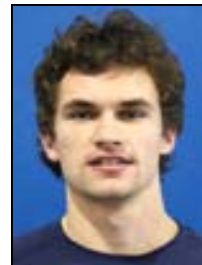
Ben Blackwood



London School of Economics,
London, UK

Master of Science, Local
Economic Development

Joe Smetona



Columbia University,
New York, NY

Master of Science, Financial
Engineering

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