

## **Inventory of Program Assessment Activities, 2012-2013**

**Department of Jewish Studies  
College of Liberal & Creative Arts  
San Francisco State University**

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### **Department of Jewish Studies Mission Statement**

The only free-standing undergraduate Jewish Studies department in the Bay Area, Jewish Studies offers a B.A. degree in Modern Jewish Studies, with special focus on modern Jewish experience. JS introduces the conceptual categories of “Jew” and “Judaism” into SF State’s curriculum and intellectual discourse, thereby problematizing notions of religion, nation, ethnicity, and culture. Correspondingly, it demonstrates to a diverse student population, the breadth and depth of Jewish culture, religion, literature, and history, as well as the importance of the Hebrew language.

### **Overview of Departmental Learning Outcomes (2005-2013)**

The Department of Jewish Studies (JS) has revised its departmental learning outcomes several times since 2005. The first iteration focused on building visibility within the humanities and increasing FTEs in the Segment III curricula. We identified the following items as desirable programmatic outcomes:

1. Knowledge of Judaism
2. Knowledge of Jewish Social and Cultural Experiences
3. Knowledge of Jewish Literatures
4. Knowledge of Jewish Studies
5. Knowledge of Modern Jewish Thought

These were operative in 2005-2007, but by 2008 we redefined departmental outcomes to reflect the potential for intellectual and curricular intervention that we believed the nascent Jewish studies program could have in the university:

1. Provides an understanding of Jews and Judaism in terms of the interactions of culture, history, and religion.
2. Trains students to identify the challenges of modernity faced by Jews and Judaism.
3. Trains students to map how the last two hundred years have transformed traditional Jewish societies and generated a great measure of difference and diversity. After a history of more than two millennia, Jews have redefined

religion, notions of identity, and social organization in contexts of a dominant culture (in Israel) and a minority culture (in diaspora).

4. Trains students to analyze the broader dynamics of how ethnic, religious, or racial minorities interact with dominant societies.

5. Explores the constants and varieties of the Jewish experience in different historical periods and geographical settings, including the study of Hebrew.

Subsequently, a number of major changes in the department have led us to begin a process to reconsider, again, our learning outcomes for the following assessment cycle. These changes were: 1) the elevation in status from program to department; 2) an increase in the number of tenured faculty; 3) the hire of an endowed chair in Israel studies; and 4) the projected hire of an endowed chair in American Jewish studies (in process 2013-14; to be filled Fall 2015). Since Jewish studies consists of a range of scholarly fields and sub-fields encompassing many scholarly disciplines, the department could make no a priori assumptions about the curricular contribution of a new faculty member, especially given that that new member would represent a 25% increase in the faculty.

However, during this process, the University introduced new writing requirements (GWAR), as well as a major GE revision so that our revision of learning outcomes was displaced by the more immediate concern of compliance with the new guidelines. Although we intended to conduct a thorough assessment beginning in 2011, several factors intervened to slow down our progress:

- a. Prof. Millet, the department's resident assessment "guru," was on sabbatical and unavailable (Spring 2011);
- b. The remaining two faculty (Astren, Dollinger) felt it difficult to revise until after the department could determine how the new hire in Israel studies would change the curriculum.
- c. New courses associated with Israel studies became a priority, since they had to articulate the University's new guidelines, and since the Israel studies chair would not be joining the faculty until the following Fall.

With departmental learning outcomes in flux, mid-term and exit surveys were conducted in Fall 2013 in several courses taught by a tenured faculty member to gauge student perception of the curriculum's articulated learning outcomes. As suggested by the initial surveys conducted in the 2005-2007 and 2008 cycles, student responses fell into a easily identified and familiar pattern:

1. Responses reflected a student population with little or no knowledge of Jews and/or Judaism at the beginning of the semester.
2. Students demonstrated incremental increases in such knowledge by midterm.
3. Students demonstrated a full step increase in knowledge by the end of term.

However, these steps were not uniform; they reflected each student's perception of personal growth. Using a small sample (from courses JS 546, JS 437, and JS 410), evidence of improvement was tethered to the identification of specific concepts,

vocabulary, events, and dates. Since all of these courses are cross-listed, they had significant populations of non-majors in each class. Therefore, the last item of measurement contrasted majors, minors, and non-majors. In this regard, majors had similar perceptions about their level of knowledge at the same markers if the course in question was their first course in the major.

In Spring 2013, the department completed another step in the revision of learning outcomes to coincide with GE revisions:

1. Students will develop interpretive and analytical skills in reading Jewish religious texts.
2. Students will develop interpretive and analytical skills in reading Jewish literary texts.
3. Students will gain knowledge of the history and cultures of Jews and Judaism in the ancient, medieval, and modern periods in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.
4. Students will gain knowledge of the relationships of Jews and Judaism to other peoples, religions, and cultures in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.
5. Students will gain knowledge of the ways that Jews and Judaism illuminate the histories, literatures, religions, and cultures of non-Jews in the world.
6. Students will gain knowledge of the ways that non-Jewish histories, literatures, religions, and cultures are necessary to understand Jews and Judaism in the world.
7. Students should be able to find, read, understand, and assimilate primary and secondary research materials.

These outcomes remain in force in the current year, 2013-2014. After the new endowed chair in American Jewish studies is filled (anticipated Fall 2014), the department will revise them again to reflect the contributions of the new hire.

### **Overview of the Department: Units and Enrollment**

Jewish Studies is a relatively new, and small department, with somewhat more minors than majors. Trying to understand the department's size, faculty presumed that recruitment was challenged by the number of core courses required for the degree. With a small faculty and curriculum, all core courses are required for majors and minors in Jewish Studies. The degree includes a Hebrew language requirement as well, making the degree contingent on student articulation of ACTFL novice intermediate status ("C" or better in the lower-division). With the increase in faculty members, the department plans to rethink the roadmap in order to focus on areas of emphasis and to streamline the core requirements. While our degree is in line with the College's average APR (approx. 40), smaller programs and departments appear to be trending toward fewer credits for majors (TPW, American Studies, CWL, FLL—individual languages counting as smaller units; WGS). In comparison to Science and Social Science APRs, our department appears "light."

#### Sampling of College APRs:

Journalism—40 units  
Liberal Studies—46 units  
Music—45 (Creative Arts)  
Philosophy and Religion—40  
Philosophy—40 to 43  
DAI—62 (Creative Arts; impacted)  
WGS—39  
FLL—30  
English—Major Linguistics and Literature, 45  
English—Major Education, with variable emphases: 53-66  
English—Creative Writing, 42  
CWL—39  
Humanities—42  
Communication Studies—40 (pending impactation)  
Classics—43-44  
Cinema—45  
BECA—45  
American Studies—39  
TPW—45

#### Sampling of Sciences, Social Sciences, and other Colleges APRs:

Biology—57  
Math—54  
Meteorology—69  
Physics—52  
Nursing—87 (impacted)  
Business—Accounting 60  
Computer Sciences—71  
Civil Engineering—93  
Kinesiology—66-70  
Psychology—41 (impacted)

The comparison of APRs did provide faculty with a sense of why the department's single lower-division course (JS 280) is routinely undersubscribed. Part of the problem is that the course remains outside of GE. Initially it was part of the upper-division GE III cluster, "Jewish Experience," but was reclassified as lower-division and lost that status. Since the university-wide revision to GE was in process, the department could not change the course's status to lower-division GE and as a consequence it was ultimately "orphaned."

Additionally, the APRs demonstrate that students expect majors outside of the College to focus exclusively on the departmental discipline, leaving space only for GE and other university-wide requirements. If the major requires lower-division

preparatory courses before upper-division courses, students are more likely to privilege lower-division courses in terms of utility and not in terms of interest. That is, students will take lower-division courses within their major rather than outside of it. Since the above referenced survey data identifies student populations in JS courses as largely unfamiliar with Jews and Judaism, and we have only a single lower-division course, faculty come into contact with this student population primarily at the upper-division level.

Since JS courses are routinely cross-listed with other departments in the College, the student population is disciplinarily diverse. These students may often already have designated minors in other colleges. Although JS enrollments course by course are usually strong, the department has been challenged in the recruitment for the major and it does not appear to be due to an excessive amount of credits for the major. Faculty have speculated on the reasons for this small population of majors:

1. The relative “newness” of the Jewish Studies major in the overall curriculum. Although established in Fall 2002, the JS major was originally part of a CSU-wide Jewish Studies consortium, whose degree curriculum was in part based on distance learning. JS at SF State immediately built a program to be independent of consortium uncertainties that arose due to the lack of central coordination and manifold problems of associated with distance learning. As a consequence, enrollment during the major degree’s early years was spotty.

As a consequence of many factors, including the fluid situation that characterizes GE currently, the rethinking of JS learning outcomes, the implications of rethinking on the JS “roadmap,” and the addition of new core faculty, JS has been a constantly evolving unit. As such, we find ourselves again being required to rethink where the department fits into the larger picture at SF State. The result of so much institutional change has had a real impact on the department’s development.

2. Lack of visibility. Incoming students have no knowledge of Jewish Studies as a viable major or minor because it is outside the parameters of high school and community college curriculum. From Prof. Millet’s participation in the College Ambassadors Program during new student orientation in Summer 2013, JS faculty noted that the majority of incoming new students already declare their majors and potential minors prior to matriculation. With high school and community college curricula rarely capable of offering courses in Jewish Studies, advising for the department is non-existent at this level. This is the case with almost all of the specialized small departments in the former College of the Humanities. Moreover, Jewish Studies is particularly disadvantaged due to student perception that its major is too specialized to be useful in the workplace, i.e., it is significant only for a niche group who desire religious education (which, of course, is not the case). Without preparatory courses at the secondary and transfer levels, students are often unaware of the existence of Jewish Studies as a major. Whereas large departments, like English, Journalism, and Philosophy, can count on student awareness of the major prior to matriculation, JS cannot.

3. The absence of lower-division curricula to segue into upper-division JS core courses. The primary and only recruitment tool left to the department is the lower-division course (short of attracting new majors from other major programs). However, the university GE lower-division revision makes the casual enrollment in a lower-division course outside of GE or of the major non-viable. JS intends to put forward at least one new lower-division GE course as soon as the moratorium on new course proposals ends. The new course(s) will be linked to articulating the new lower-division GE requirements (perhaps beginning with the literature requirement). (Comment: The moratorium on new courses is a stunningly unnatural impediment to the normal and necessary operation of the university. Much can be said about this instance of the “tail wagging the dog.”)

4. With students well on their way to articulating the high counts of required courses in their majors, it will become virtually impossible to attract majors and minors from the existing upper-division populations outside the College. JS has continually experienced a small percentage of students enrolled in other majors who opted to sign on to JS as a minor or second major. This will not be the case for much longer. The new requirements make it unlikely that students devoting a large proportion of their coursework to fulfilling major requirements will abandon or add to that project except in the rarest of circumstances. With a 120-unit cap, students are being shepherded out of the system when they reach the cap. Thus, students who want to change their major relatively late in their university career could not only be penalized with late registration dates, but could also be prevented by administrative fiat from making that change.

5. JS departments and programs are small, both at the national and international level. Graduates often go on to doctoral programs or advanced degrees at Research I institutions. In terms of this national habit, SF State’s department has been remarkably successful. Our majors and minors are routinely fellowship recipients when they matriculate as doctoral students. We place about 1-2 students a year in such programs.

6. In Research I institutions, JS majors and minors can count on significant subventions in the form of scholarships; they can also augment their degrees with study abroad programs in Israel and in other countries with significant Jewish studies resources (academically, as well as historically and culturally). Disciplinary diversity at the department level is also broader at Research I institutions. Currently, JS has been working to increase disciplinary diversity by actively developing student scholarships. (Prof. Dollinger has had some successes in the regard.) Eventually, the department hopes to increase student subventions by adding 1-2 more significant scholarship endowments.

The problem remains though that JS recruitment has been challenged by ongoing institutional changes. The steps we intend to take in order to address that situation depend on a number of factors: the department’s ability to open up new mechanisms of recruitment; the introduction of lower-division GE courses that

attract potential majors; the outreach to secondary and community college advising; increased visibility of JS courses on campus; and increased visibility on campus of JS extracurricular scholarly events and activity that can help shift student perspectives on what JS contributes to undergraduate education. In this final register, both Prof. Astren and Prof. Millet will host research group meetings at SF State this year. Such meetings will not only offer student attendees exposure to Jewish Studies and related content, but will bring into focus the contribution of Jewish Studies to the university scholarly environment as a whole. And, some students will be able to apply for participatory roles in support capacities, whereby they will see such things up close.

## **Conclusions**

The department has confidence in the many course proposals submitted in Spring 2013 for inclusion in the new GE scheme. (We await notification of their status.) In this regard, the department is deepening one of its two curricular strengths, whereby it serves the university curriculum as a whole through robust, solid GE course offerings. Its second strength comes from its strong cross-listing strategy, whose inter-disciplinarity mirrors the multi-disciplinarity that is inherent in Jewish Studies.

For 2013, with revised PLOs, we have still to clarify a new roadmap for majors and minors. This is perhaps, after recruitment, our most pressing issue. Based on Prof. Millet's experience with the College Ambassadors Program, and with the unknown variable of the contribution of the next departmental hire (anticipated Fall 2014), department priorities are moving toward:

1. Streamlining the major and minor to reflect institutional change and current faculty capacities.
2. Preparing new lower-division courses so that they can be proposed as soon as is possible.
3. Redesigning the departmental mission statement so that students understand both the broad appeal of JS courses within the general curriculum and how a JS major can enhance students' future goals and aspirations.

## **Appendix: Assessment of Sample Course, JS 546 (Fall 2103)**

Self Assessment level of knowledge:

0 = no knowledge and 4 = extensive and advanced knowledge

In 2010, the department began assessment within several courses. Since then, efforts have been concentrated on one course, JS/ENGL/WGS 546, "Jewish American Women Writers."

The total population of 546 in any given year since 2011 is 25-35 students. In the 2010 survey, 3% were JS majors and minors out of 27 students who participated in the assessment. The remaining students came mostly from English and Women and Gender Studies. In subsequent years, we have seen a 10-15% jump in students coming from outside the college. The number of majors has been about 2% and minors about 5%. The increase in minors reflects student perception that the JS minor is easier to achieve since it does not require a foreign language and has significantly fewer requirements than the major.

For 2013, there are no majors or minors in the class. There are however students who have taken more than one JS class prior to taking 546. The assessment instrument asks students to estimate how much knowledge they had at the beginning of the semester about the major tenets, concepts, and traditions of Judaism, and their general exposure to Jewish literature and Jewish history. Then they were asked to compare that estimate to their perception of how much knowledge they have at the midpoint in the semester. The instrument reflects the PLOs of 2010, and the survey measures #1 and #2 on that older document. On a scale of zero for nothing, 1 for simple, 2 for moderate or some exposure to, 3 for advanced knowledge of these items, the breakdown was as follows:

- Of the 27 (out of 28 enrolled) students present on the day of survey, 1 identified as advanced at the beginning of the semester and continuing to advance by the midpoint. The student had had previous instruction in Jewish Studies, either in the department or at another institution.
- 2 identified as moderate at the beginning and advanced by midpoint.
- 22 identified as simple at the beginning and moderate at midpoint.
- 2 identified as simple at the beginning and simple at midpoint.
- 1 identified as zero at the beginning and simple at midpoint.

Like the 2010 conclusions, the faculty instructor had similar perceptions about student estimates.