

Jewish Studies Assessment Narrative, 2010
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The department defined programmatic learning outcomes when we were still a program and not a department. Thus we imagined our program in very different terms. At that time, we existed primarily as a service program, with resources for a small cohort of majors and minors. Likewise, our FTEs were tied to our presence in the General Education, Segment III curricula. Since we were a new program, with only two tenured and one tenure-track faculty, we decided to focus on building our visibility within the Humanities and increasing our FTEs in the Segment III curricula. Thus in 2005, our first iteration of a program assessment matrix identified these 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 outcomes remained in force for 2006-2007. However, in 2008, we redefined the outcomes as the following:

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.

However, these outcomes do not reflect recent changes in the Jewish Studies curriculum, our change from program to department status, our increase in tenured faculty, the introduction of an Israel Studies focus, and the rethinking of our departmental goals in the long term. Furthermore, we did not anticipate some of the changes that the University has recently made regarding GWAR requirements, as well as the general education revision. Thus we will revisit these outcomes over the next year and conduct a much more thorough assessment for 2011-2012. The more thorough assessment has to take place in the coming year for two main reasons: 1) 2009-2010, 2/3 of the faculty were on sabbatical and so the department operated with one full-time faculty member for most of the year. In 2010-2011, we will likewise see a reduction since 1/3 of the faculty will be on sabbatical as well. 2) in 2011-2012, we will gain a fourth faculty member and that will allow us to implement finally many of the changes we are working on at the moment.

Overview of the Department:

Majors and Minors in Jewish Studies are encouraged to define specific tracks of emphasis in addition to taking core courses expected of all JS majors and minors. The tracks include: Modern Jewish Studies; Jewish History; Comparative Jewish Literatures; Israel Studies; Jewish Religious Experience. For this year's assessment, I chose two courses, one assessed over three semesters of instruction (JS 410), and one in the process of assessment this semester (JS 546). I selected these two courses for different reasons:

- 1) as the sole faculty member in the department whose teaching load has remained the same over several years, I had the opportunity to assess the same course (410) over several semesters;
- 2) JS 410 is a core course for the major and I could expect that all majors would take the class;
- 3) JS 410 is also a key course because of its emphasis on Judaism as an object of knowledge;
- 4) 546 is an elective course for majors and minors;
- 5) 546 is a component in the Comparative Jewish Literatures track; and
- 6) while Judaism is not a major topic of the course, it still is extremely relevant since writers utilize its terms throughout their texts, i.e. Judaism is embedded in the subject matter.

For 546, I have conducted surveys to measure student perceptions of how much content they were learning. I decided to go this route because of my experiences with measuring student articulation of programmatic outcomes in JS 410, Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism. As I will describe later in this narrative, 410 students reversed themselves on the amount they felt they had amassed before taking the course and the amount they felt they had gained after taking the course. For 546, the survey assessed for #1 and #2 of the programmatic outcomes. Given that the course does not conclude until December, I didn't feel I could assess all of the outcomes for 546 until the conclusion of the semester.

Student Self Assessment for 546

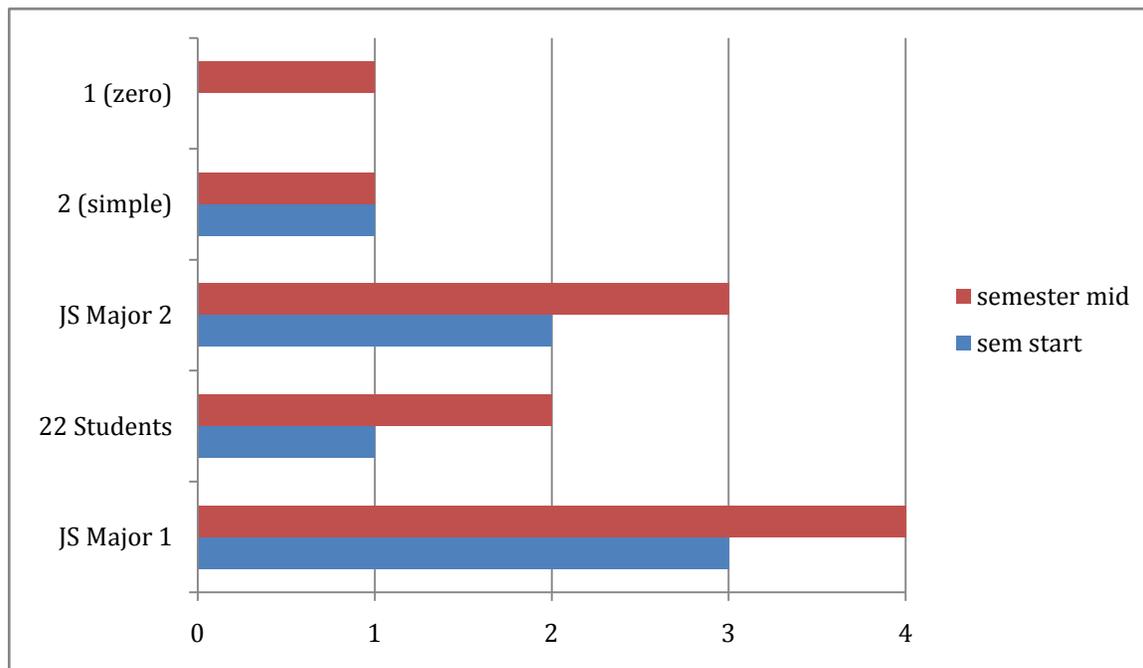


Figure 1 (Left column identifies student's initial self evaluation of their knowledge of Judaism and Jewish literature; identifies students as numerical quantities: 1 student identified as having no knowledge—zero. 2 students identified as having simple knowledge, etc.)

Self-assessed level of knowledge:

0 = no knowledge and 4 = extensive and advanced knowledge

The total population of 546 is 35 students. Of these, 3% are JS majors or minors. On the day of the survey, 27 students were present. The rest of the students come from English and Women and Gender Studies primarily. 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, their general exposure to Jewish literature, Jewish history, and to compare that estimate to their perception of how much knowledge they have at the midpoint in the semester. 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:

1 (JS major) identified as advanced at the beginning of the semester and continuing to advance by the midpoint.

1 (JS major) 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

As the instructor of record, my perception matches the students' estimates. In the first exam assessment for the course, students struggled with concepts, tenets of Judaism, were largely unfamiliar with Jewish history and culture, their

impingement on Jewish identity, and had no background in Jewish literatures. Thus their first exam demonstrated that 50% of the students had incrementally begun to gain knowledge in these areas. The second exam demonstrated that students had overwhelmingly improved their knowledge of these items and that they felt confident they would improve steadily throughout the semester to articulate the two outcomes. If the 546 class is indicative of other literature offerings in the department, students not only gain moderate knowledge of programmatic outcomes, but also perceive themselves as incrementally building on that knowledge throughout the semester.

For 410, I decided to chart majors and minors exclusively over a period of 3 semesters (2008, 2009, 2010). The course assessments remained the same for all three courses and overall I was dealing with a cohort of app 10 students out of a general population of 102 in the three courses. Using an oral interview with students in my office hours, I determined that the majority of the majors (7) felt they had extensive knowledge of #1 and #2 of the 2005 outcomes, but lacked any knowledge of #3-5 of the 2005 outcomes. However, students believed that they articulated all of the programmatic outcomes of the 2008 revision, a conclusion that I believe is flawed and based on the lack of disciplinary language in the 2008 revision. We are working to resolve the problem now. The overview of 410 between 2008-2010 suggests that students lack exposure to more advanced aspects of #1 and #5 of 2005 outcomes, but perceive themselves as articulating #1-5 in the 2008 outcomes.

This data has pushed us to shift the lower division course in Judaism to upper division, and to make it a core course for the major. At the end of the 2006 cycle of Assessment, we knew that the formal instruction of Judaism as a religion was lacking in the curriculum, but we didn't anticipate that students would need more than a lower division course to address the lack.

In 2005, we noted the absence of a clear path of courses articulating #3 Jewish Lit and #5, Modern Jewish Thought of 2005 outcomes. At the time, we offered 2 courses in Jewish literature (437 and 451). In 2006, we added 546, and by 2010, we currently offer 6 courses for #3, Jewish Literatures (437, 451, 546, 480, 495, 530), with 2 more in planning (lower-div, ge lit; GVAR) for next year. Through a partnership with CWL, we are now offering a Comparative Jewish Literatures option for students wishing such a focus.

We're still tackling how to address the absence of a clear track of Modern Jewish Thought courses in our curriculum, #5. Currently, non-majors take crosslisted courses that are offered through the Dept. of Humanities (JS 413, 414, 545), i.e. majors don't perceive these courses as pertinent electives so they don't take them generally. We hope to begin adding courses to this component of our major in the next two years.