

UGC Program Review- Judaic Studies

1/30/14

This review is the first for the Judaic Studies program in nearly 20 years, the last having occurred in 1995. The program has a rich history and offers both a major and minor in Judaic Studies. The faculty is drawn from a number of departments on campus, and currently a core group of faculty (numbering 6) is responsible for ensuring the health and efficiency of the program. During a one-day period, the committee met with the program director, a number of core and affiliated faculty members, and administrative and support staff to discuss the current state of the program.

Overall, the committee was impressed with the great strength of the Judaic Studies faculty, which consists of highly-accomplished and enthusiastic teachers and scholars. Moreover, the program is well-funded and has considerable potential for growth. Despite this, our impression is that the program is currently in a sensitive and difficult place, lacking vision and cohesiveness. Specifically, it has a faculty and large resources but very few students. While we are mindful that there is a general drop in numbers of humanities students at the college-level, we are concerned about the sustainability of the program and with its ability to attract students. Rapid improvement is necessary in order to ensure that the Judaic Studies program remain viable and relevant for the UCSD student body. The following recommendations may be helpful in reshaping the direction of the program.

Curriculum

A major curricular overhaul is recommended and will be beneficial. The main focus of this overhaul should be to shift the central focus of the major. We do acknowledge the importance and richness of biblical studies; however, a shift towards better balance and an increasingly modern focus in the curriculum will improve the program. This would involve moving away from a biblical studies focus to a “Jewish culture”-based focus. This will both draw on the broader talents of the UCSD faculty and enhance the relevance and interest of the major for students, while retaining the traditional roots that have made it successful in the past. In particular, the committee feels that contemporary topics such as Israel and the Middle East are underrepresented in the curriculum.

Specific recommendations include the following:

- Adding courses to the curriculum is not necessary. A tighter, leaner program is in order. Accordingly, an emphasis should be placed on assessing current courses with an eye towards re-tooling and re-titling existing ones. These courses could be made even more relevant to students if they were to satisfy general education requirements or diversity requirements. We note that an effort has been underway in the program to go through the course catalog in order to remove unnecessary or defunct courses, and we feel that this is exactly the right action going forward.
- A logical sequence of classes should be achieved, with a smaller number of overall required credits for the major.

- Core courses should be more of an introduction to Jewish Studies and not Hebrew-based. This will allow greater numbers of students to take the introductory classes who do not possess the language requirements.
- The committee noted that language (Hebrew) is an issue for some students, particularly transfer students, thus making access to the program difficult. One suggestion is to develop two tracks of majors, one language based and one non-language based, in order to open up the major to larger numbers of students.
- Service-learning should be a greater priority. Students should be encouraged to connect with non-profits, external organizations, etc.
- Specific class issues/suggestions:
 - A new gateway course, perhaps “JUDA 10” that would function as the introductory course, with an emphasis on introduction to Jewish studies. Alternately, JUDA 100 could be retooled to function as that course.
 - Incorporation of diverse topics in classes. Examples that came up during the discussion included the global Jewish diaspora, Jews of color, Jews of Asia (China, India) etc.
 - While we are not advocating new classes per se, the program may wish to consider topics such Jewish and World History, Jewish Culture in America, Jews of the West/California; these are examples of successful courses at other universities that may be of particular interest for UCSD students.

Organization/structure

A new structure for faculty oversight may be beneficial to the program. Specifically, the committee believes that a reorganization of the core/affiliated faculty distinction could serve to bring new energy and ideas to the major. It is not necessary to restrict oversight of the program to endowed chair-holders. The committee recommends expanding the core faculty to also include affiliated members with strong or growing interests in Jewish studies (n ~ 10). From that larger pool of faculty, the committee recommends that the Dean of Humanities appoint a faculty advisory committee to assist the director in making key decisions related to the major and program. This advisory committee should include a number of individuals committed to change and working closely with the program director. We also believe that new hires are not necessary at this time, and that revenue from currently un-filled chairs could be used to make temporary hires to fill gaps in teaching requirements.

Finally, the committee believes that the relationship between the program and the board of visitors should be re-examined. Regular meetings and an increasingly frequent dialogue with this important group of individuals who contribute financially to the program would be highly beneficial. Regular engagement with donors will provide benefit, even if the potential for alienating some donors does exist.

Student recruitment and branding of the major

The committee noted that renaming the major might make it more appealing. Although a minor suggestion, renaming the major “Jewish Studies” (as is the norm at most major programs) might represent an attractive alternative to the current program name (from the student perspective.) Recruitment efforts in the program need to be improved to attract students. Transfer students are an untapped resource that deserves increased attention.

These efforts at recruitment may require financial resources, but fortunately the program is in a position to assist. Among the ideas discussed were scholarship funds for Jewish studies majors, the creation of attractive promotion materials, the use of social media and an enhanced web presence, and active recruitment at community colleges and high schools in the area. Finally, the committee suggests that effort should be placed in providing student opportunities that create a cohort of Judaic Studies undergraduates. The creation of an undergraduate Jewish studies council, whose members receive a stipend, can help to build camaraderie amongst students that would likely improve the program.

Summary

In summary, the committee acknowledges the great strength of the Judaic Studies program over the years and is impressed by the faculty resources currently in place on campus. We believe however that the old model for the program is no longer sustainable and that a transition is necessary to meet the current needs of the student body and the university. A shift towards balance in the curriculum with a more modern focus will make the major attractive to today’s students. Expanding the core faculty is another suggestion that we hope will be taken into serious consideration. The committee believes that the changes outlined in this review are prudent and necessary to maintain the health and relevance of the program moving forward.

Geoffrey W. Cook

Gary Jacobson

David N. Myers

August 29, 2014

PROFESSOR DEBORAH HERTZ, Director
Judaic Studies Program

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Judaic Studies Program

Dear Professor Hertz,

The Undergraduate Council has discussed the Judaic Studies Program's 2014 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee. In addition, we would like to comment on the following:

- **Number of Students in the Major:** The Council is dismayed by the absence of students in the major. We expect the Judaic Studies major to be in-line with the other small programs on campus. The Council is pleased by the proposed increased recruitment effort for the minor program and requests the Program expand these efforts to the major program as well.
- **Curriculum Review:** The Council is pleased that the Program is undertaking a review of their curriculum and we encourage the Program to thoroughly review every aspect of their curriculum, including core requirements, electives, and enrollment numbers in each course. The Council, like the review subcommittee, encourages the Program to consider a modern Jewish culture core requirement. Core requirements should send a message to the student about what is essential to study.
- **Modern-Themed Course Offerings:** The Council agrees with the review subcommittee's assessment that additional modern-themed coursework could appeal to a wider audience. The Program response indicates the potential of offering more modern Jewish culture coursework, but predominantly by visiting professors. This does not seem a sustainable model and we urge the Program to make a long-term teaching plan for modern-themed courses.
- **Faculty Communication:** We are pleased to learn of the establishment of regular meetings among the core faculty. The Council also encourages increased communication between all faculty, affiliated and core.

The Undergraduate Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Program during or after Fall Quarter 2015. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Program's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council will specifically review the status of the curriculum and recruitment efforts. The Council extends its thanks to the Program for its engagement in this process and we look forward to a continued discussion.

Sincerely,



James Nieh, Chair
Undergraduate Council

cc: G. Boss L. Carver C. Della Coletta K. Pogliano R. Rodriguez B. Sawrey M. Sidney