

The entire College-Institute faculty convened in Lisle, IL, from June 16 to 18, 2008, for the Burton Lehman Faculty Retreat, endowed in honor of the past Chair of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. Organized by a steering committee, led by Dr. Isa Aron and comprised of Dr. Michael Meyer, Dr. Carole Balin, Dr. Dvora Weisberg, and Dr. David Levine, and coordinated by Joy Wasserman, National Director of Alumni Affairs, the Retreat brought together faculty from HUC-JIR's Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York campuses. Faculty had the opportunity to study and worship together, address emerging trends in Jewish studies, and confront current issues in American

Jewish life. Throughout the formal sessions and ongoing informal conversations, they were able to collaborate in shared teaching areas, hone pedagogical skills, and share best practices.

Dr. Norman Cohen, HUC-JIR Provost, stressed the significance of this biennial event. "As in past years, the Lehman Faculty Retreat was indispensable in advancing a number of key goals in HUC-JIR's strategic plan: enhancing faculty, promoting academic excellence, strengthening student assessment, and integrating HUC-JIR's four campuses into one institution."

Presentations by guest scholars sparked intensive and far-reaching discussions. Guest scholar Dr.

Shaul Kelner, Associate Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, addressed the faculty on trends and controversies in American Jewish life in a session chaired by Dr. David Kaufman, with responses from Dr. Steven Cohen and Dr. Tali Hyman. Pointing to cultural production, he proposed "looking not at how people are taking things from the salad bar, but at how the chefs of Jewish culture are setting it." Rather than identity studies, which "will always be lagging indicators, not leading ones," he argued that "if we want a window onto the American Jewish future, we will find it by looking at the producers. This means we should go back to our studies of leadership, of social

movements, of organizational change, and reread them as hints of where things might be headed."

Small group discussions explored the implications of Dr. Kelner's presentation in the areas of synagogue life, led by Rabbi Renni Altman; recruitment, led by Dr. Aaron Panken; leadership development, led by Dr. Norman Cohen; changing Jewish institutions, led by Dr. Rob Weinberg and Dr. Sam Joseph; Diaspora-Israel relations, led by Dr. Michael Marmur; education, led by Dr. Michael Zeldin; outreach, led by Rabbi Jerome Davidson; authenticity in searching for meaning, led by Dr. Lawrence Hoffman; and social justice, led by Rabbi Richard Levy.

The Burton Lehman FACULTY RETREAT

Jean Bloch Rosensaft





Guest scholar Dr. Moshe Rosman, Professor of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, spoke on “Trends and Controversies in Judaic Scholarship” at a session chaired by Dr. Michael Meyer, with responses from Dr. David Aaron and Dr. David Levine. Dr. Rosman discussed five issues that challenge the continued existence of Jewish studies as we know it: the instability or indeterminacy of definitions of Jews and Jewishness; multiculturalism in the academy; research that undermines the supposition that Jewish civilization is original, valuable, generally salutary, and even inspiring; Jewish studies not being Jewish enough, by not sufficiently bolstering students’ Jewish commitment and sparking attack from the Jewish religious right; and the migration of the locus of Jewish Studies from Israel to America, resulting in the American Jewish experience becoming the axiom for a new master narrative of all Jewish history. (See www.huc.edu/news/08/6/facultyretreat/fulltext for his presentation).

Rabbi David Ellenson spoke to the faculty about the College-Institute’s academic and fiscal goals, and expressed enthusiasm for the new e-classrooms and their capacity to promote collaboration in teaching and learning across the campuses. Faculty shared insights into new ways to invigorate teaching. A presentation on Sakai technology enhanced the faculty’s familiarity with enrichment resources for classroom teaching, while Gregg Alpert, National Director of Distance Education, presented “Wikis, Blogs, and Google Docs.” Dr. Michael Zeldin and Dr. Tali Hyman discussed teaching in the ‘Smart Classroom’, while Cantor Benjie Schiller explored nurturing spiritual, professional, and intellectual growth. Dr. Lewis Barth and Dr. Mark Kligman reported on working with an artist in residence, and Dr. Aaron Panken facilitated a session on teaching students to use textual resources.

The faculty were joined by Barbara Friedman, Chair of the Board of Governors, Sheila Lambert, Vice Chair and Chair of the

Board’s Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee, Frederic Lane, past Chair of the Committee, and Joan Pines, incoming Chair of the Cincinnati Board of Overseers. “What a delight it was to spend three days with our entire faculty and participate in their intensive dialogue and shared learning,” said Barbara Friedman. “The depth of their conversations and discussions of scholarship and new research reflected their intellectual excellence. I was impressed by their eagerness to develop new partnerships in teaching across our four campuses, and to advance our mission of academic integration into one institution. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet our newest faculty appointments, who are most impressive and were fully involved and engaged in the discussions. We thank Burt Lehman for recognizing the importance of the faculty retreat in advancing our institutional mission and for underwriting the 2006 retreat, and thank the members of the Board of Governors for their generous endowment support of this

biennial program to honor Burt’s retirement as Chair of our Board.”

Amid the intellectual deliberations, there were also opportunities for spiritual refreshment. Faculty-led worship, organized by Cantor Eli Schleifer, Dr. Michael Marmor, Rabbi Shirley Idelson, Dr. Nancy Wiener, and Merri Arian, reflected a diversity of liturgical traditions and the introduction of movement, as well. Cantor Schleifer’s impending retirement was honored, and he composed a new piece of music to mark this milestone. The screening of the powerful Israeli film “Beaufort” prompted much discussion and questions posed by the Americans to their Israeli colleagues.

The three days of sharing knowledge and kinship bound HUC-JIR’s community of scholars more closely together. They returned to their home cities recharged and ready to resume their sacred task as teachers and mentors to the next generation of Jewish leaders. ■