

Mazel tov! Jewish studies becomes a department

March 14, 2012 12:30 PM Fran Simon

fsimon@tulane.edu

The Jewish studies program at Tulane University has come into its own. When students attend fall semester courses, the program will be a stand-alone department within the School of Liberal Arts.



With Jewish studies courses in demand, Tulane expands the curriculum, which focuses on the modern Jewish experience through the study of history, politics, literature, art, film, music and other fields. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Nearly 30 years after the [Jewish studies program](#) was established by Joe Cohen, the Department of Jewish Studies opens its doors on July 1. Jewish studies courses are in demand, with more than 400 students enrolling in them each semester.

With the establishment of the department, Tulane can expand Jewish studies curricular offerings, says Michael Cohen, director of the Jewish studies program.

“The number of Jewish studies majors and minors has grown enormously, and we have to serve them well with a full program,” Cohen says.

The department's emphasis is on the modern Jewish experience, rather than religion. In the lower-level courses, about a third of the students are not Jewish.

Cohen, whose expertise is in the modern history of Jews, is one of five Sizeler Professors of Jewish Studies at Tulane; the others are Ronna Burger (philosophy), Brian Horowitz (German and Slavic languages), Marline Otte (history) and Gary Remer (political science).

"Jews have played a very important role in American history," Cohen says. "Students are starting to see it as a valuable area of study. We look at the human experience from a particular focus perspective. Looking at the totality of the Jewish experience can teach you a lot about the world â? it's America, it's Europe, it's the Middle East."

The fledgling department will host more guest lecturers and special events with visiting scholars. Tom Freudenheim, who has a 40-year career in museums, will speak on "Do Holocaust Museums Matter?" on April 18 at 7 p.m. at Tulane Hillel, with support from the Center for Scholars. Freudenheim, a visiting fellow at Goodenough College in London, was assistant secretary for museums for the Smithsonian Institution.