Overview of Departmental Learning Outcomes

The department has revised departmental learning outcomes every two years since 2005. The first iteration focused on building our visibility within the humanities and increasing our FTEs in the Segment III curricula. It coincided with Kitty Millet’s hire in 2005. We 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

For 2008-2010, we redefined our outcomes to reflect the unique intervention our nascent program suggested:

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.

With the move from program to department, the increase in tenured faculty, the hiring of a chair in Israel Studies, we opted to revise our learning outcomes for the next assessment cycle, 2011-2013. However, during this process, the University introduced new writing requirements (GWAR), GE revision so that the revision of learning outcomes was displaced by the more immediate concern of compliance with new guidelines. Although we intended to conduct a thorough assessment beginning in 2011, several factors intervened to slow down our progress:

a. Kitty Millet was on sabbatical (Spring 2011) and unavailable;
b. Of the remaining three faculty, faculty felt it difficult to revise outcomes until after we were able to determine how the new hire in Israel Studies affected our curriculum.
c. The introduction of new curriculum associated with Israel Studies and the introduction of new guidelines by the University meant that new courses developed during this time were essentially tied to GWAR and Israel Studies.
With departmental learning outcomes in flux, Millet conducted mid-term and exit surveys in several of her courses to gauge student perception of curriculum’s articulated learning outcomes. Her courses were chosen because she had access to the greater percentage of students: she taught 3/3 with approximately 135-40 students and the courses illustrated a range of disciplinary crosslists (cwl, wgs, engl, phil, js). The responses reflected a population with little or no knowledge of Jews and Judaism at the beginning of the semester, incremental increases in such knowledge by midterm, and 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. Evidence of improvement was tethered to the identification of specific concepts, vocabulary, events, and dates.

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

1. Students develop interpretive and analytical skills in reading Jewish religious texts.
2. Students develop interpretive and analytical skills in reading Jewish literary texts.
3. Students 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 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 gain knowledge of the ways that Jews and Judaism illuminate the histories, literatures, religions, and cultures of non-Jews in the world.
6. Students 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 find, read, understand, and assimilate primary and secondary research materials.

These outcomes remain in force from 2013-2016. With the addition of a new Chair in American Jewish Studies, we intend to revise outcomes in Fall of 2016.
Overview of the Department:

In 2013, Majors and Minors in Jewish Studies were required to take all core courses. However, we have begun to rethink the roadmap to focus on areas of emphasis in addition to streamlining core. The major requires 42 units for completion. We are currently examining how to drop the minimum requirement to 38 units without compromising degree integrity. While our APR is in line with the College's average (app. 40), smaller 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, we are remarkably “light.”

The APRs demonstrate that students expect majors outside of the College to focus exclusively on their discipline, leaving minimal space only for GE and other University requirements. This mood has derailed electives as effective alternatives for students outside the major. Furthermore, students are required by many majors to take lower-division preparatory courses before upper-division classes. This means that students outside the College see their lower-division courses exclusively in terms of utility and not in terms of interests. Since above referenced survey data identifies student populations in JS courses as largely unfamiliar with Jews and Judaism, and since we only have one lower-division course, we see this student population at the upper-division level. Consequently, students enrolling in JS classes through crosslisted sections often already have designated minors in other Colleges too. Although JS enrollments are usually strong, recruitment for the major and minor has been largely inefficient because of these trends. It does not appear to be due to an excessive amount of credits for the major.

There are though several reasons for this inefficiency.

1. The relative “newness” of the JS major in the overall curriculum (less than a decade). With the fluidity of current GE, the rethinking of our roadmap as well as learning outcomes, and the addition of new core faculty, we are a constantly evolving unit and we have to rethink constantly where we fit in to the larger picture at SF State.

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. We have attempted to correct this lack by participation in events like “Sneak Peek,” but the majority of incoming new students already declare their majors and potential minors prior to matriculation. With high school and community college curricula unable to offer 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. However, 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. Since there are no preparatory courses at the secondary and transfer levels, University mechanisms routinely overlook Jewish Studies.
Whereas large departments, like English, Journalism, 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 core courses. The primary and only recruitment tool left to the department is the lower-division course. However, the GE lower-division revision makes the casual enrollment in the lower-division course outside of GE non-viable. JS intends to put forward at least one lower-division GE course as soon as the moratorium on new proposals ends. This course will articulate a portion of the lower-division GE literature requirement.

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. As a practice, JS saw a small percentage of students enrolled in other majors who opted to sign on to JS as a major or minor in addition to their primary 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 the minute they reach the cap. Thus students changing their major relatively late could not only be penalized with late registration dates, but could also be prevented from making that change at the administrative level.

The problem remains though that JS has underperformed in terms of recruitment significantly for several years. The steps we intend to take to remedy that problem depend on our 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.

Consequently, we have identified “Sneak Peek,” and New Student Orientation as events that we could utilize as recruitment vehicles. This year, 2016, we participated in “Sneak Peek” for the first time. Professor Millet ran an email sign-up for prospective students and their parents in which each individual received email updates about upcoming events in the department, a general welcome to the University, and information about curricula offerings. We made eighteen new contacts and of those eighteen, we have commitments for three minors, and a lot of expressed interest in our General Education courses, and some interest in a Jewish Studies major partnered with another degree program (a dual major track).

Future strategies though remain contingent on how our newest hire impacts the department. We expect to see new disciplinary partners emerging because of Professor Gross’ uniquely different expertise in several fields.