

# Undergraduate Student Profiles



**Averyl Edwards, '17:** “*Tikkun olam* (repairing the world) has always been a guiding principle for me,” says Averyl “Avivi” Edwards, '17. “It’s important to talk about inequality not just because we are Jews and we know what it’s like, but also because we’re commanded to take action to improve the lives of those around us.” Edwards is currently wrapping up her double major in Religious Studies/Jewish Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies and she sees her majors as two sides of the same coin—as part of her unwavering determination to fight injustice in the world. Publish Date: Spring 2017



**Tesla Lee, '16:** I had the unique privilege of traveling to New York City this winter, after receiving a generous research grant from the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies, to complete some archival research for my undergraduate senior honors thesis. I am sincerely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies to complete this research. I offer a genuine thank you for helping to make my first trip to New York City both atypical and rewarding. It is my hope that I can continue working on this subject in the future. Publish Date: Fall 2016



**Collin Davis, '15:** For me, it was simply a question of what would I *really* like to learn about for two years. It wasn’t going to be chemistry or math, or even history. But religious studies, that was interesting to me,” said Collin Davis, '15, who soon will be the second undergraduate to complete the new degree program in Jewish studies. Since transferring to Carolina, he has had courses with 10 different Jewish studies faculty members who are based in five different academic departments. Publish Date: Spring 2015



**Liliana Gregory, '15,** from Atlanta, is pursuing a double major in Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures with a Central European Studies Concentration and Economics. She also is minoring in Jewish Studies and is planning to write an honors thesis which will study how the post-1989 Jewish cultural revival in Kraków, Poland has contributed to the cultural and economic revitalization of Kazimierz in the early 21st century. “What drove me to declare the Jewish Studies minor was Professor Ewa Wampuszyc’s 20th Century Polish Literature and Culture course. It showed me how integrated Central European Studies and Jewish Studies are.” Publish Date: Fall 2014



**By Hannah Nemer, '14:** “I spent this past spring break traveling through Ethiopia, visiting with members of the Beta Avraham Jewish community to record their stories of faith, oppression, and resilience. Partnering with Israeli film and music producer Irene Orleansky, I was fortunate enough to go into the community to record a few of their many stories and traditions as part of a documentary film.”

Publish Date: Fall 2014



**Jocelyn Burney, '14,** had a childhood dream of being an archeologist. Now, as a Religious Studies and Archaeology major, she has spent the past two summers in Huqoq, where she has learned an important lesson: that hands-on interaction with history is an experience no textbook can convey. Burney’s plans for the future are aimed at fulfilling her childhood dream, made more real by her experiences at Huqoq. She is applying to graduate programs in religious studies and will continue to spend her summers at the dig in Huqoq. Publish Date: Spring 2014



**Tony Botros, '14,** is a chemistry and biology double major from Milwaukee who plans on enrolling in medical school. In summer 2013, he worked at Professor Magness’s archaeology dig in Israel. For Botros, working on the site when the mosaics were uncovered was a very powerful experience, “a memory I’ll never forget.” Though his future plans include medical school, Botros also intends to remain involved in archeology in the Holy Land. Publish Date: Spring 2014



**Hayley Wright, '13,** took pen to paper in spring 2012 and became the first declared major in Jewish Studies at Carolina. For the New York City native, the decision capped a mounting interest in the field that had grown since her days as a first-year student. “Through the Center, I’ve been able to learn about myself and where I’m from.” She is quick to add, though, that “Jewish Studies is not just for Jewish people. I would encourage anyone on this campus to take a course.”

Publish Date: Fall 2012



**Abigail Lewis '12** Early on at Carolina, Lewis increasingly came to concentrate her studies on the history of the Holocaust. Currently a senior honors student in the Department of History, Lewis has taken numerous upper level and even graduate level courses in history, in addition to learning German and French. “It was fun to sit down in a French library and read original French documents. That’s fun for me. Maybe that’s nerdy, but hanging out in libraries in Paris for a job sounds awesome to me.” Publish Date: Spring 2012



**T. Fielder Valone Jr., '11** a History and American Studies major, is the first recipient of the Elsie Kaplan "Mother Shapiro" ZBT Undergraduate Research and Travel Grant in Jewish Studies. He used the research funding to help support a month-long research trip to the YIVO Institute in New York City. There, he averaged six hours a day examining eyewitness testimonies of Lithuanian-Jewish survivors of genocide. "I figure that the Honors Thesis project is good practice for graduate school, to see if I really enjoy doing sustained intellectual research and to see if writing a dissertation is something I'd like to do." Publish Date: Winter 2010



**Josh Thompson, '10** Upon entering Carolina, Josh Thompson had a huge decision to make: what to do for the language requirement. He already knew Latin, but he wanted to learn something new. He decided to give Modern Hebrew a try. He ended up making it a minor, and when that was completed, he then enrolled in Biblical Hebrew. "I chose to pursue Modern and Biblical Hebrew for personal reasons: to allow me to read works in their original language and to help with my travels to Israel. I've since learned that it's also a vibrant culture, giving me the opportunity to explore both history and current events. I would recommend Jewish Studies courses to any student. Just check it out, you'll be amazed." Publish Date: Winter 2009



**Yelena Aleksandrovich, '09** During a Birthright trip to Israel, she decided to do more to reconnect with her Jewish heritage. She returned to Chapel Hill and formed the Jewish a cappella group, Sabba. She also joined Sigma Rho Lambda, the Jewish sorority, and she took six courses of Modern Hebrew to complete the minor. "I have a passion for learning languages because it helps you better understand other people and their cultures. I also knew that having strong language skills could certainly help me when applying for my first job out of college." Publish Date: Spring 2009



**Adam Yosim, '10** was drawn to Carolina by its prestigious journalism program, but he has also found many other opportunities on campus, including singing with the Jewish a cappella group and minoring in Modern Hebrew. He has loved all his journalism courses, but one of his favorite courses at Carolina was in Jewish Studies. "I never knew about the history of anti-Semitism before taking that course, I just knew about the Holocaust and everything that followed that." Publish Date: Winter 2008



**Diana Gergel '09** is one of those people who make everyone else look like they're standing still. And her busy schedule does not slow one bit during summer breaks. Last summer she worked at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and she did research at the Library of Congress focused on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Next summer, she hopes to continue this research work in South Africa. "This summer internship was one of the best experiences of my life. The ability, as an undergraduate, to work so closely with Holocaust scholars was a great

learning experience. These types of opportunities, plus knowing that Carolina had a Jewish Studies program and an active Hillel, were all important factors in my decision to study here.”

Publish Date: Spring 2008



# Averyl Edwards, '17

Publish Date: Spring 2017



“*Tikkun olam* (repairing the world) has always been a guiding principle for me,” says Averyl “Avivi” Edwards, ’17. “It’s important to talk about inequality not just because we are Jews and we know what it’s like, but also because we’re commanded to take action to improve the lives of those around us.”

Edwards is currently wrapping up her double major in Religious Studies/Jewish Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies and she sees her majors as two sides of the same coin—as part of her unwavering determination to fight injustice in the world.

Enrolling in a Modern Hebrew course for the language requirement paved the way for her to take her first Jewish Studies content class the following semester—“Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Judaism,” taught by Professor Andrea Cooper—and this course in turn led her to the two majors.

“I know it sounds cliché,” Edwards admits, “but I didn’t choose Gender Studies and Jewish Studies—they chose me. In no other fields have I been so intellectually stimulated, or found my passions overflow from the classroom and permeate every other aspect of my life. These are the only topics I could read about forever and never get bored.”

Her passion for these topics has culminated in her senior honors thesis project that explores modern scholarship on Genesis 1:27, “male and female created He them.”

Edwards is putting her academic interests into action around campus. She holds leadership positions at UNC Hillel, including serving on the Hillel Student Board and as director of the a cappella group, Sababa, while also spearheading numerous events on gender equality. This year, Edwards is also serving as the undergraduate student representative on the Center’s Advisory Board and is working on behalf of the Center as an intern. Her responsibilities focus on helping promote the Jewish Studies academic programs, course offerings and extracurricular events by creating outreach materials and holding face-to-face meetings with students to generate awareness and interest.



“The internship is providing unique opportunities for me to use what I’ve learned in the classroom,” said Edwards. “For example, one day I was visiting a higher level Modern Hebrew class to promote Jewish Studies course offerings, and Professor Shemer

asked me at the last minute to give my spiel in Hebrew! It was perhaps a little choppy but I definitely got my message across and I think the other students appreciated it.”

As the wick of her career at Carolina burns ever shorter, Edwards is hopeful for the future as she navigates entrance into the work force and eventually graduate school. But first, shortly following graduation in May, she plans on returning to Israel to participate in the excavation at Huqoq.



# Tesla Lee, '16

Publish Date: Fall 2016



By Tesla Lee

I had the unique privilege of traveling to New York City this winter, after receiving a generous research grant from the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies, to complete some archival research for my undergraduate senior honors thesis.

My thesis advisor and I had originally planned the trip for late January. However, due to adverse weather conditions and subsequent flight cancellations, my trip to the archives was postponed to mid-February. I left campus with an archival digital camera, a metro card, and a list of places I would need to visit in order to better understand my topic. Finding myself alone and in New York City for the first time, I mapped out a feasible plan so that I could cover as much ground as possible. Since I was scheduled to stay in the city for only two days, I made arrangements to visit the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Chajim Bloch's neighborhood in the Bronx, a nearby synagogue, to spend a day in Hasidic Williamsburg, and of course, to devote a full day to the archives at the YIVO Institute.

With unforgiving Monday morning snowflakes falling to the ground, I'll never forget making it to the doors of the Center for Jewish History on 16th St. only to find locked doors. The security guard informed me that it was President's Day, and that the archives were closed. And just like that, I learned rule number one of archival research: make sure said archives are in fact open. After leaving an unsure and altogether sad voicemail to my advisor, I found myself with nothing to do until my evening flight back to Raleigh. So I made my way over to Columbia University to work on restructuring my thesis around the unsuccessful attempt at completing my research. I did this for a few hours until it was time to head back to JFK. Then, upon check-in, I found out that my flight had been canceled until the following afternoon. Another round of phone calls and planning then took place, and I made arrangements to stay in a hotel near the archives.

The next morning, I was able to look through hundreds upon thousands of personal documents on my subject, Chajim Bloch (1881-1974), whom I have been researching for over a year. These documents include correspondences with scholars and rabbis, to and from family, friends, and peers, as well as personal records, family histories, and much more. After registering at the YIVO Institute and locating the finding aid for these files, I was finally able to look at the aspects of my research I'd been unable to access from UNC, including these personal correspondences to important figures of the time period. I spent most of the day looking through these texts, taking notes, and getting help with basic Hebrew translations from the helpful employees at the archives.

Without receiving this research grant, my honors thesis would have been lacking many components which make it original and unique. Chajim Bloch saved everything, which means a large part of my work for this project was pre-cut out for me. Being able to physically touch and look through these preserved historical documents is not just an experience I will always remember, but it is also of continued use in developing the topic.

Despite the difficulties in itinerary, I am sincerely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies to complete this research. I offer a genuine thank you for helping to make my first trip to New York City both atypical and rewarding. It is my hope that I can continue working on this subject in the future.

**Photo Caption:** *Tesla Lee, '16, a German and Psychology major with a minor in Jewish Studies, traveled to New York City in spring semester to utilize archives at the Center for Jewish History. Her research examined the life and work of Chajim Bloch and her research project is titled, "Folk Tales, Legends & Short Narratives: Considering the Role of Consciousness and Laughter in Eastern European Jewish Identity."*

# Collin Davis, '15

Publish Date: Spring 2015



“For me, it was simply a question of what would I *really* like to learn about for two years. It wasn’t going to be chemistry or math, or even history. But religious studies, that was interesting to me,” said Collin Davis, ’15, who soon will be the second undergraduate to complete the new degree program in Jewish studies.

Davis transferred to Carolina after earning his Associate of Arts degree at Forsyth Technical Community College, which allowed him to immediately enroll in UNC courses for his major and minor.

“I was looking into schools with religious studies and Hebrew language programs, and knew I wanted to stay in North Carolina,” said Davis. “Carolina clearly had the best programs, and once I started here I was able to become even more focused on Jewish studies. In the two years I have been here, nearly every class I’ve had has been in Jewish studies or Arabic, which is my minor.”

Since starting at Carolina, he has had courses with 10 different Jewish studies faculty members who are based in five different academic departments.

“The courses have ranged from History of the Holocaust to Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Judaism, from Jewish Humor to Classical Hebrew,” noted Davis. “And the Shalom Y’all: The Jewish Experience in the American South course with Professor Marcie Cohen Ferris was fantastic too. It made me proud to be who I am—a southerner.”

A former professor advised Davis to consider taking Arabic language courses in addition to his Jewish studies pursuits.

“Now with the minor nearly completed, I realize my interest in Jewish studies has broadened to include the Jewish culture in Arab countries,” said Davis. “Right now I’m taking Professor Shemer’s Arab-Jews: Culture, Community, and Co-existence course, which has really showcased how I can combine both Jewish studies and Arabic.”

Davis is also very involved at Hillel. Last year he co-chaired Israel Fest and this year he is director of Sababa, the Jewish a cappella group. And he has become the unofficial sukkah builder “due to my height advantage.”

In December, Davis spent two weeks at the Conservative Yeshiva Program in Jerusalem, Israel, which allowed him to delve into his studies in a whole new way. After graduation this May, the former Eagle Scout from Winston-Salem plans to return to Israel for a year, to continue his Talmud studies and make his long-term career plans.

“Initially I considered becoming a professor—lecturing about topics that I like to a captive audience would be fun—but now I think I might go into a different type of teaching, maybe doing Jewish education and outreach efforts,” added Davis. “Whatever path I choose, graduate school is definitely in the plan. I am going to visit universities during spring break so I can have the information with me when I’m back in Israel, trying to figure out my life.”

The degree program, launched in fall 2012, allows students at Carolina to make the study of Jewish history and culture the centerpiece of their undergraduate experience. The degree is offered through the department of Religious Studies, where students earn a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies with a Concentration in Jewish Studies. This is the first official undergraduate degree program in Jewish studies to be offered by an institution in the state of North Carolina. For more information, visit [jewishstudies.unc.edu](http://jewishstudies.unc.edu).



# Liliana Gregory, '15

Publish Date: Fall 2014

“What drove me to declare the Jewish Studies minor was Professor Ewa Wampuszyc’s 20th Century Polish Literature and Culture course. It showed me how integrated Central European Studies and Jewish Studies are. Every Central European Studies class I’ve had since, whether cross-listed with Jewish Studies or not, has addressed the Jewish history and culture within the region in some capacity,” said Liliana Gregory, '15.



“I wanted to take this academic knowledge and somehow turn it into practical experience. This led me to an internship at the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, Poland during summer 2013.”

During Gregory’s internship, she guided English-speaking groups through the museum, led a workshop for students, trained new interns, sold tickets, translated documents from Polish to English, and updated the intern blog. Gregory received a travel and research grant from the Center, which allowed her to not only to have this experience, “but to jump in with both feet.”

“It paid for my flight, and it allowed me to live directly on the market square of Kazimierz, Kraków’s historic Jewish district. With the Center’s funding, I was able to teach literally hundreds of people from around the world about Polish-Jewish history and relations and the big questions surrounding each. While I was there, I also got to see the tremendous revitalization of Jewish history and culture sweeping Poland, including the nine-day Jewish Culture Festival.”

Gregory, from Atlanta, is pursuing a double major in Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures with a Central European Studies Concentration and Economics. She also is minoring in Jewish Studies and is planning to write an honors thesis which will study how the post-1989 Jewish cultural revival in Kraków, Poland has contributed to the cultural and economic revitalization of Kazimierz in the early 21st century. This year, she is a recipient of the Louis & Nellie Skalny Scholarship from the American Council for Polish Culture, which provides a \$4,000 scholarship for the fall semester.



Gregory is also busy outside the classroom. She is a pianist for campus musicals, volunteers every week at the Inter-Faith Council, and is the undergraduate student representative for the Center’s advisory board. Last year, she worked as an advertising intern at the *Carolina Alumni Review* magazine, the before she was treasurer of the UNC Pre-Law Chapter of Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity and co-chaired UNC Hillel’s Reading of the Names event to commemorate Holocaust victims.

When asked about her long-term career goals, she had a very honest response: “I wish I had a stellar answer to this question, but alas, I don’t know what I want to do with myself yet.”

*Liliana at her graduation in May 2015.*



# Hannah Nemer, '14

Publish Date: Fall 2014



## **The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia**

by Hannah Nemer, '14

I spent this past spring break traveling through Ethiopia, visiting with members of the Beta Avraham Jewish community to record their stories of faith, oppression, and resilience. The Beta Avraham (also known as the Balla Ejj) community is Ethiopia's virtually unknown Jewish population. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, the community moved away from the better-known Beta Israel who have since migrated to Israel. There are still more than 100,000 descendants of Jewish ancestry living in Ethiopia—more than 20,000 of whom secretly practice a pre-Talmudic form of Judaism. Despite efforts to outwardly conceal their Jewish identity, the Beta Avraham are persecuted by neighbors who seize their property and threaten their lives.

Partnering with Israeli film and music producer Irene Orleansky, I was fortunate enough to go into the community to record a few of their many stories and traditions as part of a documentary film— *Balla Ejj: The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia*. The documentary will celebrate the community's ongoing struggle to maintain a religious identity and their desire to be known by the larger Jewish world. The documentary will be the first with access to the secret synagogues of the community and the guarded narratives of elders.

The funding I received from the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies has proven invaluable during this process, enabling me to access the necessary technology to enhance this production. I am grateful, now more than ever, as I am spending this summer working to edit the documentary using equipment that I was able to acquire through the Center's research and travel grant. We hope to have a rough cut of the film complete by the summer's end.

# Jocelyn Burney, '14

Publish Date: Spring 2014



Jocelyn Burney, '14, had a childhood dream of being an archeologist. “My mom has a great picture of me showing off an ancient Egypt-themed Lego kit that I got for my eighth birthday,” said Burney. “I stayed up past my bedtime and built the whole thing in one night!” Burney’s interest in religion developed more recently, sparked by her academic pursuits at Carolina. The Undergraduate Research and Travel Grant she received from the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies enabled her to pursue both of these interests. Burney, a Religious Studies and Archaeology major, spent last summer participating in the ongoing archeological excavation of the Huqoq synagogue in Israel led by Jodi Magness, the Kenan Distinguished Professor for Teaching Excellence in Early Judaism, Department of Religious Studies. She plans to return to Huqoq for the summer 2014 dig.

While Burney’s work focused on the domestic area at Huqoq, where discoveries are rooted in the realities of everyday life, the impact of that work still had the potential to be quite profound. Burney recalled, “One of my favorite moments last season was finding a pile of nails in the doorway of a house. The wooden door was lost to time, but you could easily picture it swinging on its hinges. Discoveries like that remind us that we are working in someone’s home, which is a powerful and intimate experience.”

Students such as Burney who work at the excavation site at Huqoq quickly learn that archeology has little in common with the Hollywoodstyle portrayals featured in the Indiana Jones films. However, Burney stressed that, “We still have plenty of ‘ah-ha!’ moments, not from finding hidden treasure, but from piecing together evidence to answer questions about the site.”

For Burney this experience was invaluable. Not only is she able to use material from the excavations in order to write her senior honors thesis, but she has also learned another important lesson. “Hands-on interaction with history is an experience no textbook can convey. Working at Huqoq has enriched my studies at Carolina by giving me a holistic familiarity with the region that I study. The ability to picture landscapes and locations gives my studies more depth and meaning.”



Burney’s plans for the future are aimed at fulfilling her childhood dream, made more real by her experiences at Huqoq. She is applying to graduate programs in religious studies and will continue to spend her summers at the dig in Huqoq.

*Burney, far right, in Huqoq, summer 2014.*

# Tony Botros, '14

Publish Date: Spring 2014



Tony Botros, '14, is a chemistry and biology double major from Milwaukee, Wisconsin who plans on enrolling in medical school next fall. Botros also serves as the senior class vice president for the 2013–2014 academic year. Though he is actively engaged in many activities on Carolina's campus, Botros's classroom experiences also motivated him to travel beyond the boundaries of North Carolina.

After taking an archeology class and realizing the importance of studying and researching in the field, Botros spent last summer participating in the ongoing archeological excavation of the Huqoq synagogue in Israel. He recalled, "When I heard about Professor Magness's dig in Israel, I saw it as a unique opportunity to get first-hand exposure to archaeology."

Botros learned a great deal from his participation in the dig— about archeology, and the region more generally. He explained that, "The biggest thing I took away from this is that I learned how much of a science archaeology actually is. Being only accustomed to bench work in Carolina's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, I didn't expect archaeology to follow the same scientific method as the physical and biological sciences. The project had a proposed hypothesis, and we collected specimens in a very precise and meticulous manner in order to prove or reject this hypothesis."

Being in Israel also allowed Botros to get a better sense of the region than strictly classroom instruction could provide. "Throughout my time in Israel, I had the opportunity to talk with Druze, Bedouin, Jews from all different geographical backgrounds, Palestinians, and Christians. I gained a much fuller and diverse insight of the region."



For Botros working on the dig site when the mosaics were uncovered was a very powerful experience. He emphasized that "being one of the first people in 1,500 years to set eyes on the beautiful mosaics is a memory I'll never forget." Though his future plans include medical school, Botros also intends to remain involved in archeology in the Holy Land. His commitment is so strong, that even as a student Botros has already made a philanthropic donation to the program that allowed him to have such incredible experiences.

*Botros, at the front of the camel (top) and Botros, far right middle row, with mosaic, in summer 2013.*

# Hayley Wright, '13

Publish Date Fall 2012

Last spring, Hayley Wright, '13 took pen to paper and became the first declared major in Jewish Studies at Carolina. For the New York City native, the decision capped a mounting interest in the field that had grown since her days as a first-year student.



Although she always planned to study Hebrew for her foreign language, she found herself taking more and more classes in Jewish Studies. Soon, she was working on a minor, and by the end of her sophomore year she learned about the upcoming new major in Jewish Studies.

“Our people are so interesting,” Wright explains about her academic focus. “Through the Center, I’ve been able to learn about myself and where I’m from.” She is quick to add, though, that “Jewish Studies is not just for Jewish people. I would encourage anyone on this campus to take a course.”

The greatest asset to Carolina’s Jewish Studies program — and Wright’s motivation for the major — has been the faculty. What really makes the program is the professors,” Wright observes. “They care, take time, and work with students.”

This semester, Wright is working closely with Professor Hess on an independent study project that incorporates her experiences during a life changing trip this past summer through Eastern Europe with her synagogue. The youngest in the travel group, Wright recalls, “It was my first trip abroad without my mom and dad, but I had plenty of ‘mothers’ by the end.”

From the cultural jewels of Budapest and Prague to the centers of mourning in Warsaw and Auschwitz, Wright’s journey took her through the center of the once thriving Jewish communities of Europe and left her thankful for her Jewish Studies background.

“I still had many questions after it ended,” Wright says of her trip, “but it all felt more put together. I still found myself asking, ‘Why?’”

Her independent study course is allowing her the opportunity to work through many of these challenging questions. Her project focuses on the role of shoes in Holocaust memorials from the banks of the Danube to the waters of the Potomac.

The recurrence of these personal objects and their symbolic importance has inspired Wright to think more generally about memorials of the Holocaust around the world.

Wright describes Jewish Studies as one part of her identity. The other is musical theater. She will graduate with a second major in Drama and currently serves on the Executive Committee of the student-run acting troupe the Pauper Players.

After graduation, she plans to audition for theater roles when she returns to New York City.

Though Wright is uncertain what role her Jewish Studies major will play in this future, she notes, “It’s shaped me as a person — and that will help me in any career.”

The two interests may be closer than they seem. While in Krakow this summer, Wright attended a Shabbat service at the local synagogue.

Confronted with the loud chatter of many local women, Wright and others went outside where an impromptu second service was underway. Recognizing the Hebrew hymns being sung, Wright spontaneously joined the group.

On a warm Friday evening outside the walls of a Polish synagogue, Hayley Wright, a UNC Drama and Jewish Studies double major from New York City, felt at home in song.



Graduation, May 2013.



# Abigail Lewis, '12

Publish Date: Spring 2012



Although many undergraduates begin their college careers with an idea of their future, many completely change plans during their course of study. Not so with Abigail (Abby) Lewis, '12. "Ever since high school," she says, "I knew I wanted to study history." For the senior from Apex, North Carolina, UNC has presented her with many opportunities to pursue her ambitions of higher study in history. Early on at Carolina, she increasingly came to concentrate her studies on the history of the Holocaust. "I took a class on analyzing camp and gulag memoirs and then gravitated towards that field of study." Currently a senior honors student in the Department of History, Lewis has gone on to take numerous upper level and even graduate level courses in history, in addition to learning German and French.

This past summer, she had the chance to use these language skills when she conducted research in Paris for her honors thesis, which she found exhilarating. "It was fun to sit down in a French library and read original French documents. That's fun for me. Maybe that's nerdy, but hanging out in libraries in Paris for a job sounds awesome to me." She added, "I guess I have a thing for libraries."

During fall semester, she received a Carolina Center for Jewish Studies Undergraduate Research Grant to conduct additional research utilizing the Fortunoff Video Archive of survivor testimonies, which is housed at Yale University. "Without the Center's funding, my project would primarily be reading published memoirs and watching interviews available at UNC, but thanks to this funding, I have had access to a greater breadth of resources and I will have a more well rounded project."

Focusing on French survivor accounts, Lewis' research explores Jewish identity in Europe in the wake of the Holocaust. She is also interested in the ways memories of survival change over time. "What people say in 1946 versus what they say in 1970 reveals a great deal about the way their own thinking about survival and about witnessing changes over time."

Lewis will present her research at an honors symposium in the spring, and she intends to convert the thesis into an article for an undergraduate journal. The thesis represents the capstone of a four-year program of intensive historical studies. She will attend graduate school in the fall to pursue a Ph.D. in Jewish History.

# T. Fielder Valone, '11

Publish Date: Winter 2010



In 1998, at age 10, T. Fielder Valone, Jr. was on a family trip that changed his life forever. While visiting Belize, the family decided to take a quick trip into neighboring Guatemala, despite the political unrest in that country at the time. The sightseeing trip took an unpleasant turn, when their van was surrounded on a remote mountain road and the family was held at gunpoint. Their dramatic escape, made while driving in reverse down the twisty, narrow road, introduced Valone to the feeling of terror and the experience of being a victim.

Nearly 10 years later, while doing late-night research for his Holocaust course with Professor Christopher Browning, Valone suddenly connected with the reports of other victims, who realized terror as a constant reality, not just for a few minutes while traveling.

“I suddenly understood the wider implications of facing terror, of being a victim,” said Valone. “As I worked on my paper for the Holocaust course, I developed an intellectual passion to really delve into the subject.”

Valone, a History and American Studies major, is the first recipient of the Elsie Kaplan “Mother Shapiro” ZBT Undergraduate Research and Travel grant in Jewish Studies. He used the funding to help cover expenses for a month-long research trip in New York City this past July. There, he averaged six hours a day examining eyewitness testimonies of Lithuanian-Jewish survivors of genocide, collected immediately after World War II and now archived at YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. As an interesting twist, he was only able to pursue his research project because Professor Jonathan Boyarin, associate director of the Center, had translated the documents from Yiddish to English a few years ago. There are 2,000 pages of handwritten testimonies in total, but Valone decided to focus on those from three rural counties on what was then the Lithuanian-German border. The testimonials were recorded by a Holocaust survivor who visited displaced person campus between 1946 and 1948.

“The records are very detailed and organized, exploring pre-war and post-war life in addition to the victims’ experiences during the war years,” explained Valone. “A couple weeks after starting work, I was able to meet with Professor Boyarin and really talk through everything I was learning about. It was difficult to get through the testimonials, the accounts were very brutal, they told about neighbor against neighbor, and it was large scale. I really couldn’t chat about it with friends.”

Back in Chapel Hill for his last year, he is busy turning his numerous legal pads worth of notes and hundreds of pages of photocopies into his senior honors thesis. “This fall, I have about 3,000 pages of additional background reading to do, and then I need to finish the first draft of my paper by January,” Valone explained. “I figure this project is good practice for graduate school, to see if I really enjoy doing sustained intellectual research and to see if writing a dissertation is something I’d like to do.”

Valone serves as the student representative on the Center’s Advisory Board this year. After graduation this May, he plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Modern German History and further his research efforts after taking a year off. He is hoping to spend his gap year in Germany, doing the mirror image of his senior thesis research—reviewing the testimonials of war criminals who were in Lithuania.

*Photo: Fielder Valone, at right in dark jacket, presents his research findings to the Center’s Board of Advisors.*

# Josh Thompson, '10

Publish Date: Winter 2009



## Language Requirement Opens Doors to Unique Experiences for Medical School Hopeful

Upon entering Carolina three years ago, Josh Thompson had a big decision to make: what to do for the language requirement. He already knew Latin, but he wanted to learn something new.

“I thought Modern Hebrew would be the most interesting choice and decided to give it a try. I loved learning the language, the teacher was great, and I made lots of friends in the classes,” said Thompson. So, he ended up making Modern Hebrew a minor. “From that, I ended up becoming involved in other campus groups, audited another Jewish Studies course, and even traveled to Israel in 2008.

”Now that the Modern Hebrew minor is completed, this semester he is enrolled in Biblical Hebrew. “I am really excited to start reading the Bible in its original language.”

This year, Thompson joined the Center’s advisory board as its student representative. “Jewish Studies is a huge part of my undergraduate experience. I am thrilled to have an opportunity to give input and learn even more about the program.”

Thompson, a Biology major with a second minor in Chemistry, worked during his undergraduate years as a Nursing Assistant at UNC Hospitals. He spent this past summer applying to medical schools in the southeast and plans to go into Family Medicine. “I want to really know my patients, not just see people for one or two visits as a specialist,” Thompson explained. “I chose to pursue Modern and Biblical Hebrew for personal reasons: to allow me to read works in their original language and to help with my travels to Israel. I’ve since learned that it’s also a vibrant culture, giving me the opportunity to explore both history and current events. I would recommend Jewish Studies courses to any student. Just check it out, you’ll be amazed.”

# Yelena Aleksandrovich, '09

Publish Date: Spring 2009



## Hebrew Student Embarks on International Business Career

Two events in Yelena Aleksandrovich's life helped her find her true identity. First, she moved from Russia to the United States when she was just seven years old.

“In Russia I never really knew much about being Jewish. But after moving to the United States and enrolling at a Jewish Day School, I started to discover my Jewish background and my true self.”

Then, during a Birthright trip to Israel in 2006, she decided to do more to reconnect with her Jewish heritage. She returned to Chapel Hill and formed the Jewish cappella group, Sababa, which currently has more than 15 performers. She joined Sigma Rho Lambda, the Jewish sorority, and served as President in 2007. She also decided to learn more Hebrew, ultimately taking the full six-course offering in Modern Hebrew.

“I have a passion for learning languages because it helps you better understand other people and their cultures,” says Aleksandrovich. Her native Russian was soon followed by learning English after moving to the United States and studying Hebrew when in Jewish Day School and again in college. She also speaks some French, which she studied in high school and perfected by listening to French music.

“The Hebrew program here is really great with Professors Friedman and Shemer – they're a great combination. I also knew that having strong language skills would certainly help me when applying for my first job out of college.”

Last summer, Aleksandrovich interned in Israel at a start-up high-tech firm and her goal is to have a career in International Business that is based in both Israel and the United States. She will graduate this May with a business major and Modern Hebrew language minor. She plans to spend this summer in Israel before moving to Washington, D.C. to join a consulting firm.



# Adam Yosim, '10

Publish Date: Winter 2008



## **What Do Dreams of Anchoring for ESPN and Modern Hebrew Have in Common? Adam Yosim Is Making the Connection**

The Broadcast Journalism major has opted for a Modern Hebrew minor, and he plans to use both academic areas in his future endeavors.

Academically, Yosim loves all his Journalism courses. But one of his favorite classes so far was in Jewish Studies: German Culture Jewish Question with Jonathan Hess. "I never knew about the history of anti-Semitism before, I just knew about the Holocaust and everything that followed after that." Yosim has completed four of the six required semesters of Modern Hebrew. "I like that it's a language I can relate to as a person of the Jewish faith. Although I don't have the luxury of practicing it daily in Israel or in another immersion environment, I can still use it to directly translate the prayers I say, the weekly parshah of the Torah and converse with my other friends that are also taking Hebrew."

Yosim was drawn to Carolina's prestigious journalism program, but has also found many other opportunities on campus, including his fraternity, AEPi, and singing with Carolina's only Jewish a-capella group, Sababa. Last summer he held an internship at ABC 11, where he put all his classroom learning to use while gaining hands-on experience in the broadcast field. He previously worked at the UNC Phonathon for two years, calling up alumni, parents, and students for donations. In all, he says he raised more than \$200,000 for UNC.

"My pipe dream is to end up at ESPN as an anchor for SportsCenter. If that doesn't happen, I hope to work my way up to anchor at a news station in a top 15 news market. I've always wanted to go to Chicago!"

And how do Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies fit into his future? "I see myself using my Hebrew minor for my journalism career by translating interviews and documents whenever there is a story involving Israel and the Middle East. Personally, I'll use my minor to converse with friends, teach Hebrew at Sunday school and with other activities at my synagogue."

# Diana Gergel, '09

Publish Date: Spring 2008



## **Activities Outside the Classroom Round-Out This Student's Carolina Education**

Diana Gergel is one of those people who make everyone else look like they're standing still. Her campus involvement would overwhelm most of us—she co-chairs Student Government's Academic Affairs Committee, serves as Peer Advising Program Director for the Office of Undergraduate Research, coordinates the Bina Initiative at Hillel and is the student representative on the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies' Advisory Board.

Her busy schedule does not slow one bit during summer breaks. Last summer, she headed off to Washington, D.C. to work at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. There, she reviewed and chronicled newly-acquired documents. The team's work will be published next year as primary source content for professors teaching the Holocaust.

"This internship was one of the best experiences of my life—I enjoyed every minute. The ability, as an undergraduate, to work so closely with Holocaust scholars and graduate students was a great learning experience," said Gergel. "I felt the importance of the work because it is vital to continue to teach the lessons learned from the Holocaust."

When not working at the museum, she was often found at the Library of Congress working on a research project that was funded by the UNC Office of Undergraduate Research. The focus of her work was the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as related to the Nuremberg Trials' "Never Again" legacy. This coming summer, Gergel hopes to continue this work in South Africa, interviewing people from the hearings.

"These types of research opportunities, plus knowing that Carolina had a Jewish Studies program and active Hillel, were all important factors in my decision to study here," added Gergel. A History and Political Sciences major with Modern Hebrew minor, she plans to attend Law School after graduation from Carolina in 2009.