

**2021-2022 Yearly Assessment Report
Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice
Minor in Jewish Studies and Social Justice**

LOGISTICS

Name of Program:	Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice
Type of Program:	Minor
Division:	College of Arts and Sciences, Humanities
Submitter:	Oren Kroll-Zeldin, Assistant Director, Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice (omkrollzeldin@usfca.edu)
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MISSION STATEMENT AND PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

MISSION STATEMENT

The Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice minor engages students in both theoretical and practical applications of social justice and activism rooted in the Jewish traditions. Our interdisciplinary curriculum examines Jewish culture, history, politics, philosophy, and language to better understand and strengthen marginalized communities around the globe.

No changes were made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR MINORS

Our three Program Learning Outcomes include the following:

1. *Social Justice*: Students will articulate theoretical and practical applications of social justice and activism rooted in the Jewish traditions.
2. *Social Identities, Intersectionality, and Marginalized Communities*: Students will articulate the intersectionality of social identities, specifically those of marginalized social groups, vis-a-vis social in/justice, using Jewish communities as a window into the processes of dominance and subordination.
3. *Jews and Judaisms*: Students will articulate various dimensions of Jewish cultures, histories, politics, philosophies, and/or languages.

No changes were made to the program learning outcomes since the last assessment cycle.

YEAR OF REFLECTION

The Swig JSSJ Program recently completed an intense and exciting year of reflection that included the first APR in the program's history. Since in the previous three years we assessed each of the program's core Learning Outcomes, this year we have opted to provide an alternative assessment based in our year of reflection. This enabled us the opportunity to think about our program holistically through the APR and past assessments in order to help us in planning our next few years of educational programming.

In the previous years we assessed all three of our Program Learning Outcomes. In 2019, we assessed Program Learning Outcome #3: *Jews and Judaisms*: Students will articulate various dimensions of Jewish cultures, histories, politics, philosophies, and/or languages. In 2020, we assessed Program Learning Outcome #1: *Social Justice*: Students will articulate theoretical and practical applications of social justice and activism rooted in the Jewish traditions. In 2021, we assessed Program Learning Outcome #2: *Social Identities, Intersectionality, and Marginalized Communities*: Students will articulate the intersectionality of social identities, specifically those of marginalized social groups, vis-a-vis social in/justice, using Jewish communities as a window into the processes of dominance and subordination.

In each assessment cycle we used direct methods of assessment and collected work products from the two required courses for the JSSJ minor: "Social Justice, Activism, and Jews" (THRS 125) taught by Professor Aaron Hahn Tapper and "Jews, Judaisms, and Jewish Identities" (THRS 130) taught by Professor Oren Kroll-Zeldin and Professor Noa Bar-Gabai. Since the JSSJ minor is relatively small, we collected data from a somewhat limited sample size, but were nonetheless able to get an overall sense of our successes with the PLOs. Based on our assessment the JSSJ program is successfully teaching students about the complexity and diversity of Jews and Judaisms as a rich religious, ethnic, and cultural group (PLO #3) and about the significance of social justice and activism rooted in the Jewish traditions (PLO # 1). However, based on our assessment, the JSSJ program has mixed results with regards to teaching students about the connections between social identities, intersectionality, and the Jewish experience (PLO #2). The work products we assessed show that students generally have a strong understanding of intersectionality, the complexity of social identities, and can articulate the various ways that

Jewish communities experience both dominance and subordination. Unfortunately, the majority of students (68%) scored in the lower half of our assessment rankings, indicating a disappointing level of competency among JSSJ minors with regards to the PLO focused on social identities, intersectionality, and marginalized communities. These results show that there is work to be done to improve the competency of all JSSJ minors towards this PLO.

Over the past year we reflected on the results from these PLO assessments alongside our much more comprehensive APR. The APR, which was delayed by two years by the COVID-19 pandemic, was the result of many years of work by Professor Hahn Tapper to provide a holistic overview of our program, based on our work both in and beyond the classroom. The external reviewers for the APR, both of whom are renowned Jewish Studies scholars, helped us gain an outsider's perspective of our program, but it also reinforced some key things that we already knew to be true. The external reviewers provided a rating of "excellent" for the minor in Jewish Studies & Social Justice. They were "impressed with the excellence demonstrated in the JSSJ program, both by the quality of program developed by the director and assistant director as well as their ability to achieve such high standards in a challenging resource environment."

The reviewers also noted that, "academic excellence, the use of text, and independent reasoning to address questions of meaning [are] evident in the work of this program," which has a "national reputation... as a leading center of both critical inquiry and civic engagement within the academic world." While the curriculum "differs from traditional Jewish Studies approaches" in the explicit connection to social justice, the reviewers found that "it aligns with levels of quality expected in an undergraduate Jewish Studies program" and that the opportunity for students to enroll in Hebrew and Arabic language courses "not only lift[s] the academic quality of the JSSJ program, but it also offers a powerful symbolic statement to other Jewish Studies programs: comparative approaches to the study of Jews and Judaism, and Israel/Palestine in specific, are critical to understanding the Jewish experience."

They "applaud the JSSJ program leadership for its decision to step away from its original Judaic Studies [designation] and redefine itself along social justice lines" and "believe that strategic move not only offers important insights into the study of Jews, in general, but it simultaneously lifts the academic stature of USF within the larger scholarly world of Jewish Studies." The reviewers also mentioned that they "left the external review visit with a deep sense of everyone's commitment, dedication, appreciation, and even passion for the mission and vision of the Jewish Studies & Social Justice program."

RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on our year of reflection stemming from the previous PLO assessments and our comprehensive APR, we have four key takeaways, which are summarized below:

- 1) We need to recruit more minors. In part, this will help us to increase our sample size and get a better sense of our ability to teach students the core program learning outcomes. But it is also an important element of the overall growth of the JSSJ program. One of our

overall primary goals is to transform from an academic program into the Center for Jewish Studies and Social Justice. Recruiting more minors is a crucial part of that process.

- 2) We are confident with our curriculum and do not believe that we need any major curricular changes. We are also confident with our ability to teach students and ensure their achieving the PLOs. Although our students did not achieve a consistently high rate of success with regards to understanding social identities, intersectionality, and the Jewish experience (PLO #2), upon further reflection we think that may have had to do with the fact that the assessment was conducted during the period of the pandemic when students were learning online. This also coincided with reduced attendance at our public events (which took place online). We structure our program in such a way that the learning in the classroom is reinforced by our events and public programs beyond the classroom.

Our public events focus largely on presenting students with opportunities to learn from exemplary individuals who embody the diversity and multiplicity of Jewish identities and challenge students to think about the intersectionality of social identities within Jewish communities. Since we had fewer events, all of which were online and were not as well attended by students, we think that had an impact on the student work products collected during online learning. As we have transitioned back to both in person learning and in person public events, we are confident that the in classroom and beyond the classroom learning will once again reinforce each other and encourage our students to form a deeper understanding of the complexity of intersectional Jewish identities.

- 3) We need more administrative assistance. Since 2007, the Program Assistant for JSSJ has been a shared appointment, at most dedicating 25% of their time toward JSSJ responsibilities. This has proven to be a core challenge for our program. Much of the work a full-time (i.e., 100% dedicated time) PA could do for the JSSJ program is often done by Professors Aaron Hahn Tapper and Oren Kroll-Zeldin, which hinders our ability to focus on less administrative actions. This also has an impact on both our scholarly production and sometimes our classroom teaching since we need to focus so much attention on administrative details. A full time PA dedicated to our program would go a long way towards ensuring student success since we would have more time to focus on student concerns. We have asked the administration to have our own program PA—even offering to raise 100% of the money for this position—but have not yet been given permission.
- 4) We have encountered numerous structural challenges with teaching Jewish Studies courses inside a Theology and Religious Studies department. Our reflection has helped us understand the curricular need to have our own JSSJ course code, which we have discussed with CAS deans through the APR. Also, through this reflection, we confirmed what we stated in our APR, that “JSSJ should become an independent program—separate from THRS—that is supervised within the College of Arts & Sciences.” Jewish studies, as a field, is inherently interdisciplinary, and in no way is something Jewish only insofar as it is linked to theology or religious studies. Having our own course code would allow JSSJ

courses to exist, structurally speaking, in a similar manner to SII (St. Ignatius Institute) and their course offerings. This would benefit JSSJ, THRS, and make things much easier for both. It would also clarify for those at USF and beyond how JSSJ is not only studied through the academic lens of religion, which is important pedagogically, as well. This will permit us to deliver our courses in ways that better aligns our administrative standing with our most effective means of offering classes and larger educational programs across campus.

We believe, as was confirmed by the external reviewers' report to the APR, that our "lack of curricular independence (i.e., the linkage of JSSJ with THRS) hampers program progress. On one hand, JSSJ's courses reflect an expansive definition of 'who is a Jew?' that reflects even the most basic scholarship and teaching in Jewish Studies curricula across the nation. On the other hand, the JSSJ linkage with a theology and religious studies department, especially at a Jesuit University, casts Judaism as a parallel faith tradition to Christianity. It is not. In order to create internal coherence, as well as more accurately define and teach Jewish Studies, JSSJ needs... to control its academic and educational self- definition."

In addition, this will "address many of the challenges faced by JSSJ, offering a level of operational autonomy, the ability to define itself and its discipline, attract a larger cohort of students, and expand its campus-wide footprint, in terms of activities and their visibility. Short of departmental status, yet higher profile than its current program status, [this structural growth] promises the most efficient pathway to achieve [their] goals within [their] size and scope."

SUGGESTIONS/FEEDBACK FROM THE FDCD ON PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT REPORT

We received thorough and thoughtful feedback on our previous PLO Assessment Report. The feedback made it clear that our previous assessments were well done and useful in evaluating our program learning outcomes. Since we had completed all three PLOs in the previous years, we decided to conduct a year of reflection.

BIG PICTURE

In the future we plan to incorporate feedback from this assessment, our previous PLO assessments, and our APR in order to give us a sense of the big picture of the Swig JSSJ program. At this point, we may be ready to revisit and reassess some of our PLOs. In particular, we are considering a review of PLO #2, which provided mixed and disappointing results. If we revisit PLO #2 with our next assessment, we hope to discover more positive results.

FEEDBACK FOR ASSESSMENT TEAM

We do not have any substantive feedback for the assessment team. We do appreciate the support the assessment team has given us as our program grows and continues to seriously evaluate and reflect on the Program Learning Outcomes.