

Inspiring Research
Advancing Education
Sparkling Conversations

SCHUSTERMAN CENTER FOR ISRAEL STUDIES



Musician Yoni Battat '13 performs for the 2025 Summer Institute for Israel Studies fellows.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES, COMPLEX REALITIES

Innovative digital tools are transforming the way scholars engage with Hebrew literature, history, and culture, opening new avenues for understanding Zionism and modern Israel.

p. 8

ALSO INSIDE:
Summer Institute, Eizenstat Travel Grant, & more

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Strengthening our Focus in Troubling Times

This has been another challenging year. Profound suffering among Israelis, Palestinians and the entire region has continued as the scope of war has expanded. Back home, politicization of Israel and Zionism has contributed to national polarization—on campuses, in the media and in political discourse. In such a moment, we need to reaffirm the value of thoughtful, open scholarship.

At the **Schusterman Center for Israel Studies**, we remain committed to fostering academic spaces where difficult questions are not avoided but examined; where disagreement is not silenced but respectfully engaged; where knowledge and understanding remain our guiding values.

As part of this commitment, we've taken time to clarify our mission, vision, and to rearticulate our values for the future. We're proud to announce a renewed statement of purpose that reflects who we are and what we stand for (see page 3).

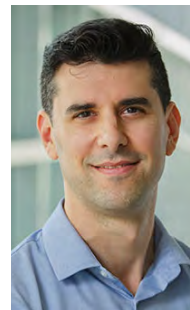
Each year, the **Institute for Advanced Israel Studies** brings together a cohort of exceptional fellows to pursue cutting-edge research on a shared theme. This year, our theme was "Digital Humanities in Israel Studies," an approach that utilizes computational technologies to pose new questions and offer innovative perspectives within the traditional humanities. The results have been remarkable. Highlights include **Yael Dekel's** crowdsourced database of Hebrew novels, **Daniel Stein Kokin's** interactive map of historical settlements in Israel and Palestine, and **Renana Keydar's**

digital archive of October 7 attack testimonies—each project pushing the boundaries of how we study culture, history, and memory. These are just a few examples from a diverse and internationally engaged group of scholars.

At a time when facts themselves are under threat, we believe that spaces like ours—committed to constructive conversations, scholarly excellence, and openness—are more essential than ever. Through advanced scholarship, public engagement, and educational support across all levels, we continue to nurture a vibrant academic community grounded in integrity and inquiry.

We are proud to share our work with you. May it inspire further questions, deeper understanding, and renewed commitment to the values that make serious scholarship possible.

With warmest regards,



Alexander Kaye

Alexander Kaye, PhD
*Director, Schusterman Center for
Israel Studies at Brandeis University
Karl, Harry, and Helen Stoll
Chair in Israel Studies*



Summer Institute for Israel Studies fellows in a seminar.

MISSION + VISION + VALUES

Mission

The **Schusterman Center for Israel Studies (SCIS)**, a research center at Brandeis University, advances the understanding of Zionism and modern Israel. Through exemplary research and innovative education, we inform and inspire a global academic community, and students at the university and around the world.

Vision

The Schusterman Center for Israel Studies (SCIS) envisions a vibrant academic community of scholars, students, and a broader global community, equipped with trusted research and resources on Zionism and modern Israel, from the late Ottoman period to the present day. By supporting cutting-edge research, training the next generation of experts, and ensuring that diverse viewpoints are always included, we are shaping a future for Israel Studies that is open-minded, nuanced, and constructive.

Values

- In keeping with Brandeis University's founding, SCIS welcomes scholars, artists, writers, and staff of all backgrounds and beliefs.
- We uphold rigorous academic standards and foster critical thinking to advance thoughtful, informed dialogue.
- We are field-builders and committed to contributing new knowledge and academic discourse.
- We embrace intellectual openness with a commitment to understanding Israel Studies in the broadest terms, encouraging diverse perspectives and challenging assumptions.
- We are committed to advancing a culture of inclusion and mutual respect.
- We transcend divisive binaries in political discourse, fostering nuanced and constructive engagement.
- We believe Israel Studies should be accessible to all and strive to make our programs, research, and resources available with minimal barriers.

Schusterman Center by the Numbers



30,500
YOUTUBE VIEWS



10
EXPERTS IN RESIDENCE
IN ACADEMIC YEAR
2024-2025



3,019
EVENT ATTENDEES IN
ACADEMIC YEAR
2024-2025
(IN-PERSON AND VIA ZOOM)



39
BOOKS IN OUR ISRAEL
STUDIES SERIES

HIGHLIGHTS

Our faculty and doctoral students are the experts in Israel Studies. Whether publishing cutting-edge research or appearing in prominent outlets across the globe, their work provides invaluable knowledge and context regarding current events and culture in Israel.

Here are a few notable highlights from the 2024-2025 academic year:

Alexander Kaye offered a perspective on antisemitism on college campuses, reported in **Harvard Magazine** about a conversation with a former SCIS participant and professor from Morocco, who asked for advice on teaching about the Hamas October 7 attack. Prof. Kaye explained the wide reach of the center: "We as a community have built up trust among each other that perspectives and viewpoints are all welcome, as long as there is respectful and curious engagement with each other."

Shayna Weiss offered her take on Israeli culture to the **Jewish Telegraphic Agency** in response to the music video "Sof Tov [Happy Ending]" from singer and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Yoni Bloch. She explains that this video stands out as a rare, mainstream example in recent Israeli pop culture where a Jewish Israeli artist imagines a peaceful end to war. However, she notes that the video makes no mention of Palestinians, and the role they might play in a future peace plan.

The Justice, Brandeis' independent school newspaper, featured **SCIS** after hosting *Roots*, an initiative of Israeli Settlers and West Bank Palestinians working together for reconciliation. The Justice praised *Roots/Shorashim/Judur* for allowing Jews and Muslims to "come together and put the difficult texts out on the table and find ways to interpret them in a way that will allow us to live together in peace and reconciliation."



Alexander Kaye and Shayna Weiss with Khaled Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger of *Roots/Shorashim/Judur*.

Alexander Kaye, Yehudah Mirsky, and Eugene Sheppard were recognized for their exceptional mentorship and support by the Class of 2024, who honored nearly 200 faculty and staff as "Career Heroes" for their lasting impact.

Yehudah Mirsky is serving as a Content Advisor for "Voice of the People: The President's Initiative for a Shared Jewish Future," launched by the President of Israel, H.E. Isaac Herzog. In addition, Mirsky appeared as a panelist on **Makan**, Israel's Arabic-language public broadcasting channel and spoke in Hebrew and Arabic on **Asharq News**, contributing to critical conversations in multiple languages.

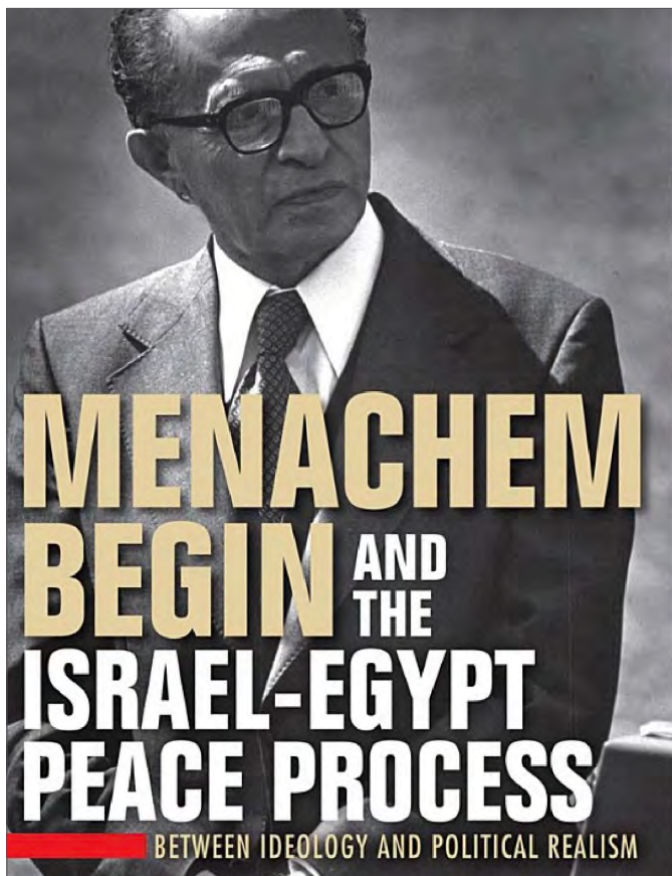
Jonathan D. Sarna received an honorary degree at Brandeis University's 74th commencement ceremonies, for his many achievements as a historian, Jewish communal leader, and long-serving member of the Brandeis faculty.

Ilana Szobel interviewed Israeli artist Limor Ashkenazi for *Moment Magazine*. Ashkenazi spoke about her sexual expression and how it intersects with her disabled identity. Ashkenazi's art and activism will also be featured in Szobel's forthcoming book, *The Un-Chosen Body: Disability Culture in Israel*.

Skyler Inman was awarded a prestigious **Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant** for her project, "Waiting, Leaving, Staying: Eritrean Negotiations of Futurity Under Israel's Self-Deportation Policy." Her research explores how Eritrean asylum seekers navigate forced migration, contributing vital insights to anthropological understandings of human resilience and futurity ([read more about her work on page 6](#)).

LEADING THE WAY IN SCHOLARSHIP

SCIS is at the forefront of Israel Studies, advancing groundbreaking research that shapes the future of the field. Our faculty publish with prestigious university presses and peer-reviewed journals, and our publications are accessible to over 3,200 university libraries and subscribers worldwide.



Here are a few notable publications from the 2024–2025 academic year:

Books and journals supported directly by SCIS:

Menachem Begin and the Israel-Egypt Peace Process: Between Ideology and Political Realism

Focusing on the character and personality of Menachem Begin, Gerald Steinberg and Ziv Rubinovitz offer a new look into the peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt in the 1970s.

The Palestinian National Revival: In the Shadow of the Leadership Crisis, 1937–1967

Former Israeli intelligence officer Moshe Shemesh offers a fresh understanding of the complex history and politics of the Middle East in this new analysis of the Palestinian national movement.

The Tribal Challenge: Alliances and Confrontations in the Israeli Negev

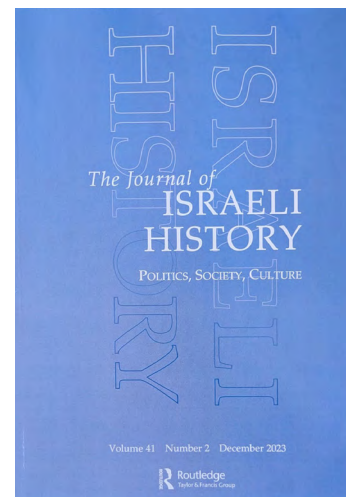
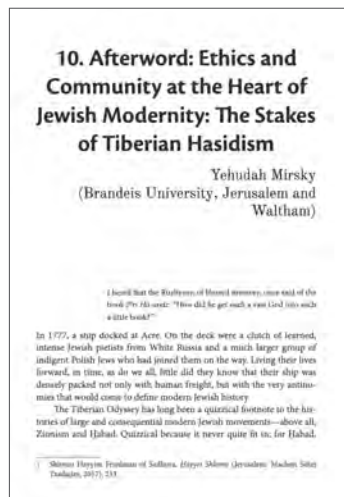
Drawing on a wealth of ethnographic and historical sources, Havatzelet Yahel offers an engaging and sometimes surprising history of Israel's policy toward Bedouin tribalism in the Negev desert in southern Israel.

Israel Studies

This journal presents multidisciplinary scholarship on Israeli history, politics, society, and culture. Each issue includes essays and reports reflecting diverse points of view.

Journal of Israeli History

A premier source of cutting-edge scholarship on Israel's history, this journal, co-edited by Alexander Kaye and Orit Rozin, is essential for scholars and students of international relations, Middle East Studies, and Jewish Studies.



Selected Publications by SCIS Faculty and Students

Alexander Kaye edited the first English-language collection of writings by Israel's first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in *The Collected Works of Rabbi Yitzhak Halevi Herzog*. The two-volume set from Koren Publishers includes a foreword by Israel's president, Isaac Herzog. He also published an article about the legal thought of early socialist religious Zionists in the Israeli law journal *Dine Israel*.

Ziva Hassenfeld explored how Israeli teachers reacted to the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in the classroom for "Curriculum on the Front Line: An Ethics of Care During War" for the journal *Contemporary Jewry*.

Yehudah Mirsky wrote "Afterword: Ethics and Community at the Heart of Jewish Modernity: The Stakes of Tiberian Hasidism" for *Tiberias with Love: A Collection of Tiberian Hasidism*. The book examines the theology and devotional practice of an early Hasidic group in 18th-century Tiberias.

Jonathan D. Sarna examined the curious history of the concluding phrase of the Passover Seder in "The Transformation of 'Next Year in Jerusalem' in the Postwar American Haggadah" for the edited collection *Jerusalem Transformed Politics, Culture, and Hidden Corners*.

Shayna Weiss wrote "The New Black: Haredi Jews on Israeli Television", which is the first analysis of the roughly twenty Israeli television series about Haredi Jews on Israeli TV. The book chapter is part of the edited collection *New Directions in Israeli Media: Film, Television, and Digital Content*.

Gilli Cohen explores the lead-up to, formation, and immediate aftermath of the first Canadian Jewish Congress (1919) and its attempts to support Jewish life in Canada in "Between Jewish State and Diaspora: Exploring the Founding of the Canadian Jewish Congress" for the *Canadian Jewish Studies Journal*.

Skyler Inman and Orit Gazit co-authored an article "Conflict, gender and ontological security-seeking between Eritrea and Tel Aviv" for the journal *Conflict, Security, and Development*. The article is based on their fieldwork with Eritrean Tigrinya asylum-seeking women in southern Tel-Aviv and considers how these women search for security amidst trauma and migration in a new locale.

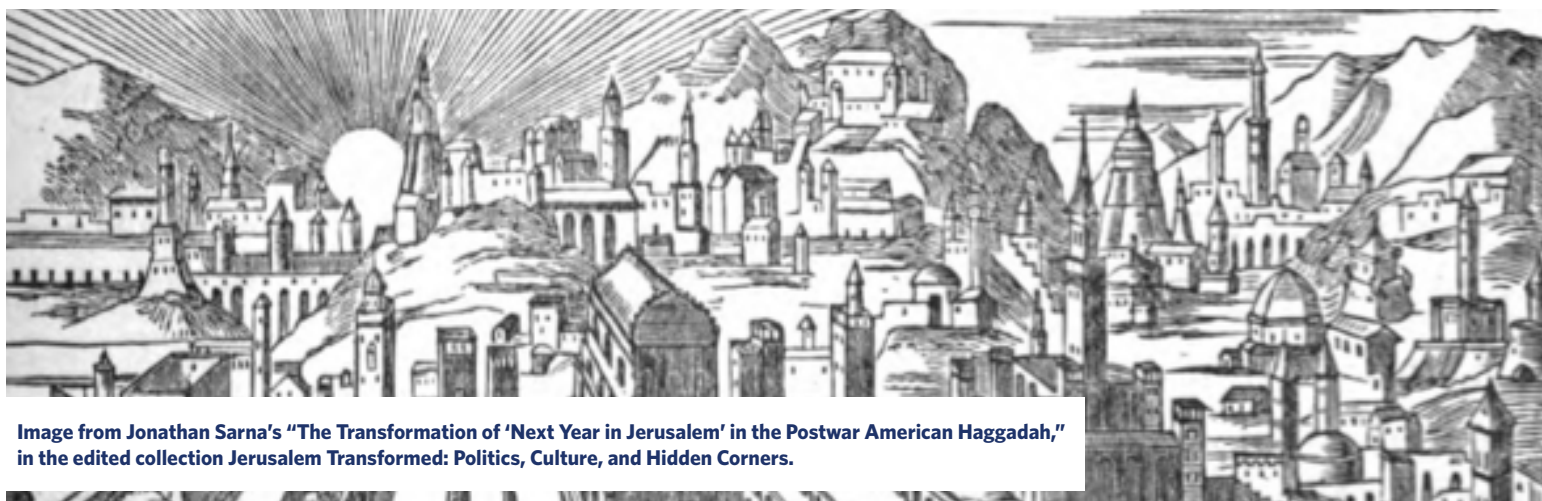


Image from Jonathan Sarna's "The Transformation of 'Next Year in Jerusalem' in the Postwar American Haggadah," in the edited collection *Jerusalem Transformed: Politics, Culture, and Hidden Corners*.



*Meet Skyler Inman,
Schusterman Doctoral Fellow*

Exploring Migration and Identity in Israel: Schusterman Scholar Skyler Inman's Journey

SCIS is dedicated to promoting exemplary teaching and scholarship in the field of Israel Studies. Training the next generation of Israel Studies scholars is a crucial part of our mission. Our doctoral fellows, known as **Schusterman Scholars**, are an essential part of the Center's vibrant intellectual community, joining our faculty, visiting scholars, and artists in developing the field of Israel Studies.

Current Schusterman Scholar **Skyler Inman** has found both inspiration and scholarly support at the Schusterman Center. A PhD student in anthropology, Inman is researching the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel, focusing on how migration, bureaucracy, and daily life intersect to shape perceptions of the future. Inman describes the Schusterman Center as a collaborative and intellectually open environment.

"The Schusterman Center is open-minded in its approach to what 'Israel Studies' includes and encourages diverse perspectives," she said. "There's a welcoming atmosphere for all kinds of academic inquiry. The assumption that Israel Studies must reflect a narrow viewpoint doesn't hold true here."

Inman's dissertation grew out of firsthand experience in Israel, where she witnessed past debates on immigration policy. "In 2018, the Israeli government proposed a plan for the large-scale deportation of Eritrean asylum seekers," she recalled. "Many Israelis organized in response, and ultimately the plan was shelved. That moment left a lasting impression on me."

The impact of observing a large immigrant community living in fear and uncertainty over potential government deportation deeply affected Inman, setting the trajectory for her studies exploring the human consequences of such policies. Her research seeks to understand and document the human experience in a time of global upheaval. "I'm interested in how people make sense of their futures in uncertain legal and social conditions. What does it mean to build a life when your status could change overnight?" she explained.



Inman examines how Israeli policy, such as temporary group protection and the so-called "voluntary departure" framework, shapes the everyday lives and future of Eritrean residents in Israel. Her project examines how this policy shapes the way Eritreans and Israelis think about the future, and how they create meaning when the lives they built over 15 years could disappear overnight.

"How does one existentially, psychologically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally make sense of the trajectory of one's life in a situation where it's quite clear that the government doesn't want you to stay?" she said. "I'm looking at how Eritreans speak about the future, how they think about the future, what they do to make the future seem livable in those circumstances."

Returning to Israel to continue fieldwork, Inman received support from SCIS, which funds student research, travel, and related expenses. "That support is incredibly important," she said. "Field research is costly and logistically complex, especially in anthropology. The Center not only provides funding but also encourages us to pursue bold and rigorous

projects. They've connected me with other scholars doing related work. It's an open and supportive network that's really enriched my research."

Skyler Inman's work exemplifies the vision of the Schusterman Center—to shape a future for Israel Studies that is innovative, open-minded, and instructive.



Skyler Inman (center) at the Boston Jewish Film Festival (BJFF) screening of "Running on Sand," where she moderated a conversation with filmmaker Adar Shafran (right). At left is festival director Joey Katz. Photo courtesy of the BJFF.



lean-owned storefront at the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv. Photo by Skyler Inman.



Poster of a model displaying a typical hairstyle from Eritrea. Photo by Skyler Inman.



Meet Amichai Chasson, SCIS Writer in Residence 2024-2025

SCIS Writer in Residence Amichai Chasson Explores Modern Israel Through Poetry and Portraits

Amichai Chasson is an Israeli poet, writer, curator, and filmmaker. He connects contemporary Hebrew poetry with modern Israeli art and has published three poetry collections. He has received multiple prizes, including the Israeli Ministry of Culture Award for Literature, the First Lady of Israel Award for Hebrew Poetry, and the Prime Minister's Prize for Hebrew Literary Works.

The Moon Grove By: Amichai Chasson

at night a howl
is heard in Jerusalem's heart
and the sleepless go out to seek
in the streets empty of people.
a defiant jackal walking among us

and it happens that in the moon grove
someone sits under the lofty pine,
a burning bush consumed at his feet
his hands coals and his voice
the voice of the jackal.

Solar eclipse in the Moon Grove
the children gaze at the ground
a snail that has lost its home
meanders across a large rock.

Translated from Hebrew by Vivian Eden

MAPPING THE HEBREW NOVEL

Lead Fellow Yael Dekel leverages technology to create a searchable database of Hebrew literary history.



Yael Dekel presents her research at the IAIS project showcase.

“My research focuses on Hebrew literature, and being away from Israel—the center of that literature—helped me gain a new perspective... It was valuable to see things from the outside.”

- Yael Dekel

As the 2024-2025 Lead Fellow at the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies' Institute for Advanced Israel Studies (IAIS), **Yael Dekel** brought her innovative use of technology to the large-scale analysis of Hebrew literature and led a cohort of 14 other fellows exploring this year's theme: "Digital Humanities in Israel Studies."

"Digital humanities encompasses a wide range of methodologies that use digital or computational tools across disciplines such as art, history, philosophy, music, and literature," she explained. "There is a productive challenge in bringing together a group of scholars, each specializing in a completely different field within Israel Studies."

In 2019, Dekel launched "Roman Maftach: Distant Reading of the Hebrew Novel," a digital humanities project that collects holistic data on the Hebrew novel by combining traditional close reading with distant reading, which uses technology to analyze literature.

"There are so many documents available in digital editions and obtainable online," she said. "You can analyze not just one or two texts, as historians or literary scholars used to do. Now, you can analyze thousands of books. The challenge is that since you're

dealing with a lot of information, it's difficult to analyze such a large corpus of texts, images, maps, or other data. Much of it is a work in progress—not only because it takes time to write the research, but also because the scope is so big. I am building a database that can take many research directions and will eventually become a public website."

The IAIS fellowship offers a unique opportunity to collaborate with scholars from around the world and across academic disciplines.

AI as a Research 'Assistant'

"Digital humanities is constantly evolving. There's always something new to explore, and we haven't even talked about artificial intelligence (AI) yet," she added. "There are ethical concerns with AI. One fellow described it as a 'research assistant who is always available.' It can be used to analyze language in different contexts, but it can also be systematically wrong about words it was trained to interpret differently, or to ignore altogether. That's why AI must be used critically and responsibly. Ultimately, a human still has to interpret its output."

Inspired by Fellows Across Disciplines

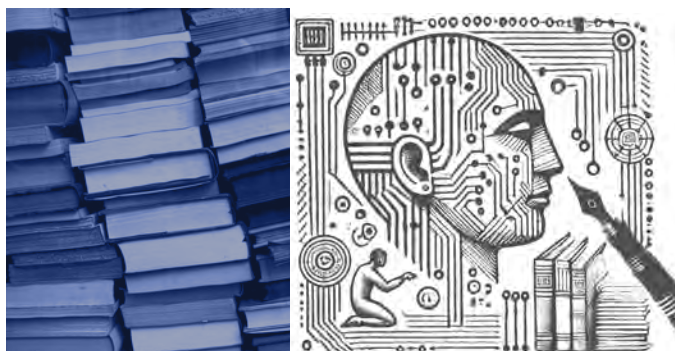
Dekel drew inspiration from the diverse work of her fellow IAIS scholars, who opened new perspectives on her own research.

Among them was Ella Ebaz's project, "Traveling Homelands," which explores the global Palestinian literary system, and Daniel Stein Kokin's "All the Points," a digital mapping project that traces the development of cities and towns in Israel-Palestine over time.

"Using mapping software to portray communities in Israel and Palestine is a fascinating and compelling way to understand history," she said.

Dekel also praised the joint project of Rona Aviram and Omer Benjakob, titled "The Two-Article Solution: Zionism and the Digital Echo Chambers on Wikipedia." Their research analyzes how Wikipedia articles on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have evolved since the platform's founding in 2001.

"Wikipedia is run by a community of volunteers, with strict rules about sources. By seeing how these articles were edited, their project provides a fascinating way to study the history of ideas in the digital sphere," Dekel noted.



Looking Ahead

Now back in Israel, Yael Dekel has returned to her teaching and research at Ben-Gurion University. She is now completing "Space and Time in the Hebrew Novel," a collaborative project with Uri Roll of the Department of Desert Ecology at Ben-Gurion University. The project, which she developed during her time at IAIS, maps the locations where Hebrew language novels take place, both globally and nationally, while identifying networks among these settings and tracking trends across time.

She credits the Institute for Advanced Israel Studies with deepening her work and expanding her network.

"I want to thank the Schusterman Center and Brandeis in general, because I had such a great experience," she said. "The faculty and staff were incredibly supportive, and always ready to help, listen, and collaborate."

Digital Humanities in Israel Studies Conference



The IAIS 2024-2025 fellows.

The Digital Humanities in Israel Studies Conference marked the culmination of the 2024-2025 Institute for Advanced Israel Studies.

As AI, digital mapping, distant reading, visualization tools, large language models, and data scraping continue to evolve rapidly, their impact on the study of Israeli and Palestinian society material is becoming increasingly significant. One of the conference sessions focused on pedagogy, on how to bring these digital humanities tools to the Israel Studies classroom and involve students in innovative research. The conference additionally explored how to implement design thinking, the ethics of AI decision making, the environmental effects of AI, and more.

The event featured a public showcase of IAIS fellows' projects, demonstrating the growing role of new technologies in humanities scholarship, which are available for viewing on our YouTube channel. The showcase highlighted how digital humanities can reshape how scholars write history, interpret literature, analyze culture, and visualize space.



*Discover the
IAIS fellows'
projects on
our YouTube
playlist*

FELLOW SPOTLIGHT: RENANA KEYDAR

Archiving in Real Time: Renana Keydar and the Ethics of Digital Testimony After October 7



Renana Keydar and a Brandeis student at the IAIS project showcase.

IAIS Fellow Renana Keydar leads efforts to preserve survivor voices through *Edut 7.10*, a grassroots initiative that emerged immediately after October 7, responding to the urgent need to document firsthand testimonies from survivors of the attacks.

As head of the archive and content department at the website *Edut 7.10*, **Renana Keydar** plays a critical role in building a digital archive of survivor testimonies in real time, during an ongoing state of war. The project's goal is to preserve voices that might otherwise vanish in the chaos that followed the attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023. During her time as an IAIS Fellow, Keydar considered the technological challenges and ethical considerations in building archives in times of ongoing emergency, such as how to ethically apply AI techniques to preserve and analyze sensitive testimonial materials during ongoing crises.

The project stands apart from institutional archives like those at the Shoah Foundation or Yad Vashem, in that it was created during a live emergency. Within hours and days of the attacks, volunteers, including filmmakers, academics, and therapists, began collecting testimonies, sometimes in hotel lobbies where evacuees had just arrived from their destroyed homes. From the very beginning, *Edut 7.10* prioritized ethical listening, inspired by Holocaust scholar Dori Laub, which emphasizes minimal interruption and trauma-informed interviewing to allow witnesses to reclaim their narrative.

Edut 7.10 also uses cutting-edge, AI-powered technology that allows survivors to share their experiences and perspectives while also offering the option to create personalized memorial ceremonies for the user. The AI tool allows users to pose natural language questions and retrieve relevant testimonies and materials through a sophisticated search system powered by large language models (LLMs). Testimonies can be searched by specific events, locations, or experiences from October 7th, gaining insights from multiple perspectives, providing a pluralistic view of events, rather than a single, fixed interpretation.

“We believe that every survivor deserves an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words without hierarchies or interruption. We are here to collect testimonies of voices for eternity, both for the communities and for the witnesses themselves, and for us, all of us, as society.”

– RENANA KEYDAR, IAIS FELLOW



Interview with Ortal Haimi. Photo: Gil Levin.

Renana Keydar is an associate professor of Law and Digital Humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is also the Academic Director of the Center for Digital Humanities and heads the Alfred Landecker Lab for the Computational Analysis of Testimonies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

CLIMATE CHANGE IGNORES BORDERS: Israel Studies and the Environment



Shay Rabineau on his 2022 Dead Sea trek. Photo by Julian Bender.

At this year's Summer Institute, Shay Rabineau delivered a guest lecture that captured the evolving scope of Israel Studies.

Shay Rabineau specializes in Israeli environmental history, a topic that may not be top of mind when people think of Israel Studies, but one that is increasingly vital for understanding Israel today. Rabineau spoke about his research at the **Summer Institute for Israel Studies (SIIS)**, which began when he was a doctoral fellow at SCIS.

Climate change, environmental degradation, and resource management transcend not only physical borders, but also intellectual ones. By placing environmental issues at the center of his work, Rabineau broadens the conversation within Israel Studies, demonstrating that the field encompasses far more than traditional studies of conflict and politics.

Through support for cutting-edge research, the training of future scholars, and an ongoing commitment to intellectual diversity, the SIIS is helping to shape a field that is open-minded, nuanced, and deeply relevant.

"Including environmental studies is part of our commitment to being at the forefront of scholarship and pedagogy," said

Shayna Weiss. "It's not just an extracurricular interest. SIIS fellows learn how global challenges such as climate change are crucial to understanding the region and how its effects shape the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The urgency of Rabineau's research is clear. Environmental challenges are reshaping life in Israel and must be treated as core concerns for scholars and students alike. Freshwater shortages, the growing threat of wildfires and global warming — among other concerns — threaten an already unstable reality for both Israelis and Palestinians.

This expanded view of Israel Studies reflects a broader commitment to innovative scholarship and pedagogy. By tackling subjects like environmental change head-on, the program continues to push the boundaries of the field and serves as a training ground for the next generation of scholars.

Shay Rabineau is an associate professor of Israel Studies at Binghamton University and the author of "Walking the Land: A History of Israeli Hiking Trails," a history of Israel's 6,000-mile hiking trail system. Based on research that began while he was a PhD Student at SCIS, "Walking the Land" also won the Shapiro Award for Best Book in Israel Studies.

"The Summer Institute experience has been instrumental in helping me develop a more open-minded and well-rounded approach to teaching about Israel. Exposure to diverse perspectives and in-depth scholarly engagement has deepened my understanding of the complexities of Israeli history, society, and politics. This has enriched my own knowledge and enabled me to offer my students a more comprehensive and thoughtful perspective, encouraging them to engage with the subject critically and empathetically."

-2023 SIIS PARTICIPANT



CROSSING LINES: The 2025 Summer Institute for Israel Studies

The SIIS 2025 fellows.

Exploring Borderlands and Contact Zones in Israeli Society

The Schusterman Center's Summer Institute for Israel Studies (SIIS) continued its mission of advancing Israel Studies globally with its 2025 program, which began with a 10-day residency at Brandeis University, where fellows engaged with leading Israel Studies scholars including a conversation with author Sayed Kashua, an Israeli music seminar with Edwin Seroussi, and a session with Ghaith Al Omari on Palestinian politics and peacemaking. Unfortunately, due to the war between Israel and Iran, participants were unable to travel to Israel in 2025. Pivoting at the last moment, SIIS added experiential learning to the program, including a conversation with Israeli-Palestinian physician Dr. Yasmeen Abu Freiha about healthcare and human rights and a private concert featuring Arab-Jewish musician Yoni Battat.

For the first time, co-conveners Shayna Weiss and Yuval Evri chose a theme for SIIS. This inaugural theme, “Borderlands and Contact Zones in Israeli Society,” offered a fresh and thought-provoking lens through which to explore Israel’s cultural, political, and geographical complexities.

While the program has long included diverse topics, this past summer’s focus on borderlands provided an especially rich framework for analysis. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the program explored how boundaries — both real and imagined — were constructed within Israel’s cultural landscape and how they influence perceptions, narratives, and lived experiences.

Yuval Evri shared: “This is the opportunity to re-engage the history of Israel/Palestine through the lens of contact zones and borderlands, and to transcend the national perspective based on binary divisions between languages, identities, territories, and traditions. It’s an opportunity to challenge some basic assumptions, categorizations, and terminologies that organize the official (Jewish and Arab) historiographies; and to problematize the clear-cut separations between Jews and Arabs, Hebrew and Arabic, Israel and the Middle East, West and East, which guide the current official political and historical discourse. It’s an opportunity to explore geographies that position Jewish history and Israel studies in



SIIS 2025 fellows in discussion.

"It's an opportunity to challenge some basic assumptions, categorizations, and terminologies that organize the official (Jewish and Arab) historiographies; and to problematize the clear-cut separations between Jews and Arabs, Hebrew and Arabic, Israel and the Middle East, West and East, which guide the current official political and historical discourse."

- YUVAL EVRI

Middle Eastern history. Instead of imagining purified national territories and societies with clear border lines, we can draw different maps with thick borderlands that represent complex and intertwined cultural and geographical connections."

Participants examined the pivotal role of cultural production and representation in shaping identities, challenging social and national boundaries, and rethinking ideas of belonging, memory, and hybridity. The Institute critically engaged with the historical, political, and social dimensions of Israel/Palestine as portrayed in scholarly work, film, art, literature, and music, tracing the evolution of these cultural borderlands from the early 20th century to the present. Key focus areas included ethnic contact zones, cultural borderlands,

intersections of religious and secular identities, the national divide between Jews and Arabs, and the shifting boundaries around gender. By moving through and reflecting on these social and cultural borderlands both in the classroom and on the ground, participants gained a deeper understanding of the complex and often contested spaces that shape Israeli society.

This year's Institute reinforced the importance of understanding Israel not as a monolith, but as a dynamic and deeply layered society. Through immersive learning, fellows bring the knowledge, tools, and resources gained at SIIS back to their home institutions. We welcome 2025 fellows to our growing network of SIIS alumni dedicated to fostering deeper, more nuanced academic engagement with Israel.

Since its inception in 2004, SIIS has **equipped 411 professors from 287 institutions across 36 countries** and six continents to teach about Israel within their academic disciplines.

Participants' home countries include **Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cameroon, China, Denmark, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Zimbabwe.**

Collectively, alumni have **developed and taught over 2,100 courses, reaching nearly 36,000 students worldwide.**

For more information on SIIS, including when applications open for 2027, please email: scis@brandeis.edu.

Snapshots: SIIS 2025



IN FOCUS: The Eizenstat Travel Grant

The Frances Taylor Eizenstat '65 Israel Travel Grants are competitive awards of up to \$2,500 open to Brandeis students from any department who are pursuing academic or career interests in Israel.

Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat established the grant in 2013 in memory of his late wife, Frances Taylor Eizenstat '65 — an alumna who first visited Israel through the Brandeis Hiatt study abroad program in 1963. The travel grant supports Brandeis undergraduate and graduate students seeking to study or intern in Israel.

Grants may support pursuits in science, business, the social sciences, humanities and the arts.

Students have used the grant to study Hebrew; intern with social justice organizations, NGOs, Israeli companies, and research labs; participate in projects ranging from archaeology to contemporary issues; pursue EMT and pre-med training; conduct senior thesis research; and study abroad at leading Israeli universities such as Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

MEET TWO RECENT RECIPIENTS OF THE EIZENSTAT TRAVEL GRANT:



Eizenstat grant recipients with Stuart Eizenstat, Alexander Kaye, and Shayna Weiss.

In the summer of 2024, between her first year and sophomore year at Brandeis, **Rebecca Rappaport** interned at Reut Rehabilitation Hospital in southern Tel Aviv. Working in the physical therapy ward, she assisted patients with a range of needs and had the opportunity to shadow physicians and nurses.

"It was an incredibly impactful experience because I was able to form close connections with the patients over the course of two months, and hear about their experiences. A lot of the injuries that we treated were due to the October 7th attacks or army-related injuries. Hearing these patients' stories, many of them my age, motivated me to continue doing this internship, because I really felt like my work was needed and appreciated at a time where hospitals all over the country were full with patients and understaffed."

Inbar Shifrin, a doctoral student in ethnomusicology and a Schusterman Doctoral Fellow, conducted preliminary research for her dissertation, tentatively titled "Music for the Secular Jewish Prayer: Musical Choices in Israel." After completing the first year of her doctoral program, she spent the summer interviewing rabbis, secular leaders, musicians, and congregants about their musical selections and how these choices evolved in the wake of October 7th and the ongoing war.

"When going to Israel this summer, I planned to deepen my understanding of musical choices in Israeli contemporary Jewish prayer. My core question was: 'What makes a prayer Israeli?' from the music perspective. I went to Israel with the goal of narrowing down my ideas, but found myself expanding them in new and exciting ways."

UPCOMING AT SCIS

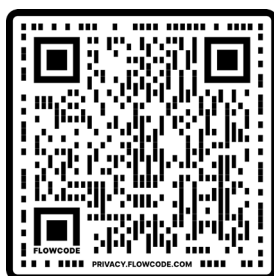
The 2025-2026 Institute for Advanced Israel Studies at Brandeis University will focus on “Diversifying the Israeli Diaspora.” Our fellows will explore evolving expressions of Israeli identity beyond Israel, examining how they intersect with global migration trends, diverse diasporas — including Jewish, Palestinian, and non-citizen Israeli communities — and complex cultural dynamics across the globe.

Projects include comparing the Armenian and Israeli Diasporas, examining new Breslov Hasidic communities in the Ivory Coast, and analyzing Palestinian-Israeli literature via the framework of a double diaspora. To learn more about these projects, visit our website.

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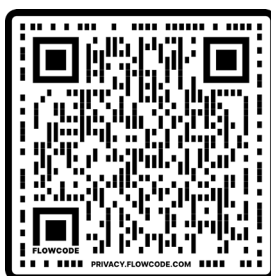


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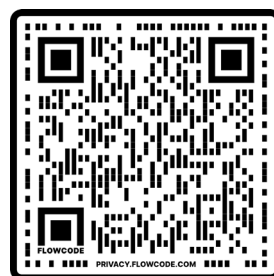


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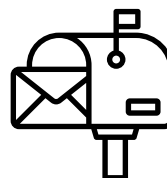
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Recent Schusterman Center artists in residence, Stav Marin and Neta Weiner, perform their dance-theater piece "Cut.Loose" for Brandeis students.



SIIS fellows watch musician Yoni Battat '13 perform.

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Schusterman Center doctoral fellows, left to right: Gilli Cohen, Jen Mabray, Skyler Inman, and Leighton Souza.

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