Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin received the UCLA Israel Studies Award during an award ceremony at the Chancellor’s Residence. Credit: Todd Cheney/UCLA
What a nine months it’s been for the UCLA Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies, and for me personally! In January, I became a professor at UCLA and holder of The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation Chair in Israel Studies, as well as the director of the Nazarian Center, taking over from Professor Yoram Cohen, who had successfully directed the center for the past five years. I was excited to lead the Nazarian Center and to continue advancing Israel Studies at UCLA, the best public university in the U.S., if not the world.

Upon my arrival at UCLA, I was immediately impressed by the dedication of the Nazarian’s Center staff, the intelligence and enthusiasm of the students involved in the center’s activities, and the commitment of its supporters in the local community. I knew that the Nazarian Center was well-positioned to become a world-class center for Israel Studies, not just the preeminent center on the West Coast, which it has been since its founding a decade ago. But I had no idea about the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.

Within weeks of taking up my new position, I received a phone call from Sharon Nazarian, the chair of our Community Advisory Board, asking whether the center could host the President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, for a brief visit in just a few weeks’ time. Although the prospect of hastily arranging a presidential visit was daunting, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to host a leader who is widely respected by Israelis of all backgrounds – Jews and Arabs, religious and secular – and from across the political spectrum. It seemed entirely fitting to honor President Rivlin with UCLA’s Israel Studies Award for his many contributions to Israel. When the award ceremony took place, on February 18th, President Rivlin gave a speech that made it clear why he is such an exemplary and visionary leader, and a great statesman for Israel.

Also in Winter quarter, the center had the honor of hosting another high-profile Israeli official, Isaac Herzog, the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and former leader of the Israeli Labor Party. On February 5th, he gave the inaugural Harry C. Sigman Distinguished Lecture in Israel Studies, in which he discussed the relationship between American Jews and Israel and the challenges it faces.

Spring quarter promised to be a little less eventful, but then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and all our lives were turned upside-down. UCLA’s campus was closed, classes were moved online, and Zoom became the platform on which we taught, met, and socialized. The center quickly adjusted to this new reality, moving all of our planned events online. In doing so, we discovered the benefits of online programs, as we attracted audience members from around the world, and hosted many speakers from Israel. Although we miss the intimacy of in-person events, we’ve realized that we can reach many more people, across the world, through our online programs. When we do return eventually to our beautiful campus, we plan to continue with a mix of online and in-person programming.

While the 2020-21 academic year begins online, the pandemic is not slowing us down. We will have several new Israel Studies courses and lots of fascinating public programs, including conversations with authors of outstanding new books on Israel, film screenings, virtual panel discussions, and a major research colloquium, “Democracy in Israel: Past, Present and Future.” Scholars working in a range of disciplines will present and discuss papers on this critical issue, with the papers to be published in an edited volume. The colloquium will also include three keynote public lectures on Israeli democracy given by some of the country’s most prominent public intellectuals. I encourage you to visit our website and join our mailing list to learn more about all of the center’s activities.

We hope you will enjoy this newsletter, which highlights some of the Nazarian Center’s work – in teaching, research, and outreach – to expand knowledge and understanding of modern Israel. We’re committed to creating a space for people to teach and learn about Israel’s history, society and culture, whatever their politics or backgrounds. And we are deeply grateful to all our center followers and donors whose support makes our work possible.

Professor Dov Waxman
Director, UCLA Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies
The Rosalinde & Arthur Gilbert Foundation Chair in Israel Studies
The Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies welcomed Professor Dov Waxman as the new director in Winter 2020 and hosted his debut lecture in January. The lecture, titled “The Religionization of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” was held at the UCLA Faculty Center and co-sponsored by the UCLA International Institute. Waxman, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation Chair in Israel Studies, was previously on the faculty of Northeastern University. He is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and four books, including most recently, The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford University Press, 2019).

In a ceremony held on campus in February 2020, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin was presented with the UCLA Israel Studies Award. Rivlin has a distinguished career in public service and has advocated on behalf of minority communities, particularly Arab citizens of Israel. The award recognizes individuals of extraordinary character and merit who have contributed to a greater understanding of Israel and have made outstanding contributions to Israeli society or culture. Chancellor Gene Block was joined in the award presentation by Soraya Nazarian and Sharon Nazarian, chair of the center’s Advisory Board.

In February 2020, Isaac Herzog, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and a former Israeli government minister, shared his insights on the relationship between Israel and diaspora Jewry as the Nazarian Center held its inaugural Harry C. Sigman Distinguished Lecture in Israel Studies. Herzog spoke about a need for understanding in the Jewish community, including between Jews living in Israel and those abroad, particularly North America. The distinguished lecture series is named for the late Harry C. Sigman, a long-time Los Angeles attorney, UCLA alumnus, and generous supporter of the Nazarian Center.

The Nazarian Center sponsored more than 20 public programs during the latest academic year, individually and in partnership with other campus units and organizations. Below are highlights from a few of our most memorable events. The center’s academic programs are designed to provide students, faculty, staff and the broader community with a greater understanding of modern Israel. Programs were held on everything from the tech economy, Middle Eastern rap music and Israeli literature, to a discussion of Israeli elections and response to the pandemic.
Teaching remains a core focus area of the Nazarian Center, with center-sponsored courses attracting students of all backgrounds and across a wide range of departments. In 2019-20, the center hosted two visiting Israeli faculty and two postdoctoral fellows to teach and pursue innovative research on modern Israel. The center sponsored 10 courses, reaching more than 500 undergraduate students in disciplines ranging from political science, anthropology and sociology to Jewish studies, comparative literature and multicultural education.

### 2019-2020 Courses

- U.S.-Israel Relations: Anatomy of Special Relationship
- Popular Jewish and Israeli Music
- Global Perspectives on Multicultural Education
- On Happiness: A Literary History, from Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel
- Social Debates and Popular Culture in Israel
- Zionism: Ideology and Practice in the Making of the Jewish State
- Sociology of Work: Israel in Comparative Perspective
- Modern Israel: Society, Politics & Culture
- Sociology of Israel: Culture, Ethnicity and Social Debates

In the 2020-21 academic year, the center is again planning a wide-range of Israel Studies courses. We are thrilled to be hosting Visiting Professor Menachem Hofnung, a distinguished political scientist from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to teaching several classes, including Democracy, Civil Liberties and National Security: Israel in Comparative Perspective.

Other new courses in the coming academic year include Populism, Representation, and Polarization: Israeli Politics as a Case Study of Global Trends, to be taught by the center’s research fellow, Dr. Liron Lavi, as well as courses in the history of Israeli foreign policy and modern Israeli and Palestinian literature.
Teaching

Study Abroad in Israel

The center has two endowed scholarships to provide financial support to students of all backgrounds who wish to study abroad in Israel.

- **Mudie-Glaser Scholarship** for Study at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- **Harry C. Sigman Scholarship** for Study in Israel (Various Universities)

For more information, contact Wils Lieux, Associate Director for Scholarships, at wlieux@ieo.ucla.edu

Minor in Israel Studies

The Israel Studies Minor is designed to give students with majors in other fields an opportunity to have a concentration in the academic study of Israel. Comprised of coursework that serves to create a broad familiarity with Israeli history, society, politics, and culture, the minor is appropriate for students from a wide range of majors.
Research

Through collaborative and innovative research projects – including a major colloquium on Israeli democracy – and a multi-tiered approach to mentorship, the center aims to enhance academic excellence in Israel Studies and build meaningful connections among students, junior scholars, and established leaders in the field. To that end, the center recently instituted a new fellowship program (The Harry C. Sigman Graduate Fellow) specifically geared towards graduate students at UCLA who are pursuing research related to modern Israel.

“BLACKNESS IN ISRAEL: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS” SYMPOSIUM, FEBRUARY 2020

The Nazarian Center hosted a symposium exploring different meanings of Blackness in Israel that drew scholars from the U.S. and abroad. The event featured presentations and a lively roundtable discussion with Cheryl Keyes, professor in the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology. Other panelists were Fran Markowitz (Ben-Gurion University, Israel), Don Seeman (Emory University), and Sarah Hankins (University of California, San Diego). The symposium was organized by cultural anthropologist Uri Dorchin, visiting assistant professor at the Nazarian Center.

The Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies at UCLA is organizing a 2021 series of online programs devoted to exploring critical issues of Israeli democracy. The colloquium series, titled “Democracy in Israel: Past, Present, and Future,” includes three public keynote addresses by prominent speakers, as well as a closed-group research colloquium for scholars from diverse institutions and disciplines. The colloquium series is scheduled to run January-May 2021 and involve some of the most important scholars and thinkers on democracy in Israel from a range of disciplines – history, law, political science, sociology and philosophy. They will present and discuss papers to be published later in an edited volume. The series is co-sponsored by the Sady and Ludwig Kahn Chair in Jewish History.

For more information, visit here.
Research

Israel Studies Research Seminars

The Nazarian Center’s research seminars bring together UCLA faculty, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students to discuss research-in-progress related to modern Israel and build an interdisciplinary research community engaged in Israel Studies. The seminars meet twice per quarter and are organized by Nazarian Center Research Fellow Dr. Liron Lavi. In 2020-21, the center plans to expand the seminar series to include graduate students and scholars from other University of California campuses. Below is a list of recent and upcoming seminar topics and presenters:

March 9, 2020
Coalition for Competition: Inter-actor Relations, Institutional Complementarity and Class-Representation in an Age of Liberalization, Dr. Assaf Bondy, Postdoctoral Fellow, 2019-20.

April 20, 2020
Contemporary Israeli Theory and Philosophy of Education: Multiculturalism and the Question of Integration, Dr. Nili Alon Amit, Israel Institute Visiting Assistant Professor at the UCLA Nazarian Center, 2019-20.

May 18, 2020
Housing Ideology: Israeli Settlement of the West Bank, Professor of Finance Stuart A. Gabriel, Arden Realty Chair and Director of the Richard S. Ziman Center for Real Estate at UCLA.

October 21, 2020
“All the Points”: Mapping Settlement in Israel/Palestine Online,” Dr. Daniel Stein Kokin, a scholar of Renaissance, Jewish and Israel Studies affiliated with UCLA and Arizona State University.

January 27, 2021
Patterns of Representation and Support for Democracy in the 2019-20 Israeli Elections, Dr. Liron Lavi, Research Fellow at the UCLA Nazarian Center.

February 24, 2021

New issue of Currents explores ‘Blackness’ in Israel

During the Summer, the Nazarian Center released the second issue of Currents: Briefs on Contemporary Israel with an article by Israeli anthropologist Dr. Uri Dorchin, “The History, Politics and Social Construction of ‘Blackness’ in Israel.” Dorchin also is co-editor of a forthcoming book, Blackness in Israel: Rethinking Racial Boundaries (Routledge, 2020). Currents, the center’s bi-annual publication series, covers a broad range of topics relating to Israel, including politics, security, culture and more. The center’s research fellow, Dr. Liron Lavi, serves as managing editor and Professor Dov Waxman as the publication’s editor-in-chief. The Editorial Board is comprised of leading scholars from UCLA, RAND Corporation, and top Israeli universities.

Visiting Scholars

Over the 2019-20 academic year, the Nazarian Center hosted a vibrant group of visiting professors and postdoctoral fellows – Scott Abramson, Nili Alon Amit, Assaf Bondy, and Uri Dorchin – who taught courses and conducted research in Israel Studies. Besides teaching at UCLA, our visiting scholars participated in numerous public events and webinars, which reached a global audience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Abramson will remain at UCLA as a lecturer to teach several courses, including a course on the history of Zionism. Alon Amit will stay at the Nazarian Center in the new academic year as a Visiting Scholar. She also is completing her latest book, On Happy Souls: The History of Soul in Western Culture (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming 2021).
Throughout the year, the Nazarian Center presents a wide variety of educational and cultural events – including lectures, panel discussions, literature and art events, and film screenings – for campus and community members. These programs bring together individuals of all backgrounds, political views and faiths for dialogue on complex and often controversial issues surrounding Israel and to explore multiple facets of the country.

Making the global connection

The center transitioned to all-virtual public programming after the pandemic changed the way we live and learn. Our online events since April 2020 reached thousands of people across the United States and at least 25 other countries. As we continue our diverse programs now and in the future, the center will continue to reach around the globe.

Coming Up in Fall...

Conversations with Authors Series

For Fall 2020, join us for a new series of live, online talks by authors of recent scholarly books on Israel. The four-part webinar series kicks off October 14 with Yaacov Yadgar (University of Oxford), author of the new book, *Israel’s Jewish Identity Crisis: State and Politics in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Registration is currently open for all the events.
Outreach

Incitement Film Screening and Discussion

Marking the 25th anniversary of the 1995 assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Nazarian Center presents a discussion of the film Incitement with the director and co-writer, Yaron Zilberman and Prof. Yoram Peri, author of a book on the assassination and a former political advisor to Prime Minister Rabin.

Please refer to the Nazarian Center’s Events page for the latest on upcoming public programs.

Spring & Summer 2020 Programs:


**JULY 9**  “Golda” Documentary Post-Screening Discussion, with filmmakers Udi Nir and Sagi Bornstein and scholar Pnina Lahav (Boston University).

**MAY 28**  Love in the Time of Corona, with acclaimed Israeli author Ayelet Gundar-Goshen.

**MAY 20**  Policing Citizens: Minority Policy in Israel, with author Guy Ben-Porat (Ben-Gurion University, Israel).

**MAY 11**  Israeli Society and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Strengths and Strains in the National Fabric, featuring a group of scholars on the pandemic’s impact on Israeli society.

**MAY 1**  For All Your Songs (L’chol shirayich), an exploration of classic Israeli songs on work and workers.

**APRIL 28**  Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader, with author and historian Derek Penslar (Harvard University).

**APRIL 13**  Israeli Women in Combat: A Gendered Analysis, with author Ayelet Harel-Shalev (Ben-Gurion University, Israel).

Israel in Depth Podcast

The Nazarian Center’s new Israel in Depth podcast, hosted by Professor Dov Waxman, tackles some of the most pressing issues facing Israel and the Middle East today. Each month, Professor Waxman interviews scholars, thought leaders, policymakers and veteran diplomats. Recent guests include former Ambassador Dennis Ross, veteran Middle East peace negotiator for Republican and Democratic presidents, and Israeli diplomat Uri Resnick discussing the significance of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates normalizing ties with Israel.
Spotlight

VISITING SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Professor Menachem Hofnung, Visiting Professor for 2020-21

The Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies is delighted to welcome distinguished political scientist Dr. Menachem Hofnung as Visiting Professor for the 2020-21 academic year. He is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Professor Hofnung served as the academic director of the Joint Graduate Program in Public Policy and Law at The Hebrew University and as academic director of the Gilo Center for Democracy and Civic Education. His research covers Israeli national security and civil liberties, constitutional politics and comparative political finance.

An internationally recognized scholar, Hofnung has taught at multiple universities in the U.S. and abroad, including in Russia, India and Australia. While at UCLA, Hofnung will be teaching two courses, including Political Science 139 – Special Studies in International Relations: Democracy, Civil Liberties and National Security: Israel in Comparative Perspective.

“I am excited to start teaching at UCLA,” said Hofnung. “After a long teaching career in class, this is the first time I will start the year with teaching online from my home in Jerusalem, 10 hours ahead of Los Angeles and close to 10 thousand miles away. At the end of the term I hope to give the experience a grade of 10 out of 10.”

Dr. Hofnung is a past president of the Association for Israel Studies and the Israeli Law and Society Association. He served as a member of the National Commission on Campaign Finance Reform (Levin Commission, 2000) and the National Commission on the Structure of Governmental Administration (Magidor Commission, 2006).

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

The Roslyn and Abner Goldstine Undergraduate Fellow

Leila Achtoun, a fourth-year student majoring in Middle Eastern Studies, is the Roslyn and Abner Goldstine Undergraduate Fellow at the Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies. She also serves as chair of the Nazarian Center’s Student Advisory Council. While at UCLA, she has been doing research under Professor David N. Myers and the Luskin Center School for History and Policy about the effects of U.S. soft power in the Middle East. She developed an early interest in the Middle East through her family’s connections to the region and a desire to learn more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Last Fall, Achtoun spent two months in Nablus, West Bank, learning more about the present situation through interactions with local community members. While in the West Bank, she taught English at a boys’ high school and exercise classes to women at the Askar refugee camp. Achtoun’s plans are to go into teaching after finishing her education.

The Harry C. Sigman Graduate Fellow

Avery Weinman is a Ph.D. student in the UCLA Department of History, and the Harry C. Sigman Graduate Fellow at the Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies. She graduated in 2019 with a B.A. in History and a minor in Jewish Studies from University of California, Santa Cruz. She also served as editor-in-chief of UCSC’s Leviathan Jewish Journal. During 2018, she studied abroad at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her Ph.D. research revolves mainly around the history of Mizrahi Jews in Israel, the history of Zionism, modern Israel and the role right-wing political parties play in Mizrahi Israel’s collective memory. In 2019, Weinman participated in the Nazarian Center’s Undergraduate Scholars Conference in Israel Studies at UCLA and presented research on Mizrahi Israelis. In her role as a Sigman Graduate Fellow, she will help organize the center’s next Undergraduate Scholars Conference.
Your contributions help to support the Y&S Nazarian Center’s work to advance education and scholarship on modern Israel. Thank you!

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