

Voices AND WISDOM

The Newsletter from the **FERN & MANFRED STEINFELD PROGRAM IN JUDAIC STUDIES**

UT ALUM, HUSBAND FUND 'SCHOLARS IN ISRAEL' PROGRAM, WHICH DEBUTS SPRING '24

UT alumnus **Dan Ricketts** (business '85, law '92) was born and raised in Tullahoma, Tenn. He didn't travel outside of the United States until after college. Now that he travels the globe for work and pleasure, he revels in exploring new places and diverse cultures.

His husband, Steve Frankel, was born and raised in Ohio. The son of Holocaust survivors, Frankel has made numerous trips to Israel to visit relatives and learn about his heritage. While attending New York University, he studied abroad in London and traveled to Paris, Ireland, Wales, and the Netherlands. That semester was a treasured experience, and, like Dan, it ignited his passion for traveling.

Ricketts and Frankel are now highly successful businessmen in Los Angeles, Calif. When considering programs to support, they look for causes they both care deeply about.

Judaism, Israel, and Holocaust remembrance are important to Frankel. Ricketts loves art. Both men say traveling has enriched their lives.

Those passions led them to create the Frankel-Ricketts Scholars in Israel Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The program will give UT students from all faiths and backgrounds the opportunity to travel to Israel and immerse themselves in its rich and diverse culture.

They have created an endowment that they will support with annual gifts and, eventually, a bequest. Their contribution "will be our biggest single donation ever," said Helene Sinnreich, associate professor of religious studies and director of the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies.

Ricketts and Frankel want their contributions to be used for travel scholarships for students to visit or study in Israel; undergraduate scholarships; visiting lecturers or faculty from Israel who come to UT for short-term teaching assignments; faculty awards for teaching or research focusing on Israeli culture; and other programs that help students learn about the history and culture of Israel.

"It's really important for people to travel outside of Tennessee, outside of America," Ricketts said. "It really changes your perspective on America and the world."

Ricketts said these days, when there's so much strife in the world, travel can lessen prejudice and hatred and enhance understanding and tolerance.

While cultures are different and unique, "you learn that everybody's kind of the same," he said. "If you've been to a place, it gives you a whole different perspective. It's hard to hate someone you've gotten to know."

Associate Vice Chancellor Marc Gibson, UT System President Randy Boyd, and donor Dan Ricketts go out for a jog in Israel



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A TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Hebrew University

The Frankel-Ricketts Scholars in Israel Program will debut in spring 2024 with Religious Studies 225: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, a three-credit-hour general education course open to students in all disciplines. Enrolled students will travel to Israel for the week of spring break. They will reside at Hebrew University, which was founded by Albert Einstein in 1918. The students will attend lectures by Hebrew University faculty and enjoy a private tour of the art and archaeological exhibits in the Israel Museum.

Collaborating with Hebrew University was a natural choice. Sinnreich has a strong relationship with some of the faculty.

Frankel is a board member of The Friends of Hebrew University and The Friends of The Israel Museum. Frankel and Ricketts have been honored on the university's Wall of Life for their monetary support and received the university's 2021 Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award at a dinner that raised more than \$2 million for the university's scholarship program. The men are also supporters of the Israel Museum.

Among the experiences Sinnreich is planning for students on the trip: a visit to a Bedouin camp to learn about that desert culture's hospitality, food, religious practices, and textile production; visits to Kibbutzim (collective communities), which were instrumental in establishing Jewish settlements in Israel; and visits to archeological sites, including UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Meggido, Masada, and the Crusader tunnels at Akko.

The first class will be limited to 15 students. Scholarships will cover most of their traveling expenses.

Sinnreich will teach the class and lead the trip with colleague Erin Darby, who is an associate professor of religious studies, an archaeological project director, and UT's inaugural faculty director for undergraduate research and fellowships. Ricketts and Frankel will try to meet up with the entourage during the trip.

"I hope this is a class that really transforms students, especially students who wouldn't otherwise have this opportunity by giving them a taste of an international experience," Sinnreich said.

While many trips to Israel are sponsored by groups from a particular faith, this trip will allow students to "view these spaces with a critical eye" while learning about the area's importance to Christians, Jews, and Muslims, she said.

Ricketts and Frankel also want students to learn about modern-day Israel, with its thriving start-up economy, the strong high-tech sector, and reputation as a foodie's paradise.

"We want students to really experience Israel and its vibrancy," Frankel said. "They need to experience Israel on the ground while having fun and meeting people."



Dan Ricketts and Steve Frankel

ABOUT THE DONORS

Ricketts remembers his time at UT as a "normal college experience"—living in a residence hall, pledging a fraternity (Sigma Phi Epsilon), and going to football games and concerts."

Though he loved art, he worried about making a living as an artist. He opted to major in business and, after graduating, worked as a banker in Nashville for a few years.

Ricketts was raised Baptist and briefly considered pursuing a graduate degree in theology. Instead, he decided to attend UT's College of Law. The day he graduated, he accepted a job in California. He spent several years working in the legal departments of computer companies and dot.coms.

When the dot.com bubble burst, he decided to try his hand at flipping houses. Although he had no formal training, he had a knack for interior design. That knack became a business

that grew into DJR Design Group, whose corporate and residential clients range from Hollywood stars to wealthy businesspeople. The group has done projects in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Nashville, Palm Beach, New York City, Toronto, Montreal, Bali, and Jakarta.

Frankel was born and raised in Shaker Heights, Ohio. His parents, Rina Barth Frankel and the late Samuel M. Frankel, were Holocaust survivors.

"As young people, my parents endured unspeakable horrors and incredible personal loss," he told an audience at a US Holocaust Museum event in Cleveland last year. "They met in Israel and married six weeks later. They put down roots and started their own family. From an early age, my sisters and my brother and I were inspired by their resilience and understood our obligation to honor the memory of those murdered during the Holocaust."

He earned a degree in liberal arts from NYU and moved to California in 1990.

Today, he is a realtor in Beverly Hills and specializes in luxury properties. He's sold more than \$2 billion of residential property during his 25-year career and consistently ranks in the top 1 percent of real estate agents in the world.

Ricketts and Frankel have been together for 25 years. They were married in March 2015 by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who performed their nuptials while he was the state's lieutenant governor.

In addition to supporting the new Israeli travel program in Judaic Studies, Ricketts and Frankel have been strong supporters of UT's Pride Center. For several years, they've matched all gifts given during annual fundraisers.

ISRAEL EXPERIENCE



Mehane Yehuda Market

Israel, a foodie's paradise

Like Ricketts and Frankel, Sinnreich has a passion for Israel and making sure people remember the horror of the Holocaust. Her grandparents were Holocaust survivors.

A Holocaust scholar, Sinnreich has been at UT for six years. She has a doctorate and master's degree from Brandeis University and a bachelor's degree from Smith College. She has served as a fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. She is co-editor of the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.

Sinnreich said she's been to Israel "many, many, many times," including twice in the last six years. In November 2019, she traveled to Israel with UT System President Randy Boyd, College of Arts and Sciences Dean Theresa

Lee, Vice Provost for International Affairs Gretchen Neisler, and other UT faculty members and deans. Ricketts accompanied the group and got to know more about UT and its desire to forge academic collaborations in Israel.

"I think Israel is an amazing country to visit," Sinnreich said. "It is in many ways so different from the United States and at the same time, it has surprising similarities. It has a very deep and rich history. There are so many layers of history that you can see, literally and figuratively.

"Seeing how it touches your life can change the way you see the world," she said. "For me, it's always been a very unique experience. It could have been my 20th time going to Israel, yet I will see things I have never seen before."

Read a note from the director at judaic.utk.edu.



Jerusalem, Israel



The Western Wall and Dome of the Rock



Yosef Rivlin Street, Jerusalem



Rachel Rui in Mahane Yehuda Market, Jerusalem



Mahane Yehuda Market, Jerusalem



Church of The Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem



Jennifer Ware

Jennifer Ware, a double major in Jewish studies and religious studies with a minor in history, is the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Scholarship recipient. She is in the final year of her degree program and plans to attend graduate school. Last year, Jennifer took a research seminar course on Zionism and the state of Israel during which she wrote on “Eretz Israel’s Silent Holocaust Survivors.” Jennifer presented her research, which examined tensions between Zionist pioneer conceptions of ideal bodies and minds and the health realities of Holocaust survivors who made Aliyah in the early post-war period at the 2022 EURECA showcase and received an Award of Excellence in her division.

Jennifer has also served as Professor Sinnreich’s research assistant, supporting research on medical conditions, treatments, and practices in the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War. She was also instrumental in helping organize the Lessons and Legacies Southeastern Regional Holocaust Conference, hosted at UT in fall 2021.

Carl Weinstein is the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies graduate assistant and a PhD student of 20th century Germany history. Their research explores Jewish survivors in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons Camp, focusing on how survivors produced, received, and transmitted information and constructed networks of communication that connected Jewish survivors with one another and to the world outside of the DP centers. Carl’s research interests include education systems, gender, and memory studies.

In summer 2022, Carl was awarded funding from the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies and the Department of History to study Yiddish through YIVO’s Uriel Weinreich Program in Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture, a six-week intensive language program in New York City. Yiddish-language documents are an important aspect of Carl’s research on the Holocaust and survivor communities in the postwar period. The YIVO Summer Program was a wonderful opportunity to focus on learning Yiddish, work with the archival collections housed at the Center for Jewish History, and communicate with other students researching aspects of Jewish history, religion, and culture.

Leah Faupel is the Ruben Robinson Scholarship in Judaic Studies recipient. She is from Roswell, Georgia, and is a junior double majoring in Jewish studies and psychology. She is currently serving her second term as the vice president of Shabbat and holidays for Hillel at UT, as well as teaching Sunday and Hebrew School at Temple Beth El in Knoxville. During the summer of 2022, she was a Goldman Fellow for the American Jewish Committee.

Sarah La Fetra is the Ruben Robinson Scholarship in Judaic Studies recipient. She is a junior in Jewish studies. Outside of school, she is a song leader and teacher at both Heska Amuna Synagogue and Temple Beth El. Sarah is very excited to continue this journey at UT!



Read more about Judaic Studies online at judaic.utk.edu.



Jack Love



Tina Shepardson



Phillip Stokes



Gregory Kaplan

Robert Blitt (UT College of Law) was named the Toms Foundation Distinguished Professor of Law at the College of Law. Highlights of Blitt’s writing during this period included a policy brief published by the Brookings Institution and Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs concerning the Kremlin’s use of religion as a soft power foreign policy lever, a law review article addressing the Trump administration’s use of misinformation and disinformation to subvert international human rights norms, and several op-eds exploring the foreign policy implications of amendments to Russia’s constitution. Blitt and family also celebrated two beautiful and much anticipated simchas: Noah Blitt’s bar mitzvah and the publication of Pinchas Blitt’s Holocaust memoir, *A Promise of Sweet Tea* (Azrleli Foundation, 2021).

Gregory Kaplan (Hispanic Studies, Department of Modern Foreign Languages & Literatures) published an article, “Converso Refugee Travel in the Treatises of Saul Levi Mortera” (in *eHumanista* 51, pp. 551-561), related to his ongoing project on Mortera, who was the rabbi and teacher of Baruch Spinoza until he oversaw the rabbinic panel that excommunicated Spinoza in 1656. After performing research during the summer of 2022 at the Ets Haim Library in Amsterdam, Kaplan received faculty development leave for fall 2022 to work on his book project, “A seventeenth-century Q&A about the Apocalypse between a Christian cleric from Rouen and a rabbi from Amsterdam.”

Jack Love (Department of Religious Studies) continues to teach Biblical Hebrew and is looking forward to offering a Jewish philosophy course this spring. The course will begin with Baruch Spinoza, and move forward to explore modern Jewish philosophy in several of its dimensions. Along with his wife Terri Lee who serves as the Dean of the UT College of Arts and Sciences, Love is looking forward to moving into some sort of retirement phase.

Daniel H. Magilow (German Studies, Department of Modern Foreign Languages & Literatures) co-taught the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s annual Curt C. and Else Silberman Faculty Seminar in June 2022, which was attended by more than 20 scholars from the United States and Canada who ranged from late-stage doctoral students to professors with decades of teaching experience. The 2022

Silberman Seminar explored the topic of “Teaching Holocaust Photographs” by looking at how and why these images were originally created, and how Holocaust photographs have been used in scholarship, teaching, and the public domain. Alongside this teaching work, Magilow helped co-organize the Lessons and Legacies Regional Holocaust Studies Conference with Helene Sinnreich in November 2021 and, also with Sinnreich, he is a co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*. He currently serves on the Academic Council of the Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University and on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Academic Committee. His new book, *The Absolute Realist: Collected Writings of Albert Renger-Patzsch, 1923-1967* (Getty Publications) will appear in November 2022.

Tina Shepardson (Department of Religious Studies) looks forward to her last year as head of the Department of Religious Studies. The publication of two co-edited books in the past year remains some of her biggest recent professional successes: one volume on Religious Rivalry in Late Antiquity, and another volume Syriac Christianity that is written for a wider audience. Last year included an invited presentation in Toronto at a conference on Jewish-Christian relations and Christian anti-Jewish Polemics in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and this year she has been invited to present her research at a conference in Ottawa. In June, she received a UT Alumni Association’s Outstanding Teacher Award, and in August she was named a Distinguished Professor in the Humanities in recognition of her ongoing research and scholarship. Summer 2022 also included a pandemic-delayed trip to Jerusalem to deliver the annual Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn Lecture on Early Christianity at Hebrew University, where she also led a graduate seminar.

Phillip W. Stokes (Arabic, Department of Modern Foreign Languages & Literatures) specializes in the history of the Semitic language family and focuses especially on the history of the Arabic language. Stokes’s recent research has focused on the language of non-Classical Arabic medieval literature, such as Judaeo-Arabic writings from the Cairo Genizah, as well as Christian texts from St. Catherine’s Monastery (Sinai). He has studied Biblical, Mishnaic, and Modern Hebrew, as well as various dialects of Aramaic, and regularly integrates relevant aspects of these languages into his work.

JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM


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ISRAEL EXPERIENCE

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