

The Jewish Theological Seminary

Proposal Narrative for FY23 Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

“Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship”

I. Summary

This Implementation project addresses program Goal 3 (Enhance the training and professional development of the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities.) and Objective 3.3 (Create and/or refine training programs to build library and archival workforce skills and expertise).

The proposed project will prepare 30+ specialists to help fill a documented workforce need for Judaica and Hebraica collections. The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (JTS), home to one of the world’s outstanding Judaica libraries, requests a grant of **\$249,581** to offer a Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship.

The certificate program is designed as a 12-month series of eight online modules repeated in three cycles (enrolling 10-15 participants per module), offered free to qualified and highly motivated applicants who are now completing MLS or Ph.D. degrees or working in Jewish archives and libraries and wish to advance their careers. JTS is offering this new credential in partnership with the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL), which represents the interests of over 75 libraries in the United States as well as over 400 individual members working in the U.S. and at dozens of institutions around the world.

Upon completion of the certificate, graduates will have acquired the skills necessary to engage with and address the curiosities of diverse communities throughout the United States. Participants will have the ability to deepen the understanding of users not only about the role that Jews have played in the development of U.S. and global societies and cultures, but also in the ways American and other cultures have shaped the Jewish narrative.

Certificate graduates will learn from expert librarians to develop and curate collections of Judaica and Hebraica (either as stand-alone collections or as part of broader collections). They will gain expertise that is specific to working with Judaica and Hebraica collections, as well as learning state-of-the-art reference, cataloging, and archival processing skills. Graduates will be especially poised to fill the growing number of job openings in the field of Judaica and Hebraica at public and private institutions throughout the United States at research, academic and special collections libraries and archives.

II. Project Justification

We are at a crucial moment when the pipeline for Judaica and Hebraica library professionals is in urgent need of replenishment. In 2021 AJL convened a task force and surveyed member libraries and archives (of which three-quarters are in the United States), finding that over 40% of key staff are planning retirement within the next 5-10 years, amounting to over 150 job openings.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Narrative, pg. 2

The field has not invested in focused training of the specialty workforce for Judaica and Hebraica collections in 30 years. This certificate will revive and update programs that were discontinued, such as one that ran in the 1970s at JTS and another in the 1990s hosted by Drexel University.

Judaica and Hebraica collections are already facing huge challenges filling open positions. Positions are open for longer periods, straining current staff, or are being filled with staff who struggle to “learn on the job” because they do not have the requisite qualifications. At present, openings for positions requiring expertise in Judaica and Hebraica librarianship include the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and Emory University in Atlanta, to name just a few. AJL member organizations that recently filled positions are located across the country, from Stanford and Ann Arbor to Boston.

If these needs are not urgently addressed, the number of librarians with training in collections of Judaica and Hebraica will dwindle further, jeopardizing the expert preservation and study of these collections. To fill this void of librarians we need well-trained individuals who grasp the complex narrative of the Jewish past. They must be prepared to generate nuanced understandings of Jewish history from surviving resources for both scholarly and wide public engagement. For this, librarians need to be trained in all aspects of accessing, reading, recording, and teaching the science of research and information, with specific emphasis on Jewish religion, history, and culture.

In response to the urgent need for training, and prior to receiving any funding from IMLS, JTS and AJL are offering a cost-based pilot series of modules beginning in Spring 2023, the first of which are already fully enrolled. The first module we are offering in March 2023 is Judaica and Hebraica Cataloging, responding to an acute need that was evidenced by new cataloging positions recently filled (e.g. Stanford, Yale, Brandeis) by staff who do not have adequate training or experience who were eager to enroll in the course. For similar reasons, the second pilot module in Collection Development is scheduled to begin in June 2023 and there is already a waitlist for admission (participants include relatively new staff in collection development positions at sites including Princeton, UCLA, and South Alabama). While we were pleased to find a way to introduce the program with minimal resources and volunteers, to meet the much greater demand for a professional program that is more widely accessible, we will require the paid administrative staff, instructor capacity, and marketing.

Judaica and Hebraica librarians have an important role in promoting and sustaining civil discourse across the United States. The knowledge gleaned from sources written about and by Jews is an integral part of United States history and culture. Important Judaica and Hebraica collections exist not only in Jewish institutions and seminaries, but also throughout the country in university libraries from Seattle to Gainesville, as well as Houston, Phoenix, Columbus, and New York.

III. Project Work Plan

The program has been developed and will be administered by a collaborative team made up of a project director at JTS, a JTS faculty member, and two AJL board members. The team will be supported by a part-time Project Coordinator who will facilitate communications with participants, instructors and internally within JTS and support all administrative tasks.

A. Curriculum design, course sequence and requirements:

The curriculum was designed with input from library and archive experts through the AJL and the provost, faculty, and librarians at JTS, all of whom have expertise in pedagogies and best practices related to accessing, reading, and recording knowledge about Jews. Before designing the curriculum, we spent over two years assessing what the field of Judaica and Hebraica librarianship requires and researching past programs.

The program will be offered online as a 12-month series of eight virtual modules, repeated three times during the grant period. Each module will consist of at least seven hours of class time. Virtual, synchronous courses will maximize accessibility of the program for participants regardless of their time zone within the United States.

The certificate's required three modules—Judaica and Hebraica Cataloging, Judaica and Hebraica Collection Development, and Judaica and Hebraica Reference—create a necessary foundation. These courses function as the cornerstone of the knowledge and practical skills needed to position oneself in any Judaica and Hebraica collection:

- Judaica and Hebraica Cataloging sessions: Introduction and overview; ALA/LC romanization; Descriptive cataloging; Hebraica access points and authority files; Subject cataloging and LCSH; LC Classification; and Current trends in Hebraica and Judaica cataloging.
- Judaica and Hebraica Collection Development sessions: What is a Judaica collection; Building a Judaica and Hebraica collection development policy (Collecting in different languages, non-English, non-Roman scripts. When to keep, when to refer, who to refer to. Diversity in Judaica and Hebraica collecting); Creating and managing a collection (Weeding and deaccessioning concerns for sacred texts); Vendors for Judaica and Hebraica collections.; Building print, archives, and special collections; Electronic resources and collections specific to Judaica and Hebraica collections; Consortia and other collaborative initiatives; and Fundraising, donor relations (Deeds of gift, accession policies, gift management, endowed and restricted funds).
- Judaica and Hebraica Reference sessions: Introduction to reference, what constitutes a Judaica collection? (Bibliographic Instruction/Reference Interview); Reference services to a diverse population; Judaica and Hebraica resources that intersect with other disciplines; Jewish Periodicals and e-resources; Jewish graphics, arts, ephemera; Jewish texts (Rabbinics); Israel Studies/ Israel/Palestine; Jewish Languages and Literature; Jewish History (Area studies, biography, genealogy, primary sources).

In addition to these three core requirements, students will take advantage of electives to pursue areas of particular interest to them for career advancement. The certificate will require each student to choose two of five elective courses:

- Judaica Manuscripts, Early Prints and Ephemera
- Introduction to Jewish Paleography and Codicology
- Judaica and Hebraica Archives
- Digital Scholarship and E-Resources for Judaica and Hebraica collections
- History, Practice and Politics of Judaica and Hebraica collections in America

Additionally, a required 100-hour internship in a recognized library or archive will provide students with practical experience in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship, allowing them to acquire customized job competencies. Students already working in libraries can fulfill the internship at their own institution, provided that they can identify a supervised project that can be completed within 100 hours, this will ensure that for those already working in a library can learn new skills while not disrupting their employment. For others not currently in a job that will serve this role, we will work with our AJL member partners to place participants in internships where they live. It is important that participants be compensated for the 100 hours that they will dedicate to the internships; some will incorporate the internship requirements into their existing paid jobs, some will be placed at sites that can budget for the internship, and, if neither is the case, we have funds from a donor to AJL that can be used to compensate interns who are not otherwise being paid.

The internship program will be overseen by the JTS Project Director who will establish an action plan with each participant and their site supervisors and meet with each at the midpoint and conclusion of the internship. Expectations of the internship include submission of a final project (possible examples include a collection development policy, archival finding aid, cataloging records of a specific collection, topical resource guides, digital exhibition).

B. Instruction

Modules will be team-taught or taught by single instructors, all offered within a flexible program schedule. Students will learn from experts in the field of Judaica and Hebraica librarianship who are specialists across different subjects. Instructors are all AJL members and represent a range of institutions and roles, thereby also modeling various career paths for participants.

For the Cataloging module, which will be team-taught, we have engaged catalogers from the Library of Congress, from major academic libraries in the United States, and from the National Library of Israel. Each lecturer will target their lectures to their specific expertise (e.g. LC subject headings for Judaica collections, classification that specifies the details of primary and secondary sources in Judaica collections, and Authority Control in Judaica and Hebraica with a specific focus on names that are transliterated and those not found in the LC Authority file, transliteration from Hebrew and Yiddish, etc.).

The Reference module instructor will be a Judaica reference librarian from the New York Public Library who regularly leads reference sessions relating to the Judaica and Hebraica collection targeted to a public audience. This course will include instruction in the use of specific databases for a vast array of primary sources in Judaica and Hebraica, the differences between the databases that are available, reference resources specific to Judaica and Hebraica etc.

For the Collection Development module, we have engaged a librarian from University of Florida who has vast experience building collections and who taught a webinar on Judaica and Hebraica collection development for AJL several years ago. There will be lectures on creating a Collection Development policy for a Judaica and Hebraica collection, including what fits into the collection; working with Hebrew and other Judaica languages, book vendors, acquiring e-resources in Judaica, (including selecting packages that are appropriate, and collaborating on purchases with other librarians), and dealing with gift collections (which are often tied into a relationship with the Judaica and Hebraica librarian and the local Jewish community).

C. Recruitment goals and strategy, admissions criteria:

Recruitment and enrollment will be ongoing through the first two cycles, ensuring the goal of having 10-15 U.S. attendees in each module. Participants can customize the sequence to their own schedule to complete the full requirements of the certificate within the time frame that modules are being offered. The goal is to have at least 30 U.S. participants complete all requirements and earn the certificate. With the IMLS grant, we will offer the courses without charge to qualified applicants. Applicants from Europe and other countries will also be admitted to the program; their participation fees are being covered by a separate grant made to AJL.

Recruitment will primarily consist of advertising (paid digital placements and social media outreach) and networking outreach through the AJL membership, professional associations such as ACRL, ATLA, SAA, academic and library listservs, and directly to MLS faculty throughout the United States. We will make a strong effort to recruit participants from groups or locations that are underrepresented in our field. For example, we will advertise through the national Jews of Color Initiative and other organizations with networks that are outside of the library field. Outreach and targeted follow up to MLS degree program directors, also including coordinating with library school students and the AJL Student Ambassador to recruit library school students, is also expected to broaden the diversity of our applicants.

We anticipate a promising yield, as we have already seen the quick response to our limited promotion for the pilot courses. The initiation of the pilot modules in 2023, mentioned above, has demonstrated the latent high demand for this training, providing us with confidence in meeting or exceeding our recruitment goals. An initial group of 10 U.S.-based participants have signed up for the pilot modules and those individuals hope to complete the full certificate under the IMLS grant if awarded. The first pilot module is filled, and we created a waitlist for participants for future modules.

We will screen and select qualified applicants who show readiness to pursue careers in Judaica and Hebraica librarianship or are already working in libraries. Based on our early experience with the current pilot, applicants fall into three categories: librarians who have been assigned the Judaica and Hebraica collection portfolio without specific training in the subject area; academics with strong Judaica skills and Hebrew language skills who serve in libraries but do not have specific librarianship training; and para-professionals in libraries who are seeking to advance in their career in libraries through additional training.

Criteria for acceptance includes well-defined prerequisites for Judaica and Hebraica librarian positions, including proficiency in reading Hebrew. Command of Hebrew grammar is critical for cataloging Hebrew language material, as bibliographic citations need to be standardized with Library of Congress romanization rules, which is covered in the certificate's required cataloging module. Although MLS degrees are not required, we expect applications from some who are in graduate school while others are working in libraries and seeking continuing education. We will review essay statements describing applicants' commitment to the profession, professional resumes and references.

D. Evaluation, mentoring:

Grades for the certificate will be Pass/Fail. Participants will be evaluated for their attendance, participation in group discussion, presentations, and written assessments. Each student will also receive a final evaluation.

All participants will be given individualized attention to assure that the greatest number possible complete the full sequence successfully and earn the certificate credential. Because the stakes are high and we need to ensure that our participants are working in the field, we will take their career goals seriously and provide guidance. Networking is a key aspect in placement in the field, and so the Association of Jewish Libraries will coordinate virtual low-key networking events with professionals in the field to support students' career development.

The JTS Project Director also will work closely with host institutions to customize the internships. Each internship will have a clearly devised action plan with goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes. Assessment of each student's internship will be measured by successful completion of the action plan; student logs; mid-session review with an internship supervisor, and an evaluation with the internship supervisor. In the context of the internship, students also will create a final project – whether a publishable paper, a grant proposal, a digital project, a collection development policy, a discreet collection of cataloged items, or another creative endeavor – to share with potential employers. Our hope is that these deliverables will not only be useful to others in the larger field of library and information sciences but will also chart a course for participants to prepare themselves for future jobs and contributions to librarianship down the road.

IV. Diversity Plan

The certificate program diversity plan has two parts: seeking diversity among the participants who partake in the program and, in the curriculum, addressing questions of how Judaica Librarians can advance understanding of how Jewish history

and cultures, in their great diversity (and with recognition that Jews have often not been considered “White”) add to American discussions of race, ethnicity, gender, and a breadth of topics relevant to communities today.

A. Diversity amongst participants:

Recruitment outreach will be targeted to the widest possible range of librarians and professionals. Our goal is to admit participants who will be able to serve as Judaica and Hebraica librarians throughout the United States particularly outside of major cities. Prerequisite for the certificate includes Hebrew language skills, narrowing the population of potential participants. Nevertheless, there are people with these skills who are also underrepresented in the field and can be encouraged to apply. We emphatically affirm that Judaica and Hebraica librarians with the requisite expertise need not be Jewish.

Outreach steps are included above in our recruitment strategy. They include, for example, outreach to groups such as the Jews of Color Initiative and outreach to deans overseeing MLS degree programs.

Judaica and Hebraica collections exist across the country – in Ohio and Texas, Alabama and Washington, Iowa and Nevada – and we need individuals who are well trained to support their growth, care, and access. We already are hearing interest in the program from a broad geographic scope of the United States, with an awareness that the collections far beyond the east and west coasts are the ones struggling most to find appropriate subject specialists. Christian theological libraries, for instance, often contain collections with Jewish material, but don’t have the specialists to deal with it. Hebrew language study is often a requirement in divinity school and these librarians could greatly benefit from the certification program.

Evidence from our recruitment of participants thus far points to concerted interest from those who are not currently in Jewish institutions. Students who have enrolled in our pilot modules are all working in institutions that are not specifically Jewish, and where the Judaica and Hebraica collections are a minority collection within the larger institutional library. There are local history archives holding Judaica and Hebraica materials in states such as Michigan, Missouri, and Nebraska.

We are striving to reduce any barriers to participation due to geographic location or expense. We have intentionally constructed an online program to obviate the costs for travel or lodging and to attract the broadest pool of students geographically. We are committed to helping students locate appropriate sites for internships in their local region and to work with those sites to develop a suitable internship. We will compensate students who lack access to a paid internship.

AJL maintains connections to library programs to share a scholarship award focused on aspiring Judaica and Hebraica librarians, and we will utilize these connections to attract a diverse applicant pool. A recently created “Student Ambassador” position within the Association of Jewish Libraries will work with students in the program – both to ensure a broad reach and to maintain connections and support even after the program is completed.

B. Training for Engagement of Diverse Communities and Issues:

Our intention is to offer training in how to integrate collections representing minority cultures for maximum use and knowledge production. Diversity, equity, and inclusion will be essential elements addressed in the curriculum. This is especially critical in the Reference module, to consider ways that library visitors who are seeking reference help could gain from exposure to Judaica and Hebraica materials that touch on the intersection, for example, of the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States and the experience of other ethnic and national groups. In the Collection Development module, the curriculum will include instruction on how to create a collection development policy that promotes the rich diversity of Jewish communities throughout the world and ensure that these are represented in the library's collection; it will emphasize collecting materials from little documented, lost, and remote Jewish communities from around the world.

The value of this program should be understood also in context of the documented rise in antisemitism in the United States. As influencers of culture and ideas, libraries have a role in educating for the values of freedom, diversity, and democracy. Trained librarians who can effectively draw from materials to make available balanced depictions of the Jewish experience can counter the false stereotypes that abound, both online and in person. While modern presumptions about Jews tend toward a vision of interiority, Jewish sources from all historical periods suggest that the diverse social, religious, cultural, and political contexts in which Jewish communal life thrived have contributed to its diversity.

Judaica and Hebraica librarians can quite naturally draw from the many global communities through which Jews have passed and with which they interacted dynamically and productively. This is reflected in the many different languages, including Ladino, Judeo-Italian, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian, in which Jewish documents were (and continue to be) written. The extraordinary ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of Jewish communities that resulted from Jewish interaction with a variety of cultures informs all aspects of our librarianship program.

Our objectives in creating a Judaic librarianship certificate also include training a specialist workforce that will contribute to the excellence of libraries that are not exclusively Judaic in focus, allowing future librarians to teach their patrons to conduct necessary interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinarity generates cross-cultural connections and furthers significant community discourse relevant to broader communities made up of Jews and non-Jews. For example, knowledge of documents from the Ethiopian Jewish community promises linkages to non-Jewish Ethiopian communities. In addition, documents expressing the tensions within the Jewish world, such as between Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Ashkenazic communities, introduce sensitivities to racial issues that also speak to the American experience today.

V. Project Results

30+ graduates of the Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship Certificate program will substantially increase the number of new and well-trained professionals entering this specialty field. They will be ready candidates for advanced positions that are or

will be available within the next five years. This program will also improve the versatility of library professionals already in the field, enabling them to enhance the usability of the collections in their institutions. Graduates will be prepared to serve U.S. communities in settings from university and seminary libraries to special research libraries and archives, as well as in community libraries.

In the same way that we recruited participants, we will use similar networks to guide and support graduates as they embark on careers in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship. AJL leadership is often asked about qualified candidates to fill open positions, and we will gladly guide prospective employers to the newly graduated Certificate holders. The AJL network will connect graduates with postings for open positions, and, together, AJL and JTS will guide participants through the application and interview process. Part of the value of an in-person internship as a critical part of the program is that it ensures regular interaction with at least one (and often many) library professional(s) in the field, and an AJL member professional will supervise the internship, again, welcoming the student into the broader AJL network.

At the conclusion of the three-year program, we will post the digital products produced as part of the program on the AJL website. These products, consisting of syllabi and presentation slides, will be openly available for use on the AJL website in accordance with the Creative Commons 4.0 copyright law.

The program leadership team will encourage certificate graduates to attend and present their final projects at the annual AJL conference, as well as to write articles to submit for publication in journals such as *Judaica Librarianship* (the open-access, peer-reviewed journal of AJL), where their ideas will be exposed to a broad audience of library professionals.

The program leadership team will also create a white paper documenting the lessons learned from this three-year project to serve as a model for other area studies specialties in librarianship who similarly face workforce needs and could benefit from this kind of training program. The white paper will be specifically shared with the Association of College and Research Libraries and with the Society for American Archivists. Both organizations will potentially benefit from the experiences which we will gather through this project.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

"Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship"

Schedule of Completion

Year 1 - August 2023- July 2024

		Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
1	Announce program												
2	Hire project coordinator												
3	Market, recruit, process applications and accept students												
4	Confirm and prepare instructors for first cycle of modules												
5	Module 1.1- Cataloging												
6	Module 2.1- Collection Development												
7	Module 3.1- Reference												
8	Module 4.1- Judaica Archives.												
9	Module 5.1- Judaica Manuscripts, Early Prints and Ephemera												
10	Module 6.1- Introduction to Jewish Paleography and Codicology												
11	Module 7.1- History, Practice and Politics of Judaica collections in America												
12	Module 8.1 Digital Scholarship and E-Resources for Judaica collections												
13	Ongoing evaluation and assessment (participants survey and interviews with lecturers)												
14	Confirm and prepare instructors for second cycle of modules												
15	Internship development and follow up												

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

"Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship"

Schedule of Completion

Year 2 - August 2024- July 2025

		Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
1	Market, recruit, process applications and accept students												
2	Module 1.2- Cataloging												
3	Module 2.2- Collection Development												
4	Module 3.2- Reference												
5	Module 4.2- Judaica Archives.												
6	Module 5.2-Judaica Manuscripts, Early Prints and Ephemera												
7	Module 6.2- Introduction to Jewish Paleography and Codicology												
8	Module 7.2- History, Practice and Politics of Judaica collections in America												
9	Module 8.2 Digital Scholarship and E-Resources for Judaica collections												
10	Ongoing evaluation and assessment (participants survey and interviews with lecturers)												
11	Confirm and prepare instructors for second cycle of modules												
12	Internship development and follow up												

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

"Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship"

Schedule of Completion

Year 3 - August 2025- July 2026

		Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
1	Recruit, process applications and accept students												
2	Module 1.3- Cataloging												
3	Module 2.3- Collection Development												
4	Module 3.3- Reference												
5	Module 4.3- Judaica Archives.												
6	Module 5.3- Judaica Manuscripts, Early Prints and Ephemera												
7	Module 6.3- Introduction to Jewish Paleography and Codicology												
8	Module 7.3- History, Practice and Politics of Judaica collections in America												
9	Module 8.3 Digital Scholarship and E-Resources for Judaica collections												
10	Ongoing evaluation and assessment (participants survey and interviews with lecturers)												
11	Internship development and follow up												
12	Final evaluation of project												
13	Produce and post digital products												
14	Preparation of white paper about using the certificate program as model for area studies												

The Jewish Theological Seminary
“Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship”

Digital Products Plan

Type: *What digital products will you create?*

The Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship will generate syllabi for each of the eight modules and the slide presentations for each of the modules. These materials could be used as models for future instruction in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship and in other area studies librarianship certificate programs.

Availability: *How will you make your digital products openly available (as appropriate)?*

We plan to make the digital products available at the conclusion of the three-year project. This is spelled out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with our partner organization, The Association of Jewish Libraries. We are working with several lecturers who work at public institutions who require that their intellectual property, in this case their syllabi and presentations, are in the public domain. We will comply with those requirements. Materials will be hosted on the Association of Jewish Libraries website with a link from the JTS webpage for the program. The materials will be openly available on the website. The Digital Products will be posted at the conclusion of the program as we anticipate tweaks to the modules over the three-year period.

Access: *What rights will you assert over your digital products, and what limitations, if any, will you place on their use?*

At the conclusion of the three-year period, we will provide free open access under a Creative Commons 4.01 license. All instructors will be advised through their contracts that their materials will be in the public domain.

Sustainability: *How will you address the sustainability of your digital products?*

Our partner organization, the Association of Jewish Libraries, will host and maintain the digital products on their cloud-based server. Their content is regularly updated and archived via the Internet Archive. By hosting these materials on the AJL website, it will ensure sustainability of the materials.

The Jewish Theological Seminary: “Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship”

Organizational Profile

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America was incorporated in New York State on February 20, 1902 by special act of the legislature. The absolute charter by the Board of Regents was established in its first instance on April 2, 1924 and was amended December 11, 1998 to consolidate The Jewish Theological Seminary of America with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. JTS was issued an IRS determination letter in January 1938, recognizing it as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3).

JTS is a preeminent institution of Jewish higher education, training rabbis, cantors, educators, lay leaders, and scholars with a vision of Judaism that is deeply grounded in the Jewish past and thoroughly engaged with contemporary society. Our approach is centered in critical engagement with the texts and rich experiences and ideas of the Jewish people. We enroll ~400 students in five schools: an undergraduate college for Jewish Studies, a rabbinical school, a cantorial school, a graduate school of education, and a graduate school for Jewish Studies. JTS is home to centers for ethics and justice, multifaith pastoral education, spiritual arts, and interreligious dialogue. JTS also provides high-caliber lifelong learning and professional development to alumni, adult learners, and Jewish communities throughout North America.

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) is one of the most important repositories of rare Judaica in the world. We house the world’s largest collection of Hebrew manuscripts in a single institution, the most complete collection of Hebrew incunables, the world’s second-largest collection of fragments from the Cairo Genizah, along with world-class collections of Ketubbot, Esther scrolls, broadsides, and much more. The importance of our collections has compelled us to partner with institutions worldwide since the 1960s to create surrogates in microfilm format and over the past two decades in digital format.

Founded in 1893, the nucleus of the Library was formed by contributions from outstanding private collectors and philanthropists, including Cyrus Adler, Mortimer L. Schiff, Felix Warburg, Louis Marshall, Mayer Sulzberger, Elkan Nathan Adler, and Hyman G. Enelow. Alexander Marx, who served as chief librarian for 50 years (1903–1953), was responsible in large part for collecting the material and making it available to readers. In the 1930s, recognizing that European Jewry was threatened and that America offered Jews and Judaism a place to grow, the Library made its goal to become the National Museum of the Jewish Book. It adopted a policy of collecting and preserving the totality of the Jewish cultural experience. The books that were acquired during this period remain in the Library’s collections. The Library’s objects became the foundation of New York’s Jewish Museum.

The Library suffered a disastrous fire on April 18, 1966. The fire occurred on the upper floors of the Library tower, where most of the books were housed. Seventy thousand volumes were destroyed, and every other book in the tower was damaged by fire, smoke, or water. Fortunately, rare books and manuscripts were kept in another area and were spared the damage. In July 1983 a new Library building was completed and opened to the public. This facility served the JTS community and the public until the summer of 2015.

On September 1, 2015, the Library opened in temporary quarters on JTS’s campus, anticipating the construction of a much improved Library for the 21st century. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the new Library was rebuilt and opened in 2021, with the Rare Book Room and exhibition gallery opening in 2022. The Library is an active hub for classes, researchers, tour groups, and many more. It has dedicated facilities for state-of-the-art digitization and conservation.