

Route to Roots: Old Kappa Beta's Link to the Jewish Studies Program

In the early 1970s, a Judaic Studies Department and program was founded on the SUNY at Albany campus. Starting quite modestly, this Department increased dramatically in size, scope, and quality during the ensuing decades. In 2001, the University announced the creation of a Center for Jewish Studies to promote academic excellence in the field of Jewish Studies that is expected to establish Albany as the focal point of Jewish Studies for the State University of New York System and for public higher education in the Northeast. With an estimated 4,000 Jewish students enrolled at Albany, nearly one-quarter of the student body, there has been heightened interest in Jewish Studies at the University. In 2004, UAlbany boasted a strong Judaic Studies Department, including four permanent full-time faculty, a comprehensive Judaica and Hebrew language studies curriculum, several part-time instructors, and more than 500 students enrolled in classes each semester.

From its start, Jewish Studies at Albany received strong support individually from Kappa Beta alumni, especially those who were Jewish, but in 1987, when the Old Kappa Beta members celebrated the fraternity's 50th reunion, they established the original Kappa Beta Memorial Fund which by 2001 had grown to \$50,000. Money from this Fund sponsors the biennial Kappa Beta Lecture given by a scholar in Jewish Studies or a prominent Jewish leader. In alternate years, it provides scholarship funds for a UAlbany graduate student in some area of Judaic Studies or community service. Further evidence of support and commitment is evidenced by the appointment of three brothers from the Old Kappa Beta as Founding Members of the Jewish Studies Advisory Board: Bernard Arbit '42, Nahum Lewis '38, and Haskell Rosenberg '40.

In recent years, four of the Old Kappa Beta members have been instrumental in establishing endowments that support the Jewish Studies program at the University.

The Fishman Fund Grant. Awarded to worthy Judaic Studies students in need of financial support, this fund was established by Irving Fishman '40. Irving is founder and president of Maritime Power Corporation of Jersey City, New Jersey, the world's largest supplier of marine and industrial equipment.

The Lillian L. Kensky and Dr. Harry C. Kensky Award. Established by Mrs. Kensky in memory of her husband, Harry C. Kensky '43, this scholarship goes in alternate years to an outstanding senior who plans to pursue graduate studies in Jewish service or scholarship.

The Stephen Arnold Rosenberg Fund. Established by Haskell Rosenberg '40 and his wife, Sunny, in memory of their son, this Endowment supports the activities of the Judaic Studies Department.

The Calvin and Patricia Zippin Scholarship Endowment. Calvin Zippin '47 and his wife, Patricia, founded this endowment in memory of Cal's parents, Samuel and Jennie Zippin, to help outstanding students in Judaic Studies pursue their education. Cal recently retired as a

cancer epidemiologist at the University of California School of Medicine at San Francisco.

Remembering their difficulties in starting Kappa Beta as an all Jewish fraternity in 1937, to some degree in reaction to the alienation they felt and the discrimination they suffered at Albany State Teachers College, the older brothers must feel a sense of pride and satisfaction to see that about one-quarter of the student body at UAlbany in 2004 is Jewish and that a strong Jewish Studies program is thriving.

May it continue.

Sources

Most of the information in this section came from the article by Christine Hanson McKnight in the January 2001 issue of UAlbany Magazine titled "The Boys of Kappa Beta" and from material sent to me by The Center for Jewish Studies at the University.