Jay M. Harris, a longtime member of the Harvard faculty who has also served in a variety of administrative roles at the university, has been named Harvard College’s new Dean of Undergraduate Education. His appointment, began on July 1.

Harris holds a B.A. from Columbia University, awarded in 1978, master’s degrees from Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary, awarded in 1980 and 1983, respectively, and a Ph.D. from Columbia, awarded in 1985. After various teaching appointments at Columbia, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Princeton University, and the University of Pennsylvania, he joined Harvard as an assistant professor of Jewish Studies in 1989. Harris was named the Harris K. Weston Associate Professor of the Humanities in 1991, and the Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Jewish Studies in 1994.

“Jay’s commitment to undergraduates is long-standing and well known. He also brings a wealth of experience and deep institutional knowledge to this new role, and our students will reap the benefits of his wisdom and administrative savvy. I’m pleased that we will add Jay’s considerable skills to an already strong team here in the College.”

Harris has been a member of the Harvard faculty since 1989. He is currently the Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Jewish Studies and chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He has also served, since 2003, as commarer of Cabot House, one of Harvard’s 12 upperclassman residences. For the past year Harris was senior advisor to former College Dean David Pilbeam; he was director of Harvard’s Center for Jewish Studies from 2001 to 2005. Harris was a Harvard College Professor, a five-year appointment recognizing outstanding undergraduate teaching and mentoring, from 2000 to 2005.

A scholar of Jewish culture, history, and literature, Harris has authored or edited nine books. He was editor of the Association for Jewish Studies Review from 2000 to 2004. Harris holds a B.A. from Columbia University, awarded in 1978, master’s degrees from Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary, awarded in 1980 and 1983, respectively, and a Ph.D. from Columbia, awarded in 1985. After various teaching appointments at Columbia, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Princeton University, and the University of Pennsylvania, he joined Harvard as an assistant professor of Jewish studies in 1989. Harris was named the Harris K. Weston Associate Professor of the Humanities in 1991, and the Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Jewish Studies in 1994.

(Adapted with permission, Harvard News Service)

ABOVE: Faculty and students of the Harvard Summer Program in Jerusalem, in the synagogue of Masada.

HARVARD SUMMER PROGRAM IN JERUSALEM BY PROF. SHAYE J.D. COHEN

Each summer the Harvard Office of International Programs and the Harvard Summer School jointly sponsor a variety of study abroad programs for undergraduates, and this year for the second time Jerusalem was one of the options. Twenty-three students participated, all of them Harvard College undergraduates. During the four and a half weeks of the program the students took two courses, did a lot of touring, and experienced Israel. The two courses, one ancient and one modern, were designed to take advantage of the setting. The ancient course, “From the Maccabees to the Mishnah,” was taught by Prof. Shaye J.D. Cohen, the modern course, “Zionism and the Emergence of Modern Israel,” by Prof. Jay Harris. As a group, the students toured the Old City of Jerusalem, Qumran, Masada, Sepphoris, Caesarea, Zikhron Yaakov, Safed, and elsewhere. Most students also toured extensively on their own; one large group of students spent a weekend en masse at Petra. The program was headquartered at the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University. For almost all of the students this was their first ever visit to Israel, and their excitement was delightful.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to BRENNA WELLS
Staff Assistant at the Center for Jewish Studies, on her recent wedding. Brenna Wells and John Paulson were married in Seattle on June 7, 2008. Brenna and John are living in Cambridge.

RACHEL ROCKENMACHER, the Center’s Administrator, graduated last spring with a Ph.D. in Sociology from Brandeis University. Her dissertation was a qualitative study of the ways in which young adult children of intermarriages [with one Jewish parent] arrive at their identities.
IRIT AHARONY
Senior Preceptor in Modern Hebrew

Castel Bloom. She has also published several papers about Israeli literature, and is particularly interested in the relationship between modern Israeli writing and the Bible, and the influence of historical events on modern Israeli life and literature.

A gifted and experienced teacher, this is Dr. Aharony’s thirteenth year teaching Hebrew at Harvard. She taught previously in all the levels of the educational system from first grade until college. Dr. Aharony started her career as a teacher in the Israel army, and also ran a program for gifted high school students in Israel, worked in the Ministry of Education in the department for gifted children, taught literature, trained high school teachers, and taught in an elementary school. “She is the best teacher I have ever had,” remarked one of her students, herself trained in pedagogy.

“Even though this is my 35th year in teaching,” says Dr. Aharony, “I love it and I am still enthusiastic about teaching. Most of all, I like the special moment in class when teacher and students bond in the revelation of the new—the minute of comprehension. I love to find new ways of teaching and to improve my teaching. I love to learn from my students and I always learn from them. I love to see them at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. … I love hearing from them in subsequent years, when they remember our classes. I love to bring them the feeling of “Israel” and “Israeliness” as I feel it. I love to teach Hebrew literature most of all because this is a true part of me. I love the students at Harvard. I don’t know if I am lucky because my students are so wonderful or if all the students at Harvard are wonderful.”

In her new role, she will head the program in modern Hebrew in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Irit Aharony and Anna Grinfeld, Preceptor in Modern Hebrew will continue to offer language instruction at four levels, as well as courses in modern Hebrew for academic reading, and courses on Hebrew literature and cultural history. This year’s advanced courses, focused around topical themes, include “All About Boys and Girls,” “Bible Novel” and “Israeli Humor and Satire.” Dr. Aharony says, “A student can start the program with no knowledge of the aleph bet [the Hebrew alphabet] and graduate with the ability to read Hebrew literature. All courses incorporate sources from Israeli literature and media, including “You Tube Israel,” which helps our students develop aural comprehension skills and … feel the pulse of Israeli culture.”
Ronald Androphy, Rabbi at the East Meadow Jewish Center in East Meadow, NY, spent the spring 2008 semester at the Center for Jewish Studies as our thirteenth Daniel Jeremy Silver Fellow. This fellowship was established in memory of Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver (’48), to enable “an active congregational rabbi who has demonstrated exceptional intellectual and academic interest, originality, and energy” to engage in full-time academic research at Harvard.

Rabbi Androphy is currently enrolled in a D.H.L. (Doctor of Hebrew Letters) program in Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Languages at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), in addition to his rabbinic duties, and has written scholarly articles. During his stay at Harvard, Rabbi Androphy worked on a study of paronomasia, particularly puns and plays on the trilateral roots of Hebrew words in the Tanakh. He gave a public presentation of some of his research at the Starr Seminars, entitled “Proleptic, Polysemous, and Parasonantic Paronomasial Paradigms in Former Prophets: Prolegomenon and Preliminary Progress.”

The 2007–2008 academic year marked the fourteenth annual Harry Starr Fellowship in Judaica at Harvard. A generous bequest from the estate of Harry Starr, ’21, former President of the Lucius Littauer Foundation of New York established this fund to support a group of scholars from around the world to gather at Harvard to engage in full-time research in Judaica. Our Starr Fellows come to Harvard from all over the world and a variety of universities and disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Here they have an opportunity to share their research with each other as well as with members of the Harvard community.

Each year, the Executive Committee of the Center for Jewish Studies normally designates a subject area within the field of Jewish studies around which the Starr Fellowship is organized. Last year’s theme, “The Family in Jewish History,” drew a vibrant and diverse group of Starr Fellows. Their weekly presentations throughout the spring semester spanned a wide range of topics (see list of Starr Seminars) and elicited lively discussions. Many of the Starr Fellows told us of the importance the undisturbed time the fellowship provided them to focus on academic research, surrounded by a cohort of scholars working on a similar topic, and Harvard’s exceptional resources.
The Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2008 Norman Podhoretz Prize in Jewish Studies and the 2008 Selma and Lewis Weinstein Prize in Jewish Studies.

MISHY HARMAN ‘08, a senior in Plimoth House and HILLARY BERKOWITZ ‘09, a junior in Kirkland House both won this year’s Selma and Lewis Weinstein Prize in Jewish Studies. Hillary Berkowitz’s entry was “The Problem of Assimilation in The Goldbergs: Creating a Jewish American Identity in the Postwar United States” and Mishy Harman’s entry was “Theodor Herzl: Aspiring Nobleman, Dreamer, Diplomat.” The Weinstein Prize, which is given to the Harvard University student who submits the best undergraduate essay in Jewish studies, was established by Lewis H. Weinstein, A.B. 1927, LL.B. 1930.

DANIELLE SASSOON ‘08, a senior in Dunster House, won this year’s Norman Podhoretz Prize in Jewish Studies for her essay, “From Consent to Descent: Ludwig Lewisohn’s Anti-Assimilationism as a Product of Historical Change.” This award “is given to the Harvard University student who submits the best essay, feature article, or short story on a Jewish theme. A tribute to Norman Podhoretz, editor of Commentary magazine from 1960 to 1995, the prize is sponsored by the Ernest H. Weinre Fund at the American Jewish Committee.”

CONGRATULATIONS CJS GRADUATES 2007-08

DOMINIC GREEN, A.M., Jewish Studies
YAQUB HILAL, A.M., Jewish Studies
EITAN KSENSKY, A.M. (continuing), Jewish Studies
NA’AMA PATEL, Ph.D., Semitic Philology
ANJA QUILITZSCH, A.M., Jewish Studies

2008 Harvard College Graduates with Secondary Field in NELC:

SAMANTHA PARKER, History of Science with Jewish Studies
JOSHUA SHARP, Government with Jewish Studies
JOSHUA WERTHEIMER, Government with Jewish Studies
Marcie Lenk is working hard to complete her doctoral dissertation while beginning a two-year appointment as a Visiting Professor in Religion at Boston University this fall. She is teaching courses on early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism and particularly enjoys working in a large religion department, with colleagues in many areas of the field. She is grateful for her success in finding an academic job, especially before finishing her Ph.D., and for the opportunity to have an office where she can plan her classes and work on her dissertation.

Lenk earned her B.A. at Stern College, Yeshiva University, and her M.A. in Bible at the Bernard Revel Graduate School at Yeshiva University. After that, she taught Bible and Midrash in Jewish and Christian seminaries in Israel for twelve years. While teaching in Christian contexts, Lenk explains, “I realized I only had the Jewish language and didn’t know the language of the Christians I was teaching.” She became interested in learning more about the interaction of Jewish and early Christian communities in ancient times, as well as in contemporary dialog between Jews and Christians. It was this interest that led to her Masters Degree in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and to her current doctoral study of early Christianity.

Her dissertation is a study of Apostolic Constitutions and “what they might tell us about the relationship between Jews and Christians in 4th Century Syria.” Lenk has found that, even as late as the 4th Century, there was serious contact between Jews and Christians that affected both the ways Christians prayed and the laws they kept. For example, according to the Apostolic Constitutions, Christians should observe both the Sabbath as well as the “Lord’s Day.” At Harvard, Marcie Lenk has been grateful for access to wonderful teachers who have been generous with their time, and to the vast library collections and online materials. With a job so close to Harvard, she is still close to the resources she needs to help her complete her dissertation.

Lenk is also taking great pleasure in her teaching, and particularly enjoys working with undergraduates. “Students come to courses in religion because they want to think about religion [in their own lives] and it’s very exciting to be a part of that process.”

Yehuda Kurtzer is currently Charles R. Bronfman Visiting Chair in Jewish Communal Innovation at Brandeis University. Endowed by Charles Bronfman, this two-year fellowship supports a promising scholar to write a book that is expected “to change the ways Jews see themselves.” The Brandeis News office described Kurtzer as “widely recognized as a rising star among Jewish scholars.” He was selected unanimously from over 200 entrants from around the world.

The title of Kurtzer’s research project is “The Sacred Task of Rebuilding Jewish Memory,” which seeks to provide new language for Jewish particularism using the model of collective memory. Professor Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis described Kurtzer’s project as “seek[ing] to understand how and why we remember what we do, and how Jewish memory can be strengthened and renewed.”

As a college student at Columbia University, Yehuda Kurtzer completed a double major in Religion and History. There, he studied early and medieval Christianity as well as modern Jewish history, particularly Hasidut and modern Hasidism, focusing his research on the life of Shlomo Carlebach. After completing his B.A., Kurtzer began an M.A. program at Brown University, studying early Christianity with Professor Shaye J.D. Cohen. After one year, Kurtzer left Brown, “unsatisfied with the field,” and took a year off to consider his options. He realized that he was more interested in the world of antiquity from a Jewish Studies perspective, and entered the Ph.D. program at Harvard in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations seven years ago. This November, he is scheduled to defend his dissertation. Kurtzer’s doctoral work studied the Jews in the late Roman Empire during the Rabbinic period, who lived outside the centers of rabbinic Judaism at Babylonia or Jerusalem, and were “lost in the narratives of Jewish history.”

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Profile:

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The Center for Jewish Studies wishes to welcome the following faculty members who have recently joined our Advisory Committee:

Andrew Teeter
Anna Grinfeld
Charles Berlin
Doris Sommer
Eric Nelson
Irith Aharony
Jeffrey Hamburger
Kay Shelemay
Kevin Madigan
Luis Giron Negron
Marshall Goldman
Noah Feldman
Stephen Greenblatt
Susan Suleiman
Yuri Vedenyapin