

Project Judaica Academic Advisory Committee Meeting

February 6, 1992
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
1:00 PM

Present: David Fishman, *presiding*. Samuel Kassow, Ivan Marcus, Alan Nadler, Samuel Norich, Mayer Rabinowitz, David Roskies, Robert Seltzer, Michael Stanislawski, Marek Web, Steven Zipperstein. Rebecca Jacobs, *recording*.

David Fishman opened the meeting, reporting on the progress of all aspects of Project Judaica--its academic program at the Russian State Humanities University, the archival search, and the establishment of a Judaica library on the University campus. He described our curriculum's coordination with the University's undergraduate requirements of courses in Russian and World History, and the Committee endorsed the principle of maintaining this parallel curriculum in the coming years.

The library is in place in its own room, and is available to the community at large as well as to the University. The library is staffed, books are circulating, and cataloguing is in progress. Michael Stanislawski mentioned that gaps in the library's holdings might be filled with microfilmed materials. Mayer Rabinowitz said that Project Judaica is welcome to duplicates in the Seminary Library's collection.

The Committee discussed faculty appointments for the coming academic year. David Fishman said that with our "pilot" year behind us, we must require semester-long commitments from our faculty rather than three-week stints. It is apparent that the longer stays are most effective. (This may discourage faculty with school-age children.) Additionally, it is essential that there be one Russian-speaker be in residence at any time.

Ivan Marcus urged that we seek out the top scholars in their fields. Mayer Rabinowitz suggested, on the other hand, that we might consider young scholars with recent PhDs. Aside from the question of cost, it became clear that a good case could be made for either option: Young scholars would probably be easier to recruit; they may well be equally effective pedagogues, and might welcome this "exotic" and impressive teaching opportunity, which could be offered in the context of a teaching fellowship at either JTS or YIVO. A senior scholar, however, brings intellectual and personal maturity and a seasoned command of the field. Seniority and a strong CV which includes several books command respect, which may be especially important, since part of our agenda is to educate the larger Russian university community that Jewish studies is a legitimate and respected academic discipline.

One particular faculty need is a good teacher for an "introductory Judaism" course. Michael Stanislawski suggested that retirees, either professors or rabbis, may be ideal. Steve Zipperstein urged that the Committee suggest possible faculty members to David Fishman; categories to be kept in mind include retirees and Israeli scholars.

Since the first year of instruction is proceeding so successfully, it was suggested that we offer the first year again this coming Fall. Marek Web argued that we need more time and experience before making such a significant investment of resources and energy. David Roskies proposed that an ideal time to start again would be in the program's fourth year, when a group of the Russian students will be in residence in New York. That way, our program would maintain a continuous presence on the Moscow campus.

Finally, Marek Web described the status of the archival project. A computer work station has been established, and numerous archives throughout the former Soviet Union are being contacted. Collections are being identified and listed; some of Jewish origin and some non-Jewish. At this point a standardized system of description must be taught. The students will be trained soon to begin work on the archival materials.