

# Project Judaica

## Academic Advisory Committee

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January 19, 1993  
3:00 PM  
Private Dining Room  
Jewish Theological Seminary

*Present: David Fishman, presiding. Zvi Gitelman, Samuel Kassow, Misha Krutikov, Ivan Marcus, David Roskies, Ismar Schorsch, Marek Web, Steven Zipperstein*

David Fishman opened the meeting by wishing a *bon voyage* to the three Academic Advisory Board members (David Roskies, Steve Zipperstein and Sam Kassow) who will be teaching in Moscow during the coming Spring 1993 semester.

### Academic Program

David Fishman, who had returned from Moscow the previous week, reported that the students are enthusiastic and serious; they are said to be better-educated than most Moscow Hebrew school teachers. Awakened to their Jewish identities, many are using their skills in the Jewish community: as teachers, or working for Jewish organizations and publications. Attrition (two emigrations and one dropout) has reduced their number to 22, plus a number of auditors.

The housing issues that plagued the first semester have been resolved; two-room suites with showers for Project Judaica faculty are under construction, and a kitchen for our exclusive use is being installed.

A new contingent of students will be admitted in the fall of 1993, but into the Literature and Culture "faculty" rather than the Historical Archival School. Our program dovetails perfectly with the new school's curriculum, which requires students to study Russian history and culture in conjunction with another culture. Incidentally, this school is also a more prestigious, high-profile division of the University than the Historical Archival School.

Zvi Gitelman asked about the mechanics of recruitment and what this change represents in terms of our commitment to train archivists. David Fishman replied that we have been offered a position on the Admissions Committee when it meets in the summer. Recruitment of students will take place through regular university channels as well as through the Va'ad. Marek Web confirmed that the Jewish collections in the former Soviet Union demand the attention of no more than 5-10 archivists.

David Roskies wondered whether the second contingent of students will require a year in New York. David Fishman responded that this inducement may be essential to the program's appeal to potential students.

## **Archival Survey**

Marek Web reported on the archival aspect of the program. The infrastructure for the archival search is in place, but work progresses slowly. He noted a number of obstacles, which must be overcome to make the database as complete as possible: The existing Soviet archivists' "old boy network" has its uses, but only up to a point. As a result of decentralization, each archive must be contacted separately; the lack of uniformity also means a variety of financial arrangements. Many Western libraries and other bodies are seeking access to these archives, yet there exists no consensus in the West as to process and methodology. He also mentioned the practice of making "discoveries" that are then "sold" and "re-sold" to various Western institutions.

Because materials of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin are being searched, our method of sending inquiries to each of the many archives is preferable, so that materials can be described by archivists who know their holdings well. The quality of the responses is uneven, but our questionnaire's use of 31 MARC fields helps overcome this problem, since it requires quite detailed description.

David Fishman added that most archives are eager to participate. They see our work as a kind of "advertising;" once their collections are listed in our comprehensive directories, they imagine that lucrative orders for materials will pour in from around the world.

## **Future Faculty**

One challenge for the academic aspect of the program is recruitment of faculty, especially for long-term stays. Misha Krutikov, who is working on his doctorate at the Seminary, represents a long-term solution. In the short term, good faculty must be found.

For historians of Russia and Eastern Europe, being in Moscow has an intrinsic appeal which is lacking for scholars in other fields. Use of Masorti/Bet Midrash personnel from Jerusalem was suggested, but David Fishman reported that the instructors who taught Basic Judaism during the Fall, 1992 semester were pre-occupied with other concerns, and (correctly) perceived by the students as being "not real academics;" thus, the courses they taught were not taken as seriously by many students. Names were suggested to fill the gap for a professor to teach about inter-war Poland, for Philosophy and Jewish Thought, and for the History of the Yishuv and of the State of Israel.