

Department of History Alumni Newsletter

SPRING 2016

FACULTY NEWS

ZEINAB ABUL-MAGD's first book, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*, won the Roger Owen Book Award in Middle Eastern History for 2016.

MATT BAHAR returned to Oberlin in 2015-16 after a year away on a long-term fellowship at the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif. He is completing his first book, *Pirating Empire: People of the Dawn in the Age of Sail*, a colonial American story of Indians, empires, and pirates in the waters of the northwest Atlantic.

MICHAEL H. FISHER's *Short History of the Mughal Empire* has been published by I.B. Tauris (London). See the book spotlight for more information on this publication. In addition, he is currently taping a 36-lecture *History of India* series (to be released in 2016 via DVD and Internet streaming) for *The Great Courses*. Following his retirement in 2016, he will write a book, *The Environmental History of India*, to be published in the series *New Approaches to Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

CLAYTON KOPPES continues to flog scholarship on the Cold War. He published "Beyond Containment: George F. Kennan and 'the various non-wasps'" on the H-diplo blog in March. This was part of a roundtable with other historians in response to the publication of the Kennan diaries. He has a forthcoming essay, "The Real Ambassadors? The Cleveland Orchestra Tours the Soviet Union, 1965," in Simo Mikkonen, ed., *Art, Music, and Diplomacy: East-West Cultural Exchanges During the Cold War* (Ashgate). Finally, he presented a paper, "The Shock of the New: Regulating the Emergent Cinema in the United States and Europe, 1890s to 1934," at the International Association for History and Media biannual meeting at Indiana University in Bloomington in June 2015. This paper is based

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Chair's Greeting

RENEE ROMANO, CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, AFRICANA STUDIES, AND COMPARATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES



We hope you enjoy the 2015-16 newsletter of the Oberlin history department! As the new chair, I am thrilled that we are continuing the tradition—new last year—of an annual newsletter, and I offer my thanks to Shelley Lee, associate professor of history and comparative American studies, for overseeing and coordinating the production of this second edition.

This is a year of transition for the history department. At the end of the year we will say goodbye to four beloved members of our faculty. Steve Volk, professor and specialist in Latin American history; Michael Fisher, the Danforth Professor of South Asian History; and Shulamit Magnus, professor of history and Jewish studies, will all retire in the 2015-16 academic year. Carol Lasser, professor of 19th century U.S. history, is teaching her last courses this spring and will retire next January after a career sabbatical in the fall. To say that these long-time members of our department will be missed is an understatement. All of them have shaped the department and the institution, and the rest of the department wishes them many wonderful and productive years as emerti members of our faculty.

But even as we say goodbye to Steve, Michael, Shulamit, and Carol, the department is thrilled that two new tenure-track faculty members have joined us this year. Danielle Terrazas Williams, our new Latin Americanist, received her PhD in history at Duke University, where she wrote a dissertation on free women of color in colonial Mexico. This year, she is teaching the Latin American history surveys, as well as new courses on the African Diaspora in Latin America and Women in Latin America. Tamika Nunley, the new historian of 19th century U.S. history, comes to us from the University of Virginia, where she received her PhD in history. Nunley researches the criminalization of black women in Civil War-era Washington, D.C. Her courses include History of Slavery, History of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, U.S. Women's History to 1865, and the U.S. South. The department is excited to welcome these two accomplished and energetic young scholars.

We are also excited about the wide range of programs and speakers we are sponsoring this year. In the fall, the department hosted famed historian of slavery Marcus Rediker, who both gave a talk and screened a documentary he made about the descendants of Africans on the Amistad. Other fall speakers included Geoff Eley (University of Michigan), Zeb Tortorici (New York University), and Alexander Wendt (OSU). This spring brings an exciting symposium on one of Oberlin's early African American alumna, Mary Church Terrell, organized by Carol Lasser to mark the gift of Terrell's papers to the Oberlin archives. We will also welcome back history alum Jason Sokol, now an associate professor of history at University of New Hampshire, a civil rights historian who will give a talk during Black History Month.

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WELCOME NEW TENURE TRACK FACULTY!

IN FALL 2015 the history department welcomed new faculty members Tamika Nunley, a 19th century U.S. specialist, and Danielle Terrazas Williams, a historian of colonial Mexico. Here they answer questions about their research and their first months at Oberlin.

Can you describe your current research project?

TN: My book manuscript, *'By Stealth: Black Women's Strategies for Survival, Resistance and Self-Making, 1830-1865*, examines how enslaved and free black women challenged race and gender-based legal proscriptions by legally and illegally reconstituting their lives and labors. The project explores how these women's actions help us understand the racial and gendered contexts in which the law circumscribed their everyday lives.

DW: I am at work on my book manuscript, tentatively titled *The Capital of Free Women: Race, Status and Economic Networks in Colonial Veracruz*, which reexamines and challenges traditional narratives of racial hierarchies, gendered mobility, and the navigation of etiquettes of interracial interactions during the early and mid-colonial period of Mexico. It focuses on free African-descended women and the accumulation and negotiation of social, cultural, and economic capital in one of Mexico's sugar zones



Tamika Nunley and Danielle Terrazas Williams

during the height of slavery.

What new courses are you offering?

TN: HIST 279: Civil War and Reconstruction and HIST 488: U.S. South

DW: In Spring 2016, I will be teaching HIST 110, a survey on Contemporary Latin America, and HIST 487, a historiographical course on Women of Latin America.

What drew you to Oberlin, and how has it been so far?

TN: I wanted to work in an intellectual environment that fostered excellence in both teaching and scholarship. The faculty here are inspiring examples of professors who have mastered teaching and produced relevant research. The

overall academic climate that centers around innovation allows me to find inspiration anywhere, from special collections to the Allen Memorial Art museum. Both the faculty and students are afforded an array of resources to succeed, and I wanted to chart my career at a place where I felt both personally and professionally supported. I am enjoying my first semester. The students are engaging, and working with them has been a truly gratifying experience. I learn so much from student engagement, and I feel as though I'm becoming a stronger teacher. I enjoy attending Oberlin events such as Convocation, theater and music performances, and lectures because it gives me an opportunity to see the innovative and creative work of students, members of the community, and faculty.

DW: Oberlin has really welcomed me with open arms. Right away, I was impressed by how helpful (and patient!) our staff is. And faculty inside and outside of the department are encouraging and collegial. What drew me in as a job candidate were the diverse interests of my colleagues and the drive of the students. Oberlin students are bold and have an intellectual curiosity that urges us to challenge them with new courses and cutting-edge approaches to history. I feel inspired by the Oberlin community to grow as a scholar, which is a wonderful gift to a new member of the faculty.

FACULTY NEWS, CONT.

on a chapter of the book he is completing on American movie censorship from the 1890s to 1968.

RENEE ROMANO began a four-year term as chair of the history department in the fall. In the past year, she gave invited lectures on her 2014 book, *Racial Reckoning: Prosecuting America's Civil Rights Murders*, at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, and the Hudson Public Library. She delivered the plenary address at the conference of the Southern Association of Women Historians and gave the 14th Annual American Studies Lecture at the University of Leicester in Leicester, UK. She is currently working to adapt that lecture on narratives of white innocence into an article. She is also developing a new class, *Repairing the Past: Readings on Historical Justice*, to be offered for the first time next year.

SHELLEY LEE gave several talks during fall semester. She gave a joint keynote address (with sociology faculty member Rick Baldoz) for Filipino American History Month at the University of San Francisco, spoke about immigrant labor for a symposium commemorating the Immigration Act of 1965 at Indiana University, and presented new research at the Western History Association meeting in Portland, Ore. She continues work on her monograph about Koreans in LA from 1965, for which she collected mate-

rial during summer 2015 as a short-term research fellow at the Huntington library in San Marino, Calif., and is looking forward to offering a new course in fall 2016, a research seminar titled *Afro-Asian America*.

LEONARD V. SMITH returned to the classroom after a year's leave working on his monograph *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference: The 'Laboratory over a Vast Cemetery'*, to be published by Oxford University Press. His article-length introduction was published in Nicolas Beaupré, Heather Jones, and Anne Rasmussen, eds., *Dans la Guerre, 1914-1918: Acceptor, Endurer, Refuser* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015). In June 2016, his article "France, the Great War, and 'Return of Experience'" will be published as part of the World War I Centennial Series in the *Journal of Modern History*.

CHAIR'S LETTER, CONT.

Last year, we graduated 31 history majors. There are currently 77 declared history majors, including six seniors who are working on honors theses under the supervision of honors coordinator Shelley Lee.

Please enjoy these updates and thank you for your continued support! We want to hear from you! Please send us updates about what you've done with your Oberlin history major to history@oberlin.edu.

FOUR HISTORY FACULTY MEMBERS RETIRE

2015-16 WILL SURELY MARK A TURNING POINT in the history department, as four faculty members have announced their retirement: Michael Fisher, Carol Lasser, Shulamit Magnus, and Steve Volk. Although they end their distinguished teaching careers, all will remain active in various scholarly, professional, and teaching endeavors. We honor them for their distinguished contributions to teaching and research in the fields of South Asian, Jewish, early American, and Latin American history and are deeply grateful for their tireless work on behalf of colleagues, students, and the wider community over the years. They each leave an undeniable legacy and will be missed very much. Here, Fisher, Lasser, Magnus, and Volk reflect—in their own words—on their careers at Oberlin.

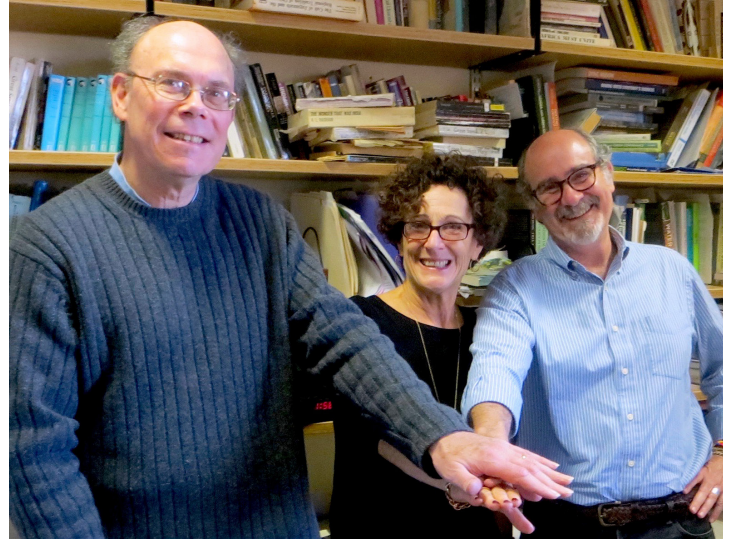
Carol Lasser on her arrival at Oberlin: I came to Oberlin in 1980, before finishing my dissertation. I taught as a graduate student at Harvard, in the Committee on Degrees in Social Studies and in the history department. I was among the first people to be hired at Oberlin to fill a job description that included specifically teaching about women. When I first came to Oberlin, I think it had the same number of tenured full professors who were women that there were at Harvard in its College of Arts and Sciences, where I did my graduate work; and I believe that number was two. I was fortunate that one of those professors, Marcia Colish, was in the history department here. Professor Colish was a trailblazer; she made it possible for those of us who came after her to move ahead.

On her plans after retiring from teaching: I will spend part of the summer polishing the digital projects created by students in my second-wave feminism course for posting on the website Digitizing American Feminisms (americanfeminisms.org). In addition, I will be installed as president of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic in July 2016. And I will finish the book on which Gary Kornblith and I have been working too long. Now titled *Elusive Utopia: The Strange Career of the Color Line in an Abolitionist Community*, the book explores how the town of Oberlin retreated from its early commitment to racial egalitarianism, even as the town's residents of color continued to push for full equality in an increasingly hostile environment over the course of the "long nineteenth century." I'll be busy.

On her involvement with women's studies and GSFS: I was active in women's studies from the start, and so there's a nice symmetry to directing the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies Institute during my last year on the Oberlin faculty. Oberlin is a wonderful place to teach. I have enjoyed the many Oberlin students who have come through my classes, [and] I remain inspired and motivated by the smart, feisty, committed, kind, curious people whom I have met in my office and my classrooms. I have learned so much from these students, and I am deeply grateful.

Steve Volk on his journey to and early days at Oberlin: This is my 30th year (came in 1986). Prior to that, BA at Brandeis University; Fulbright to Bolivia; grad school at Columbia. Did dissertation research in Chile 1972-73, left a few months after the coup and began to work at the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), where I was research director and executive director until 1984. Taught in New York area (CCNY, New School, Yale, and NYU) in 1983, 1984, 1985. When I came [to Oberlin], we didn't have computers. I was given an old typewriter, which didn't have the letter "e" on it. Barry McGill, the chair at the time, said it was the best he could do and I shouldn't complain.

On pedagogical innovation: Besides my general teaching in Latin America, and helping Latin American studies grow into a thriving major, one thing I've very proud of is working to bring the museum (AMAM)



People whom we'll dearly miss: Michael Fisher, Carol Lasser, and Steve Volk.

into a standard pedagogical approach. With Liliana Milkova and her predecessors, I developed a pedagogy ("Crossing the Streets") that now underlies a lot of the museum visits by many classes. Working up a new field of museum studies has been very important. I've also done a lot around pedagogy and in terms of faculty governance and ways to bring staff and faculty together.

On his proudest accomplishment at Oberlin: The creation of CTIE (Center for Teaching Innovation and Excellence), which I think has made a difference to many people and which, I hope, will live long and prosper!

On post-retirement plans: My immediate plan is to hike the "Camino de Santiago" in Spain, from León to Santiago de Compostela! [After that] Dinah and I will stay in Oberlin. I've got a lot of writing I want to do and will likely still have a hand in CTIE.

Michael Fisher on teaching at Oberlin: Over the past 25 years, Oberlin students and faculty have continually provided me with both a congenial community and an intellectual home. According to my records, over these years I have worked with over 1,700 Oberlin students, in formal classes, private readings, and honors projects.

His plans after retirement: [From] spring 2016 onward, I will be engaged in full-time research, setting aside formal teaching and committee work. Much of what I learned from students and faculty has greatly improved the quality of my scholarship.

Reflections on scholarship: One scholarly project nears completion: a set of 36 lectures on "The History of India," issued by the Teaching Company as one of its Great Courses. These lectures will consider the history of South Asia from the beginnings of human history to the present, for what is today India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. These lectures will be available, individually and collectively, streamed or on DVD, starting in the summer of 2016, via <http://www.thegreatcourses.com/>. A longer-term scholarly project is researching and writing an Environmental History of India, to be published by Cambridge University Press as part of its "New Approaches to Asian History" series. This is due to be published in 2017. Beyond these two ongoing projects, I look forward to continuing to research and write. My scholarship will always reflect my Oberlin experience.

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FACULTY RETIREMENT, CONT.



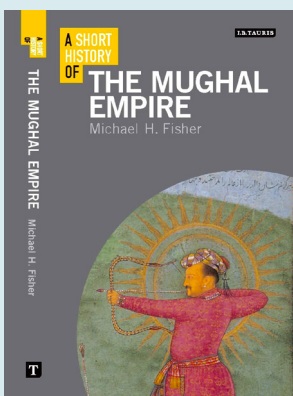
Shulamit Magnus retired at the end of the 2014-15 academic year. On life after Oberlin: I am teaching Jewish history and philosophy and western feminist theory in Hebrew University (Jerusalem) and in Tel Aviv University and enjoying it very much. I am also continuing scholarly projects and may initiate some new ones, so what I am doing now is not so different, though the venue (not to mention the weather), is! Good new challenges.

On coming to Oberlin: Previously, I taught at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Stanford University. I was at Oberlin for 16 years.

On building Jewish studies and serving in the history department: I was brought in to build the Jewish Studies Program following a program review in 1997 that called for hiring a Jewish historian who could teach from antiquity to the present and had fluency in Hebrew and classic Jewish texts. The job seemed right off my CV; I had had graduate students who had done their BAs at Oberlin and of course, had heard of the college. I was thrilled to take up the post and the challenge and did my best to fulfill it, and to be a member of a history department with such dedicated, hard-working, prolific, smart historians.

On working with students: The superb students and the quality of interactions with them has been an immense gift. I treasure that and my ongoing connections with many of them. I learned tremendously from both colleagues and students and am most grateful for that.

BOOK SPOTLIGHT



Michael H. Fisher's *Short History of the Mughal Empire* has been published by I.B. Tauris (London). The Mughal Empire dominated India politically, culturally, socially, economically, and environmentally, from its foundation by the Central Asian adventurer Babur in 1526 to the final trial for treason and exile of the last emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar at the hands of his British captors in 1858.

Throughout the empire's three centuries of rise, preeminence and decline, it remained a dynamic and complex entity

within and against which diverse peoples and interests conflicted and many voices contended. This book reveals the struggles and interactions

of the key individuals, groups and cultures that comprised the Mughal Empire and also contended within and without it. The larger significance and meanings of the Mughal Empire continue to be controversial among scholars and politicians.

In the past decade, leading scholars in the UK, U.S., India, and Pakistan have advanced an array of fresh and exciting new insights, theories, and interpretations about the Mughals. Most notably, emerging themes of gender and environmental history have provided new perspectives on much debated events and contested interpretations of them. Analysis of the empire's art and architecture, as well as its literary achievements, enrich the understanding of the social and cultural lives of its men and women, both high and low. Using original sources and 30 illustrations and maps, this book engages both the student and the general reader with a clear, lively and informed narrative of the core political events, the lives of its leaders, subjects and rivals, and the historiography of the Mughal Empire.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

WARREN HARDING '13

This year's alumni spotlight brings us an update from Warren Harding, who graduated with a double major in history and Africana studies in 2013 and is now pursuing doctoral studies in Africana studies at Brown University.

Upon my graduation in 2013, I worked at Urban Prep Academies in Chicago for one



year. There, I taught and mentored freshman students as they transitioned from grammar school to a high school focused on college preparation. Following

this experience, I moved back to New York City, where I worked with the New York City Bar Association in developing its inaugural CLICKS (CLEO Inspired College Cohorts of Students) program. This mentoring and pre-professional initiative targeted low-income high school students of color in the city who were interested in the legal profession through sports, entertainment, and health fields.

During this time, I also applied to graduate school and I am now a PhD student at Brown in the Department of Africana Studies. [My] experience in history continually gave me an equally important lens. From my understanding, history, as a discipline, interrogates the archives. In many ways, I can't help but view literature as my archive. It's a moving archive that goes beyond the written and incorporates

orality (oral histories). To a certain extent, as I'm in graduate school, I am methodologically exploring the possibilities that exist in exploring what literature as an archive tells us about the world and beyond. I've consistently used my history education since I've left Oberlin beyond my pursuit of graduate studies. I find myself going to museums, to performances, to public centers (taking students, friends, and family alike) in Chicago, in New York, or as I travel between national borders. And in these moments, I am sensitive to what these places tell us about the histories of im/migration, race, gender, class, and sexuality. But more importantly, I am curious as to how I and who I'm with experience, refute, and re/imagine our own place in that history; thus enacting (new) histories, (new) archives.

MEET OUR STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES!

This year we are fortunate to have three student representatives who participate in departmental affairs and serve as conduits between faculty and majors/minors. They are Meghan Mette (senior history major and German minor, honors student), Natalia Shevin (third-year history major and dance minor), and David Kaplovitz (third-year history major, rhetoric and composition minor). Below they offer some thoughts on history at Oberlin.

Q. What drew you to history?

NS: I was drawn to the kinds of questions my professors were asking. I'm interested in American history primarily, and the ways each professor would complicate a social movement, war, historical figure, or whatever it may be, continues to fascinate me. It pushes me to look at history not as something fixed and unchanging, but as a set of diverse and constantly evolving interpretations.

MM: Besides my love of learning about the past, history is a broad major that teaches you about the world and gives a good general background for different future paths. It also teaches you how to read, write, and research well, which is invaluable to most careers.

DK: I have always loved history, since I first learned about the American Revolutionary War in fifth grade. History is a constant narrative, the story of all of us; how we lived, died, loved, interacted with each other, and made our mark on the world. For these reasons, and the fact that Oberlin places such a high regard for the study of history, I was drawn to the history department. I do not have a declared concentration currently, but I guess if I had to state my concentration I would say Medieval-Early Modern European, and American (all periods) in addition.

Q. What, in your view, are the strengths of the department?

NS: Having both incredible survey and focused courses within my concentration. I've taken U.S. Foreign Policy, whose content spanned from 1800 to the present, and I'm currently taking Race, Gender, and Uncle Tom's Cabin (cross-referenced English course), in which we spend a semester on a novel and its historical context, response, and reinterpretation.

MM: The wide range of historical areas as well as the diversity in approaches to teaching. The professors are very accessible and engage with the students passionately.

DK: The caliber of the staff in the Oberlin history department is one of its greatest assets. Professors do not just teach history because they want to get paid. They actually enjoy their subject and concentration and work diligently to try to make students and others love it in addition. This infectious love for their subject has rubbed off on me over time. Also, the caliber of students that compose both the history department and wider historical community in Oberlin is second to none. Like the professors, history students are not just interested in studying history to get graduation credit or to fulfill some other requirement. They take history classes because they love the study of the past, in all of its intricacies and complexities.

Q. What has been the most rewarding or valuable aspect of being a history major?

NS: One of the most meaningful parts of being a history major so far was researching this past summer in the archives. I never thought I would fall in love with fraying old journals and deciphering the script of Oberlin alumni of the 1800s. I enjoyed the process of figuring out who



Natalia Shevin, Meghan Mette, David Kaplovitz

these people were whose journals and letters I was reading and re-reading, and situating them in the context of Oberlin history and relevant social movements.

MM: The department requires that all majors take at least one 300-level history class. This entails writing an extensive research paper. I took two 300-level classes, which not only greatly improved my research skills in general, but very much prepared me to write an honors thesis.

DK: My ability to interact with some of the most intelligent academics I have ever met. The professors of the Oberlin history department really care about connecting with their students, helping them to explore their historical passions, in whatever time period or region they may be in. In addition, I have also found the rigor of the history department and major very meaningful. The fact that I am challenged, academically in my history classes, has allowed me now only to learn more, and develop my critical thinking and writing skills, but also shown that I can interact with the other students and professionals around me, in a sophisticated and educated manner about history.

Q. What advice would you give to younger students or those considering a history major or minor?

NS: For students considering being a major, I'd take a 200-level class first, because you'll be able to really delve into a topic. If it is something that's interesting to you, I'd go back and take the 100-level survey in that area.

MM: Go beyond the regional diversity requirements—take many classes in different historical areas, because it provides a better balance of global understanding. If I could do the major over again, I would be more diverse in my course options.

DK: I would tell them to follow their passions and learn what they want to learn. Oberlin has such an incredible history department and other resources for prospective historians (the college archives/special collections, the Allen Memorial Art Museum, etc.) that it really is impossible for any student interested in history to have no resources to help them in their studies. History is such a diverse and dynamic field that it can appeal to anyone, and can cater to any interest level.

HISTORY DEPARTMENT FACULTY AND STAFF

Renee Romano, *Professor and Chair (History, Comparative American Studies, Africana Studies)*
Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Associate Professor*
Matthew R. Bahar, *Assistant Professor*
Michael H. Fisher, *Robert S. Danforth Professor*
David Kelley, *Associate Professor (History and East Asian Studies)*
Jiyul Kim, *Visiting Assistant Professor*
Clayton Koppes, *Professor*
Carol Lasser, *Professor and Director, Gender, Sexuality, Feminist Studies*
Shelley Lee, *Associate Professor (History and Comparative American Studies)*
Pablo Mitchell, *Professor (History and Comparative American Studies; on assignment in Dean's office)*
Tamika Nunley, *Assistant Professor*
Emer O'Dwyer, *Associate Professor (History and East Asian Studies; on leave 2015-16)*
Willis Okech Oyugi, *Visiting Assistant Professor*
Austin Parks, *Visiting Assistant Professor (History and East Asian Studies)*
Gil Ribak, *Visiting Assistant Professor (History and Jewish Studies)*
Annemarie Sammartino, *Associate Professor*
Leonard V. Smith, *Frederick B. Artz Professor*
Christopher Stolarski, *Visiting Assistant Professor*
Danielle Terrazas Williams, *Assistant Professor*
Steve Volk, *Professor and Director, Center for Teaching Innovation, and Excellence*
Ellen Wurtzel, *Assistant Professor*

EMERITI

Heather Hogan
Gary Kornblith
Shulamit Magnus

Administrative Assistant: *Kathy King*

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES (2015-16)

Meghan Mette
David Kaplovitz
Natalia Shevin

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