

# WINTER 2023/2024 NEWSLETTER



Center for Judaic, Holocaust,  
and Peace Studies



@appstatejhp



the center for  
JUDAIC, HOLOCAUST,  
AND PEACE STUDIES



## HAPPENINGS AT THE CENTER

### THE CENTER HAS MOVED!

Well it's done. We are officially moved, after a few months with our furniture in the hall and boxes stacked to the ceiling. But finally, that too is changing. The walls are painted, the floor has new carpet, and we have beautiful offices and a conference room. The furniture has been brought in and we have unpacked many of our treasures. The location could hardly be better, almost every App State student takes at least one class in Anne Belk Hall, so we have the ability to really make our presence known. Join us for an open house over the summer, when more of our supporters are in town. But you don't have to wait for the open house, drop by and say hi at **Anne Belk Hall, Suite 250!**

- 2-3. Retracing Legacies - Trip to Krakow & Berlin
4. Scholarships / Director Search / Faculty Advisory Board
5. Rennie Brantz / Donations

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## 2023 - 2024 EVENTS

- 1/22-2/4 Art Installation: The Holy Land by Ann Kaplan
- 1/25-1/30 Holocaust Remembrance Week
  - 1/25/2024 Panel "Marc Chagall and Shtetl Life"
  - 1/27/2024 Holocaust Remembrance Memorial Service
  - 1/29/24 - 2/2/24 Historical Exhibit: "The Tuchyn Story: Roots of Resistance Exhibit"
  - 1/30/24 Anne Parsons on "The Tuchyn Story"
- 2/21/24 Panel on Israel and Palestine: The Context
- 4/24/24 Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day Event
- 5/2/24 Center Award Ceremony
- May 2024 Student Field Trip
- 7/11-17/24 Summer Symposium
- 7/14/24 Center Open House

# RETRACING THE LEGACIES OF JEWISH LIFE



*The group with the tour guide to the right. This is the restored interior of the Temple in Swietokrzyski Shtetl in Chmielnik. Behind us is what is called a bimah, which is the platform in synagogues from which the Torah and the Prophets are read. Our guide said the purpose of a bimah was to “have nothing before your eye’s save the word of God.” This is the only glass bimah in the world and it is intended to replicate the original stone bimah destroyed by the Nazis.*

## MAY FIELD TRIP TO KRAKOW & BERLIN 5/10/2023 - 5/18/2023

In early May, six AppState students (Ali Plumides Manning, Baleigh Whitesell, Ben Sullivan, Chase Scott, Drew Magnuson, Ellis Austin, ) and Interim Director Amy Hudnall flew out of the Charlotte airport on their way to Krakow, Poland. Chosen out of two history classes on the Holocaust, taught spring 2023, these six students manifested a great desire to expand their understanding of the Holocaust and apply what they learned in real life applications like in teaching. They received full scholarships for the trip from the Brenner Foundation, the Greensboro Jewish Federation, and the Rosenblatt family. Our group ranged in age from 21 to 30, some of them had been in the workforce and come back to school, others were just starting their careers.

Only two had ever been out of the country. This turned out to be an adventure for all. Ellis Austin wrote early in the trip:

“During my time in Poland, my thoughts coincided with deep divisions over legislative actions that threatened the foundations of freedom and education in my home country. The polarization, the spread of misinformation, and the distortion of historical truths for political gain trouble me profoundly.”

The goal of the trip was to expand their deep understanding of the Holocaust, to help them visualize Jewish life prior to the Holocaust, to see what lessons from the Holocaust could be applied to the present day, and to experience how the Holocaust had altered the cultural landscape in Poland and Germany. In Krakow we spent time experiencing the old city and the culture on our first day. The next day we were picked up by a professor who took us outside of the city to former Jewish villages or shtetls. It gave us a sense of present-day Poland, how they lived with the loss of the Jewish population, and what life for Jews might have been like. It was an important starting point. Important conversations arose during our rides to the next shtetls. Ben Sullivan wrote in his cryptic notes of the ride, “indifference vs. awareness,” and understanding “economic interconnection is vital when there is social division.” Notes from students’ journals showed a remarkable level of understanding of key elements leading to the Holocaust. The next day we explored the Jewish part of Krakow, called Kazimierz.

Here one can see a portion of the ghetto wall in Krakow made from Jewish grave markers. One student, Chase Scott, took a quick break from the museums and walked the ghetto wall. She was struck by how small the space was for the number of people forced to live inside its walls, 68,842 people over three phases. She walked the entire circumference in about 30 minutes. Chase wrote:

**“It was small, smaller than you think, and quiet. It was as if the souls of the past did not speak. . . The streets and the buildings spoke for them. They held so much sadness, so much loss.”**

The next day we spent almost 12 grueling hours at Auschwitz—perhaps a bad word choice since grueling was what was experienced by the prisoners not us. As we thought about our feet hurting, our heads hurting or our physical responses to the space, we all had those moments of guilt for feeling the way we felt. Baleigh Whitesell wrote: “our feet and knees started to hurt, and we complained. . . . We had no right.” In Birkenau, she wrote, there were

**“Birds chirping in the trees. And I was angry at the birds for chirping. Nature pays no mind to the past, so we must.”**

After a six-hour tour, lunch and a quick break, we went to Auschwitz’ new educational center and did an amazing workshop that helped to draw together all our feelings and allow us to leave only somewhat shattered. Auschwitz inevitably marks you for the rest of your life. At the end of the day, Ben quoted a guide as saying,

**“Hope is the last to die.”**

The next day we took a train through Upper and Lower Silesia, areas that had originally held huge Jewish populations. Six hours later we arrived in Berlin, a place to experience some of the world’s greatest monuments and museums about the Holocaust. It is also a place to think about the human system that made the Nazi regime from Hitler’s



bunker where he committed suicide, to the Reichstag. Perhaps the museum they appreciated the most (in terms of how it was laid out) was the Topography of Terror a museum that explains the function of the Nazi regime. Drew Magnuson wrote:

**“I thought the museum in a way, humanized the Nazi a little more. Not in a sympathetic way but in a way that conveys that anybody could have committed these atrocities, it’s just a matter of the level of propaganda and societal pressure/manipulation, and the environment/culture setting.”**

What an important awareness. Students spent two days in Berlin exploring the city and the important Holocaust and Nazi landmarks before flying home. Ali Plumides Manning summed up comments from all the students when she wrote:

**“This trip was a once in a lifetime experience and I am so glad I was chosen to go.”**

As their leader I felt lucky to have taken this trip with students who were so open to reflection and thoughtful about the events we were covering. And we, the Center can’t thank our supporters enough, the Brenner Foundation, the Greensboro Jewish Federation, and the Rosenblatt family, as we know our students are learning important lessons of life through these trips.

# SCHOLARSHIPS



## THE WHITE ROSE CONTEST

The Center is participating in an exciting scholarship program for high school students thanks to the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education and their donors. Incorporating our contacts from the Summer Holocaust Symposium and App State's Education College offers a strong base for allowing high school students to learn rigorous writing skills and historical research skills. Based on a given prompt students from across the state of North Carolina and beyond will be given the opportunity to show their skills at writing and researching. In the process of promoting such scholarship we will create connections across high school programs as well as experts on the Holocaust. The potential for student excellence is something we are excited to facilitate as an important extension of our work in the Martin and Doris Rosen Symposium.

## THE ROSEN SYMPOSIUM AND THE 22<sup>ND</sup> VERA SCHOLARSHIP

Because of the work we have done supporting teaching excellence on the Holocaust, Vera Ripp Hirschhorn chose to establish a teacher scholarship awarded at the end of each symposium. We are excited to offer teachers attending the symposium the opportunity to be awarded a scholarship that allows them to expand their teaching possibilities.

# THE SEARCH FOR A NEW DIRECTOR

Despite having a number of strong applicants, we were unsuccessful in filling the Director position last year. However, we are working with university community to develop and implement a strategy to reopen the search, and we are optimistic that we will be able to fill the position in the near future.

# FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD

**Elizabeth Bellows**, Reich College of Education  
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**Barbara Zaitzow**, Department of Government and Justice Studies

All major religions recognize the dove as a symbol of peace. The Center has long used the dove to symbolize our belief in the power of peace, as such, we pray for a peaceful resolution for Israelis and Palestinians.



# RENNIE BRANTZ

*photo by Jesse Woods*

The Appalachian State University Center for Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies mourns the loss of founder Dr. Rennie Brantz (1942-2023). May his memory be a blessing.

Dr. Brantz served as a professor in the Appalachian State University Department of History since first moving to Boone in 1974. His area of specialty was modern German history, with an evolving expertise in Holocaust studies. As good a teacher as he was, Brantz didn't just teach, he helped change the future of the university. He was active in building the Honors College. Additionally, Brantz helped establish and served as the first director of the university's First Year Seminar. Not only did he share his visions with the university, but he also served the Town of Boone for 18 years, much of that time as mayor.



Perhaps the accomplishment he was most proud of was being a driving founder of the Center for Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies. Dr. Brantz and his friend and colleague from the Appalachian State Department of English, Dr. Zohara "Zo" Boyd, had a dream. They dreamed of an annual Holocaust teaching symposium for middle school and high school teachers. The first symposium occurred in 2002. Over two decades later, the Center is now planning its 22nd Annual Martin & Doris Rosen Symposium and serves as one of the oldest Holocaust symposiums in the country. The Rosen Symposium has impacted the lives of hundreds of teachers who in turn have better taught the Holocaust and its lessons to thousands of students. Out of the symposium evolved a minor in Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies, and finally, in 2005, the state officially recognized the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies, an active presence at App State. Through those 21 years, directors and students of the Center looked to Rennie for support and advice, which he readily and humbly provided. He will be deeply missed.

For more information please go to Dr. Brantz' complete obituary and the Watuaga Democrat article "Former Mayor Passes Away, Leaves Behind a Lasting Legacy in Boone and Beyond" by Luke Barber.

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## The Center for Holocaust and Peace Studies Donation Form and Contact Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Donation Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

holocaust@appstate.edu

General Fund

Endowment Fund

Strategic Initiatives Fund



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