Fall Newsletter 2015

A Word from Our Director

I had been aware of the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies (CHJPS) for many years. I always regretted that I had not been able to help by teaching at its 2012 summer symposium due to a previous commitment as a visiting research fellow at the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture in Leipzig, Germany. Thus, when the opportunity to direct the Center and to continue the important training of high school teachers in Holocaust Studies arose and evolved into the CJHPS, I was thrilled.

The Martin & Doris Rosen Summer Symposium will continue to be at the heart of its activities. The Center will also engage in more outreach and research activities, including talks and symposia with nationally- and internationally-acclaimed researchers. Faculty and staff affiliated with the Center will strengthen the minor in Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies and offer new classes, including much-needed gateway courses. Genocide is of course not only a phenomenon of the past. It is very much part of our world today and going on as you read these lines. We will, thus, also collaborate with other ASU departments and off-campus institutions in programming and classes that explain the enduring spread of systematic mass murder to ASU students and the broader community. The visit by Rwandan genocide survivor Mugabo Yves in November is one step in this direction. The Center and its work can only thrive with the support of the campus and broader community. I would, thus, like to ask everyone to continue their support, to participate in Center events, volunteer, and be part in any way they see fit. The Center has many programs and initiatives in the works, but I would also explicitly like to invite everyone to make suggestions, share ideas, and give input. In the end, this is a small, but vibrant Center that is in the truest sense of the word a community effort.

I am looking forward to working with all of you, Thomas Pegelow Kaplan Leon Levine Distinguished Professor of Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies
O n September 17, the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies welcomed Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor Dr. Susan Cernyak-Spatz to the ASU campus for its first program of the fall term 2015. Cernyak-Spatz, who is a Professor Emeritus of the History of Literature at UNC Charlotte, recounted her suffering at the hands of the Nazis and other Germans at Plaszow Concentration Camp, one of the first concentration camps in the Auschwitz complex. The Nazis had set up Plaszow behind Polish lines in order to avoid extermination of Jews by regular German forces. Dr. Cernyak-Spatz, now in her mid-80s, described the presence of God at Auschwitz and negated the importance of faith in most inmates’ struggle for survival. “It is easy to talk about this subject when all the victims are nameless and faceless,” stressed ASU student Katie Shindle. “However, hearing an account from an actual holocaust survivor... makes it even more real. I feel lucky to have heard her experience.” 

“...my future will likely never get this opportunity. My goal now is to teach my students all that I have learned about this event so that they too may have a greater understanding of such a complicated piece of history.”

In Munich, Nuremberg, and Strasbourg, and spend time in the Nuremberg courtroom where top Nazi war criminals were tried after WWII. Students also explore the Europe’s culture and society today during visits to Paris, Salzburg, and Innsbruck. Each student earned six hours of academic credit. The impact on participating students has been profound, several decided to minor in Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies; one student changed her major as a result of this experience. Seven of the students received $2,000 travel scholarships from the Miriam and Abe Brenner Holocaust Memorial Foundation administered by the Greenbaum Jewish Federation. Students told us that this trip was a life changing experience.

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