

Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies



Summer in Jerusalem

2018





This past summer, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies at Concordia University ran their Summer in Jerusalem program for the second year in a row. Professor Csaba Nikolenyi, Director of the Institute and a Political Science professor at Concordia, returned to Israel with a new group of students eager to spend four weeks in the Middle East. This year's program built on what was best about the summer 2017 program and also featured some exciting changes to the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Students earned three credits from a 400 level Political Science course titled, "Israel in the Middle East", taught by Professor Nikolenyi. Because they only spent half their day in a formal classroom setting, students were left with plenty of time to enrich their learning by exploring Israel on organized field trips or venturing out on their own. The entire experience was captured

on film by the group's unofficial "official" photographer, Jennifer Solomon. As the Assistant to the Director of the Institute, Jennifer joined the group for the first time this summer and proved invaluable in helping students navigate their way around Israel and make the best of the Summer in Jerusalem Program!

The twelve students of the 2018 Summer in Jerusalem program came from many different academic disciplines, including Fine Arts, History, Biology, Political Science and International Business. They also came from different religious and national backgrounds. There were Canadians, Americans and Mexicans in the group. Some of the students had been to Israel before and had family in Israel, while for others this was their first trip. Each member of the group brought to Israel their own unique motivation for wanting to be there. For Isabelle Wilms, a Political Science Student with a minor in Arabic Language and Culture, it was Israel's cultural and religious diversity that drew her to the program and to Israel for the first time. As Isabelle explained, "I am from a super small rural town in Ohio, so I really wanted to be able to go abroad and experience a new culture where so many different religions and groups of people all live".





Shlomo Tanny, by contrast, was not a newcomer to Israel, but chose to participate in the program in an effort to gain an “understanding of Israel through different lenses. For example, to see secular aspects of Israeli politics, as well as the religious sides”. No matter what their motivation, each of the students came to the program excited about the prospect of learning about Israel in Israel!

Accommodations for the 2018 Summer in Jerusalem program were provided by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Students stayed in modern apartment-style dormitories, located on the scenic Mount Scopus campus. They lived four or five students to a unit, with individual bedrooms and a shared living room, kitchen and dining area. This living setup made it easy for the students to get to know each other and organize group trips in their free time. Noa Ogilvy, a Painting and Drawing student with a minor in Israel Studies, commented that “The Hebrew University dorms were great. We often got together as a group outside of class and hung out, discussed classwork, and sometimes even

cooked together! Living in small groups ensured that nobody felt alone or isolated”. They had easy access to downtown and the Old City via the light-rail, which was just a short walk away. Other amenities, such as cafes, shops and grocery stores, were walking distance from the dorms, as was the local bus. All of the students agreed that living in Jerusalem was easy to adapt to once they got over the initial culture shock. Moises Espinosa, an International Business student, observed; “Living in Jerusalem was special and unique. At first, I struggled, mainly with food, given that almost all places are kosher. [But]...., I was able to adapt quickly”.

Over the course of the four weeks, the students participated in a number of unique experiences that are not generally found on the typical tourist itinerary. For example, journeying south, students were given a tour of a water desalination plant in Ashkelon and learned about the ever-pressing issue of water shortages in the Middle East. This was a favorite field trip for many of the students, including Ninell Sygall, a Biology major. Ninell’s background in science

made her trip to Ashkelon a memorable one, for reasons she herself articulated; "Coming from a scientific background, I was amazed to visit the Desalination Plant. I was amazed to see how a country with more than half its total land area filled with desert can still find a way to provide the necessary water and even more".

Another very popular field trip was the group's visit to Kibbutz Hatzetim, home of the drip-irrigation company Netafim. JJ Cohen, majoring in Political Science, spoke very highly of the experience and pointed to the value it added to the academic portion of the program; "In class, we learned about kibbutzim in general and how they operate. This field trip was my favorite because it showed that although kibbutzim have an overarching common goal of social living, they each operate differently with different goals. It was incredible to see how one idea can grow into a multi-billion dollar company, starting from a small kibbutz in the desert".

Other fieldtrip highlights included: touring the Knesset, visiting the Israel Democracy Institute, an overnight trip to northern Israel where students visited Kibbutz Malkiya and stood at

the Israel-Lebanon border; a walking tour of a Northern Druze village, visits to major Israeli museums, wading through Hezekiah's Tunnel, visiting a Greek Orthodox church in Nazareth, standing at David Ben-Gurion's grave in Sde Boker and visiting Ben-Gurion University's Innovation Centre in Beersheva and drinking tea in a replica Bedouin tent. And this is just a partial list of the 2018 Summer in Jerusalem program fieldtrips!

These out of classroom field trips and experiences deeply affected many of the students. Jonathan Penny, an Honours student in History, remarked that "the field trips were really integral to the learning experience.





While the classroom provided a theoretical framework for understanding Israel's place in the Middle East that drew on history, the field trips allowed us to see the reality of Israeli political existence and connect it to what was being talked about in class". Yana Moscovitz, a student of Cell and Molecular Biology, agreed, adding "Learning about the politics of a new country while traveling the country itself gives a much stronger appreciation of the material. I found my knowledge acquired through the course was retained in a much more meaningful matter than a regular course. Our field trips around Israel were engaging and none of my other classes can compare".

Within the classroom, Professor Nikolenyi presented students with a creative and engaging syllabus which used a unique combination of Israeli cinema, traditional textbook reading, class discussions and a guest Professor's lecture to teach the complexities of Israeli history, politics, and culture. For their final assignment, each student was given a major Israeli political figure

to research and then present to the class. The curriculum left all the students with a newfound understanding of the many different political positions in Israel. History student Yaacov Amselem reflected after the course that "on a personal level I feel I am more attentive to different political opinions of Israel. And I also feel the deep love and excitement in many Israelis of debating discussing Israel's future."

In addition to their educational experiences, the students also made 'extracurricular' memories, a favourite being spending an evening with







Professor Nikolenyi and his wife Andrea in their Jerusalem home. Orli Lesser, a student in Anthropology and Sociology with a minor in Human Rights, spoke to the experience, saying "My favorite memory was going to the Professor's house for dinner. Everyone on the trip was super close with one another and with the Professor, his wife, and Jennifer, which made the entire experience more fun and personal.

The Professor was extremely approachable and welcoming. We were really lucky with our group because everyone was truly good friends!".

It is clear in looking at photos taken of the group, as well as speaking to the participants, that this trip is one they will carry with them in the future. Academically, they leave the Holy Land with a much richer education in the realities of Israel,



expressed simply by History major Corey Jimi Grant: "I have a new appreciation for Israeli culture, [and] I learned a lot about the history of the country."

When asked for a favourite memory or anecdote, many responded that it was the entire experience, rather than one or two moments, that made the program special. Karla Baston, a Political Science student explained, stating that "the whole trip was truly amazing. The people that you meet, in the classroom or outside of the

classroom, will definitely have an impact on you at an academic or a personal level. This will be something you will carry with you forever".





Participants

Yacov Amsellem, History/Minor Israel Studies

Karla Baston, Political Science

Jonathan Cohen, Political Science

Moises Espinosa Gonzalez,
International Business

Corey Grant, Political Science

Orli Lesser, Anthropology and Sociology/
Minor Human Rights

Yana Moscovitz, Cell and Molecular Biology

Noa Isabel Ogilvy, Painting and Drawing/
Minor Israel Studies

Jonathan Penny, Public History

Ninell Sygal, Biology

Shlomo Tanny, Management/Minor Israel Studies

Isabelle Wilms, Political Science/Minor Modern
Arabic Culture and Language





**FACULTY OF
ARTS AND SCIENCE**

Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

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