

Presented by Boaz Morris and Arianna Kalkstein

Coming to Rutgers was an overwhelming experience. Between making new friends and enjoying the newfound freedom, it was easy to feel lost amongst the thousands of students. It especially was not easy transitioning to giant lectures where you were just one in a crowd of hundreds of other students. However, Hebrew classes were different. The intimacy of a small class, along with the strong bonds that come from a shared passion of the Hebrew language, lead to an amazing and unique college experience. However, any misconceptions we may have had that this would be an extension of a simple high school language course, were quickly dispelled.

While previous language classes we took concentrated on learning vocabulary and had a simple framework based on stringing together short sentences, Hebrew classes proved to be highly structured courses that emphasized immersing oneself in the language. The idea was simple: The Hebrew Language is dynamic and large in scope, so our studies should be as well. The Hebrew program provided myriad opportunities throughout our four years here to view the language as an Israeli would view it. Israeli newspapers geared toward new immigrants were provided, and we were expected to not only read, but to analyze the articles. You were expected to look up a word if you did not know it, think about the sentence structure, look for patterns and roots (now, finding the shrosh, the root of words, is second nature to us) and think about the various intricacies of the language. Together, this made learning Hebrew difficult, but in the end it proved extremely rewarding.

Hebrew became personal, as we were encouraged to write essays every week on topics important or interesting to us. These essays were meant to not only give us experience writing and thinking in Hebrew but to use it to connect abstract academic ideas to our lives. Only this way could Hebrew be brought alive. Outside of class, we were expected to go to computer labs to listen to special recordings provided by the Hebrew program throughout the week. It was not merely enough to read, we had to listen and interact with the programs as well. But it did not end there. Every week we received emails informing us of opportunities to meet Israeli's visiting campus, meet with tutors, and attend Israeli film screenings. We especially enjoyed this last semester of learning literature with Orly. It was very satisfying to be able to apply our knowledge and analyze high level Israeli literature, poems, and songs. Without a doubt, the Hebrew program did everything it could to ensure that Hebrew was not just another course, but an integral part of our lives. In fact, we think that the critical thinking and analyzing that were so important in our Hebrew education, has had a positive effect on the rest of our academic pursuits. I'm always amazed how the skills I learned in my early Hebrew classes have helped me even in my higher level courses in my major.

But all this hard work begs, the question: why? Why subject oneself to such a tough curriculum for four years? Why learn a language at all? Well, every student has their own reasons for taking Hebrew and I can only comment on my own. From an early age my parents instilled within me a love for Israel and prior to coming to Rutgers I knew I wanted to make Aliyah, move to Israel and join the IDF. These four years of learning have provided me with both a strong foundation of Hebrew and a deeper understanding of Israeli culture. But I would be truly remiss if I did not once again emphasize how amazing and unique the Hebrew program here at Rutgers is. As a graduating senior who majored in both Economics and Premedicine and minored in Hebrew and History, it is

fair to say that I have taken my fair share of classes. I've met many professors, dealt with multiple departments, and navigated the Rutgers bureaucracy (which as any Rutgers student can attest to, is a journey in and of itself) and throughout all this, I can say with absolute confidence that there has been no other department, that has taken such a great interest in its students and done as much to ensure an academically challenging and enriching curriculum. Without a doubt, Edna and Orly have created a Hebrew program that has had the greatest academic impact on my college experience and I owe them much thanks.

As for me, I went to Politz, the Orthodox Religious Private School in Cherry Hill NJ from 1st through 8th grade. There I learned Torah and how to read and write in Hebrew, but never learned how to speak. For high school I went to public school because I lifeguard and taught swimming lessons, danced, and went to Midrasha, Hebrew Junior College for 2 years. I did not speak, read, or write Hebrew for 4 years. When I came to Rutgers I decided I wanted to learn how to speak Hebrew. I took advantage of the language courses at Rutgers, I took Spanish, Arabic, ASL- but I took all of the courses needed to have a minor in Hebrew. I loved being surrounded by fellow Jewish students and to be honest, it was the only class where my voice could be heard. Edna was one tough cookie- but she taught me more in three years than I could have ever imagined. I am glad that I was able to have a final semester with Orly- Hebrew Literature and Media was a special class. There were only five of us, and the class focused on readings of Israeli culture and deep conversations which helped connect me to Israel. This class did not focus on grammar and spelling, which are very important, but I learned how to effectively get my point across and how to read between the lines and see the deeper, more important meaning behind the words.

In today's ever shrinking world, it is becoming increasingly important for graduates to be able to connect with other peoples and cultures. Language remains the best tool for this job. With the Hebrew minor, the Hebrew program here at Rutgers prepares students with an unparalleled education in an increasingly important language. It has been our absolute pleasure to complete the Hebrew minor.