

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

Over the past year, discussion among executive directors of learned societies large and small has revolved around the employment security, conditions, and prospects of its members; the impact of the economy on academic publishing; and the financial stability of academic associations, whose destinies are intertwined with that of higher education in general. Of particular concern to virtually all societies has been the ability of scholars to maintain their memberships (oftentimes, in more than one professional association) and to attend annual meetings (oftentimes, more than one a year), at a time of salary, budget, and travel support cuts.

As of the end of October 2009, AJS members have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to our organization by maintaining their membership at the same rate as in previous years, and by registering to participate in the 41st Annual Conference in record numbers for a West Coast location (indeed, submission numbers were on par with those for last year's conference in Washington, DC, a striking fact given that more than 40 percent of AJS members are based in the Northeast). These statistics suggest both the loyalty of AJS members to the organization and the annual meeting, as well as the particular importance of the association's professional services and conference in these difficult times.

What do AJS members tell us about

the impact of the economic crisis on their work and professional lives? Not surprisingly, the reports vary, based upon the type of institution (public or private), the location (hard-hit state, North America, Israel, Europe), the member's position (graduate student, adjunct, tenure track, tenured, endowed chair, retired), the type of program (Jewish studies center, endowed program), etc. No one we have heard from has been untouched. There have been widespread reports of program/department budget freezes or cuts (anywhere from 5–10 percent). Several members report that their institutions have reduced or eliminated travel and research support for tenured faculty (often lumped into one reserve fund or annual cap) in order to preserve funding for assistant professors, for whom participating in scholarly conferences and completing research for articles and books is most time-sensitive. Members holding endowed chairs point out that while they may have access to some travel and research funds due to provisions of their chair, they still face the same furlough days, increased class size, program budget reductions, etc., as scholars without endowed positions. Other members have noted salary and hiring freezes. Hardest hit have been part-time and adjunct faculty, several of whom have found their positions suddenly eliminated; those still holding adjunct jobs have found that they no longer are eligible to apply for institutional research or travel support. A telling statistic is the number of applicants we received for the Conference Travel Grant Program: seventy-four applicants (which represents 15 percent of presenters), most of whom receive no form of institutional support for conference travel.

Of particular concern are graduate students who have recently completed or are near the end of their PhDs. Job prospects for newly minted PhDs was a primary topic of

discussion at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). Societies across the disciplines are strategizing how to help early career scholars, who have invested great time and, in many cases, expense to secure their degrees and in whom institutions have invested so heavily. One approach discussed at the ACLS meeting is to expand the pool of postdoctoral fellowship programs in order to give recent graduates time to turn their dissertations into a book while the job market recovers. Some questioned whether programs in the humanities are simply accepting too many PhD students, and if graduate departments should rethink their admissions policies to better reflect the realities of the job marketplace. AJS's own positions listings have seen a 19 percent drop for the period January 1, 2009 to September 30, 2009 (fifty-one postings), compared to the same period last year (sixty-three postings), pointing to the importance of helping recent graduates stay in the field in a more challenging job market.

I have been asked if Jewish studies has fared better or worse than other fields. Quite frankly, it's difficult to say. One can point to the numerous endowed chairs (more than 230 listed in the directory on the AJS website) and endowed programs in the field, and conclude that Jewish studies has the extra cushioning of these endowments to maintain programming, positions, and courses that would otherwise fall into institutional budget gaps. But no matter how well endowed a program, that program is still part of the universe of the institution and subject to the overall health of its finances and employee policies. Furthermore, these endowments are subject to the same vagaries of the market, and rules regarding endowments that are underwater can severely restrict spending in current and future fiscal years. And while

Jewish studies has benefited greatly from the support of community members and foundations, these supporters' financial challenges necessarily trickle down to the programs they support.

Over the past several months, AJS has launched several programs to meet the evolving needs of our members in these unprecedented times, including the Legacy Heritage Jewish Studies Project, in collaboration with the Legacy Heritage Fund, to support innovative Jewish studies

programming in small to mid-sized cities and to help build ongoing partnerships between Jewish studies programs and the communities that surround them; the AJS/CJH Professional Development Series, in cooperation with the Center for Jewish History, to provide workshops on critical issues in the profession, including career options for recent PhDs inside and outside of academia; and an expanded conference travel grant program to subsidize travel expenses for participants with little to no institutional funding (AJS members

and major foundations were extraordinary in their support for this new initiative, contributing more than \$30,000). AJS relies on feedback and suggestions from its members to develop such new services and opportunities. Please e-mail us at ajs@ajs.cjh.org and let us know what additional resources and programs the association can provide.

Rona Sheramy
Association for Jewish Studies

THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES

*is pleased to announce that it
awarded more than*

70 TRAVEL GRANTS

TO SUPPORT SCHOLARS PRESENTING RESEARCH
AT THE AJS 41ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

*The AJS thanks its members
and the following foundations and institutions
for supporting the AJS Travel Grant Program:*

CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

CHARLES AND LYNN SCHUSTERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

LUCIUS N. LITTAUER FOUNDATION

MAURICE AMADO FOUNDATION

POSEN FOUNDATION

TAUBE FOUNDATION

TIKVAH FUND