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COHEN CENTER FOR
MODERN JEWISH STUDIES

The Summer Institute for Israel Studies: 2020 Annual Survey

Fern Chertok
Matthew A. Brookner
Tzvi Glazer



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Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University
Mailstop 014
Waltham, MA 02454-9110
781.736.2060
www.brandeis.edu/cmjs

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Introduction

The Summer Institute for Israel Studies (SIIS), developed and convened by Brandeis University in 2004, is a one-of-a-kind program designed to equip scholars from around the world to engage in quality teaching and scholarship about Israel. The signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) of SIIS includes an immersive introduction to the field of Israel studies within the context of an intellectually stimulating and supportive cohort of peers. The summer portion of the program includes a two-week residency at Brandeis, seminars and lectures delivered by leading scholars in the field, and a 10-day educational experience in Israel. Post program, SIIS Fellows continue to have access to Schusterman Center resources and an online community of practice composed of program alumni.

The systems scientist, Peter Senge, characterized the “learning organization” as committed to refining its behavior based on the proactive and continual acquisition of new knowledge (1990). SIIS’ progression from a start-up, experimental program to a mature initiative has included an ongoing program of formative and summative evaluation research conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS). This body of research indicates that SIIS Fellows successfully initiate Israel-related courses on their campuses and contribute to Israel studies scholarship through publications, conference presentations, and other platforms (Koren & Fleisch, 2014; Shain, 2018).

The 2020 SIIS follow-up survey extended this program of research to the 2004-19 cohorts and gathered information on their scholarship and teaching of Israel studies as well as their continuing connections with the program and with the larger alumni community. The report begins with an overview of the 2020 study methodology followed by a description of the current academic and professional positions of Fellows. The report details Fellows’ activities in the 2019-20 academic year including the number and types of courses taught, research and publications, work with students, and media appearances. Also explored are Fellows’ connections with other alumni, their use of Schusterman Center resources, and their perspectives on additional needed resources.

Methods

The study employed a survey of participants from the 2004-19 cohorts. As part of the 2020 follow-up, two versions of the survey were utilized. The first, a shortened version, was designed to increase responses from earlier SIIS cohorts (2004-11). Members of these cohorts were asked about their current academic positions, courses taught in the 2019-20 academic year, conference attendance, and publications. More recent cohorts (2012-19) received a more comprehensive survey that asked additional questions about their teaching and courses, publications, media appearances, and use of SIIS resources. Both surveys included questions about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on their academic activities.

Surveys were fielded June 3, 2020 through July 20, 2020. Multiple emails and phone calls were used to boost the response rate. Schusterman Center staff members also used the SIIS listserv to encourage Fellows to complete the survey. The overall response rate for 2004-11 cohorts, who received the shorter survey, was 58%. The response rate for 2012-19 cohorts was 68%. Response

rates varied across cohorts, but was highest (95%) among the most recent, 2019 participants (Table 1). The overall response rate for the 2020 follow-up (63%) was substantially higher than for the 2019 study, when it was 51%.

Table 1: Response rate to 2020 SIIS survey, by cohort

SIIS cohort	Number in cohort sent survey	Number responding	Response rate
2004	14	8	57%
2005	18	11	61%
2006	14	10	71%
2007	13	7	54%
2008	19	13	68%
2009	18	8	44%
2010	17	9	53%
2011	20	11	55%
2012	20	13	65%
2013	19	13	68%
2014	17	8	47%
2015	21	9	43%
2016	20	15	75%
2017	22	13	59%
2018	23	18	78%
2019	22	21	95%
All cohorts	297	187	63%

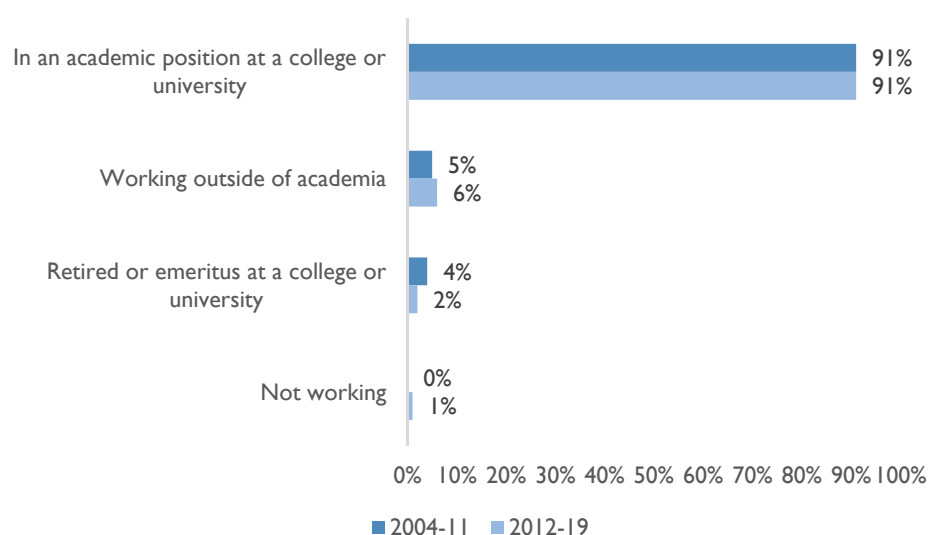
Note: Some Fellows were not sent an invitation to complete the survey, either because they had previously indicated that they did not want to participate in future surveys, or because they no longer worked in academic settings.

Findings

Academic Positions

The vast majority (91%) of survey respondents, from earlier and more recent cohorts, were employed in academic positions during the 2019-20 academic year. Only small portions of survey respondents from the 2004-11 and 2012-19 cohorts were working outside of academia (6% and 5% respectively), retired or emeritus (2% and 4% respectively), or not working (1% for earlier cohort members) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Professional positions of SIIS Fellows



Note: n=187

Courses

One of the goals of SIIS is to empower participants to develop Israel-related courses for their home institutions. Surveys of earlier and more recent cohorts asked about the number of courses Fellows taught during the 2019-20 academic year that primarily focused on Israel (Israel-focused courses), and the number of courses that were not specifically about Israel but included content on Israel (Israel-related courses). Fellows from 2012-19 cohorts were also asked about the department affiliation, topic area, and student enrollment for Israel-focused courses.

Across all cohorts, a majority of survey respondents (90%) reported teaching college or university courses during the 2019-20 academic year. Similar portions of Fellows in the earlier (90%) and more recent cohorts (91%) taught in the academic year prior to the survey.

Israel-Focused Courses: Number and Reach

Of the survey respondents who taught in the 2019-20 academic year, 51% reported teaching a college or university course with a specific focus on Israel. Fifty-five percent of the 2012-19 Fellows and 45% of the 2003-11 Fellows taught an Israel-focused course. Approximately one third (32%) of these courses were first-time offerings.

Sixty-one Fellows taught a single course, and 26 taught multiple courses with a specific focus on Israel. In total, 87 Fellows taught 128 courses about Israel in the 2019-20 academic year.¹ These courses reached at least 1,810 students. The course number brings the total number of Israel-

¹ The number of courses reported is a minimum number. Due to nonresponse from a substantial portion of Fellows, the data from the 2020 survey should be treated as minimum estimates. Some of the Fellows who did not complete the survey, and for whom no information is available, may have also taught courses about Israel.

focused courses taught by SIIS Fellows since 2004 to at least 1,400, and the total number of students enrolled to at least 33,549.

Among survey respondents, 28 from the 2012-19 cohorts were employed at universities outside of the United States. The majority (93%) of these Fellows reported expanding course offerings about Israel in these countries.

Israel-Focused Courses: Course Characteristics

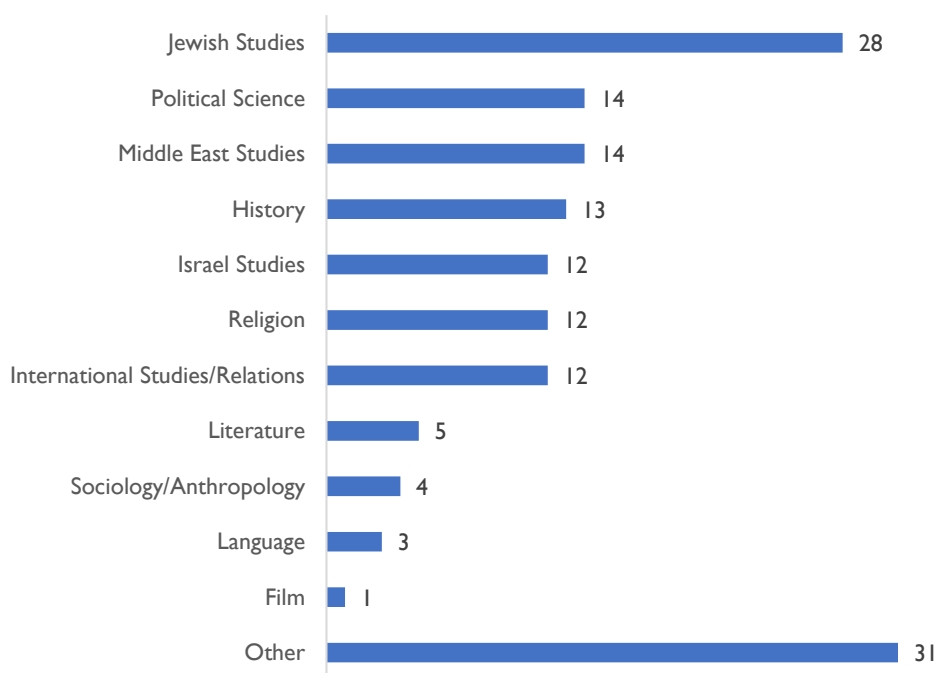
The survey of 2012-19 cohorts asked for additional information about Israel-focused courses. As shown in Table 2, the majority of Israel-focused courses taught by 2012-19 SIIS Fellows had only undergraduate enrollment (70%). When asked about the departments in which their Israel-focused course were listed, the most common responses were Jewish Studies, Political Studies, and Middle East Studies (Figure 2). The most frequently listed topics of these courses were Israeli society, history, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Figure 3).

Table 2: Student course enrollment

Students taking courses	Proportion
Only undergraduates	70%
Both undergraduates and graduate students	15%
Only graduate students	15%
Total	100%

Note: Asked only of cohorts 2012-19, n=56.

Figure 2: Department of course listing



Note: Asked only of cohorts 2012-19, n=56.

Figure 3: Courses' central area(s) of focus



Note: Asked only of cohorts 2012-19, n=55.

Israel-Related Courses

In the 2019-20 academic year, 73% of Fellows taught at least one college or university course that was not specifically about Israel, but included content on Israel. In total, 124 Fellows taught 225 courses with content related to Israel in the 2019-20 academic year.

SIIS Influence on Course Content

Fellows from 2012-19 cohorts were asked to indicate the extent to which their participation in SIIS influenced the Israel content in the courses they teach. The majority (57%) responded that SIIS had “very much” increased their focus on Israel in teaching.

Survey respondents in all cohorts were asked, in an open-ended question, to describe how their participation in SIIS influenced the content of the courses they taught. For many, their SIIS experience formed the foundation of their Israel-related pedagogy. Fellows indicated that SIIS increased their knowledge of Israel, gave them frameworks for presenting material about Israel, and expanded their confidence to teach this content. Fellows also described SIIS as a valuable source of materials for classroom use. The resources that were most commonly mentioned included case studies, readings, media presentations, and historic documents.

My experience at SIIS remains the bedrock of my knowledge about Israel. It informs everything I teach, even if it is not specifically about Israel. (2004 Fellow)

[SIIS] still plays a huge role in my Israel teaching as one of the foundations. (2011 Fellow)

I would not have taught my course on Israel without my SIIS experience. It's the gift that keeps on giving. (2005 Fellow)

My participation reoriented my pedagogy, deepening my teaching of Israeli history, politics, and literature. That is permanent. (2009 Fellow)

[SIIS] provided the perfect foundation for the Israel studies courses I've taught and trips I've led. (2018 Fellow)

SIIS has transformed the way in which I teach about Israel and Judaism in my courses. (2016 Fellow)

SIIS provided foundational information for me to speak knowledgeably. It also gave me access to ongoing discussion of current topics and sources. (2017 Fellow)

Non-Teaching Work with Students

Fellows from the 2012-19 cohorts were asked about their work with students apart from teaching. In the 2019-20 academic year, 21% of Fellows advised undergraduate theses, and 17% served as graduate thesis or dissertation committee members or advised a student group (Table 3). Overall, 37% of survey respondents worked with students on Israel-related academic work outside of the classroom.

Table 3: Other academic work with students related to Israel

At least one form of academic work	37%
Undergraduate thesis advisor	21%
Graduate thesis advisor or dissertation committee member	17%
Student group advisor	17%
Other	9%

Note: Asked only of cohorts 2012-19, n=92.

In open-ended responses, some Fellows described the influence of their SIIS experience on their Israel-related work on the larger campus. These activities included leading trips to Israel (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic); working with campus organizations, most notably Hillel; and more general efforts to address the campus climate related to Israel and antisemitism.

I've become involved with campus Hillel as a resource to students and advisers. (2017 Fellow)

[SIIS] affected the guest speakers I've brought to campus, including SIIS fellows. (2016 Fellow)

[SIIS] strengthened my background in Israeli history to further my efforts at combating antisemitism in academia. (2018 Fellow)

Scholarly Work

Spring semester 2020 was not typical. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted higher education, national and international travel, and precluded the gathering of large groups, including scholarly conferences. The scholarly activity of SIIS Fellows during the 2019-20 academic year should be considered in the context of these major disruptions.

The 2020 surveys of SIIS alumni asked how the pandemic affected their scholarly work. Among Fellows with academic appointments, 82% reported some form of disruption (Table 4). The majority of responding Fellows (61%) experienced the cancellation of a conference they planned to attend (not including those that had a conference moved to an online format). Other commonly experienced disruptions included the loss of presentation opportunities (43%) and cancellation of research trips to Israel (39%).

Planned to attend a conference in NYC, but [it] was cancelled because of COVID-19 pandemic. (2015 Fellow)

COVID has slowed all my work and plans for both research and teaching. I had a new course on [Jewish Studies topic] approved last fall and had planned to teach it next spring but may have to delay that due to the impacts of COVID. (2018 Fellow)

The long-lasting pandemic crisis has significantly disturbed (is still disturbing) my planned curricular as well as extracurricular activities related to Israel. (2019 Fellow)

Table 4: Academic disruptions from COVID-19 among Fellows in academic positions

Type of disruption	Proportion affected
Any disruption	82%
Could not attend a conference	61%
Could not make a presentation	43%
Cancelled research trip to Israel	39%
Cancelled guest speaking plans	25%
Skipped content on Israel in cancelled course/session	17%
Cancelled student trip to Israel	8%
Could not make a media appearance	7%
Something else	18%

Note; n=153

Academic Conferences

About half (49%) of survey respondents attended at least one conference in the 2019-20 academic year (Table 5). Small numbers attended conferences with an overall or partial focus on Israel studies, including those held by the Association for Israel Studies (8%), the Association for Jewish Studies (14%) and the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (3%). For most survey respondents, the conferences attended did not have a specific focus on Israel (AAR, ASA, MLA).

Table 5 illustrates the type of academic conferences Fellows attended in the 2019-20 academic year.

Table 5: SIIS Fellows attending academic conferences 2019-20

Academic Conference	Proportion attended
Any conference	49%
AIS (Association for Israel Studies)	8%
AJS (Association for Jewish Studies)	14%
ASMEA (Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa)	3%
MESA (Middle East Studies Association)	2%
Other conference(s)	30%

Note: n=177

Fellows from cohorts 2012-19 who attended a conference were asked about their role at these academic gatherings. Of those who went to a conference, 43% presented original research, and 17% served as a discussant or chair on a panel related to Israel. In open-ended responses, several Fellows indicated that their SIIS connections were instrumental in their conference work.

In the past year, I used the network that I have developed through SIIS to aid me in conference planning, research, and organizing a conference panel. (2011 Fellow)

Media and Other Presentations

Fellows from 2012-2019 cohorts were asked to reflect on the impact of their SIIS experience on their extra-curricular activities related to Israel. Sixty percent of survey respondents indicated that SIIS “very much” (37%) or “somewhat” (23%) increased their participation in presenting and speaking about Israel.

During the 2019-20 academic year, 41% of the 2012-19 Fellows gave a lecture related to Israel, and 30% participated in a panel or roundtable discussion (Table 6). Over half (54%) reported at least one presentation related to Israel during the 2019-20 academic year. When asked about the location of these presentations, 35% reported presenting on their own campus, 26% presented at a non-campus setting (e.g., museum, Jewish organization or online platform), and 10% presented at a campus other than their own.

Table 6: Fellows' public presentations about Israel in 2019-20

Type of appearance	Proportion of Fellows
Any appearance	54%
Gave a lecture	41%
Spoke on a panel or roundtable discussion	30%
Presented at a film screening	10%
Participated in an interview	15%
Gave a media appearance	6%
Served as a guest artist	2%
Other	4%
Location of appearance	
Own campus	35%
A non-college setting	26%
Another campus	10%

Note: Asked of cohorts 2012-19 only, n=60

Publications

Forty-three percent of Fellows reported publishing a scholarly or general work on Israel in the 2019-20 academic year. Among survey respondents, 18% reported publishing academic journal articles, 16% reported writing book chapters, and 9% reported writing or editing books. An additional 10% of Fellows reported publishing a magazine or newspaper article or blog post related to Israel.

Focus of Scholarly Work

Almost one third (31%) of survey respondents from the 2012-19 cohorts indicated that their participation in SIIS “very much” influenced their research agenda. In open-ended responses, some Fellows described their participation in the SIIS summer program as an inflection point in their scholarly work and as a source of new ideas for research and publication.

SIIS has got me thinking about doing Israel-centered research when current projects are complete. (2012 Fellow)

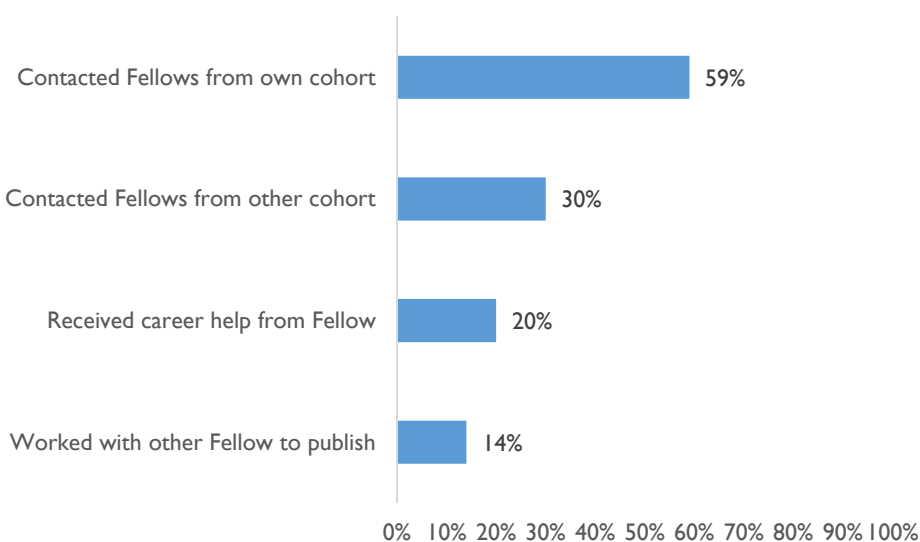
Israel has become a much more prominent part of my scholarly activity. (2013 Fellow)

Continued Connections with SIIS

Networking and Collaboration among Fellows

One of the goals of SIIS is to create a community of practice among scholars who share an interest in incorporating Israel studies into their academic work. The survey of the 2012-19 cohorts asked about a number of ways in which Fellows had contact with each other during the 2019-20 academic year (Figure 6). The majority (59%) reported contact with members of their own cohort, and 30% reported contact with Fellows from other cohorts. Twenty percent received career assistance from an SIIS Fellow, and 14% collaborated with another Fellow on research or a publication.

Figure 6: Contact among Fellows during 2019-20 academic year



Note: Cohorts 2012-19 only, n=106.

When asked about other ways in which their participation in SIIS affected their professional or scholarly pursuits, many Fellows noted gaining a network of scholars. Fellows found these connections to be a valuable source of expert knowledge and professional advice.

I have had excellent advice and mentorship because of relationships that I built through SIIS. (2018 Fellow)

I'm still very connected to members in my cohort, and I've supported my faculty members in participating in SIIS, which has led to very good courses and interesting synergies. (2009 Fellow)

Mostly it gave me a lot of knowledge and contact with other scholars. If I have any questions, I can ask. (2019 Fellow)

It gave me access to a network of experts and a pool of resources that are very helpful to both my teaching and my research. (2013 Fellow)

I have made several connections with people, in my cohort and with others that have contributed to my professional life and scholarly pursuits (2013 Fellow)

Use of Schusterman Center Online Offerings and Resources

In open-ended responses, Fellows described how valuable they found the resources provided during their initial SIIS experience and since that aspect of the program ended.

Great to have access to other people's syllabi! (2016 Fellow)

I have been very well provided by SIIS with valuable sources, both in print and on-line, and with an access to webinar lectures, and Brandeis library resources, which I am most appreciative of. (2019 Fellow)

Due to the travel and meeting restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no Schusterman Center annual conference of SIIS Fellows in 2020. The Center instead offered multiple webinars and lectures online. Thirty-nine percent of the 2012-19 Fellows reported participating in one of these offerings.

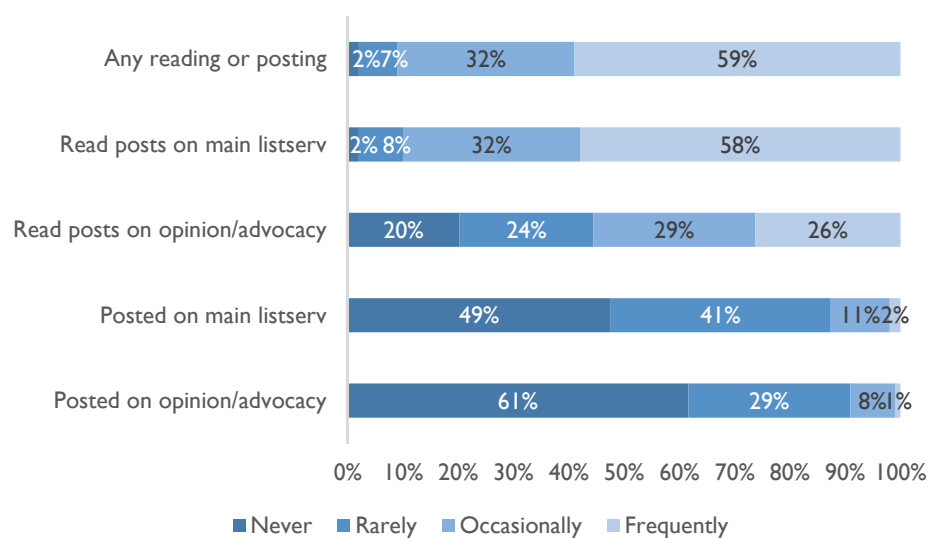
I have attended webinars and listened to lectures to upgrade my knowledge in preparation for a course on Israel that I will teach in spring 2021. (2007 Fellow)

SIIS connected me with other professional growth opportunities. (2013 Fellow)

Use of SIIS Listservs

The 2012-19 Fellows were asked how frequently they used the two SIIS listservs, a general listserv and one focused on opinion related to Israel. Almost all (99%) reported posting or reading a post on at least one of the two listservs during the 2019-20 academic year (Figure 7). More Fellows (54%) posted on the main listserv as compared with the opinion listserv (38%).

Figure 7: Frequency of use of SIIS listserv

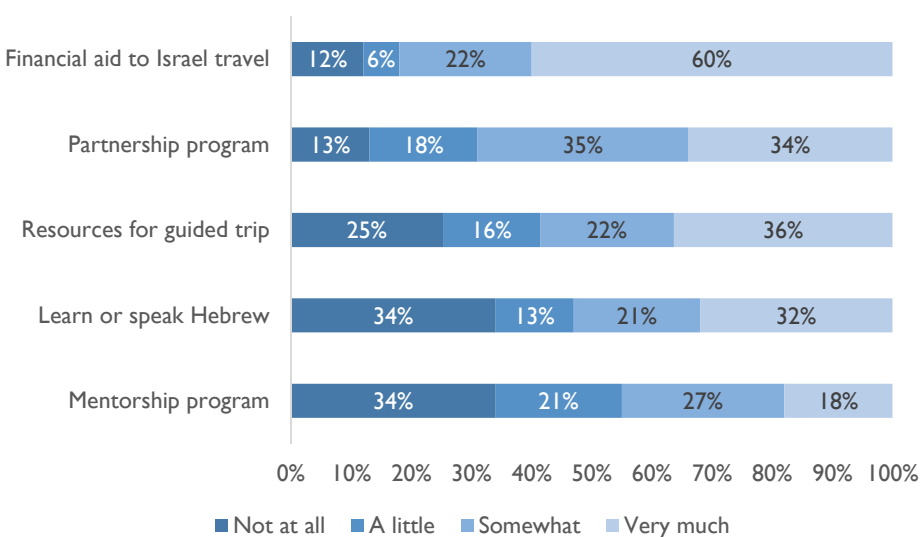


Note: Cohorts 2012-19 only, n=111.

Interest in Future Schusterman Center Resources

Fellows from all cohorts were asked about their interest in potential new resources to be offered by the Schusterman Center (Figure 8). Of greatest interest was financial assistance for Israel travel for research or teaching, with 60% indicating strong interest. Fellows would also like to see a partnership program that connects SIIS Fellows who work on similar topics (34% very much, 35% somewhat) and resources they can use when leading trips to Israel (36% very much, 22% somewhat).

Figure 8: Interest in new Schusterman Center resources



Note: n=161

Fellows were asked if they had anything else to share (2004-11 cohorts), or if they wanted to suggest other ways SIIS could assist them in teaching about Israel (2012-19 cohorts). Fellows wanted to encourage the Schusterman Center to keep providing key materials such as books, course materials, and webinars.

Perhaps there could be a round up of new articles or books from fellows. (2012 Fellow)

More seminars on the arts/literature/film in Israel. (2016 Fellow)

Provide online resources for specific course projects/homework/assignments, interactive in class and online activities, lesson plans, etc. (2019 Fellow)

Keep reaching out; keep providing newsletters; keep offering webinars; maybe a spotlight on what past fellows are doing in their research or programming. (2018 Fellow)

Providing us with lists of new books of scholarship vetted by the Schusterman Center would be awesome. (2018 Fellow)

It would be good to have a speakers list so it would be easy to find people with knowledge in different areas of expertise. Likewise, perhaps some former Fellows would be willing to serve as readers for manuscripts or grant proposals. (2012 Fellow)

Reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, several Fellows noted the importance of the Center continuing and expanding online resources and virtual offerings.

Consider more Zoom events with people from Israel (especially) during the pandemic so we can stay connected. Maybe instead of lectures by individuals, panels by different SIIS alums on specific topics? (2019 Fellow)

Given that we will be teaching online a lot this year, I would like to see if we could arrange some “virtual tours”—maybe a visit to a yeshiva or a kibbutz or to Sderot or to a TA night spot. (2012 Fellow)

Considering the new normalcy resulted from the Covid-19, I hope SIIS will do more Zoom lectures on some of the urgent issues, such as the new waves of anti-Israel and antisemitism. (2012 Fellow)

Fellows also mentioned an interest in financial support to return to Israel for their own scholarship or in connection with their work with students.

I would love assistance developing a trip for students to Israel. (2019 Fellow)

Information to assist students to study in graduate school in Israel. (2014 Fellow)

By providing information and opportunities for short-term research travel to Israel, by providing information and opportunities pertaining to Hebrew language study. (2017 Fellow)

Discussion

Through their teaching, publishing, and presentations on Israel, SIIS Fellows have had considerable influence on campuses throughout the world. At least 65 Fellows taught a minimum of 105 courses focused on Israel in the 2019-20 academic year, reaching at least 1,664 students. At least 30 courses were taught at international institutions. Additionally, 91 Fellows taught at least one college or university course not specifically about Israel, but including content on Israel.

Sixty-one Fellows reported publishing a scholarly or general work on Israel in the 2019-20 academic year. One quarter of Fellows (39) published scholarly works such as books, book chapters, and/or peer-reviewed articles. Outside of the classroom, 53 Fellows made at least one appearance related to Israel on their campus, another campus, or in another setting. Most Fellows from cohorts 2012-19 felt that SIIS at least somewhat increased the Israel content in their courses, enhanced their collaboration with other scholars studying Israel, influenced their research agenda, and increased their participation in other activities related to Israel. Fellows continue to look for expanded and new ways to access Schusterman Center resources and to connect with one another and Israel.

The most recent cohort of Fellows were positive about their SIIS experience and the impact of the program on their teaching and scholarship. The 2019 Fellows reflected that their participation in SIIS helped them network with fellow scholars teaching about or studying Israel and identify relevant materials for their scholarly and classroom work. A majority of the 2019 Fellows felt SIIS helped them respond more effectively to controversies about Israel.

Although the most visible work of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies appears each summer, as it trains a new cohort of scholars in teaching about Israel through seminars, syllabi development, and a 10-day study tour in Israel, the influence of SIIS endures beyond the program. Fellows continue to grow and learn from a community of global scholars who have access to Schusterman Center resources, conferences, and webinars. The findings of this year's follow-up survey point to the continued impact of SIIS and its role in supporting and expanding Israel studies on campuses around the world.

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