



THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Student Look Book 2026



JTS is in the midst of an exciting period of growth, expanding in the number of students we serve and in the breadth of their backgrounds, interests, and areas of study. Our Division of Religious Leadership continues to see rising enrollment in both The Rabbinical School and H. L. Miller Cantorial School. Meanwhile, our Division of Lifelong and Professional Studies now offers, among other innovative programs, an MFA in Creative Writing, an MA in Spiritual Care and Counseling, a new MA in Ritual Leadership, a certificate in Biblical Hebrew, and the Emerging Leaders Fellowship for teens that brings them together with JTS faculty and rabbinical students.

In the following pages, you will meet students from our traditional schools and from our new academic programs. You will discover their unique paths to JTS, the passions driving their studies, and the meaningful work they are already undertaking both within and beyond our walls. At JTS we are educating scholars and professional leaders for academia, preparing highly trained and compassionate Jewish educators, equipping spiritual caregivers to bring a Jewish lens to their sacred work, supporting Jewish writers as they develop their voices, and inspiring the next generation of passionate, thoughtful, and committed Jewish leaders. We are grateful for your support in these efforts, and we hope you feel great pride.

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H. L. MILLER CANTORIAL SCHOOL



LEO DWORSKY is a Cantorial School student from Golden Valley, Minnesota. He earned a BMus in Vocal Performance with a minor in Jewish Studies from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Last summer, Leo attended JTS's Nishma Program, which helped him gain fluency in classical Jewish sources and the life of the cantorate.

Upon hearing his cantor's exquisite voice filled with spiritual conviction, Leo was inspired to become a cantor. After his bar mitzvah, he began studying weekly with a cantor to learn Hebrew melodies and services. He now assists the cantor and rabbi during services and prepares children for their b'nei mitzvah. He has also served as a cantorial soloist for the High Holidays at Temple Judea in Fort Myers, Florida.

Leo has performed with the Mill City Professional Opera, Buffalo Community Orchestra, Rochester Symphony, and WCCO Channel Four. Other recent roles include Podestá in Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera* and Dr. Blind in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*. Last spring, Leo performed the role of Basilio in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the University of Minnesota Opera Theater. Leo was a Showcase Artist and scholarship winner for Thursday Musical and Minnesota Varsity (Classical MPR). In his spare time, he teaches voice and piano.



RUTH ENGEL is a Cantorial School student who brings a deep love of Jewish music and prayer to her work, with a passion for creating meaningful spiritual experiences through voice, learning, and community.

Ruth spent two summers at Ramah in the Rockies, most recently as *rosh chinuch* (head of Jewish education). As part of her cantorial program, Ruth spent last spring studying in Jerusalem and exploring the music of the Sephardi and Mizrahi traditions through melodies

of *piyyutim*, *nusah* in synagogue, and the theory of *maqam* (Middle Eastern musical modes). She studied the musical history of Israel at Hebrew Union College and participated in the Shirata program at the Schechter Institutes in Jerusalem. Last summer, she continued her Hebrew language learning and biblical Hebrew studies in the immersive seven-week program at the Middlebury Language Schools.

At JTS, Ruth has served on the Advisory Committee for the minyan and as a *gabbait*, supporting daily prayer and community life. This year she served as the student cantor at Fort Tryon Jewish Center in Washington Heights, where she continued to grow in song, *tefillah*, and connected with the community.

Ruth earned a BBA from Ramapo College of New Jersey, where she majored in Finance and minored in Accounting.



Prior to coming to JTS, **CAITLYN SHANNON** split her time between undergraduate studies, a desk job in the corporate world, and her role as the cantorial intern for her home synagogue, Mosaic Law Congregation in Sacramento, California. She was raised in a very

musical world, both Jewish and secular. If you ask her for a Jewish adaptation of a Disney song, you'll have it within the day. As a child, she attended a Jewish elementary school, and her parents brought her to children's Shabbat services every Saturday morning. She very quickly developed a love for the music, traditions, history, and culture of Judaism, which she wishes to share with all who may come to her to learn.

Caitlyn used the knowledge she gained so far at JTS to step in as her home synagogue's interim cantorial soloist over last summer, while the congregation searched for a new prayer leader. She is excited to continue to learn, grow, and share her learning with others.



COLEMAN SHICKMAN hails from Addison, Texas. His life has been steeped in Jewish tradition and activities, from attending Camp Ramah to singing in his synagogue's youth choir. But his biggest inspiration is his late father, Joel Shickman (ז"ל), a composer, singer,

and music director at his family's synagogue who instilled in him a love for Jewish music and learning that led him to his current path.

Prior to earning a BA in Religious Studies from the University of North Texas, Coleman took a gap year in Israel with Nativ, which brought him unexpected experiences and a wealth of Jewish culture he hadn't realize he was missing. After college, Coleman was hired by a local synagogue to be their cantor for Shabbat services and to teach in their Sunday school. Serving this community was the most memorable and motivating work he had ever done, and Coleman knew he had found his calling.

WILLIAM DAVIDSON GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION



TALIA FELDMAN is a part-time student working on an MA in Jewish Educational Leadership. She also takes spiritual care and counseling classes at JTS.

She grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, and attended the University of Delaware, earning her BA in

Human Services. In college, she received the Golda Meir Award for leadership from UD Hillel. As a participant in the Nachshon Project Undergraduate Fellowship, Talia studied at Hebrew University for a semester. She has worked in the Jewish community for four years at synagogues, in classrooms, and at camps. Currently, she works at the Day Camp @ the JCC at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan. She looks forward to using her William Davidson School degree to create grief support and programming at Jewish camps in the future.



LILLIAN FINEGOLD-SACHS

is an MA student at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, as well as a student at Gershon Kekst Graduate School, studying the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation. She earned a BS from the College of William & Mary in

Williamsburg, Virginia, majoring in Physics and minoring in Judaic Studies. In addition to her studies at JTS, Lillian is working on a few passion projects, including translating the Prophetic Books from biblical Hebrew to English, translating the *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache* from German to English, and writing fantasy fiction for middle-grade readers.

Lillian grew up in Alexandria, Virginia, attending services and religious school at Agudas Achim of Northern Virginia. She graduated from T. C. Williams High School (now Alexandria City High School) with an Advanced Studies Diploma, as well as the Governor's Certification for Academic Excellence, the Board of Education Scholastic Excellence Certification, and the Board of Education's Seal for Advanced Mathematics and Technology.



SHIRI GOLDSMITH GRAZIANI

is an online William Davidson student from California. After receiving her BA in Anthropology in 2005 from San Francisco State University, Shiri began touring domestically and internationally as a musician and front woman. In 2011, she started teaching

in schools in Oakland, California, and she has been working in education ever since. Her teaching specialties are in music, yoga, and Jewish education.

The birth of her two children inspired her to focus more intensively on Jewish education, cultural events, and Jewish music. She has been the recipient of multiple grants, including ones from the California cities of Glendale and Pasadena, to share klezmer music with the larger community.



ME'IR SHERER-MIZRAHI

is pursuing the William Davidson School's EdD in Leadership and Change. For 11 years, he has been the director of Congregational Learning at Temple Emunah in Lexington, Massachusetts. Prior to that role, Me'ir served as the director

of Congregational Learning at Congregation Or Atid in Wayland, Massachusetts, and director of Congregational Learning at Congregation Beth Israel in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Me'ir holds an MSW from Boston University and an MJEd from Hebrew College in Boston. He is also a graduate of the Joint Program between JTS's List College and Columbia University's School of General Studies.

In 2005 and 2006, Me'ir was a participant in the Melton Senior Educators Program at Hebrew University.

He lives in Stoneham, Massachusetts, with his husband of 12 years, Kfir Sherer-Mizrahi.

GERSHON KEKST GRADUATE SCHOOL



DEBORAH L. CABANISS, MD,

is a non-matriculated student at the Gershon Kekst Graduate School. As part of her ongoing journey of Jewish learning, she has completed JTS's Context program and taken a second-year Hebrew course. Dr. Cabaniss is a professor emerita of Clinical

Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University, where she teaches and supervises psychiatry residents. Until June of 2025, she was associate director of Residency Training in the Department of Psychiatry. She is also a training and supervising analyst at the Columbia University Center for Training and Research.

Dr. Cabaniss's research interests primarily involve psychoanalytic and psychiatric education, and she has authored many books and articles on these topics. She has been the recipient of many teaching awards, including a 2014 Presidential Teaching Award for Outstanding Teaching from Columbia University. She is a two-time Teichner Scholar of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry and is an author of *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: A Clinical Manual*, *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: An Expanded Approach*, and *Different Patients; Different Therapies*, which have been widely translated and are core reading in psychiatry residencies across the country and abroad. She has a private practice in Manhattan, focusing on psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.



AVI GLUCK is a dual MA student at JTS, studying Jewish history at the Gershon Kekst Graduate School and Jewish education at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education. Prior to attending JTS, Avi was a student of history and Jewish studies at the University of South

Carolina and a member of the University of South Carolina's chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society. While an undergraduate, Avi taught Hebrew school at a Conservative synagogue in Columbia, South Carolina. He also did an internship at a local historical organization in South Carolina and worked on a project called the Jewish Merchant Project, which documents historic Jewish businesses in the American South.

In addition to his studies at JTS, Avi is an eighth-grade teacher at the Temple Emanu-El Religious School on the Upper East Side, as well as a fellow in the UJA-Graduate Fellowship program.

Avi's passion for education and Jewish history stems from his childhood in the Satmar Hasidic community of Brooklyn. Avi hopes to make Jewish education more accessible for those on the sidelines and teach students that there is no one correct way to be a Jew.



MICHAEL GORDAN, a lawyer living in Philadelphia, is a student in JTS's DHL program studying Rabbinic literature and cultures. He is a graduate of Wesleyan University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School, as well as Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater

Boston. More recently, Michael obtained rabbinical ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in Riverdale, New York, and

is enjoying pursuing academic Jewish studies at JTS. He also served as a foreign law clerk in the chambers of Justice Mishael Cheshin of the Supreme Court of the State of Israel.

Michael's many connections to JTS include his son, Abner, who graduated in May from List College; his brother, Israel Gordan, trained as a cantor and a rabbi at JTS; and his sister-in-law, Abigail Uhrman, the director of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education.



BERRET YUFFEE is in the MA in Jewish Thought program at the Gershon Kekst Graduate School. She is studying the dialectical relationship between 20th-century phenomenology and post-Zoharic Kabbalistic thought. Prior to JTS, Berret earned a BA in Critical Theory and Social Justice from

Occidental College, where she completed a thesis on "The Human Condition (1958): Hannah Arendt and the Political Mobilization of Jewish Mystical Metaphysics."

Berret is an alumna of the 2024–2025 Avodah Service Corps, where she spent a year in pluralistic, social justice–driven Jewish community, working as a paralegal with the New York Legal Assistance Group's Domestic Violence Law Unit. She intends to continue the community-based work in sexual assault prevention and trauma-informed care that she began as an undergraduate as she works toward a career in academia.

In her free time, Berret enjoys trips to the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, making or viewing art and music with friends, talking about family history, and soaking in the splendor of a Brooklyn Shabbat.

ALBERT A. LIST COLLEGE



JACK BAECK graduated in May from the Joint Program between JTS and Columbia University. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Jack grew up in a secular yet traditional home and was always surrounded by and connected to Judaism.

Jack studied economics and sociology at Columbia and modern Jewish studies at JTS. He served on the board of Meor, a Jewish youth organization, and he worked on the finance and consulting track for Tamid, a student-run organization that connects college students with startups in Israel, providing hands-on experience in consulting and investments. He is an alumnus of the AEPi fraternity.

Jack has always been drawn to both education and Judaism. He attended Jewish day schools his entire life and was excited to continue his education in college through this one-of-a-kind program. What he finds so special about JTS is how the professors take the traditional stories taught in day school and bring them to life through deep rigor and analysis. For Jack, the stories of Judaism never change, but the way one connects to them evolves over time. Each time he revisits these stories, he sees the same images he imagined as a child, but now layered with new meaning and understanding.

Jack hopes to become a Jewish studies teacher. Through the Joint Program, he has deepened his understanding of Judaism and strengthened his connection to his faith, and he looks forward to helping others do the same. He believes that the magic of school lies in the lasting connection between students and teachers. While students may be with a teacher for only a year, teachers stay with their students forever. Jack hopes to make that same lasting difference, knowing that the lessons we take from the classroom often reveal their meaning only later, in new moments and contexts. He is very grateful for the Joint Program and the way it has allowed him to grow both academically and spiritually.



ROSE CLUBOK is from Columbus, Ohio, and graduated in May from the Double Degree program between JTS and Barnard College. She studied Jewish thought at JTS and history at Barnard. She also pursued her New York State teaching license through the Urban Teaching program at

Barnard. In addition to taking classes, she wrote her history thesis and was student-teaching high school social studies at Fredrick Douglass Academy in Harlem.

Outside of school, Rose was the children's programming coordinator at Kehillat Hadar on the Upper West Side, where she planned and facilitated weekly programming. She was also a member of the 2025–2026 cohort of the Alexander Jewish Leadership Institute, a Jewish leadership fellowship at the Columbia/Barnard Hillel. Last summer, she co-facilitated the Madatz Counselor-In-Training Program at Habonim Dror Camp Tavor in Three Rivers, Michigan. Rose plans to pursue teaching.



JULIA LANGE graduated in May from the Double Degree Program between JTS and Barnard College, having studied Jewish texts at JTS and psychology at Barnard. Originally from Scottsdale, Arizona, Julia grew up near the largest Conservative synagogue in the state, which her

parents helped establish the year before she was born. She was active in Camp Ramah and USY throughout her youth, and those experiences deeply shaped her Jewish identity.

At Barnard, Julia's academic interests lay at the intersection of spirituality and psychology, and she wrote her senior thesis on how brief mindfulness meditation affects visual attention. Julia served as editor of the *List College Newsletter* in 2024–2025 and as an orientation co-chair this past fall, helping to welcome new students to campus. She was active in several

groups at the Columbia/Barnard Hillel and a fellow in the Hadar NYC College Fellowship.

Outside of school, Julia worked as a research assistant in the Eating Disorders Program at Montefiore Einstein Hospital. Julia plans to conduct research at Reichman University in Israel, exploring how contemplative practices influence attitudes toward peace, and she hopes to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology.



Growing up in Menlo Park, California, **DEVIN LESLIE** attended a large, diverse public high school, serving as student body president and on the site council, a governance system for California public schools. Devin worked as a Jewish song leader at synagogues,

JCCs, and private events, but knew he needed more Judaic knowledge to complement his work.

At List College, Devin found what he was looking for: concrete Judaic knowledge and skills, a rigorous liberal arts education, and access to a broad, deep, and varied Jewish life.

In addition to his studies, Devin worked as the List College community engagement intern, planning the school's annual undergraduate overnight retreat, and he taught first-grade religious school through the List Education and Professional Leadership (LEAP) Fellowship. He lived in Columbia's pluralistic Jewish housing and food co-op, the Bayit, where he served as the community's religious coordinator. He continues to songlead in New York and works in the summers as head song leader at Camp Tawonga in California. In May, Devin graduated with a BA in Jewish Texts and Interpretations and a BA in Political Science. He plans to continue to pursue his passion for Jewish communal service and leadership.

THE RABBINICAL SCHOOL



BENNETT DECKER is a Rabbinical School student at JTS who also graduated with a BA in Talmud from JTS's List College, and a BA in Political Science from Columbia University. He worked at T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights for three years before returning to JTS to attend The Rabbinical School.

Bennett has served as a Slifka-Nadich rabbinic intern at Brandeis University, where he worked with students to facilitate communal learning and build up the Masorti minyan on campus. He also served as the educator for the Heschel Fellowship for the third straight year, implementing a curriculum he designed for USY students not currently enrolled in a Jewish day school. Bennett has been a JTS ambassador at a variety of different Conservative

synagogues across the United States and Canada, bringing high-level learning content to diverse Conservative Jewish communities. He spent his most recent summer teaching Judaic studies at Camp Ramah in Nyack, New York. Bennett is currently studying in Israel on JTS's Israel Program.



GABRIELA (GABBY) HELF

hails from Maryland and is happy to be back on the East Coast after spending six years in St. Paul, Minnesota, earning her BA in English Literature from Macalester College.

Gabby participated in JTS's Low Residency Mekhinah program in spring 2025. She has worked as a synagogue event coordinator, Hebrew school teacher, writing tutor, camp

counselor, and swim coach. Her rabbinic path is inspired by a passion for bringing Jewish communities into conversation with one another and a desire to walk alongside those seeking connection with their Judaism.

This year, in addition to her studies, Gabby served as a Slifka-Nadich Rabbinic Fellow at Brandeis University Hillel, teaching, praying, and spending Shabbat with the students. In her spare time, she is a drummer/percussionist and enjoys swimming, reading, and all things Broadway.



AARON NEWMAN is from Omaha, Nebraska, and graduated from the University of Nebraska in 2022 with a BA in History and Religious Studies. In college, he participated in the Nachshon Project and is now a graduate fellow. He was also an education intern

at Valley Beit Midrash in Arizona his senior year. Following graduation, he studied in Jerusalem for a year at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies.

Growing up, Aaron was active in USY and later worked several summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. After his year in Israel, he returned to work in these spaces, eventually serving as a youth director for his home community, Beth El Synagogue in Omaha.

This year, in addition to his studies, Aaron served as the Kraft Rabbinic Intern for Koach at Columbia/Barnard Hillel, leading services and engaging students through meaningful conversations, community programs, and Torah. He also interned as a monthly service leader at Gesher | The Bridge Shul in Bridgehampton, New York.



TAMARA SETT BON was born in Paris, where she founded Rimonim, a youth movement dedicated to empowering young Jews to explore their identity and values. Passionate about sustainability, she also launched a recycling program and organized community conversations about the intersection of Judaism and ecology.

After a decade of teaching and community work, Tamara felt called to deepen her learning journey. After completing JTS's Low-Residency Mekhinah program and Nishma studies, she moved to New York to attend The Rabbinical School.

Teaching has always been a central part of Tamara's life, and she teaches year-round. Last summer, she worked for the Community Care Department at Ramah Galim, supporting campers and staff in building nurturing Jewish spaces. This year, she took up the challenge of leading a Talmud Torah class on Zoom for children from around the world. These experiences remind her daily that Jewish community can flourish anywhere—at camp, in a classroom, or across continents—and that deep connections and learning in community are at the heart of our tradition.

DIVISION OF LIFELONG AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

MFA in Creative Writing



SAMANTHA MAX is a member of the inaugural class earning an MFA in Creative Writing at JTS, working on a project deeply rooted in her Jewish identity and family history. She is excited to have a community of fellow Jewish writers and to learn from incredible mentors whose

writing she has consumed and admired for years.

Samantha is a journalist who has covered the criminal justice system, immigration, health, and inequity as a reporter at local news outlets around the country, including WNYC/ Gothamist in New York City, WPLN News in Nashville, and the *Macon Telegraph* in Macon, Georgia. Her reporting has been featured nationally on NPR and *Reveal*, an investigative radio show and podcast.

Samantha co-reported an investigation into allegations of widespread sexual abuse on Rikers Island that was a finalist for the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in audio. Her reporting on Nashville's police department received multiple awards, including the Daniel Schorr Journalism Prize. Samantha was also part of the inaugural class of Report for America, a service journalism program that sends up-and-coming reporters to local newsrooms across the country.

Samantha earned a BA in Journalism and Spanish at Northwestern University. She is a Baltimore native and proud alum of Krieger Schechter Day School.



Yael Schick was drawn to the MFA in Creative Writing program for its unique emphasis on the craft of writing and the purpose of storytelling, and she is thrilled to be part of the JTS community.

Her screenwriting has earned her the Women in Film Feature Residency

Fellowship, as well as recognition from the Nicholl Fellowship, Austin Film Festival, and Athena Film Festival, among others. She is a 2025–2026 Screenwriting fellow for the Wonder Project.

Yael is the executive director of Writopia Lab, an organization whose mission is to foster joy, literacy, and critical thinking in children and teens from all backgrounds through creative writing. Yael's favorite role at Writopia is that of instructor. She has been recognized as an Outstanding Educator by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards on many occasions, and her students have been awarded national medals that include American Voice Awards, Best in Grade Awards, and Silver Medals with Distinction in their senior portfolios.

Yael graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2022 with an EdM degree in Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship. At Harvard, she was a recipient of the Saul Zaentz Fellowship, awarded to emerging leaders in early childhood education. She holds a BA in English Literature from Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University.

She lives in Manhattan but will always call Queens home.

MA in Spiritual Care and Counseling



PHIL PIZZO earned his MA in Spiritual Care and Counseling at JTS in May. He previously served as the David and Susan Heckerman Professor and Founding Director of the Stanford Distinguished Careers Institute, and before that, dean of the Stanford School of Medicine, where

he was also the Carl and Elizabeth Naumann Professor of Pediatrics and of Microbiology and Immunology. In 2022, he began rabbinical studies at the Academy for Jewish Religion, California, and became professor emeritus at Stanford.

A pediatric oncologist and infectious disease expert, Phil has dedicated his career to improving the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of childhood cancers and the infections affecting immunocompromised children. He has been a national leader in academic medicine, advancing science, education, healthcare policy, the study of longevity, and the future of higher education. Phil is the author of more than 650 scientific articles and 16 books and monographs, and his honors include the Public Health Service Outstanding Service Medal, the American Pediatric Society's John Howland Award (the highest honor for lifetime achievement bestowed by the American Pediatric Society), and the New York Academy of Medicine's John Stearns Medal.

In 2019, he and his wife converted to Judaism together. For Phil it was an affirmation of values and a life that he had already been living. He enrolled in the Spiritual Care and Counseling program at JTS because it was closely aligned with his current life calling, to continue to provide care and support to individuals in need, with a focus on the spirit/soul as enjoined with the body. He wants to care for older individuals, work he finds deeply meaningful.

Certificate in Biblical Hebrew



ABBIE H. BROWN, PHD, eager to improve his understanding of and appreciation for the Tanakh and better his Hebrew reading skills, earned a Certificate in Biblical Hebrew from JTS in May. He is professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Mathematics,

Science and Instructional Technology at East Carolina University, and an active member of Congregation Bayt Shalom in Greenville, North Carolina. Abbie was delighted to expand his Jewish community by studying with people from all over North America.

Emerging Leaders Fellowship



CALLIE COUSIN is a 10th grader in JTS's Emerging Leaders Fellowship (ELF), a nine-month program for 10th–12th graders designed to inspire curiosity, critical thinking, and a deeper connection to Jewish learning. Callie is a singer, songwriter, composer, pianist, and guitarist. She

co-leads services weekly, participates in concerts, and serves as a *madricha* at B'nai Torah. Callie also teaches for Sing Sign Simcha, a program where children, their teachers, and parents learn together through song, art, drama, and movement to the beat of traditional and original songs, using sign language to teach Hebrew and Jewish values.

Callie is currently working toward the AICE diploma and AP Capstone Certificate in writing, and she was recently chosen as one of 12 Jewish Star All-Stars in the country by Jewish Rock Radio. Callie is excited to be learning, meeting new people, collaborating, and doing research at JTS, where she dreams of attending List College, The Rabbinical School, and H. L. Miller Cantorial School one day.

