

New York scholar heads Judaic Studies program

■ Because of a generous donation, students interested in Jewish culture are given more opportunity to learn

By Brooke Ross
Oregon Daily Emerald

The year-old Judaic Studies department welcomes a new director this fall. Judith Baskin, a prominent Judaic Studies scholar, has accepted the head position of the University's Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies.

"It's an honor to be a part of the program," she said.

Baskin is interested in Judaic Studies and has spent several years teaching it. She is the author of "Jewish Women in Historical Perspective," currently in its second edition. The book is used to teach students throughout North America and Israel.

Before coming to the University, she taught at the State University of New York at Albany for 12 years.

Baskin knows it will be different teaching in Eugene because there is

less of a Jewish population in Oregon than there is in New York. Another significant difference from her previous teaching experience is



Courtesy Photo
Judith Baskin directs the new Judaic Studies program, funded by a donation.

that SUNY's program was state-supported, while the University's program is funded through a private endowment.

The University's program was established in 1999 when Harold, Arlene and Jordan Schnitzer gave the University \$1.5 million from the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation. "I think the Judaic Studies program offers students a richer opportunity to study in a variety of ways," said Joe Stone, dean of the University's College of Arts and Sciences.

Stone said he feels that the Judaic Studies program offers new choices for students, such as studying modern and biblical Hebrew. Before the program's graduating seniors think about caps and gowns, they must complete a senior project, which is focused on a Judaic Studies topic of their choosing.

Other classes within the major program include an internship and a thesis project. Baskin will be teaching Judaic Studies 201, Foundations of Jewish Thought, this fall.

One challenge in the program is that the University does not have its own Judaic Studies faculty, Baskin said. One of her goals for the Judaic Studies program is to work more with other University departments. There are several courses outside the department that can be used for the Judaic Studies major, Baskin said.

German 399, Modern Yiddish Literature, is just one of the classes that tie in with the major. The class gives a history of Eastern Europe and the Holocaust, which is reflected in Judaic Studies, said Jonathan Skolnik, assistant professor of Germanic languages and literatures.

Judaic Studies majors should find this class helpful because it offers a history about the origins of Jewish culture.

"I think the class will offer students a window to east Jewish culture of the 19th and 20th centuries," Skolnik said.

Baskin feels that keeping close connections with the community, University faculty and other colleges throughout the state is key to

the program's success. Baskin has already met with Judaic Studies representatives from other Oregon universities.

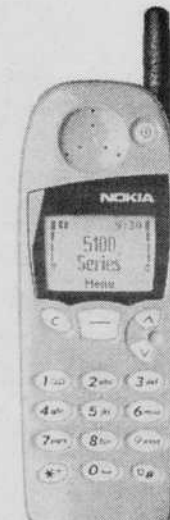
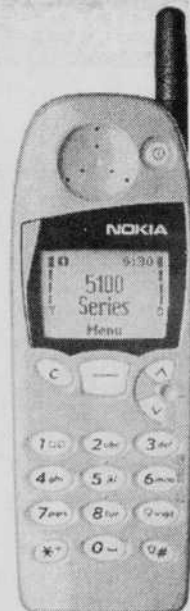
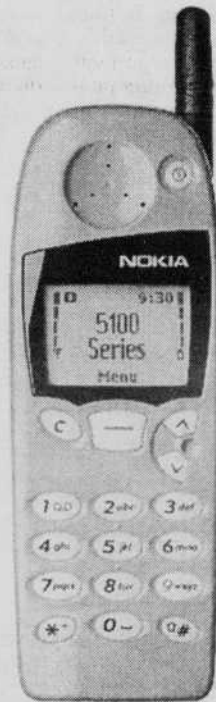
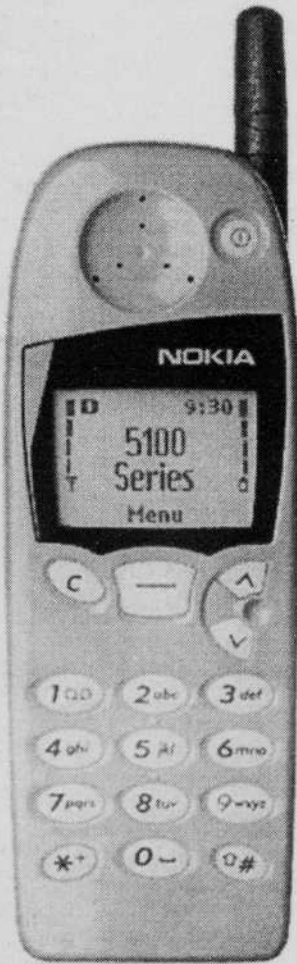
Over the summer, Baskin met in Salem with associates from Willamette University, Reed College, Portland State University, Pacific University and Lewis and Clark College.

Baskin, who served as a speaker at the meeting, feels that one good way for Oregon Judaic Studies departments to work together is by sharing guest speakers who travel to the state. Other ideas she has include fund raising and workshops.

The group hopes to meet once every year to share ideas, but for now Baskin is keeping contact established through e-mail.

Currently, the Yale graduate serves as the vice president of the National Association of Judaic Studies, of which she has been a member for 24 years. She enjoys her involvement in the NAJS and feels that the experience also helps her in the classroom.

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