

WEB-BASED LEARNING AND TEACHING RESOURCES FOR JEWISH STUDIES

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Introduction

Web-based tools and content are everywhere making their way into the classroom. Scholars are also looking at the role that they can play in promoting digital technologies. Not only are they using the Internet but they are also beginning to contribute to the development and creation of web-based pedagogical resources. Although many universities and institutions have created digital archives and websites to make collections and content more accessible, most have not explored these sites' teaching potential. This article looks at three current websites related to teaching Jewish studies. They are available for noncommercial purposes, are free of charge, and are affiliated academically. Technologies that enable the collaborative development and the sharing of educational content among Jewish studies teaching and student communities support these sites.

1. Center for Online Jewish Studies

The Center for Online Jewish Studies (COJS) was created to bring together scholars, historians, educators, and technologists and mount quality curricular materials on the Internet (www.cojs.org). The center's founder, George S. Blumenthal, originally came up with the concept in 2002. In 2004, he organized the meeting with a group of Jewish studies scholars and technologists from which the blueprint for COJS emerged. The initiative focuses on inter-institutional collaboration and

innovative uses of technology to make educational materials on Jewish history, culture, religion, and literature available to people of all ages and levels of education. The COJS team now includes scholars,

[COJS] FOCUSES ON INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND INNOVATIVE USES OF TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ON JEWISH HISTORY, CULTURE, RELIGION, AND LITERATURE AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND LEVELS OF EDUCATION...THE PROJECT AIMS TO DEMONSTRATE HOW COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOLARS, LIBRARIANS AND ARCHIVISTS, AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN RESULT IN THE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF QUALITY EDUCATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS IN JEWISH STUDIES.

students and educators from institutions located around the world. The project aims to demonstrate how collaboration among scholars, librarians and archivists, and the business community can result in the creation and dissemination of quality educational and instructional materials in Jewish studies.

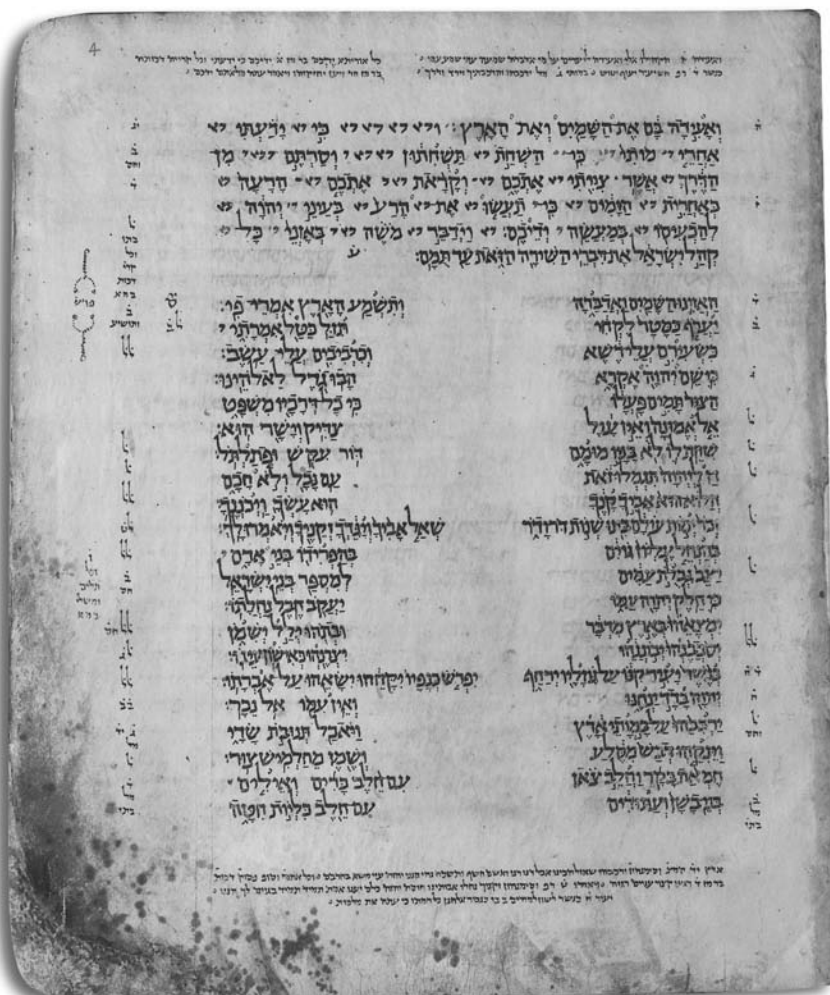
COJS is an evolving digital library and collaborative project consisting of scholarly essays, documents, and artifacts that focuses on Jewish history, culture, and civilization. The staff initially worked with partners from over thirty-five institutions to digitize more than one hundred thousand objects related to Jewish history located in their collections. These joint projects have led to the

creation of adjunct websites that can be accessed from the main COJS website and many of the digitized images are freely available for viewing by the public. The site brings together a wide range of heterogeneous primary and secondary sources in multiple formats that include text, sound, image, and video. It includes video and audio lectures by scholars.

COJS is structured hierarchically. The homepage provides a brief overview

of the site and links to the four major modules of the site.

"Exploring Treasures of the Jewish Past" provides links to the digitization efforts of COJS and its partners. Users of the site can currently view the entire Great Isaiah Scroll and the Aleppo Codex online housed at the Israeli Museum. COJS digitally photographed selections from the manuscript collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA). Viewers can see entire versions of an illuminated Haggadah from Spain and a 1290 *mahzor* from Germany, as well as fragments from the Cairo *Genizah*. Other COJS digital projects include manuscripts from the Julliard School and collections from the Central



From "The Aleppo Codex Online" on the COJS website, www.cojs.org.
Courtesy of the Center for Online Judaic Studies and the Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi Institute.

Zionist Archives, American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Museum, and Yeshiva University.

"Understanding Jewish History" links to nine "mini-websites" developed by professors associated with COJS. The sites cover Jewish history from antiquity to the early modern period. The first site to go live addresses the Dead Sea Scrolls. The site presents an overview of the importance and role in history of the scrolls, and collates primary and secondary materials, many of which are linked to the full-text version, videos, images, and other websites.

"Engaging Jewish Culture and Civilization" links to theme-based websites that provide educational resources on different aspects of Jewish life and culture, including Jewish women, Jewish history,

Passover, and the Spielberg Jewish Film Archive. COJS funded a few of these sites; others are sites that the organization finds useful and educational.

"Network for the Teaching of Jewish History" is intended to be a resource for instructors who are teaching areas of Jewish history with which they may not be familiar. The site will provide links to interactive educational modules and an educators' blog to help teachers communicate and share their experiences.

Making quality information available requires much more than just putting it "up on the web" in an attractive way. The material needs to be searchable, browsable, and maintainable. A goal of COJS is to be a central repository of online

historical documents, artifacts, and resources relating to Jewish studies. But these materials will be difficult to access if the site does not have any search mechanisms. These are lacking in COJS' current stage of development. Users can only move through the site by clicking on navigation tabs. Most quality websites offer full indexing of their sites that allow at least basic searching for author, title, subject or discipline, and type of materials by keyword and Boolean search terms. The resources at the COJS website are also "hidden" from major search engines. One hopes that the developers of the site will add searching capabilities in the future or, at the very least, a sitemap.

2. Using the Internet in College-Level Hebrew Language Courses—*Hebrew@Stanford*

The Internet offers many opportunities for technology-based learning and teaching in college-level language courses. Recent advances in technology have provided valuable new resources for foreign language teachers and learners. These include web-based text, streaming audio and video, satellite radio and television, and DVD. Interactive resources include wikis, instant messaging, and video conferencing. New resources are also available for exercises and assessment. New online materials for learning Hebrew are supplementing classroom activity and also provide an opportunity for long-distance learning. A very interesting collection of multimedia and interactive language activities is Hebrew@Stanford Multimedia created by Dr. Vered Shemtov of Stanford University (www.stanford.edu/class/hebrew/hsa/index.html).

Hebrew@Stanford Multimedia is a web-based learning resource site for Hebrew language instruction. The site contains streaming audio and video, interactive exercises and a collection of resources that expose

students to the Hebrew cultural heritage, literary and intellectual materials, and daily life. Most of the materials available on the site are freely available to the public. A few are restricted to Stanford University students because of copyright issues. Hebrew@Stanford was not designed to support—or exist—as a single online course but to supplement a variety of curricula and learning programs. The goal is to share with Hebrew language teachers and students web-based content developed at Stanford and at other institutions that can enhance and expand awareness of Hebrew language and culture outside the classroom. The Hebrew@Stanford website includes links to two other institutional sites: The Hebrew program at the University of Texas has developed a set of web-based learning tools for the study of Modern Hebrew literature and language (www.laits.utexas.edu/hebrew). The Center for Advanced Research and Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota provides a set of online materials for the teaching and study of Hebrew (www.carla.umn.edu/lctl/materials/language/hebrew.html).

Hebrew@Stanford also includes material from the multimedia Hebrew language series *Hevenu Shalom Alekhem*. The program was developed by the Pedagogic Center of the Jewish Agency for Israel and adapted to the web by the Hebrew Language team at Stanford University. The series is made up of twenty Hebrew language lessons, each consisting of a dialogue and scene depicting the everyday life of new immigrants to Israel along with new vocabulary and grammatical patterns. The vocabulary appears after each part of the dialogue. Exercises for learning new language patterns appear at the end of the segment. Each video clip is in RealAudio format as an MP3 audio file that can be downloaded onto a student's computer or iPod.

The website features many video and audio clips by native speakers that provide students with models of authentic speech. The speakers elaborate on a wide variety of topics about their culture, family, daily life, and more. Dr. Shemtov worked with Stanford's Digital Media Services department to provide maximal functionality for the Hebrew@Stanford website. The site makes use of Virage Videologger software, which makes video content searchable and interactive (www.virage.com/content/products). Users can search for a specific clip, a key frame, a word, or phrase in closed caption text or even a spoken word within video files. Search options include: keywords, file format (all clips, image files, or text files), level of proficiency (from Novice Low to Advanced), verb tense, and item type (interview, scene, translation, grammar note. . . [et al.]).

3. MODIYA Project: *Jews/Media/Religion*

MODIYA Project: Jews/Media/Religion is a fully searchable, open-access repository for scholars, teachers, and students of multiformat materials relating to the interrelation among Jews, media, and religion (modiya.nyu.edu). The project is a collaboration between New York University's (NYU) ITS Faculty Technology Center, ITS Academic Computing Center, NYU Digital Library Team and the NYU Center for Religion and Media. This group first met during the 2003–2004 academic year. The resultant website is extensive and provides access to a variety of courseware and content related to the material culture and history of Judaism. On its homepage, a sidebar lists a series of units. Each of these units includes an introductory essay and links to subtopics and related resources. There are also media resources, including digital and music resources and a link to the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archives, as well as syllabi.

There has been a lot of discussion in the academic and information technology communities about the use of open source software and academic community collaborations. A major advantage of open source software, which is usually free, is that it allows developers to customize and modify the software. The Modiya Project website is built on an open source software package called DSpace (www.dspace.org). DSpace is software for setting up digital library collections on the Web. The software enables the creation, indexing, and searching of associated metadata so that the items are easily retrievable. Different scholarly communities within and beyond a single institution can adapt and customize the DSpace system to meet their individual needs and manage the data submission process.

This program allows control over contributions and access to a website. Scholars who wish to contribute to the Modiya site must first register. Each item that is submitted is then described using a format that was developed by the project team. This allows materials to be searchable and accessible on a public interface.

Conclusion

The use of technology in higher education has grown quickly over the past two decades, both in teaching and research. COJS, Hebrew@Stanford, and Modiya Project illustrate the tremendous potential of the Internet as a medium for education and instruction. These three websites would not be possible without the generous support and collaborative efforts of Jewish Studies faculty and scholars, academic information technology departments, and business partners who choose to share their research, pedagogy, knowledge and resources to benefit others.

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