CREATING INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE IN JEWISH STUDIES

“It’s a marriage of so many of the things that matter most to Marc and to me,” says Julie Beren Platt, C’79, of a new program in the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies that she and her husband, Marc Platt, C’79, have helped create.

The new initiative, a summer school for graduate students in Jewish studies, is a partnership between the Katz Center and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Its 10-day summer seminars will feature an international faculty and will provide a forum for intellectual exchange among emerging Judaic scholars in the United States, Europe and Israel.

The highly selective program will be held in Jerusalem and Philadelphia in alternate summers. It will offer formal presentations, informal conversation, visits to sites important to Jewish history and learning, and opportunities to build connections that will be important for participants’ scholarly careers, says program co-director David B. Ruderman, the Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and the Ella Darivoff Director of the Katz Center.

“The idea of the center is to create communities of learning, and that’s exactly what we’re doing. We’re beginning the process even before the students are finished with their doctorates so that they realize that structures of learning that transcend their own institutions are extremely important,” Ruderman says. “We’re trying to broaden their horizons.”

As a University Trustee and member of the Katz Center’s Board of Overseers, Julie Platt has supported many areas of the Center’s work, but this program is especially appealing to her. “It’s a trifecta,” she says. “We are very supportive of Israel in our philanthropy, and this gives us an opportunity to support the academic mission of Penn in addition to the academic mission of these students in Israel. The third part is that we hold Dr. Ruderman in extremely high esteem and have tried to be supportive of his mission, particularly where the Katz Center is focused. It’s all the things we care about colliding.”

This summer’s inaugural seminar, designed around the theme “Mingled Identities: Rethinking the Notion of Identity in Jewish Culture,” will be hosted by Hebrew University and will take participants to key sites in Jerusalem and on the Sea of Galilee. Next summer’s seminar, which is still being planned, will be in Philadelphia and will be sponsored by the Platts.

“They’re extremely generous people,” says Ruderman. “I feel extremely privileged that Julie has singled us out for service. I’m enormously grateful for her and Marc’s support.”

The summer school is the latest effort in the Katz Center’s long tradition of exchange with Israeli and European scholars. It’s modeled on the center’s highly successful fellowship program, which brings 20 Judaic scholars to Penn each year to participate in international dialogue and to conduct research on a common theme. Over the years, the fellowship program has brought together approximately 350 scholars from the across the United States, Europe and Israel—including medieval Jewish historian Israel J. Yuval of Hebrew University, who will co-direct the new program with Ruderman.

—Tracey Quinlan Dougherty