An *Einheitsgemeinde* in Divided Berlin

Leah Weiss, 2011

I used the Nyhus Travel Grant to conduct archival research for my honors thesis in History. The Nyhus Grant allowed me to travel to Berlin, where I conducted research in the archives of Centrum Judaicum, the former headquarters of Berlin’s Jewish community, and Berlin’s Landesarchiv.

My honors project focused on the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* (Berlin Jewish Community) from its reestablishment in 1945 to its eventual division in 1953. Members of the Berlin Gemeinde had different experiences in the Holocaust, different relationships to their German and Jewish identities and, by 1949, lived in two separate German states. The Gemeinde fought to remain unified until 1953, when the leaders of the Gemeinde and 600 of its members abandoned their homes and offices in East Berlin and fled to West Berlin. By analyzing German and Jewish debates on victimhood, Jewish identity, Zionism, and reparations in East and West Berlin, my honors project traced the internal and external causes of the community’s division.

Using the Nyhus Grant, I examined the minutes of Gemeinde meetings from 1945-1953, letters sent from leaders of the Gemeinde to their surviving relatives, and publications of *Der Weg: Zeitschrift für Fragen des Judentums*, the Gemeinde’s unofficial newspaper. I also met and discussed my research with German historian Sebastian Panwitz, who led me on a tour of historic Jewish sites in Berlin.

My research complicates scholarship on the Gemeinde’s division, which understands the community’s split as a direct response to East German and Soviet anti-Zionism in the early 1950s. Using the archival materials of the Landesarchiv and Centrum Judaicum as evidence, I argued that the causes of the Gemeinde’s division were also internal, and that, to a large degree, Berlin’s Jewish community was already divided before 1953. I received the Sherman David Spector of the Class of 1950 Award in History for my honors project.

**Faculty Mentor: Page Herrlinger**

**Funded by the Large Nyhus Travel Grant**