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## Film Intrigues Goucher Students

**Rudy "Rafi" Stoler**
*Special To the Jewish Times*

Intercultural celebrations frequently suffer from the tendency of attendees to stick to their own cultural group, typically resulting in little exchange or interface. Not so at Goucher College's recent "Fusion 2009," which featured a "debut week" screening of "Faces of [Israel](#): A Discussion about Marriage, State and Religion in the Jewish Homeland."

Among the diverse crowd that packed the Kelley Lecture Hall was the film's director, Amy Beth Oppenheimer, who following the screening fielded a wide variety of questions on topics ranging from technical details on marital laws in Israel to questions about how Ms. Oppenheimer filmed, edited and directed a professional and feature-length documentary without any background in the film industry.

Of particular interest to the students was the proper role of religious authority in a country dominated by Jews.

In her introduction to the film, Ms. Oppenheimer explained that the vast majority of the editing for "Faces of Israel" was done in Baltimore during her final year at Johns Hopkins University. She described the film as "an exciting and interactive documentary intended for a wide audience, from shul-goers to university and [high school students](#) to unaffiliated members of the Jewish community."

Shira Zemel, co-president of the Goucher Hillel, agreed. "Members of the Goucher community came out to watch the documentary, and then we all engaged in an interesting discussion about the role of the rabbinate in Israel," she said. "I think that everyone learned a lot. Even our dean of students emailed me after the event to let me know how much she enjoyed learning about an aspect of Israeli culture which she previously did not know about. It was great having Amy there, as she really enabled a lively discussion."

"Faces of Israel" is designed to pose a series of questions on hot topics surrounding what it means to live in both a Jewish and democratic state, and it answers these questions through interviews with Israelis ranging from leaders in the Conservative movement to fervently Orthodox Jews—including exclusive footage with Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbinate – to openly gay students.

The film covers such hot-topic issues as the legalization of civil unions in Israel, the role of the Israeli chief rabbinate, and the place of Conservative and Reform Judaism in Israel. Students in attendance had a wide variety of background knowledge and experiences. Some already held strong opinions on the issues brought up in "Faces of Israel," while others used the film as a tool to broaden their knowledge horizons and learn more about the intersection of synagogue and state in Israel today.

Rabbi Josh Snyder, director of the Goucher Hillel, said the film was a great way to engage his students in a conversation regarding an issue in Israel that receives little attention.

"`Faces of Israel' gives wonderful insight into the diversity of the Jewish responses to the role of the Israeli rabbinate regarding marriage," Rabbi Snyder said. "This film exposed students on Goucher's campus, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to the complexity and richness of Israeli society as it struggles with the Jewish identity of

the state.”

Ms. Oppenheimer said she has been pleased with the film’s reception so far.

“The film’s debut week was a great hit,” she said. “In only five days, over 800 people have seen the film, and more events are being planned every day. In the upcoming week, we are excited that we will be announcing the [New Jersey](#) and West Coast debuts of ‘Faces of Israel.’ Look out for a screening near you, and if you don’t see one get in touch with your synagogue, Hillel, or JCC and encourage them to bring the film.”

For information on Faces of Israel visit <http://www.facesthemovie.com>

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