



SUMMER/FALL 2026

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!

UPCOMING EVENTS

FALL 2026

10 September | 4:00 p.m.

Speakers: Charlie Scheidt, Kat
Rohrer, and Rebecca Erbelding

Book Talk with Charlie Scheidt:
"Inheritance: Love, Loss, and the
Legacy of the Holocaust"

17 -18 September

**Workshop: Necro geographies of
the Marginalized Dead**

22 October | 6:00pm

Speaker: Doris Bergen

**Betrayal or Salvation? Religious
Conversion during the Holocaust**

For more information about and
to register for these events,
please visit the [Strassler Center
Events Page](#)



Dr. Hana Green with her advisor, Dr. Thomas Kühne, and Dr. Diana Hayrapetyan

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

We are proud to celebrate our 2026 Ph.D. recipients. During the spring semester, three doctoral students, Dr. Hana Green, Dr. Emil Kjerte and Dr. Diana Hayrapetyan successfully defended their dissertations and graduated from the Strassler Center. Previous newsletters highlighted Dr. Green and Dr. Kjerte. Dr. Hayrapetyan will be highlighted in this issue.

Their achievements would not have been possible without the support and guidance of their advisors, dissertation committee members,

Center staff, faculty, fellow graduate students, and the many generous donors whose contributions helped make their studies possible. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who played a role in their success.

The momentum continues. In recent months, three additional doctoral students (Janda Barazi, Alina Bojčić, and Gabrielle Higgins) successfully passed their comprehensive examinations and defended their dissertation prospectuses, marking the beginning of ambitious research projects that will take them around the world. We look forward to following their progress and sharing the results of their ongoing research in future newsletters.

The Strassler Center community continues to grow, too. We are delighted to welcome a new faculty member and a new doctoral student for the 2026–2027 academic year (profiles below). We are excited for the perspectives, energy, and contributions they will bring to our community in the years ahead.

We additionally have a dynamic series of events scheduled for the fall semester. They will include a conference, several distinguished lectures, and a range of student-centered conversations geared towards their academic and professional development. These exciting events will create multiple opportunities for us to connect scholarly perspectives on genocide with the challenges that mass violence and hatred pose today. We hope that you will join us for these events, either in person or via Zoom.

Finally, many of you have likely heard that Dr. Thomas Kühne has stepped down as Director of the Strassler Center. He will enjoy a long-deserved research sabbatical during the coming academic year before returning as a full-time faculty member. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Thomas for his

dedicated leadership and the many lasting contributions he has made to the Center. His vision and commitment have helped shape the Strassler Center into the vibrant intellectual community it is today.

As I step into this role, I look forward to working alongside our exceptional faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters to build upon this strong foundation and continue advancing the Center's mission in the years ahead.



Dr. Ken MacLean
Interim Director, Strassler Center

CELEBRATING OUR GRADUATES

Dr. Diana Hayrapetyan holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics (2016) from the Supreme Certifying Committee of the Republic of Armenia and a Ph.D. in History (2026) from Clark University. Her interdisciplinary scholarship bridges historical inquiry, linguistics, and genocide studies, with a particular focus on the modern Middle East and the South Caucasus.

Her doctoral research, *From Return to Rejection: Armenian Returnees and Civil War in the Making of Modern Turkey (1918–1923)*, investigates the experiences of Armenian genocide survivors who returned to their ancestral homes in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Situating postwar return within the broader processes of state formation, political violence, and social transformation, the study examines how these local dynamics helped shape the emergence of modern Turkey. Diana's focus on the agency and lived experiences of returnees provides us with a much deeper understanding of these dynamics, which additionally offer valuable insights for wider scholarships on other genocides.

Diana currently serves as Affiliate Faculty at Gratz College, a private Jewish Institution, where she contributes her expertise through teaching, scholarship, and academic engagement.



Congratulations Diana!

WELCOME FIRST-YEAR PH.D. CANDIDATE ZAHRA LOTFI

Dr. Zahra Lotfi earned a Ph.D. in the History of Iran from Shahid Beheshti University, where she specialized in the political and social histories of Iran and Afghanistan from the medieval period to the contemporary era. Following the completion of her doctorate in 2014, she taught the history of Afghanistan at a university in Kabul, employing critical and analytical approaches to the study of Afghanistan's past.

Since immigrating to the US, Lotfi continued her scholarly activities in a variety of ways. She spent a year as a visiting scholar at Northeastern University, where she presented her research on honor crimes in Afghanistan.

Boston University awarded her two travel grants: the first supported her research on the representation and roles of women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Afghan historical sources, and the second enabled her to travel to Spain to record an oral history interview with a survivor of the 1998 Mazar-e Sharif massacre.

Lotfi is the co-editor of *My City Was a Sparkling Jewel: Voices of Newcomer Youth from Afghanistan*, presented at the 2023 Oral History Association Annual Meeting. Her chapter proposal, "Gendered Memory and Unofficial Commemoration: Hazara Women's Oral Testimonies of the 1998 Mazar-e Sharif/Balkh Province Massacre," has been accepted by the editors for the forthcoming volume, *Memorializing Atrocities: A Study of Public Memory and Commemoration of Mass Violence*.

Dr. Lotfi's current research continues her examination of the August 1998 massacre of Hazaras in Mazar-e Sharif and Balkh Province by the Taliban. Over the past three years, she has conducted 79 oral history interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses living in Afghanistan and throughout the diaspora. These testimonies document their harrowing experiences.

Drawing on these survivor and eyewitness interviews, Lotfi is building a public archive to add to the historical documentation of mass violence against the Hazara community more broadly. Her research explores how survivors remember, narrate, and transmit experiences of atrocity to others. The important project will contribute to wider scholarship in oral history, memory studies, and genocide studies.



WELCOME DR. ASHLEY VALANZOLA!



Ashley Valanzola has been appointed the inaugural David P. Angel Endowed Chair in Holocaust Pedagogy and Antisemitism Studies. Dr. Valanzola will join Clark University as a tenure-track faculty member in the History Department and the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The establishment of the David P. Angel Endowed Chair reflects the University's continuing commitment to advancing rigorous scholarship, innovative pedagogy, and public engagement at the intersection of Holocaust studies and the study of antisemitism.

Dr. Valanzola received her Ph.D. in history from George Washington University and is a historian of modern Europe and the Holocaust. She is widely recognized for her scholarship in Holocaust memory studies, women and gender history, as well as museum and public-history practice. She is the author of *When She Remembered: Seven Women Who Transformed French Holocaust Memory* (Indiana University Press), with additional book projects under contract. Her work examines how the Holocaust is remembered, interpreted, and contested across historical and institutional settings, and it is central to contemporary discussions about antisemitism, the ways it is publicly interpreted and contested, including in the form of denial.

She thus brings to Clark a strong reputation as a dedicated and innovative educator whose teaching emphasizes trauma-informed pedagogy, close analysis of primary sources, and experiential learning in museums and other public-history settings.

Clark University and the Strassler Center look forward to welcoming Dr. Ashley Valanzola to campus and to the contributions she will make to the University community.

GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS



Gabrielle Higgins with members of her committee Dr. Thomas Kühne (Clark University), Gabrielle, Dr. Elissa Mailander (Sciences Po), Dr. Frances Tanzer (her primary advisor) and Dr. Jennifer Evans (Carleton University). Higgins' dissertation project, *Sex Education and the (Un)Making of Men in Nazi Germany*, examines Nazi sex education and its impact on the coming-of-age process for young "Aryan" men living under the Third Reich. Her project takes the form of an *(Un)Bildungsroman*,

an imaginative reworking of the traditional German coming-of-age novel. It traces the means by which young men were brought into Nazi society through entangled sexual discourses—of miscegenation, national regeneration, and conquest—while also considering how this process was linked to the progressive removal of sexualized Others from the nation. Through a dual exploration of becoming and unbecoming, Higgins aims to deconstruct the idealized figure of the "Aryan" man, and question how Nazism's framing of sex as a biological, racial, spiritual, and civilizational imperative both *responded to* and *produced* acute anxieties about masculine identity and sexual power.



Janda Barazi with members of her committee Dr. Shamarin Mako (Boston University), Dr. Ora Szelesky (Clark University), Janda Barazi, Dr. Elyse Semerdjian (her primary advisor) and Dr. Suleiman Mourad (Smith College). Barazi's dissertation "*Merchants of Genocide: The Political, Economic, and Social Uses of Mass Violence by The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria*" investigates the motivations behind the 2014 genocide against the Yazidi minority in Northern Iraq and Syria. In her dissertation, Barazi draws on a plethora of archival sources produced by the

Islamic State, arguing that the ideological roots of the 2014 genocide can be traced to the earlier writings of the founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in post-2003 Iraq. Barazi further argues that the genocide was, by

no means, solely ideological. Instead, she contends that the genocide was used as a means to achieve highly specific political and economic goals to consolidate the so-called Caliphate as a real-world state.



Alina Bojčić with members of her committee: Dr. Frances Tanzer (her primary advisor), Dr. Emily Greble (Vanderbilt University), Dr. Goran Miljan (Uppsala University) and Dr. Elizabeth Imber (Clark University). Bojčić's dissertation, *Treading the Borderlands: The Cabaret, its Multi-Ethnic Performers and the Holocaust in Zagreb, 1908 – 1946*, examines how the multi-ethnic performers of the Zagreb cabaret and coffeehouse co-produced the culture of the city and the way in which these spaces became targets for cultural purification by the Ustaša.

Specifically, she investigates how the reconfiguration of cultural life in the urban centers of the Independent State of Croatia became inseparable from the severing and reformulation of the social relations between its multi-ethnic residents and the erasure of the Jewish population. By analyzing a broad constellation of popular performers over a long chronological period, her project explores how culture transformed in the period between 1908 and 1946, which will illuminate the absences created by the Holocaust.

WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS COLLABORATION

This past spring and summer, the Center collaborated with Worcester Public Schools through a grant funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Organized by Colleen Kelly, History and Social Science/Library Curriculum Specialist for Worcester Public Schools, recent Center graduates Dr. Sandra Grudić and Dr. Diana Hayrapetyan, along with faculty member Dr. Ken MacLean, led a total of five workshops on genocide education for Worcester Public Schools educators and students.

The first two workshops were held during a professional development day for all high school social studies and history teachers. Dr. Grudić led a unit on teaching about the Bosnian War and Genocide, as well as four sessions of a presentation titled *"Do's, Don'ts, and Hows of Genocide Education."* Dr. Hayrapetyan delivered a lecture on the Armenian Genocide and presented four sessions focused on teaching the Armenian Genocide through primary source materials. Dr. MacLean concluded the series with a presentation on the Cambodian Genocide.



In June, the Center also welcomed Burncoat Middle School's rising eighth-grade students to Clark University. During their visit, students toured the campus and attended a college lecture with Dr. Ken MacLean on kidnapped Ukrainian children and cultural genocide. Reflecting on the experience, Colleen Kelly shared:

"For all of our students, it was a milestone to spend time with a college professor and be asked their opinion about international events impacting students their own age in other parts of the world. I look forward to our continued collaboration. Thank you for making a lasting difference for so many of our students."

SPRING 2026 EVENT REPORTS

Antisemitism in American Law and Life

22 January 2026

Antisemitism has become a point of intense contention and division in our world. When does free speech cross over into discrimination? How can law help to define and mitigate antisemitism without slipping into efforts to curtail political dissent? How should antisemitism be distinguished from criticisms of Israel and of

Zionism? This panel explored the legal and political consequences of recent debates about antisemitism, as well as key moments in history that have shaped the current context. The panel was moderated by Marjorie Feld (Babson College) and Jonathan Feingold (Boston University).

Beyond Establishing Guilt: The Uses of Microhistory to Rethink the Yugoslav Wars

19 February 2026

Speakers: Max Bergholz (*Professor of History, Concordia University*), Fedja Buric (*Associate Professor of History, Bellarmine University*), Sandra Grudić (*Program Administrator, Educator Outreach, Davis Center, Harvard University*)

Discussant: Marko Kljajić (*Postdoctoral Fellow, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University*)

This event explored how a micro historical approach can deepen our understanding of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. Moving beyond ICTY legal records and elite political accounts, the presenters foregrounded local voices and everyday experiences to illuminate the complex dynamics of conflict at the community level. By engaging with oral histories, local archives, and court records, the discussion focused on how ordinary people understood and experienced the war in ways often at odds with nationalist narratives. The workshop particularly emphasized the methodological and analytical value of looking at the war “from the ground up” to reveal how communities navigated violence, solidarity, and survival. In doing so, it highlighted the potential of microhistory not only to challenge linear, top-down interpretations but also to complicate the historiography of the Yugoslav Wars by centering human experiences that nationalist discourses often efface.



Come for the Wrestling, Stay for the Gospel: Christian Television in the Middle East (1981-2000)

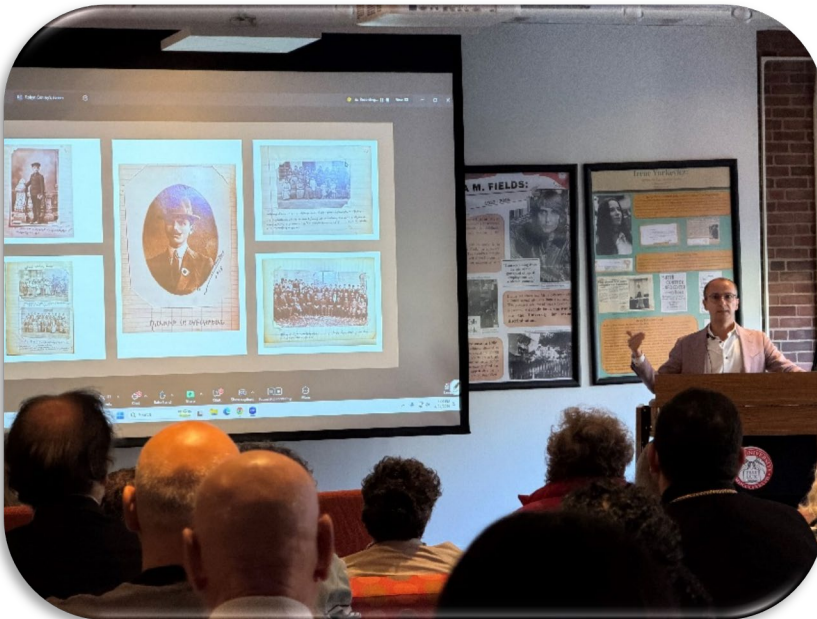
23 March 2026

Speaker: Dr. Febe Armanios (*Philip Battell and Sarah Frances Cowles Stewart Professor of History, Middlebury College*)

Dr. Armanios' presentation provided an overview of the history of Christian television in the Middle East. It explored the rise of the region's first Christian television station, which was established in war-torn South Lebanon in 1981. In collaboration with a local Christian militia and Israeli political leaders, eschatologically minded Americans funded and operated this channel, believing that their evangelism would hasten Christ's Second Coming. Over nearly two decades, the terrestrial (and later satellite) channel would introduce millions of

viewers to wholesome American family programming, American sports like professional wrestling and football, and a specific style of Arab televangelism heretofore non-existent in the region. The talk related the role of local interlocutors in promoting this station, explored the messianic vision of its backers, and considered the political and religious perspectives of its supporters and detractors.

The David Atamian Journals: An Unparalleled Record of the Armenian Genocide



24 April 2026

Speaker: Dr. Khatchig Mouradian (*Lecturer in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University*.)

Strassler Center PhD. alum, Dr. Mouradian '16, returned to Clark and offered the first scholarly reading of this manuscript. He showed how the journals deepen our understanding of the late Ottoman era and shed light on the daily emotional world of deportees.

David Atamian (1892, Behesni–1978, Arlington, Virginia) survived the Armenian Genocide and produced an unparalleled multi-volume journal

on his experiences during the early twentieth century. The manuscript spans more than 10,000 pages in thirteen volumes, covering his youth, the genocide, and the postwar period. He recorded arrests, deportation procedures, police corruption, disease, hunger, and daily survival strategies, often in real time. His postwar entries trace conditions and survivor networks across Aintab, Antioch, Birecik, Dörtyol, Iskenderun, Kilis, Marash, Nizip, Musa Dag, Suruç, Urfa, and Zeytun. Contents include a wealth of photographs, reports, and verse. Donated to the Library of Congress in 1946, the manuscript was described as “perhaps the most significant, certainly the most unusual” acquisition of the year.

“Never Always Again” Workshop

17 – 18 April 2026

In collaboration with Lehigh University's Berman Center for Jewish Studies and the College of Arts and Sciences, the Strassler Center launched what it hopes will become an annual graduate conference, bringing together students from both universities as well as institutions across the Boston area for interdisciplinary exchange.



The slogan “never again” first emerged among liberated prisoners from Buchenwald to support their efforts in combating fascism. Since then, it has become a source of contestation: the politics of “never again” can invoke a fight against antisemitism but also its weaponization. Some proponents expand its mandate beyond Jews and proclaim: “never again for anyone.” But this version, too, might obfuscate the specifics on antisemitic violence, especially in relation to the Holocaust. The workshop investigated the history and theory of “never again-ness” and, in particular, a paradox at its core: in both its particularistic and universalist manifestation, “never again” sets the conditions for repetition.

Fifth-year graduate student Nadia Crowley summarized the event’s importance to our current students:

“Through the conference, I was able to present early findings in my research. Both my professors and my peers brought important questions about my findings to the surface, many of which I had not considered, and these questions have now become instrumental in my current and future research.”

The inaugural **“Never Always Again” Graduate Workshop** featured keynote lectures by acclaimed author and artist Molly Crabapple and award-winning novelist Aleksandar Hemon.

As part of the launch of her *New York Times* bestselling book, *Here Where We Live Is Our Country: The*

Story of the Jewish Bund, Crabapple presented the lecture: **"All Men Are Brothers: Bundist Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Poland,"** exploring the history of Jewish resistance and political solidarity during the Holocaust.

Hemon, whose works include *The World and All That It Holds* (2023) and *The Lazarus Project*—a finalist for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award—delivered the workshop's plenary lecture, **"The Logic of Genocide."**

"The idea behind the graduate conference was to bring these two extraordinary speakers to campus and create an opportunity for students to think about their own work in interdisciplinary ways," said Frances Tanzer, Rose Professor of Holocaust Studies and Jewish Culture, associate professor of history, and director of graduate studies at the Strassler Center. "Both Molly Crabapple and Aleksandar Hemon engage deeply with history while approaching it through the distinct lenses of graphic art and literature." For fifth-year graduate student Nathan Lucky, the conference had a lasting impact on his approach to historical writing.

"Argument, evidence, structure, and language. These four pillars, in that order, are often invoked as the foundation of historical writing. Molly Crabapple and Aleksandar Hemon, two world-class writers, forced me to rethink this hierarchy. Language and great writing should not be the exclusive domain of literature, and history should not be boring or inaccessible. As I begin to write the chapters of my dissertation, how I present my arguments and evidence will no longer be an afterthought."



SPRING 2026 COLLOQUIUM SERIES

The Strassler Center Colloquium met twice during the Spring 2026 semester, providing a forum for faculty and graduate students from Clark University and neighboring institutions to present works in progress and engage in rigorous discussion on topics of significance to the field.

On February 10, Dr. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu (MIT) presented her work, *Halide Edib Adivar in the Face of Armenian Massacres: From Apology to Apologist*, examining the evolving perspectives of the prominent Turkish novelist and political figure in relation to the Armenian massacres.

On March 9, Dr. Ethan Kleinberg (Wesleyan University) presented the chapter "The End of Truth" from his forthcoming monograph, *The Surge*. His presentation sparked a lively



Dr. Lerna Ekmekcioglu with the Center's Dr. Elyse Semerdjian

discussion on contemporary understandings of historical truth, interpretation, and the challenges facing historical scholarship in the present day.

We look forward to continuing these engaging conversations during the Fall 2026 Colloquium Series, as scholars from a range of disciplines share new research and foster thoughtful discussion on the pressing historical, political, and ethical questions of our time.

3rd year Center student Andrew Burnstein, Dr. Ethan Kleinberg, and Dr. Frances Tanzer





Our Ph.D. students conduct innovative research in archives around the world, with genocide survivors, and at sites of mass violence. They secure prestigious fellowships, present their research at conferences and academic institutions around the world, as well as publish in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes.

Donors provide critically important support for the Strassler Center's rich Holocaust and Genocide Studies curriculum and unique doctoral programs. Their investments have been key to building a program universally recognized for its superior academic achievement. Annual gifts help the Center fund public events, undergraduate and graduate research, and ongoing operations. Endowments established by major contributions have fostered swift and robust growth.

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