Contact: Nathan Katz

First-ever ‘Jews of Asia and Africa’ class to be offered at Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU

Taught by two leading experts in the field, class will be open to students and community members

Miami Beach (Nov. 2, 2012) — Two of the world’s leading authorities on Eastern Jewish communities will explore the Jewish experience in Asia and Africa in a new course offered at the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU, located at 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach.

Beginning in January, FIU research professors Nathan Katz and Tudor Parfitt will teach the class, “The Jews of Asia and Africa,” which will be open to both degree-seeking FIU students and community members interested in taking it on an auditing basis. The uniquely structured class, which is the first of its kind anywhere, will be the first FIU offering at the Miami Beach museum, which recently joined the FIU family.

The 13-week course will look at the Jewish experience far beyond the Sunshine State, which has been the traditional focus of the museum. Among the Jewish populations to be explored include the Lemba of Zimbabwe, the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, and the Ibo of Nigeria. Asian communities include the Jews of Kochi, Mumbai and northeastern tribal peoples of India; Shanghai, China, a home in the 19th century to Sephardic Jews seeking business opportunities and refuge in the 1930s-40s to European Jews fleeing Nazi persecution; and a “Judaizing” movement in Papua New Guinea.

For students to gain different viewpoints, the class will feature guest speakers, including a visiting member of Zimbabwe’s Lemba Jewish community, and employ different methodologies, from genetic anthropology to participant/observation findings.

Prior to joining FIU earlier this year, Parfitt was director of the Jewish Studies Center at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He has been dubbed “Britain’s Indiana Jones” for his pursuit of the Ark of the Covenant and his discoveries of remote Jewish communities.

Katz, who is Bhagwan Mahavir Professor of Jain Studies and director of FIU’s Program in the Study of Spirituality, spent many years living in South Asia. A recipient of four Fulbright research and teaching awards, he was instrumental in bringing the Dalai Lama to Miami three times and has played an influential role in interreligious dialogues between Jews and Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

Official registration for degree-seeking FIU students is Nov. 5-18. Community members who want to audit the class can do so by contacting the Center for the Advancement of Jewish Education at 305-576-4030, ext. 128, or carlaspector@caje-miami.org. Cost is $295.

About FIU:
Florida International University is recognized as a Carnegie engaged university. Its colleges and schools offer more than 180 bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs in fields such as engineering, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida’s anchor institutions, FIU is Worlds Ahead in its local and global engagement, finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission. It has 160,000 alumni and enrolls 50,000 students in two campuses and three centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell and the Miami Beach Urban Studios. FIU is a member of the Sun Belt Conference and has 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit http://www.fiu.edu.