

Ellen M. Umansky Selected for 2021 Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award

THE NATIONAL BOARD OF THETA ALPHA KAPPA is pleased to announce that **Ellen M. Umansky** is the recipient of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award for 2021. She will be recognized at the society's online Annual Business Meeting on November 14.

Dr. Umansky has served since 1994 as the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Judaic Studies and the founding director of the Bennett Center for Judaic Studies at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut. She is author of many books and



articles on modern Jewish history and thought, lay religious leadership, and Jewish women's spirituality, including *From Christian Science to Jewish Science: Spiritual Healing and American Jews* (Oxford University Press, 2005) and the coedited, fully revised edition of *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook* (Brandeis University Press, 2008). Her current book project is a critical examination of Jewish feminist theology, primarily in the United States. She teaches courses including "Faith after the Holocaust" ("by no means a fun course to teach, [but] one to which I remain personally and professionally committed"), Jews and Judaism in America, women in Judaism, and women in the Bible (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Apocrypha). In addition, she is on the board of directors of the Southern Jewish Historical Society (for which she is a past president), the Board of the Stimulus Foundation of Paulist Press, and the academic advisory board of the Jewish Women's Archive

and the American Jewish Historical Society.

Umansky has been actively involved in Fairfield University's Zeta chapter of TAK for the past ten years. "In 2011, when my former colleague, Al Benney, one of the founding members of TAK, began to think seriously about retirement, he asked whether I'd be willing to work with him on TAK-related matters. . . . I was pleased to do so, and consequently I began to attend national TAK meetings and receptions at national American Academy of Religion meetings. In 2012, I volunteered to serve as a judge for the Albert Clark Award . . . and the next year, following Al's retirement, became Fairfield University's TAK chapter representative. I was asked by the chair of TAK's Nominating Committee if I'd consider standing for election on its national board as a member-at-large. I agreed and consequently served for two terms (six years)." Umansky chaired the board's nominating committee and the awards and recognitions committee, and she served on the subcommittee that revised the TAK constitution. Also, she often organized dinners and receptions for TAK functions (and considers her logistical work for the 2018 board and business meetings in Denver "one of my fondest memories"). Before and after her national board service, Umansky has diligently led her local chapter at Fairfield University, and her efforts in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic have been of particular note for this year's selection committee. Likewise, her concern for the future of this chapter is evident: "I remain chapter representative and continue to oversee the selection and induction of many wonderful undergraduates. Most recently, I have invited my colleague Lydia Willsky-Ciollo to work with me on TAK matters and to succeed me as our chapter representative after I retire."

Tracy Ferguson, a senior at Fairfield University from South Miami, Florida, is the 2021 recipient of the **Moderator's Award**. This award is presented annually to a student selected by the winner of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award.

Tracy majors in Theatre, with minors in Religious Studies and Educational Studies, and will be inducted into the TAK chapter at Fairfield later this academic year. She took Dr. Umansky's courses on women in the Bible and in Judaism and thoroughly impressed her professor: "She did an outstanding job in both. She is one of the brightest, most creative, and intellectually curious students I have taught in my 27+ years at Fairfield University."

"I am so grateful to be receiving this recognition by TAK," notes Tracy. "My Religious Studies work has helped me grow closer to and to challenge my faith. My senior capstone project for my major [a play about biblical women], in conjunction with my work through the Humanities Institute, will be the culmination of my special focus on women in the Bible and in early Christianity at large. I am so grateful to be sharing this honor with so many other respected Religious Studies scholars."

