Kurtis Bishop decided to add a major in Jewish Studies to his degrees in sociology and psychology, making him a triple threat. His new major has already opened doors. He studied abroad in Eastern Europe, and was chosen to interview Nobel laureate and human rights activist Elie Wiesel.

Kurtis’ desire to pursue Jewish Studies was prompted by his keen interest in history. “I took a class on the origins of the Hasidic movement and learned all this history about Eastern European life in the 1700s. That’s so different from what you’re usually taught about that period. Mention the 1700s and people think Paul Revere or western colonization. But there were mystical religious movements going on in Eastern Europe at that time, and other things that were a big deal in the Jewish world – things you rarely learn about. In that class, I was exposed to a whole different view of what was happening in the world at that time.”

Among the many experiences that he’s had by way of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, Kurtis regards his 10-day study-abroad course in Lithuania, Poland and Germany as one of the most meaningful. “We had very long days, visiting the historic ghettos and Holocaust death camps. We did a lot of background reading and had amazing discussions. Even though we were together for fewer than two weeks, we all became very close. For me, it was a really significant experience.”

After graduating, Kurtis hopes to sign on with Americorps, specifically with AVODAH – the Americorps inner-city program for Jewish youth. “I’ve done a lot of volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity, and I’d like to end up doing building with AVODAH. After that, my plan is to attend graduate school.”

In the meantime, he’ll continue his work in Jewish Studies, aided by what he regards as a phenomenal set of resources. “The Jewish Studies Center offers so much. I’m in there all the time, and I go to most of the extracurricular events because they’re usually so interesting. Also, Addlestone Library houses one of the country’s largest collections on southern Jewish history and culture. Those resources have really helped me with my courses.”