

Judaism

mjcarson@syr.edu | Office Hours Wednesdays 3:00-5:00pm Pages Cafe

Course Overview

This course is an introduction towards a scholarly understanding of Judaism and Jewish studies. In this course, we will read and comprehend foundational texts to Judaism, discuss the multilayered concept of Jewish identity, and learn about Jewish communities past and present. The course is not chronological, e.g. a “march through Jewish history.” Rather, the course covers several thematic themes and looks at them via many different historical standpoints.

1

Read and understand foundational/classical texts of Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism and their relevancy to contemporary Judaism.

2

Think critically about key Jewish theological concepts of God, Law/Torah, and Israel/The Jewish People

3

Understand different methodological and disciplinary approaches to the study of Judaism, and why these differences matter to scholarship

4

Write an academic term paper about a topic relating to the study of Judaism

COURSE GOALS FOR THE SEMESTER

5

Coherently present complex ideas about Judaism both orally and in writing.

Assignments

Active Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to come to class regularly. Students are given one “freebie” unexcused absence. Excused absences are permitted; reasons for excused absences include: documented illness, religious observances, documented death in the family or family emergency, documented travel as part of a SU athletic team. Requests for excused absences need to be emailed to me at mjcarson@syr.edu.

In addition to coming to class, students are expected to actively engage with the course. Students should be prepared to take notes, listen attentively, and raise questions and comments in class. Just attending class is not enough!

Computers are NOT ALLOWED IN CLASS unless you get prior permission from me AND agree to sit in the front two rows of the class.

Short Reflection Papers

Four times throughout the semester, students will write a one-to-two-page reflection paper on a question related to the section topic. Students will then come to class prepared to discuss and present their paper to the class. Paper due dates are as follows: January 25th, February 6th, February 20th, and March 27th.

Grade Breakdown

Short Reflection Paper 1: 5 PTS
 Paper 1 Discussion: 2 PTS
 Short Reflection Paper 2: 5 PTS
 Paper 2 Discussion: 2 PTS
 Short Reflection Paper 3: 10 PTS
 Paper 3 Discussion: 3 PTS
 Short Reflection Paper 4: 10 PTS
 Paper 4 Discussion: 3 PTS

Project Proposal: 4 PTS
 Revised Project Proposal: 4 PTS
 Annotated Bibliography: 12 PTS
 In-class paper workshop: 4 PTS
 Final paper: 20 PTS

Attendance: 8 PTS
 Participation: 8 PTS

TOTAL: 100 PTS POSSIBLE

SCALE

A: 100-92
 A-: 90-01
 B+: 89-88
 B: 87-80
 B-: 79-78
 C+: 77
 C: 76-69
 D: 68-57
 F: 56-0

TERM PAPER

Students will write a seven-to-nine page paper on a topic which relates to the course. Paper topics are up to the student's choosing; however, all papers must use at least one course reading. To ensure students pick a viable topic for their paper, students will write a one-paragraph **Project Proposal** outlining their desired topic of choice and how it relates to the course. **Project Proposals** will be due uploaded to Blackboard on Monday, March 20th. I will then read and comment the project proposals, and will give suggestions on how to further their topic of choice. A **Revised Project Proposal** which expands upon the first project proposal is due electronically April 10th! **Revised Project Proposals** must be 2-3 paragraphs in length.

Students will then complete an **Annotated Bibliography** with at least **five sources, one of which must be an article or chapter from the syllabus**. Annotated Bibliographies will be due on Monday, April 17th uploaded to Blackboard.

On the last day of class, **Monday, May 1st**, students will be expected to bring either a draft or an outline of their final paper to class for a paper workshop where students will peer edit each other's papers.

Required Books

These books are available at the S.U. Bookstore, on reserve on the library and many other book retailers. All other readings will be on blackboard.

***Back to the Sources: Reading Classic Jewish Texts.* Edited by Barry Holtz. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1989.**

***Feldman, Deborah. Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012.**

***Heschel, Abraham Joshua. The Earth is the Lord's.* Jewish Lights: 1995.**

***Starr, Susan Sered. Women As Ritual Experts.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.**

You are expected to read course material before the date listed on the schedule of readings. Make sure to read THOROUGHLY — come to class with some questions about the material!

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Section 1: Thinking Through What Makes Something “Jewish”

Wednesday, January 18th

Watch in class: “The Courage of a Soldier,”
Difficult People. Discussion: What is the
difference between Judaism as a religion and
Judaism as a culture?

Monday, January 23rd

Read: *Unorthodox*, first half

Wednesday, January 25th

Read: *Unorthodox*, second half

Short Reflection #1 Due: What makes a book or
television program Jewish or not Jewish?
Would you consider *Unorthodox* a Jewish book?
Would you even consider it primarily a book
about Judaism? What about “The Courage of a
Soldier”?

Section 2: Bible and Biblical Narratives

Monday, January 30th

Read: Selection From “A. Biblical Narrative” in
Back to the Sources, pages 62-70.

Wednesday, February 1st

Passage from the Tsene-Rene (blackboard)

Monday, February 6th

Short reflection #2 Due: Read the Exodus story
and discuss how the Exodus story tries to tell a
kind of history, using quotes from pages 62-70
in “Biblical Narrative.” How is this different or
similar to the way to Tsene-Rene tells narrative?

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Section 3: Talmud and Continued Uses of Talmud

Wednesday, February 8th

Selection from “Talmud” in *Back to the Sources*, pages 129-143.

Monday, February 13th

Watch in class: “Footnote”

Wednesday, February 15th

Korman, Gerd. “Jews as a Changing People of the Talmud: An American Exploration.” *Modern Judaism* 21, no 1 (2001): 23-66. (BB)

Monday, February 20th

Short reflection #3 due: Read “A Sample Passage: Berakhot 2A-3A” in “Talmud” in *Back to the Sources*. Summarize how Goldenberg reads and explains the Talmudic passage to the best of your ability.

Section 4: Midrash, and the Problem of Defining Midrash

Wednesday, February 22nd

Read “Midrash” in *Back to the Sources*, pages 177-211.

Monday, February 27th

Read: Barenblat, Rachel. “Fan Fiction and Midrash: Making Meaning.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 17. (BB)

Wednesday, March 1st

Read: Kahn-Harris, Deborah. “Midrash for the Masses: The Uses (and Abuses) of the Word “Midrash” in Contemporary Feminist Discourse.” *Feminist Theology*. May 2013, vol 21 no 3. (BB)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Section 5: Thinking About Prayer (and Gender and Prayer)

Monday, March 6th

Read: "Prayer and the Prayerbook" in *Back to the Sources*, pages 403-430.

Wednesday, March 8th

Read: Weissler, Chava. "Women's Studies and Women's Prayers: Reconstructing the Religious History of Ashkenazic Women" in *Jewish Social Studies*, pages 28-47.

PAPER PROPOSALS DUE 3/20
UPLOADED TO BLACKBOARD
BY 5:15PM!

Monday, March 20th

Read: *Women as Ritual Experts* (first half)

Wednesday, March 22nd

Read: *Women as Ritual Experts* (second half)

Monday, March 27th

Short Reflection #4: How does Jewish women's studies differ from Jewish studies? Does it differ only by covering different topics, or does there seem to be a thematic difference between these ways of approaching the study of Judaism?

Section 6: Jewish Philosophy

Wednesday, March 30th

Read: "Medieval Jewish Philosophy" in *Back to the Sources*.

Monday, April 3rd

Read: Magid, Shaul. "Is Egalitarianism Heresy? Rethinking Gender on the Margins of Judaism." *Nashim* Vol 8, 189-229.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Section 7: Foundations of Hasidism and Contemporary Hasidism

Wednesday, April 5th

Read: Selections from “Teaching of the Hasidic Masters” in *Back to the Sources*. 361-362, 367-374, 393-399

Monday, April 10th

Passover - No Class

REVISED PAPER PROPOSALS
DUE 4/10 UPLOADED TO
BLACKBOARD BY 6:35PM!

Wednesday, April 12th

Watch in class: *Romeo and Juliet in Yiddish*

Monday, April 17th

Read: Halpern, Stefanie. “A Meeting of Life and Death: Ritual and Performance at the Ohel, the Grave of Rabbi Menachem Mender Schneerson.” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 29 (1), 2015. (BB)

Wednesday, April 19th

Read: Ben-Yosef, E. “Literacy and Power: The Shiyour as a Site of Subordination and Empowerment for Chabad Women.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 27, no 1, 2011. (BB)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Contemporary Judaism: Movements, Theology

Monday, April 24th

Read: The Pittsburgh Platform and “On Changes in Judaism” by Zacharias Frankel (BB)

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES
DUE 4/24 UPLOADED TO
BLACKBOARD BY 5:15PM!

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE UPLOADED TO
BLACKBOARD BY 11:59PM ON MAY 10TH.

LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED,
BARRING DOCUMENTED AND SERIOUS
ISSUES.

Wednesday, April 26th

Read: *The Earth is the Lord's*

BRING A HARD COPY OF A
DRAFT OR OUTLINE OF YOUR
FINAL PAPER TO CLASS!

Monday, May 1st

Final paper writing workshop!

policies

Active Participation

Active participation is required in this class. Bluntly put, this means I reserve the right to mark you absent if you: (1) come to class excessively late or leave early, (2) sleep in class, (3) use prohibited electronics in class, (4) use allowed electronics in class but in order to surf the internet or anything not related to class, or (5) chit-chat with neighbors excessively. I will email you and ask to meet with you if your behavior in class becomes a problem.

Turning in assignments

All assignments are due uploaded into Blackboard into a .doc or a .pages file. Your file should be named "LASTNAMEfile." If you are having trouble submitting your file via blackboard, email me the file at mjcarson@syr.edu before the due date.

Gender-Neutral Language and Hate Speech

Please use gender-neutral language in your writing. This means say "human" instead of "man", "humankind" instead of "mankind", etc. You can refer to God by any pronoun as you do in your own personal practice, and you can omit any letters (i.e. G-d) if this is part of your personal practice. If you do not have a personal practice of using a particular pronoun, I suggest using "God" once more instead of a pronoun. Hate speech and slurs against a group of people are not tolerated in this class.

Electronics in Class

Electronics are not allowed in class, but if you want to use a computer in class come and speak to me about it. If we agree, you may use a computer if you sit in the first two rows of the classroom.

policies

Participation

Participation is an important part of this class. If you are generally shy or do not like to participate, try it out a few times in class. If you participate very easily in classes, be mindful of over-participating and give your quieter classmates a change to participate.

Grades

I try to have assignments graded within a one-week timeframe; sometimes this extends to a week-and-a-half. I will post grades on blackboard for transparency. You should always know how you are doing in class!

Late policy

Late assignments are accepted, with the exception of the final paper. The late penalty is -1/2 point per day (not class session) for a maximum of one week. Assignments over a week late are not accepted. FINAL PAPERS ARE NOT ACCEPTED LATE.

Disability Statement

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal is to create learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite any student to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond academic adjustments that may be helpful to your success.

If you believe that you need academic adjustments (accommodations) for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), visit the ODS website- <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting academic adjustments. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic adjustments and will issue students

policies

with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since academic adjustments may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Athletic Policy

If you are traveling as part of an SU Athletic team, please turn in a letter from your coach outlining the dates of your travel as soon as possible. These travel dates are excused absences.

Religious Holidays

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes (Fall and Spring semesters) when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). Students have access to an online notification form through MySlice for two weeks beginning from the first day of class that they can use to notify their instructors.