Course Offerings,
Fall 2016-Winter 2017
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*Unless otherwise noted, each course is worth 3 credits.
**NB: Courses marked with an asterisk are offered by the Department of History and Classical Studies.
100 Level Courses
JWST199 (Images of Jewish Identities)

The Narrow Bridge: Existential threats to Jews and Judaism as reflected in literature from the Bible to modern times
Instructor: Prof. David Aberbach
Fall 2016
TR 4:05pm-5:25pm

Marc Chagall, “The Falling Angel”

Jewish history from the biblical age to the present includes a series of challenges to the existence of Jews and Judaism. These threats include: military defeat, exile and depopulation, and various degrees of genocide; idolatry, Hellenism, anti-Semitism, religious and political schism, militant nationalism, messianism, rational philosophy, personality cults, excessive legalism, secularism, socialism, patriotism, self-hate and assimilationism. Jewish history can be read as a series of catastrophes followed by periods of recovery in which literature reflecting the trauma is a crucial element. This course introduces some of the main Jewish texts illustrating threats to Jewish survival and consequent Jewish religious/cultural defences: including readings from the Bible and Talmud, from medieval and modern literature, until the Holocaust.
200-Level Courses
This course will survey the nature and history of Jewish law; literary and legal sources; selections in English from the Mishnah and Talmud, as well as selected post-Talmudic Texts, on such subjects as Contracts, Torts, Public Law and Family Law.
This course will explore the music of Jewish western composers of the last 500 years. After an introduction to musical setting of the Psalms and selected Nigunim, we will pay attention to important ethnographers and ethnomusicologists that initiated the field of Jewish music study. The effects of the Haskalah will be considered with regard to the cultural factors that influenced the works of composers such as Rossi, Mendelssohn and Mahler. As well, an exploration of the rise of nineteenth century Jewish musical nationalism will be viewed through the works of Engel, Achron and Weiner. Early to mid twentieth century composers Bloch, Schoenberg, and Bernstein (among others), will be included in our discussion of Zionist and philo-Semitic trends in music as they influenced and reflected critical events affecting the Jewish world.

*Knowledge of music history, notation and/or theory is not a pre-requisite.*
This course provides an overview of Jewish history from the period of Ezra and Nehemiah to the death of Hai Gaon, c. 1035. It focuses on the experience of the Jews in Hellenistic and Islamic civilizations. Topics include Jewish sects, rabbinic literature in its various genres, the Karaite schism, and the rise of the Gaonate.

**Note that this course is offered by the Department of History and Classical Studies.**
This course will explore the history, literature and beliefs of Judaism's formative period. Both Biblical and non-Biblical materials will be studied. Topics include the Bible in the context of cognate literatures of the Ancient Near East; non-Biblical documents will be analysed for their bearing on the Jewish tradition.
The objective is to master basic communication in Modern Hebrew language. Students will develop the four language skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing through the acquisition of basic structures of the language, i.e., grammar, syntax, vocabulary, as well as idiomatic expressions, in order to be able to communicate in Modern Hebrew orally and in writing. Communicative activities, oral practice, written exercises and compositions will be assigned regularly, in order to help integrate skills and reinforce learning. In addition, because the acquisition of a modern language also entails awareness of the culture of its linguistic community, the students will become aware of cultural elements associated with the language.
This course offers an introduction to Jewish philosophy and thought from the Hellenistic period (Philo) to the beginning of the modern era (Spinoza) focusing on topics such as prophecy and philosophy, God and the world; the Law as a canon of ethical rules and as a political constitution. We will survey the treatment of such issues by Jewish thinkers from Philo to Maimonides.
JWST281 and JWST282

INTRODUCTION TO YIDDISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE (Parts I and II)

Fall 2016 and Winter 2017

Janie Respitz

Part 1: JWST281: Fall, MTR9:35am-10:25am
Part 2: JWST282: Winter, MTR9:35am-10:25am

The study of Yiddish language is introduced with attention to grammar. Students will develop skills in reading, writing and speaking Yiddish. In addition to grammar, lectures will be given on the history of the Yiddish language and literature. Selected readings and songs will introduce the students to the diverse aspects of Yiddish culture.
This course will explore the Jewish experience from the rise of the European centres to the present.

**Note that this course is offered by the Department of History and Classical Studies.**
This course explores the fabric of Israeli society through works of fiction reflecting the country’s historical, political and ethnic complexity. Focusing on tales of love during wartime, we shall pay close attention to their portrayals of relationships between Jews and Arabs, religious and secular Israelis, east and west, rich and poor, immigrants and old timers.

Among the texts we will read together include:

JWST240
THE HOLOCAUST: HISTORY AND MEMORY
Prof. Daniel Heller
Winter 2017
T 2:35pm-5:25pm

This course introduces students to the causes of the Holocaust, the experiences of its victims, perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, as well as its impact and legacy. Students will also be introduced to the key questions, debates and methodological approaches that have characterized scholarly efforts to understand the Holocaust.
300-Level Courses
This course surveys issues in the development of Biblical interpretation based on classical Jewish thought, heretical Jewish doctrines and contemporary Biblical criticism.
The first month of this course will be devoted to the study of Mordecai M. Kaplan. The founding ideologue of the Reconstructionist movement, Kaplan’s work has had great influence on all branches of American liberal Judaism. In the second part of the course we will study Martin Buber’s radical reading of Jewish religion, Arthur Green’s neo-Hasidic approach, the feminist thinkers Judith Plaskow and Rachel Adler, the Jewish Renewal thought of Arthur Waskow, Sherwin Wine’s secular reading of Judaism, and Irving Greenberg’s liberal Orthodox vision.
This course is designed to integrate students at various levels into one group with the aim of improving their basic language skills and preparing them for advanced Hebrew.
The objective is to communicate on familiar topics in Modern Hebrew language. Students will develop the four language skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing through the acquisition of the advanced structures of the language, i.e., grammar, syntax, vocabulary, as well as idiomatic expressions, in order to be able to communicate in Modern Hebrew orally and in writing. Communicative activities, oral practice, written exercises and compositions will be assigned regularly, in order to help integrate skills and reinforce learning. In addition, because the acquisition of a modern language also entails awareness of the culture of its linguistic community, the students will become aware of cultural elements associated with the language.
This course offers a post-advanced study of Hebrew language through an encounter with Israeli film, music and art as well as academic, journalistic, literary, and dramatic texts (all materials are in Hebrew).
This course will discuss the profound and integral role that music played during the era of the Third Reich. Complementing the chronology of historical events of this period will be an in depth study of prominent musicians and their works. Special consideration will be paid to the way music was used by persecutor as well as victim; as both a weapon, and as an act of defiance, perseverance, and an outlet for communal solidarity.

We will begin with the initial ban of Jewish composers and performers, deemed Entartete (degenerate), by the Reichsmusikammer. From there we will delve into Ghetto Songs, Protest and Partisan Songs, Terezin performers (including children singing for a Red Cross propaganda film), composers (Gideon Klein, Pavel Haas, Viktor Ullmann, among others), Anti-Nazi songs, songs from Jewish Displaced Persons, music written by Holocaust survivors, and finally, art music that commemorates the Holocaust.

*Knowledge of music history, notation and/or theory is not a pre-requisite.*
Novels written in Yiddish have often been categorized according to the countries in which they were written and/or set: novels of America, novels of Poland and novels of the Soviet Union. They have, not surprisingly, been understood as having been shaped by paths Yiddish culture had taken in the aforementioned locales.

In this course, we will examine Yiddish novels in English translation. We will focus on the interwar years 1920-39 and look at novels written in Poland, the USA, and the USSR. By contextualizing each novel, we will examine whether and in what way differences in geographic locale along with political, historical, and cultural differences affected the writers. Although we will be reading the novels in English, these writers drew on their own culture even as they followed artistic trends current in their surroundings. In reading each text closely, we will analyze the novel in its particularity. We will look at specific themes, characters, plot and style and attempt to evaluate their success as novels.
How does one write literature in the midst of catastrophe? What does it mean to write for a readership that may not survive? And what would it mean to be an author whose own survival is at stake? How does one theorize society under such conditions? Is it possible, for example, to develop a concept of human rights at a time when mass extermination has become legal? Or to write Jewish history when the Jewish future has become uncertain?

This course offers a survey of Jewish writing composed during World War II (1939-1945), both within Nazi occupied Europe and without. We will read novels and poems, science fiction and historical fiction, legal theory and social theory, all in an effort to explore how Jewish intellectuals responded to the destruction of European Jewry as it was happening. Throughout, we will consider how these writers changed their understanding of what it means to be a public intellectual, what it means to be Jewish, and what it means to be human.
This course explores the political, cultural and economic dynamics that shaped Jewish life within the Soviet Union. Drawing upon a range of historical sources, from newspapers, diaries and political pamphlets to literature and film, we will examine how sovietization both fueled the modernization of Russian Jewry and contributed to its eventual suppression. Topics to be covered include the government’s anti-religious campaigns, the creation of Soviet Jewish culture, Soviet Jewish collective farms, antisemitism in the Soviet Union, and the refusenick movement.
This course explores the world of Jewish-themed documentary films. We will see how filmmakers in Canada, the US, Europe and Israel have used the lived reality of Jewish experience as a canvas for their documentary explorations. We will examine how Jewish identity is depicted across a wide spectrum of perspectives – related to variations in religious and national affiliations, cultural experience, the attachment to Israel, the connection to the Holocaust and the politics of gender and sexual orientation. We will try to understand how documentary films as “the creative treatment of actuality” function as an interface between reality “out there” and the original, personal perspectives of filmmakers. Students are encouraged to developed individual response to the films as a trigger for a personal exploration of identity, Jewish or otherwise.
This course explores the debate about reason and faith in medieval Jewish literature. It will shed light on different perspectives about the truth of religion and the truth of philosophy. Some of the questions we will explore include: what epistemological criteria did medieval Jewish philosophers have for “truth”? How did these philosophers understand the contradiction between religion and philosophy in light of these criteria? What methods did they employ to reconcile the fundamental principles of Judaism with philosophical doctrines? We will pay particular attention to Maimonides’ thought, emphasizing his approach to interpreting Judaism as a philosophical religion. Central to our discussion are the following themes: True knowledge, belief, God, prophecy, and happiness. Having discussed Maimonides’ approach, we will proceed to the controversy it aroused.

The course will also offer a glimpse into the relationship between religion and philosophy in the post-Maimonidean period. We will examine the works thinkers such as Shem Tov ben Falaquera, Isaac Albalag, Joseph Ibn Kaspi, Gersonides, Nachmanides and Hasdai Crescas. The influence of Muslim philosophers, particularly Averroes, in shaping the Jewish philosophical mindset in this period, will also be discussed.
The central issue in the religious philosophy of all three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from the classical era down to the present, is the relationship between reason and revelation, philosophy and faith. In this course we will examine four Jewish thinkers who address this issue, and pair them with parallel Christian and Muslim thinkers: from the ancient world, 1) Philo and Origen; from the medieval period 2) Judah Halevi and al-Ghazali and 3) Maimonides and Averroes (ibn Rushd); and from the twentieth century 4) Joseph Soloveitchik and Karl Barth.
This course will examine key Jewish thinkers of the last 100 years whose social justice work is rooted in their faith. In addition, we will explore how diverse voices in the Jewish community respond to important contemporary social and political challenges.
Twenty five years ago Harold Bloom, a famous American critic, wrote an essay called "The Sorrows of American-Jewish Poetry." As the title shows, he took a very gloomy view of this subject, and maintained, according to his own view of the poetic process, “American Jewish poetry” did not constitute its own poetic genre. Although this view has been countered by critics since, no firm definition of American-Jewish or Jewish American poetry has been established.

In this course, we will read and analyze a wide range of poems written in America by Jewish writers, from the early years of the 19th century to the 1980s. The poems will be analyzed chronologically with the aim of unpacking various identity positions, formal innovations, thematic selections and aesthetic dilemmas. Our aim will be to assess what makes this complex body of writing distinctively Jewish even as it can also be categorized as American.
In this course will trace the images of the non-Jew in Yiddish writings. We will analyze stories from written in Eastern Europe and America from the mid 19th century to the years after WW11. Reading closely, we will examine what the depiction of the non Jew, has on the theme, plot function, effect and overall design of the story. All readings will be in English.
400 Level Courses
This will be an informal fun course exposing you to the challenges of translating modern Israeli literature and culture from Hebrew into English. We will read poetry, short stories, a script and a novel, paying close attention to stylistic, structural and cultural aspects. Our weekly assignments will be based on translations of reasonable amounts of text, determined according to each student’s level of Hebrew proficiency. A final essay in English, Hebrew or French provides an opportunity to reflect on the challenges (and art) of translating Hebrew and Israeli literature. Do we merely lose or also gain something through translation? The final essay will also put you in conversation with current scholarship on translation studies.
JWST487

TUTORIAL IN YIDDISH LITERATURE

Esther Frank
Fall 2016
TR10:05am-11:25am

Indivisualized guided research on an approved topic in Yiddish literature.

JWST491 (Fall) and 492 (Winter)

HONOURS THESIS IN JEWISH STUDIES

A member of the Jewish Studies Faculty

A tutorial for the preparation of an Honours Thesis.
This course will focus on analyzing Moses Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, including such subjects as idolatry, repentance, and sacrifices, to torts, contracts, and public law.
500 Level Courses
In this course we will read selected texts in English translation from the Zohar: the profound, colorful, and daring classic work of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. We will examine how the Zohar radically rereads the Bible, and how this radical rereading leads it to radically reinterpret such fundamental religious conceptions as God, the Jewish people, the commandments, the problem of evil, and much more. The course is designed for graduate students and advanced undergraduates.
JWST552
JUDAISM AND POVERTY
Fall 2016
Prof. David Aberbach
TR1:05pm-2:25pm

Jews wait outside a soup kitchen in Jerusalem, 1921

An introduction to the subject of poverty in Jewish literature and its influence on religions such as Christianity and Islam, and on modern, secular ideologies, especially socialism, and creative literature.
This course covers roughly the period between 1453 and 1789. A variety of topics and issues will be discussed including: the print revolution; absolutism; codification; kabbalah; inquisition and expulsion in Iberia; commerce and early capitalism; tolerance and toleration; messianism and gender; did Jews have a Renaissance?; Ukrainian catastrophe; kabbalah; Jewish responses to the Reformation and more. As much as possible, discussions will focus on primary materials in English.

**Note that this course is offered by the Department of History and Classical Studies, not the Department of Jewish Studies**
The text of the Hebrew Bible as it evolved between antiquity and the most recent printed edition. Attention will be given to the accurate reconstruction of the Bible from primary and secondary witnesses: Greek and Aramic translations, Dead Sea Scrolls, and ancient quotations, and the Massoretic notes and lists.
This course traces the modern history of Jewish individuals and communities in the Middle East and North Africa. We will investigate how they responded to the major upheavals that shook these regions in the 19th and 20th centuries, paying particular attention to the evolution of Jewish-Muslim relations. Major topics to be covered include the diverse encounters of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa with colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, and decolonization.
This seminar offers a survey of Modern Yiddish Literature in Eastern Europe, America, and Israel, focusing on romantic plots, political ideology, and how the two are connected. We will read love stories and watch romantic films in order to ask what these works of art tell us about political ideology, inter-ethnic relations, and various concepts of communal belonging. We will also read political texts and ask what they tell us about the concepts of love and devotion. The main questions we will ask are: What kind of desire is sanctioned and what is forbidden? What do love stories tell us about concepts of justice, inequality, and human rights? What is the relationship between loving a person and loving a people, or loving a state?