

JEWISH STUDIES

Overview and Contact Information

The curriculum in Jewish studies provides course offerings in a range of fields and disciplines, including English, German, history, international relations, politics, and religion. Courses represent a variety of methodological approaches and are intended to introduce students to the broad and rich diversity of Jewish culture and experience.

See Also

- Religion (<http://catalog.mtholyoke.edu/areas-study/religion/>)

Contact Information

Mara Benjamin, Chair

Natalina Tulik, Academic Department Coordinator

205 Skinner Hall
413-538-2233

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/academics/find-your-program/jewish-studies> (<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/academics/find-your-program/jewish-studies/>)

Learning Goals

Jewish Studies is an interdisciplinary field that critically examines the global diversity and historical varieties of Jewish experience. A minor in Jewish Studies is an organic component of a liberal arts education and provides a lens through which to understand the human experience. Students who minor in Jewish studies at Mount Holyoke College are expected to:

1. Critically examine the varieties of Jewish cultural, religious, and literary expression from ancient Israel to contemporary times.
2. Incorporate subject matter and modes of inquiry from across the college, including religious studies, literature, history, anthropology, and politics, in order to understand the global Jewish diaspora and its contact with other civilizations.
3. Study one of the languages in which Jews have expressed themselves throughout the centuries, especially Hebrew and/or Yiddish.

Faculty

This area of study is administered by the Jewish Studies Committee:

Mara Benjamin, Irene Kaplan Leiwant Professor of Jewish Studies

Sohail Hashmi, Professor of International Relations on the Alumnae Foundation and Professor of Politics

Jeremy King, Professor of History

Madeleine Cohen, Visiting Lecturer in Jewish Studies

Requirements for the Minor

A minimum of 16 credits:

| Code | Title | Credits |
|---|-------|-----------|
| 12 credits in Jewish Studies at the 200 or 300 level | | 12 |
| At least 4 credits in Jewish Studies at the 300 level | | 4 |
| Total Credits | | 16 |

Additional Specifications

- Those choosing a minor in Jewish studies should consult as early as possible with the program chair in order to devise a course of study in consultation with the chair and other members of the program.
- Students should consider taking Hebrew language as part of the Jewish studies minor and, in addition to the approved Jewish Studies courses at Mount Holyoke, are encouraged to consider Jewish studies offerings at the other Five Colleges.
- Elementary Hebrew is offered regularly at Smith College. The course will be conducted in person at Smith and through a simultaneous video connection for students at Mount Holyoke. Mount Holyoke students can register for this Smith class (JUD-101) through regular Five College interchange procedures, and then will have the option to participate in the class directly from Mount Holyoke via simulcast without regularly having to travel to Smith for class meetings.
- Other courses in Jewish studies are offered regularly on campus. Consult with the program chair for a list of current courses in other departments that may be taken for credit toward a Jewish Studies minor. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the Jewish studies course offerings at Smith College (<https://www.smith.edu/academics/jewish-studies/>), the University of Massachusetts (<http://www.umass.edu/jne/courses-judaic-studies/>), Hampshire College (<https://www.hampshire.edu/jewish-studies/jewish-studies-at-hampshire/>), and Amherst College (<https://www.amherst.edu/>).

Related Courses in Other Departments

For a list of current courses that may be taken for credit toward a Jewish studies minor, consult with the chair of the program.

Course Offerings

JWST-112 Introduction to Judaism

Spring. Credits: 4

Judaism is a 3,500-year-old tradition that has developed over time as Jewish communities all over the world creatively interacted with the different cultural and historical milieus in which they lived. This course explores the ways in which Judaism has sought to transform ordinary life into sacred life. What are the ways in which Judaism conceives of God, and what is the meaning of life? What roles do study, prayer, ethics, sex, marriage, family, rituals of the life cycle, and community play in Judaism? These and other questions will be taken up through study of diverse types of religious literature and historical evidence.

Crosslisted as: RELIG-112

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives

M. Benjamin

JWST-213 The Gender of Yiddish*Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

Yiddish and questions of gender have a long history. The language was called "mame-loshn" (mother tongue); it was associated with home and family. Jewish women were the primary intended readers of Yiddish, beginning with religious literature for those who could not read Hebrew and developing into a modern, secular, often moralizing literature. Despite the strong connections between Yiddish and women, women writers have been marginalized and underestimated. This course will explore the gendered history of Yiddish, including through the lens of queer theory. We will also read English translations of literature by modern Yiddish women writers who are being rediscovered today through new translations and scholarly attention.

*Crosslisted as: GRMST-213, GNDST-210YD**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**M. Cohen**Notes: Taught in English.***JWST-218 Yiddish Nation: Language as Homeland***Fall. Credits: 4*

For roughly 1000 years Ashkenazi Jewish culture has existed in exile. Since these stateless people were living in diaspora, without a sovereign territory, the Yiddish language itself became a symbolic homeland. This course will explore how some Yiddish-speaking Jews embraced their stateless existence not as a historic tragedy but as a revolutionary form of identity called diaspora nationalism. We will explore Yiddish cultural identity through literature, music, film, and politics. We will read works of history and cultural theory and seek points of intersection with other migrant, refugee, stateless, and diasporic cultures.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**M. Cohen**Notes: All readings will be in English, prior knowledge of Yiddish is not required.***JWST-225 Topics in Judaism****JWST-225HC Topics in Judaism: Remembering the Holocaust in Global Perspectives'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This seminar explores the impact of different cultural forms of remembering the Holocaust within a global perspective. At the same time that the European Holocaust continues to be remembered, subsequent genocides and related mass violence around the globe are being remembered through multiple forms of memorialization, such as art, film, memorials, and narratives that mirror particular material and virtual forms of remembering the Holocaust. We explore how the interrelationship between Holocaust remembrance and other atrocities drives discussions about subsequent genocides, current antisemitism and racism, and forms of remembering violence.

*Crosslisted as: GRMST-231HC**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**Other Attribute(s): Speaking-Intensive, Writing-Intensive**K. Remmler**Notes: Taught in English. Students interested in developing their German language speaking skills in conjunction with this course are encouraged to enroll in the GRMST-231HC-01 section of the course and in the 2-credit discussion section GRMST-295-02.***JWST-225HH Topics in Judaism: 'The Habsburgs, Hitler, and the Law'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course explores the complex, often comic, and ultimately tragic history of Bohemia, a territory located today in the Czech Republic, but previously a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, then of Czechoslovakia, and then of Hitler's Third Reich. Students will complement historical studies with autobiographical material and contemporary fiction, beginning with the Revolution of 1848, progressing through the achievements and worrisome trends of Emperor Francis Joseph's 68-year reign, and concluding with the world wars. Emphasis on the interplay among Czechs, Germans, Jews, and other pivotal players: the House of Habsburg and its supporters, and the political elites of neighboring countries.

*Crosslisted as: HIST-260HH**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. King***JWST-225ST Topics in Judaism: 'Stalinism in Central Europe'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course explores the use of revolutionary terror by the state. More specifically, it examines policies of terror pursued by Communist dictatorships in Hungary and Czechoslovakia during the early years of the Cold War. Who did what to whom, and why? What insights do secret police work and public propaganda, knitted together in macabre show trials, allow us into Stalinist rule, European politics, and maybe ourselves? How did memories of terror shape politics after Stalin's death? Students should deepen their understanding for the discipline of History, improve their reading and writing, and develop a working knowledge of Central European politics at the middle of the twentieth century.

*Crosslisted as: HIST-262, RES-244ST**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. King***JWST-234 Women and Gender in Judaism***Fall. Credits: 4*

This course examines gender as a key category in Jewish religious thought and practice. Students examine different theories of gender and intersectional feminisms, concepts of gender in a range of Jewish sources, and feminist Jewish responses to those sources. Students work with the Judaica collection at the MHC Art Museum and consider material culture as a source for women's and gender studies. Topics may include: how Jewish practice and law regulate sexuality and desire; feminist, queer and trans methods of engaging patriarchal texts; methods of studying women and gender in Jewish cultures; racialization.

*Crosslisted as: RELIG-234, GNDST-210JD**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives**M. Benjamin***JWST-240 The Holocaust in History***Spring. Credits: 4*

An attempt at understanding the Nazi-led assault on Europe's Jews. Course units include an exploration of origins, both German and European; an analysis of the evolving mechanics of genocide (mobile killing squads, death camps, etc.); comparisons (Germany proper vs. Poland, the Holocaust vs. other instances of state-sponsored mass murder); legal dimensions; and an introduction to the politics of Holocaust remembrance since 1945.

*Crosslisted as: HIST-240**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. King*

JWST-257 OMG: God and Her Critics, from the Bible to Ecological Crisis
Fall. Credits: 4

For a being often said to be immutable, God has been imagined in myriad, often contradictory, ways over the centuries – even within a single religious tradition. Using Jewish studies as a springboard, this course examines the idea of God through the writings of philosophers and poets, mystics and rationalists from ancient to contemporary times. Topics include: body/spirit dualism and feminist and ecological critique thereof; cross-cultural encounter, diaspora and cultural mixing as generative forces; superstition and other kinds of heterodoxy; and ritual performance.

Crosslisted as: RELIG-257

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities

M. Benjamin

Notes: Students who wish to take this course as a 300-level class in Jewish Studies may do so with permission of with the instructor.

JWST-269 Citizens and Subjects: Jews in the Modern World

Spring. Credits: 4

This course examines key themes in Jewish intellectual, religious, and political life from the late 17th century to the present. We examine: the effect of civil emancipation and the Enlightenment on Jewish philosophy and theology; Jews as both architects of modern thought and the paradigmatic Other in European liberal nation-states; the transformation of traditional Jewish religious rituals and belief systems in response to dramatic social and political life; new patterns of gender and family organization; the effect of antisemitism, Zionism, and imperialism on Jewish politics; and contemporary Jewish intellectual innovation, including feminist and queer thought.

Crosslisted as: RELIG-269

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities

M. Benjamin

JWST-295 Independent Study

Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 4

The department

Instructor permission required.

JWST-343 The Sabbath

Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

The practice of a weekly sacred day of rest has organized Jewish life for millennia. In this seminar, students will examine the Sabbath using narrative, folk, and legal primary sources from the biblical, Second Temple, rabbinic, medieval, and modern periods. Key themes include sacred time, cultural identity, and the transformation of religious practice. Experiential learning, and critical thinking about your experiential learning, are integral to this seminar.

Crosslisted as: RELIG-343

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities

M. Benjamin

Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors

JWST-350 Special Topics in Jewish Studies

JWST-350GE Special Topics in Jewish Studies: 'Germans, Slavs, and Jews, 1900-1950'

Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

This course explores relations among Germans, Slavs, and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe before, during, and after the First and Second World Wars. Emphasis lies on tracing continuities and ruptures in nationalist and racist ideologies and policies, from late imperial Germany and Austria through the interwar republics and then on to the Third Reich and the post-Nazi regimes. Topics covered include the Holocaust, Nazi treatment of Poles, and the expulsion of millions of ethnic Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia after 1945, but also mutual accommodation, assimilation, liberal group rights, and the ambiguities of who was German or Slavic or Jewish in the first place.

Crosslisted as: HIST-323

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities

J. King

Instructor permission required.

Prereq: 8 credits in History.

Advisory: Application and permission of instructor required.

JWST-395 Independent Study

Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 8

The department

Instructor permission required.