

Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism

MWF

REL 2930/JST2930

Prof. Rachel Gordan, Dept. of Religion

e-mail: rgordan@ufl.edu

Class schedule: MWF 3-4 pm, zoom

Our class link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/94927387461?pwd=SXJXMlpQOEES3ILMXdWQ041QWFIUT09>

Office Hours: By appointment and regular office hours will be posted in the weeks leading up to assignments. Our virtual reality will make it possible for us to have evening and weekend office hours, on occasion throughout the semester. This is a benefit of our zoom reality, that I hope will make your life a little easier

****Communication with the professor should be addressed to Professor Gordan. If you email the professor and do not hear back from Professor Gordan after five days, please feel free to send a friendly, follow-up email.**

About the class:

This course introduces students to the Jewish religious tradition in its various historical and contemporary manifestations. We will be thinking about the complicated nature of Jewishness and Judaism, and how that leads to questions about Jewish identity. “What is a Jew?” is an ancient question with no one answer. On the one hand, being Jewish is a matter of religion – the traditional, matrilineal definition of Jewish identity is founded on halakha (Jewish religious law). Non-Jews can convert to Judaism, suggesting that it has a religious basis. On the other hand, being Jewish is also matter of ethnicity and cultural background. Agnostic and “secular Jews” often proudly identify as Jewish, so what does it mean to be a Jew? In addition to the religious definition of Judaism, we will be thinking about the cultural, national, ethnic, and peoplehood conceptions of Jewishness, and how these categories “work” in a country like the US, where religious identity has often seemed like a crucial element of citizenship. But Judaism is also an international religion, so we will spend some time thinking about the diversity of world Judaism, through a few case studies (Israel, France, the former Soviet Union), and how different cultural settings have influenced the way Jews in other countries answer the question, What is a Jew?

This course is open to everyone. There are no pre-requisites, and no knowledge of religious studies in general or Judaism in particular is presupposed.

GENERAL EDUCATION DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

HUMANITIES DESCRIPTION

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

HUMANITIES SLOs:

Content: Identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theory and methodologies used. In this course, students will learn about the theories, and methodologies used in the study of

Judaism. They will read about major issues in the study of Judaism, including how texts, practice, belief, and community factor into our understanding of Judaism as a religion.

Critical Thinking: Identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the subject area. Approach issues and problems within the discipline from multiple perspectives. In this class, students will learn about some of the Protestant influences in the study of religion and how that has affected understandings of Judaism. Students will learn about how Judaism does and does not fit within these Christian-influenced ideas about religion. div

Communication: Communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively. Students in this class will learn to communicate what they have learned clearly and effectively, in writing and orally. The class will strengthen students' ability to write and talk about Jews and Judaism in clear, accurate, and comprehensive ways.

INTERNATIONAL DESCRIPTION

This designation is always in conjunction with another program area. International courses promote the development of students' global and intercultural awareness. Students examine the cultural, economic, geographic, historical, political, and/or social experiences and processes that characterize the contemporary world, and thereby comprehend the trends, challenges, and opportunities that affect communities around the world. Students analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultural, economic, political, and/or social systems and beliefs mediate their own and other people's understanding of an increasingly connected world.

INTERNATIONAL SLOs

Content: Identify, describe, and explain the historical, cultural, economic, political, and/or social experiences and processes that characterize the contemporary world. Students will learn about the attitudes and norms that characterize Jewishness and Judaism in several countries outside the US. Fifty percent of our class has an international component (the entirety of part II of the syllabus, and half of part I). We will be thinking about how geopolitics have affected Jewish identity in the Former Soviet Union, France, and Israel, and we will be reflecting on how our American setting has influenced our understanding of Jewishness and Judaism.

Critical Thinking: Analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultural, economic, political, and/or social systems and beliefs mediate understandings of an increasingly connected contemporary world. In this course, students will learn about some of the international diversity in answering the question, What is a Jew? The US, France, Israel, and the former Soviet Union are the international case studies that we will consider, in thinking about how national setting and relations with other religious groups have influenced Jewish self-understanding.

Communication: The international designation is always in conjunction with another category. Communication outcomes are listed in those subject areas. See above under Humanities SLOs.

WRITING REQUIREMENT

The University Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. This course carries 2000 words that count towards the University Writing Requirement. You must turn in all written work counting towards the 2000 words in order to receive credit for those words. The writing course grade assigned by the instructor has two components: the writing component and a course grade. **To receive writing credit a student must satisfactorily complete all the assigned written work and receive a minimum grade of C (2.0) for the course.** It is possible to fail to meet the

writing requirement and still earn a minimum grade of C in a class, so students should review their degree audit after receiving their grade to verify receipt of credit for the writing component.

The writing requirement for this course will be fulfilled by three short essays. Through writing and revising the papers, and participating in peer review, students will learn to organize their arguments with an appropriate thesis statement, detailed outline, adequate and relevant support for arguments, and clear and correct writing style. In writing assignments, students demonstrate skills in framing arguments, developing plans (outlines), identifying appropriate and accurate support for arguments, and introducing and concluding papers in persuasive and clear ways.

In addition to the feedback from the instructor and the peer review, I encourage you to seek help from the university's Writing Studio (www.writing.ufl.edu), which offers support for writing in all fields and can be very helpful both in developing your first drafts and in polishing those drafts.

Readings: Most of our readings will be made available on CANVAS. In addition, we will use Michael Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (Columbia University Press, 2006) and Barry Wimpfheimer, *The Talmud: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

Grading (how your progress will be assessed in this course):

This course includes a mix of assignment styles (oral, written, group, individual, reflective, and research-based) The details about these assignments are available on the "assignments" page of CANVAS and at the bottom of this syllabus.

- 1) 15% Attendance and Participation: Participation counts for a lot in this class, because it is a discussion-based class, and during the pandemic, this kind of learning provides the benefit of helping students feel part of a learning community at a time when it's easy to feel isolated. If you are present for nearly every class, but only speak when called on, your grade will likely be around 13/15%. Participation grades of 14 (A-) and above require speaking/using the chat to contribute to discussion almost every class and multiple times, per class. I also encourage students to keep their camera on, so that we can create a sense of community. If there is a reason it will be difficult for you to turn your camera on, please let me know privately (no need to tell me the reason why; I appreciate your letting me know when it is not possible for you to turn it on).
- 2) 5% quizzes
- 3) 15% Group ritual advertisement.
- 4) 15% One short essay
- 5) 10% Bible event assignment
- 6) 15% Virtual Sabbath assignment
- 7) 20% final paper
- 8) 5% Oral presentation of final paper

** There may be limited extra-credit assignment this semester. If so, Professor Gordan will alert the class to these opportunities.

** You are responsible for keeping track of your grades. If you missed a paper submission or a quiz, it is your responsibility to follow-up to inquire as to whether you can submit late. I do not chase students for missed assignments/quizzes.

This syllabus is subject to change and Professor Gordan will let you know

Grading Scale: final letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

A 94-100	C+ 77-79
A- 90-93	C 73-76
B+ 87-89	C-70-72
B 83-86	D 60-69
B- 80-82	E 0-59

For UF policies on grading, please see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Schedule:

We are taking advantage of our virtual reality this semester by including several guest appearances of scholars who would not otherwise be able to join our class.

Part I: What is a Jew/Judaism? The History of a Religion: its boundaries and practices

Poll: What is a Jew? Religion Race Culture nation people community

And in-class exercise: Googledoc 3-4 groups, each answering, This is what's most important about Judaism. And these are three of our questions about Jews/Jewishness/Judaism

- 1) Mon, Jan 11: What does it mean to be a Jew and why is it so complicated?

<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/is-judaism-a-religion-or-a-culture/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/12/19/is-judaism-an-ethnicity-race-nationality-trump-signs-an-order-provokes-an-identity-crisis/>

Categories: community/culture, rituals/deed, belief/God

In-class: **Name Three Things** (you know about Judaism)

- 2) Wed, January 13: **What is a Jew and what does a Jew do?**

<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/is-judaism-a-religion-or-a-culture/>

Key ideas: Origins of Jewish religious movements, Reform Movement, Pittsburgh Platform

Also, Please read *Here All Along* Sara Hurwitz Intro for today on Course Reserves p. ix-xxiii

For today: please read, Satlow, *CJ*, Chapter one, "Promised Lands," p. 22-35 up until "Kashrut is rejected."

- 3) Friday, January 15 **Jewish religious practice**

Key ideas: Origins of Jewish religious movements: Conservative movement; Solomon Schechter' Orthodox Union; ethnic Jewish identity; WWII, the Holocaust and Jewish Identity, Reconstructionist Judaism

Mordecai Kaplan

CJ, 35-43

American Jews reconsider Judaism

Judaism Unbound, episode 185

<https://www.judaismunbound.com/podcast?offset=1571376600079>

Monday, Jan 18: holiday, no class

- 4) Wed, January 20: **Jewish religious practice**
Special in-class event: **Mikveh Presentation From Mayyim Hayyim mikveh (virtual presentation)** *CJ*, 43-53
 - 5) Fri, January 22: **Jewish religious practice**
CJ 53-68
 - 6) Mon, Jan 25: **Jewish Religious Practice: Israel and the US**
Secular and religious Zionism, Praying at the Western Wall
What is “the Bible,” for Jews?
Creating imagined Communities
CJ, 69 – 79
 - 7) Wed, January 27 **Old Testament, Bible, Torah, or Tanakh?**
******Special event: Marc Zvi Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine 2-3:30 pm**
For today, please read: The Jewish Bible *The Bible With and Without Reading Jesus*, preface
The Bible With and Without Jesus, 3-13
******Bible event assignment due Sunday, January 31st**
 - 8) Fri, January 29 **Judaism as a Religion: the Israelites’ religion and Jewish holidays**
Religious authorities, kosher laws, holidays
CJ, 79-89
******Options for the ritual assignment will be presented in class.**
 - 9) Mon, Feb 1 **The Meaning of the Bible in Judaism and Protestantism**
CJ, 89-95
Choose rituals and groups in class today for Feb 26th presentations
 - 10) Wed, Feb 3: **Athens and Jerusalem: Hellenistic Judaism** *CJ*, 96- 106
Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish sects, CJ 107-114
 - 11) Fri, Feb 5 Judaism as part of Abrahamic Religions
Aaron Hughes
For today: please read the Aaron Hughes article on Abrahamic Religions Course Reserves
- ***Virtual Sabbath attendance assignment is to be conducted this weekend. Writing assignment is listed on the “assignments” page of Canvas. These write-ups are due by **Sunday, Feb 14th**.**
- 12) Mon, Feb 8 **Rabbinic Judaism**
CJ, 115-124
Yavneh, Bar Kokhba revolt, Oral Law

For today, please read, Jordan Rosenblum, “Rabbinic Drinking, Jews and gentiles,” 66-95.

- 13) Wed, Feb 10 **Written and Oral Torah**
CJ, 122-130
Barry Wimpfheimer *The Talmud: A Biography*, chapter 1
- 14) Fri, Feb 12 **Oral Torah**
CJ, 130-140, please read the first two chapters of Pirkei Avot: https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1?ven=Mishnah_Yomit_by_Dr._Jo_shua_Kulp&lang=en.
- 15) Mon, Feb 15
Barry Wimpfheimer, *The Talmud*, p. 41-50, 51-65 and Discussion of Sabbath attendance assignment in-class
- 16) Wed, Feb 17, Bar Mitzvah **Mark Oppenheimer visit**
For Today, read “Thirteen and a Day,” Introduction on CANVAS
- 17) Fri, Feb 19 **Jewish Commandments/Mitzvoth**
CJ, 164-80

Part II: Judaism Around the World: Three Case Studies: Israel, the Former Soviet Union, and France

- 18) Mon, Feb 22 Judaism in Israel:
When the State Winks
- 19) Wed, Feb 24
When the State Winks
***Purim services, Thursday evening, February 25th, and Friday, Feb 26th for synagogue attendance assignment
- 20) Fri, Feb 26
When the State Winks
Ritual Presentations
- 21) Mon, Mar 1
When the State Winks
Ritual Presentations
- 22) Wed, Mar 3 Creating new religious options in Israel guest speaker: RabbiMishael Zion
Ritual Presentations
- 23) Fri, Mar 5 **Soviet Jewish Identity**
Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, Introduction
- 24) Mon, Mar 8 Soviet Jews and the complicated matter of religion

Soviet and Kosher, chapter one, 1-12

- 25) Wed, Mar 10
Soviet and Kosher, 13-20
Guest speaker: Anna Shternshis
- 26) Fri, Mar 12
Soviet and Kosher, 20-40
- 27) Mon, Mar 15
Soviet and Kosher, chapter three
- 28) Wed, Mar 17
Soviet and Kosher, chapter three
- 29) Fri, Mon 19 **Judaism in France: Religion in a secular country?**
Modern Jewish French Thought, ed. Sarah Hammerschlag, Introduction
- 30) Mon, Mar 22 Understanding Jewish and religious identity in France
Maude Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*, chapter six, p. 125 – 134
- 31) Wed, Mar 24 **Recharge Day**
- 32) Fri, Mar 26
Muslims and Jews in France, chapter six, p. 134 – 152

***Passover virtual services can be attended Saturday evening, March 27 and
Sunday, March 28th
- 33) Mon, Mar 29 the complicated modern Jewish French identity,
“Why French Jews are leaving France,” National Geographic, Nov 20, 2019
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2019/11/french-jews-fleeing-country/#close>
- 34) Wed Mar 31 French Zionists
Guest Speaker: Professor Gayle Zachmann

Part III: American Judaism in the 21st Century: Ultra-Orthodoxy, Returning Jews, Interfaith Jewish families, and Jewish-Buddhists

- 35) Fri, April 2
Thinking about ultra-orthodoxy in the US
Judaism Unbound, episode 196:
<https://www.judaismunbound.com/podcast?offset=1582266600440>
- 36) Mon, April 5 Interfaith Jewish families
Jewish Identity in America, Krasner, part 1, 36-43
- 37) Wed, April 7 Interfaith Jewish families

Krasner, part 2, 43 - 53

38) Fri, April 9 finish Krasner

39) Mon April 12 Jew Bu
"JewBu," Introduction on CANVAS

40) Wed, April 14 Jew-Bu,
Professor Rachel Gross visit, please read Gross Intro, 1-18

41) Fri, April 16 presentations

42) Mon, April 19 presentations

Final papers due April 23rd

Assignments:

1) Recovering a Jewish ritual Ad-campaign group assignment

In groups of 2-4, please select one of the following rituals/customs of Judaism and prepare a 3-5 min pitch for observance of this ritual. Your pitch **should show effort to think about the challenges and benefits of Jewish ritual today**. Your enthusiasm is vital here: if you seem bored while making this presentation, it's not a good pitch.

In making your pitch, please answer these questions:

- 1) Where does this ritual/custom come from?
- 2) What is complicated/difficult about it?
- 3) Why do you think it could be meaningful for today?

Kashrut

Mikveh

Shabbat observance

baking and taking challah

Jewish study in *hevruta* (pairs)

fasting on Yom Kippur

a havdallah service

putting on tefillin

2) Sabbath observation assignment

*** Virtual assignment: Visit a virtual synagogue service on Friday Jan 29th night/Saturday Jan 30th morning.

Possible virtual services are listed on CANVAS

Please submit a 750-1000 word write-up that includes as many of the following as possible, as well as your own reflections on the service.

- 1) Description of the services, the room, and the participants
- 2) Explain how music/singing was used
- 3) What kind of message/feeling you received from the services -- this can be an implicit or explicit message. One way to think about it is to ask yourself how you felt before, during, and after the service.
- 4) Whether this felt like a community to you -- why or why not?
- 5) What kind of "sabbath feeling" did this service provide? Here, you might want to compare it with other sabbath experiences you've had or read about, whether they have been Jewish or from another tradition.
- 7) Your perception of the rabbi or service leaders.
- 8) **If you have never or rarely been to a religious service, see this assignment as a report of what it was like to attend one of your first Sabbath services with *this* community.**
- 9) Check the synagogue's mission statement or "About us" statement on their website and explain how you feel the services matched up the community's stated values.

We will share some of these thoughts in class on Wed after the assignment has been submitted.

Other resources:

- 1) UF Counseling and Wellness: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

UF Counseling and Wellness Center

Services offered include individual, group, and couples psychotherapy; structured workshops; psychological assessment; consultation with concerned third parties; and referrals to resources off-and on-campus. Services are free of charge and confidential to currently enrolled students.

Faculty, staff members, or students who wish to consult about a student of concern can call 352.392.1575 for phone consultation during business hours. It is helpful to consult if you find:

- You are dealing with a student in distress with problems beyond your level of ability or,
- The boundaries of your role make it unwise to work with students on personal issues, or
- You have concerns about a student and wish to consult with a mental health professional.

After hours, individuals can consult with an on call counselor at 352.392.1575.

Check out our interactive and informative website.

- 2) U Matter, We Care <https://umatter.ufl.edu/>

The underlying philosophy of the U Matter, We Care initiative is that UF community members care about each other and proactively reach out to help when needed. U Matter, We Care extends UF's caring culture by educating our community about signs and symptoms of distress and providing those in distress the appropriate resources. Faculty, staff and peers who are concerned about a student should email umatter@ufl.edu, [submit a Care Concern online](#) or call [\(352\) 294-2273](tel:3522942273) during normal business hours. If a student emergency should occur after hours, contact the University of Florida Police Department at [\(352\) 392-1111](tel:3523921111). For more information on U Matter, We Care please visit their website.

- 3) Dean of Students Office <https://dso.ufl.edu/>

The Dean of Students Office staff responds to requests for assistance made through U Matter, We Care. Dean of Students Office staff respond to this

email address seven days a week. Faculty and staff can email umatter@ufl.edu or call [\(352\) 294-2273](tel:3522942273) during normal business hours to consult with a member of our Care Team about a student of concern. The Dean of Students Office staff will reach out to the student of concern in order to provide both compassionate support and education about and referrals to necessary resources both on campus and in the community. If a student emergency should occur after hours, contact the University of Florida Police Department at [\(352\) 392-1111](tel:3523921111). For more information on the Dean of Students Office please visit their website.

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