

## **JST2930/RELI2600 Jews, Judaism, Jewishness**

Instructor: Yaniv Feller

Meeting Times: Tuesday 1:55-2:45pm (Matherly 0011); Thursday 1:55-3:50 (Matherly 0013)

Office Hours: Tuesday 16:00-17:00 or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>

**Course Description:** This course offers a presentation of Jewish experience throughout history in a way that allows us to question contemporary discourse: What is a Jew? Are Jews white? Must a Jew believe in God? What is at stake when defining someone as a Jew? Using sources ranging from the Hebrew Bible to graphic novels, we will examine the various facets of Jewish life, paying special attention to contesting definitions of Jewishness as race, religion, and culture. Building on a thematic and chronological discussion of Jewish history, we will ask theoretical questions such as the relation between gender and Judaism, the relevance of religious law in contemporary society, and the meaning of diaspora in the age of national sovereignty

**Course Outcomes:** This course will help you:

- You will be acquainted with Jewish history, religion, and culture.
- You will understand the multifaceted nature of contemporary Jewish life, and its historical antecedents.
- You will gain the ability to read primary sources in translation
- You will engage in critical thinking on definitions of race, religion, and culture.

### **Required Texts:**

1. Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews* (Princeton, 2012) ISBN: 978-0691154978
2. All other readings are on Canvas.

## Methods of Evaluation

**Active Participation (10%):** This class is based on your active participation. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the texts and thought of at least one or two topics you wish to discuss.

**Responses (7 x 3% = 21%):** 12-font, double-space, one or two pages. The main structure of the class is composed of seven units (I-VII). You are required to submit **seven responses**, but only one per unit. This gives you flexibility in your schedule.

A response should consist of the following elements: a) a one or two paragraph summary of the main argument of the text; b) an observation about its methodology or a critique of its content. Remember that critique is not simply a disagreement, but an argument about potential flaws in logic, contrasting it with other readings etc.; c) a question you were left with after the careful reading and critique.

Date: You are required to submit the response **by 9am the day of the class**. This would allow me to understand what you found interesting or difficult and adjust the class accordingly. Since there is great flexibility in terms of the deadlines, no late responses will be accepted.

**Ritual Assignment Presentation (5%):** This will be a chance for you to briefly present the ritual you will be discussing, and get valuable feedback from your class mates! In this sense, great preparation for the assignment to be submitted a week later :) Date: October 3.

**Ritual Relevance (10%):** 3-4 pages. The integration into majority society, technological changes, immigration, rise of denominations, and intermarriages have all changed religious observance and rituals. In this assignment, you are welcome to reflect on it creatively.

**Midterm Exam (20%):** In-class one hour written exam covering all the material in the class and readings up to that point. You will be handed sample exam in advance and there will also be a tutorial shortly before. Date: October 19

**Final Paper Proposal (5%):** 3 pages. This is your chance to explore some of the themes we have learned throughout the semester and develop new ideas. You will provide your research questions, tentative description, and a bibliography of five items (based at least in part on the syllabus). Creative projects would be considered but be sure to talk to me about it in advance before submitting the proposal. Date: November 21

**Final Paper Presentation (4%):** In-class, short presentation of your final project. This gives you the chance to hear feedback and improve your draft before the final papers are due :). Date: December 5

**Final Paper (25%):** 8-10 pages. This is your opportunity to explore the question you had in mind in the proposal. Most papers will begin with an introduction, followed by a description of the historical circumstances, the theory you use and/or the comparison (when applicable), the analysis of the issue at hand, and the conclusion you reach. Detailed instructions will be provided. Date: Based on the exam schedule

**Bonus Events (1% each, up to three times):** Throughout the semester, a Google document will be updated with events of interest happening around campus. To get the bonus you have to attend the event and submit a one or two pages response summarizing the key argument/plot, raise an observation, for example by connecting it to the class materials, and a question you were left with after the event.

**Late Submission Policy:** A penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. If you have a valid, documented reason for late submission, please let me know as soon as possible.

## Course Policies

### Numerical Grading Scale:

A	93-100	A-	90-92		
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	68-69	D	63-67	D-	60-62
E	<60				

### Grading Criteria is as follows:

- A-range – 90s – Excellent – Full command and facility with material with the ability to place it within larger historical/literary context and to make arguments based upon it.
- B-range – 80s – Very Good and Good – Solid understanding of material but without complete facility or ability to make arguments based on it.
- C-range – 70s -- Fair – Some understanding of major themes, lack of command with detail, or some understanding of detail but lack of contextual understanding.
- D-range – 60s -- Poor – Enough factual understanding to pass, but little to no contextual clarity.
- F-range – Fails – Lack of university level quality.

For the grading policies of the University of Florida in general, follow this link:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/> (Links to an external site.)

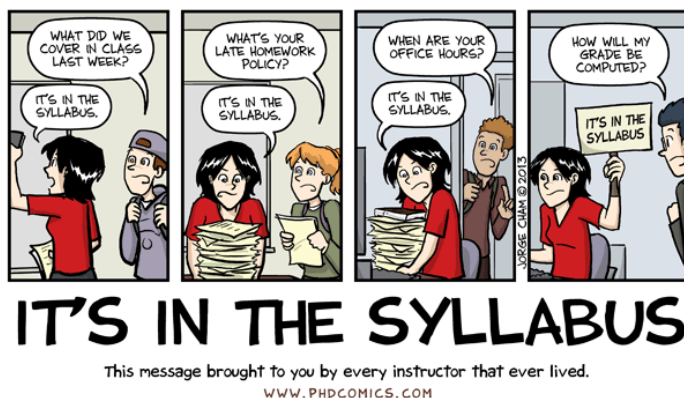
**Late Submission Policy:** No late submissions will be accepted for response papers or bonus events. There is enough flexibility built into the assignment. For all other assignments, a penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. Please do reach out if you have any medical or other concerns and we will find a solution!

## Course Policies

**Academic Integrity:** The University of Florida Student Honor Code is located at this link: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php> (Links to an external site.). UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

**Accessibility:** All students are welcome in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**Office Hours and E-Mail:** Please feel free to talk to me about the class materials and any other concerns you might have. Meetings, either in-person or via Zoom, are preferable to email. If you cannot make it to the office hours, you can schedule a meeting using this link: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>



In the case of email, please use your university email account (other accounts may land in the spam folder) and include a topic-line, your name, and the question(s) you have. I try to respond quickly, but note that emails will receive a reply within two working days. This means that if you send me an email on the weekend, or if you send a request for extension in the last minute, they might be answered only later, and the penalty incurred will be implemented.

## Academic Resources:

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learningsupport@ufl.edu](mailto:Learningsupport@ufl.edu). <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.)

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.  
<http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

### **Schedule**

Thursday, August 24: Is It Jewish?

#### **I. The Hebrew Bible**

Tuesday, August 29: Brenner, 1-17; Hebrew Bible: Gen. 22:1-19

Thursday, August 31: **Visit to the Price Library** Meet five minutes before class at the entrance to the West Library (inside).

Tuesday, September 5: Brenner, 18-29

Thursday, September 7: **GUEST LECTURE:** The American Jewish experience

#### **II. Talmud and Religious Practice**

Tuesday, September 12: **NO CLASS**

Thursday, September 14: Aaron Tapper, "Laws," *Judaisms*

Tuesday, September 19: Brenner, 31-53

#### **III. People of the Book?**

Thursday, September 21: David Nirenberg, "Early Christianity: The Road to Emmaus, the Road to Damascus," *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, 48-86

Tuesday, September 26: Brenner, 95-115

Thursday, September 28: Ezekiel 1:1-26, 8: Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Jewish Mysticism," *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, 399-423;

**Make-up Class, Monday October 2, 5pm:** Mary-Jane Rubenstein (Wesleyan), "Infinite Canaan: The Corporate Space Race in Colonial Perspective."

Tuesday, October 3: Ritual Assignment Presentation

Thursday, October 5: Brenner, 69-93

Tuesday, October 10: Brenner, 117-136 Ritual Assignment Written Submission

Thursday, October 12: Gershom Scholem, "Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy," *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 287-324

#### **IV. The Rise of the Modern Jew**

Tuesday, October 17: Brenner, 151-165

Thursday, October 19: Midterm

Tuesday, October 24: Brenner, 167-188

Thursday, October 26: **NO CLASS**

Tuesday, October 31: Brenner, 273-285; 2. *The Sassons* (selection)

## **V. The Holocaust**

Thursday, November 2: Brenner, 319-348

Tuesday, November 7: Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life* (selections)

Thursday, November 9: Eva's Story on Instagram

## **VI. Zionism**

Tuesday, November 14: Brenner, 255-272

Thursday, November 16: Theodor Herzl, [\*The Jewish State\*](#) (sections I. Intro, II. The Jewish Question, V. Society of the Jews & The Jewish State)

## **VII. American Jews**

Tuesday, November 21: Dara Horn, "Legends of Dead Jews," *People Love Dead Jews*, 75-86

### Final Paper Proposal

Tuesday, November 28: 2. James Baldwin, "Negros are Anti-Semitic because They Are Anti-White" (1967); 3. Norman Podhoretz, "My Negro Problem – And Ours" (1965),

Thursday, November 30: watch Joy Ladin [interview](#)

Tuesday, December 5: Final Paper Presentation