Jewish Studies

The minor in Jewish studies is administered by the Jewish Studies Committee: Professors Fine (Jewish studies, chair), Gill (politics), Hashmi (international relations), King (history), Penn (religion), Remmler (German studies), Weber (English; on leave Spring 2016); Lecturer Caravita (Jewish studies).

Overview

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.

First-Year Students

First-year students are encouraged to take 112 as a gateway to Jewish studies.

Contact Info

Lawrence Fine, chair
Sue Rusiecki, senior administrative assistant

Requirements for the Minor

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.

Credits

- A minimum of 16 credits

Courses

- Jewish Studies 112, Introduction to Judaism
- At least 4 credits must be at the 300 level

Related Course 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.

Students should consider taking Hebrew language as part of the Jewish studies minor and are encouraged to consider Jewish studies offerings at the other Five Colleges.

Course Offerings

JWST-103 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

Sprinng

This course provides a critical introduction to the writings contained in the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Old Testament). It investigates the social and historical context of the ancient Israelites, examines a range of ancient Near Eastern literature, and introduces the principal methods of biblical studies. Participants will read much of the Hebrew Bible as well as select non-Israelite sources. Examples of recent biblical scholarship will provide additional information for better understanding these writings and will present different methods for approaching and interpreting ancient texts.

Crosslisted as: Religion 103
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
M. Penn
Credits: 4

JWST-104 Introduction to the New Testament

Fall

This course investigates the social and historical context of first and early second-century Christianity, examines New Testament and select noncanonical documents, and introduces participants to the principal methods of New Testament studies. Students will read the 27 works that make up most modern collections of the New Testament, a number of early Christian documents that did not make the final cut, and several ancient non-Christian sources. Examples of recent New Testament scholarship will provide historical background for better understanding of Christian writings and will present different methods for approaching and interpreting ancient texts.

Crosslisted as: Religion 104
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
M. Penn
Credits: 4

JWST-112 Introduction to Judaism

Not Scheduled for This Year

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: Religion 112
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Credits: 4

JWST-150 Introduction to Modern Hebrew

Fall

An introduction to modern Hebrew language and culture, with a focus on equal development of the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. By the end of the year, students will be able to comprehend short and adapted literary and journalistic texts, describe themselves and their environment, and express their thoughts and opinions. Learning will be amplified by use of online resources (YouTube, Facebook, newspapers) and examples from Hebrew song and television/film. This course will involve regular collaboration with students from the Elementary Modern Hebrew course at Smith College. No previous knowledge of Modern Hebrew is necessary.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities: Language
J. Caravita
Credits: 4

JWST-151 Introduction to Modern Hebrew

Not Scheduled for This Year

A year-long introduction to modern Hebrew language and culture, with a focus on equal development of the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. By the end of the year, students will be able to comprehend short and adapted literary and journalistic texts, describe themselves and their environment, and express their thoughts and opinions. Learning will be amplified by use of online resources (YouTube, Facebook, newspapers) and examples from Hebrew song and television/film. This course will involve regular collaboration with students from the Elementary Modern Hebrew course at Smith College. No previous knowledge of Modern Hebrew is necessary.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities: Language
J. Caravita
Prereq: Jewish Studies 150.
Credits: 4
JWST-225 Topics in Judaism

JWST-225LF Topics in Judaism: 'Love, Friendship, and Interpersonal Relations in Judaism'

This course explores teachings and practices having to do with interpersonal relations in Jewish religious tradition, including notions of 'spiritual friendship,' relations between parents and children, teachers and disciples, and loving partners. Drawing broadly on the many varieties of Jewish religious literature, with a special interest in the mystical traditions of Judaism, the course also addresses diverse ethical questions such as the nature of forgiveness, responsibility towards the needs of others, and sexual ethics.

Crosslisted as: Religion 225LF
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Credits: 4

JWST-232 Contemporary Jewish Ethics

This course will explore issues of contemporary ethics from the point of view of Jewish religious thought and tradition. Topics will include medical and genetic ethics, death and dying, family and sexual ethics, ethics of war, poverty, and the environment. The course will explore these issues in the context of theoretical approaches to questions of religion and ethics.

Crosslisted as: Religion 232
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Prereq: 4 credits in religion or Jewish studies.
Credits: 4

JWST-235 Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

This course examines the fascinating Jewish mystical tradition with hundreds of books of diverse kinds. The course will focus on works found among the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We will read an ancient Harlequin romance, tour heaven and hell, hear of the adventures of fallen angels who sired giants (and taught humans about cosmetics), and learn how the world will end. In critically examining such texts, we will better appreciate the diversity of Judaism, better understand the historical context of early Christianity, and explore the politics behind what did and did not make it into the bible.

Crosslisted as: Religion 256
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
M. Penn
Credits: 4

JWST-249 Encounters Between Judaism and Other Religious Traditions: Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism

This course will explore selected examples of the encounter between Judaism and other world religious traditions. Living alongside other religious traditions over millennia, how have Jewish religious thought and practice creatively appropriated, adapted, as well as resisted aspects of 'foreign' religions. Examples we will consider include encounters with medieval Islam in the realms of Arabic poetry and Sufi mysticism, Christianity in connection with religious ritual, mystical notions of the divine feminine, and in our own time, the influence of Judaism on American Buddhism.

Crosslisted as: Religion 249
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Credits: 4

JWST-250 Intermediate Hebrew

This course emphasizes skills necessary for proficiency in reading, writing, and conversational Hebrew. It presents new grammatical concepts and vocabulary through texts about Jewish and Israeli culture and tradition, as well as popular culture and day-to-day life in modern Israel. Course material includes newspapers, films, music, and readings from Hebrew short stories and poetry. Starts a transition from simple/simplified Hebrew to a more literate one, and sharpens the distinction between different registers of the language.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Caravita
Prereq: Jewish Studies 150 and 151.
Advisory: At least one year of college Hebrew or equivalent or permission of instructor
Notes: Attendance will be required at a weekly Hebrew language table at either Mount Holyoke College or Smith College.
Credits: 4

JWST-256 What Didn't Make It in the Bible

This course explores issues of contemporary ethics from the point of view of Jewish religious thought and tradition. Topics will include medical and genetic ethics, death and dying, family and sexual ethics, ethics of war, poverty, and the environment. The course will explore these issues in the context of theoretical approaches to questions of religion and ethics.

Crosslisted as: Religion 232
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Prereq: 4 credits in religion or Jewish studies.
Credits: 4

JWST-265 Holy Feast, Holy Fast: Sacred Food and Eating in Judaism

This course explores the role of food and eating in Jewish religious culture, but will also include a significant comparative religious dimension. Topics will include the ritual, religious, and social significance of the dietary laws in Judaism, the symbolic foods of Passover and other festivals, fasting and ascetic attitudes toward food, as well as food culture as a marker of Jewish identity.

Crosslisted as: Religion 265
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
L. Fine
Credits: 4

JWST-270 Jewish Religious Art and Material Culture: From Ancient Israel to Contemporary Judaism

This course will explore selected examples of the encounter between Judaism and other world religious traditions. Living alongside other religious traditions over millennia, how have Jewish religious thought and practice creatively appropriated, adapted, as well as resisted aspects of 'foreign' religions. Examples we will consider include encounters with medieval Islam in the realms of Arabic poetry and Sufi mysticism, Christianity in connection with religious ritual, mystical notions of the divine feminine, and in our own time, the influence of Judaism on American Buddhism.

Crosslisted as: Religion 270, Art History 290JR
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives
L. Fine
Credits: 4

JWST-295  Independent Study
Fall and Spring
The department
Instructor permission required.
Credits: 1-4
Course can be repeated for credit.

JWST-395  Independent Study
Fall and Spring
The department
Instructor permission required.
Credits: 1-8
Course can be repeated for credit.

See Also
- Religion