Approaches to Jewish Studies: Teaching a Methods Class

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Appendix—Abbreviated Syllabus

Approaches to Jewish Studies
Spring Semester

Designed for advanced students in Jewish studies, this course focuses on the nature, development, and enactment of the field of Jewish studies. We will look at the process of creating and critiquing Jewish studies as a way of determining the methodological foundations of the field. We will ask several critical questions: what is Jewish studies, what are its political and/or ideological underpinnings, how has it evolved, what constitutes the field as a major field concentration, what are the challenges involved, and how have those challenges changed over time? As part of this inquiry into the varieties of Jewish studies, scholars and teachers from a variety of disciplines will join the class to lecture and lead discussion. This critical engagement will lead us to the incorporation and implementation of Jewish studies at this university. Special projects will help formulate critical methods to create both an ideal and a feasible concentration in Jewish studies. By focusing on the teaching and studying of Jewish studies, the class will consider, analyze, and evaluate the field itself and your own concentration in it.

Course objectives:

• To understand the development of Jewish studies as an academic field
• To study the historical conversation surrounding Jewish studies in Europe and the US
• To eavesdrop on and participate in that conversation
• To learn and engage in interdisciplinary methods of studying and teaching Jewish studies
• To evaluate Jewish studies in the American academy
• To develop a systematic approach to Jewish studies.

Weekly readings and discussions:

Tues., Jan. 7: Introduction

Thurs., Jan. 9: Myers, “The ideology of Wissenschaft des Judentums”

“Wissenschaft des Judentums,” Encyclopedia Judaica

Getting Started: Voices, Missions, Proposals

Schorsch, “Breakthrough into the Past: The Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden”
Thurs., Jan. 16: Library Tour (mandatory). Please meet in the front lobby of the Judaica Library.
Lerner, “New Technologies and Old Methodologies: Jewish Studies Research in the Digital Age”
Recommended: Berlin, Library Resources for Jewish Studies in the United States

Zunz, “On Rabbinic Literature”
Geiger, “Jewish Scholarship and Religious Reform”
Wolf, “On the Concept of a Science of Judaism” (second article)
Geiger, “The Developing Idea of Judaism”

The Rise of Jewish History
Baird, “Boys of the Wissenschaft”

Tues., Jan. 28: Graetz, “Judaism Can Be Understood Only Through its History” and other selections
Krochmal, “A Philosophy of Jewish History”
Dubnow, “Jewish History: An Essay in the Philosophy of History”
Strauss, “Jewish History: A Discussion”

Thurs., Jan. 30: Class cancelled

The Making and Founding of Institutions
Tues., Feb. 4: Shazar, “Baron David Günzberg and His Academy”
Elbogen, “A Century of Wissenschaft des Judentums”
Sperling, “Chapter Two: American Beginnings”
Neuman, “The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning: Basic Principles and Objectives”

Thurs., Feb. 6: Brinner, “The Origins of Modern Jewish Studies and the Founding of the Hebrew University”
Mosse, “Central European Intellectuals in Palestine”
Myers, “A New Scholarly Colony in Jerusalem: The Early History of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University”
Tues., Feb. 11: Zeitlin, “Seventy-Five Years of the Jewish Quarterly Review”
Rubin Schwartz, A Jewish Encyclopedia, “History, Biography, Sociology, and Anthropology”

Fox, “Jewishness and Judaism at Brandeis University”
Sachar, “The Jewish Component of Brandeis University”

Criticism, Critique, Quandaries
Scholem, “The Science of Judaism—Then and Now”
Altmann, “Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today”

Thurs., Feb. 20: Baron, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History”

Contemporary Developments and Comparisons
Ritterband and Wechsler, “Tragedy, Triumph, and Jewish Scholarship: Post-War Curricular Developments”
Schorsch, “The Place of Jewish Studies in Contemporary Scholarship”
Sidorsky, “Remembering the Answers: Jewish Studies in the Contemporary Academy”

Thurs., Feb. 27: “In Comparative Contexts” (multiple authors)

Zipperstein, “Home Again?”
Pinseker, “Queens College and the Souring of Ethnic Studies”

Group Projects Due

Thurs., March 6: Group Projects Due

Tues. & Thurs., March 11-13: Spring Break

Jewish Studies Here
Tues., March 18: Guest Speaker from Political Science

Thurs., March 20: Guest Speaker from Religion

Paper #2 Due

Tues., March 25: Guest Speaker from Germanic and Slavic Studies
Guest Speaker from Hebrew Literature
Thurs., March 27: Kirschenblatt-Gimlett, “Kitchen Judaism”

Tues., April 1: Guest Speaker from Religion

Heschel, “Jewish Studies as Counterhistory”
Baskin, “Integrating Gender Analysis into Jewish Studies Teaching”

Eisen, “Jewish Studies and the Academic Teaching of Religion”
Plaskow, “Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective”

Thurs., April 10: Tirosh-Rothschild, “‘Dare to Know’: Feminism and the Discipline of Jewish Philosophy”

Tues., April 15: In-class Project

Thurs., April 17: Passover

Tues., April 22: Presentations