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Women in Judaism

Instructor

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Institution

Fairfield University
 Fairfield University is a private liberal arts college, with an undergraduate student body of approximately 2800 students. Founded by the Jesuits just over fifty years ago, and still identifying itself as grounded in the "Catholic and Jesuit traditions," our students body is overwhelmingly Catholic (though the university welcomes those of different religious traditions, and is slowly becoming more religiously and ethnically diverse).

Course Level and Type

introductory level course for undergraduates / informal lectures combined with discussions, as well as guest speakers and films

Enrolment and Last Year Taught

30 students / fall 1997

Texts

The following are required readings and are available at the campus bookstore. They are also in Nyselius library on reserve.

Judith Baskin, ed., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*

Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, ed., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*

Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*

Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds., *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality*

Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*

In addition, you should have a Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Recommended is the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh - the Holy Scriptures* or the New Oxford Annotated Bible, College Edition.

Description and Requirements

In this course, we will look at ways in which women have understood and experienced Judaism from the biblical period through the present. Included will be a discussion of women's traditional religious roles and status, the many ways in which women themselves have understood Jewish self-identity, and recent feminist efforts to reevaluate and transform contemporary Jewish life. As much as possible, we will be drawing on the

words and images of women themselves.

Requirements include an in-class midterm to be given on Friday, October 17, a 10-12 page paper due on Friday, November 14; and a final examination on Wednesday, December 17 at 1:30 p.m. The midterm will count as 25% of the grade, the paper 25%, the final 40%, and class participation 10%.

Course Syllabus

Introduction

Sept. 4 Introduction to Course and to the Study of Women in Judaism

Sept. 5 Male and Female: What Does It Mean to Be a Jewish Human Being? Readings: Hebrew Bible, Genesis 1-4

****NO CLASS SEPT. 9 AND 11. BUT READ my essay "Piety, Persuasion and Friendship" in *Four Centuries*, 1-30 and Baskin, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, pp., 15-24**

What Does It Mean/Has It Meant to be a Jewish Woman?

— *Reflections: Past and Present*

Sept. 12, 16 Readings: Umansky and Ashton, pp. 35-55; Grossman and Haut, *Daughters of the King* pp. 237-296

— *Biblical models of womanhood*

Sept. 18, 19 & 23 Reexamining Eve; The Matriarchs, Tamar & Judah; Miriam; Hannah; The Woman of Valor

Readings: Baskin, pp. 25-42; Genesis 2-4; Genesis 17-33; 38; Exodus 1-2, 15; Number 12; I Samuel 1-2:21; Proverbs 31:10-31

— *Women's Roles and Religious Obligations*

Sept. 25 The Codification of Gender Identity

Readings: Baskin, pp. 43-93 and I.B. Singer, "Yentl, The Yeshiva Boy" (xerox)

Sept. 26, 30 Women in the Synagogue and the Home

Readings: Grossman and Haut, Preface and pp. 3-49; 89-101, 117-134; Baskin, pp. 135-158, 202-221

NO CLASS OCT. 2-3: Rosh Hashanah but by Oct. 7, students should see (in library or through arranged class showing) Joan Micklin Silver's film, "Hester Street."

Oct 7, 9 The Celebration of Gender Identity

Readings: xeroxes of women's *tkhines* (petitionary prayers); Baskin, pp. 159- 182; Grossman and Haut, pp. 314-top of 321; Umansky and Ashton, pp. 242- 247, 257-265, 314-321

**** NOTE: NO CLASS OCT. 10: Mid semester reading day**

New Challenges and Opportunities: Jewish Women in the Modern World

Oct. 14 & 16 Judaism through the Lens of Modernity

Readings: Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*

Oct. 17 MID-TERM EXAMINATION

Oct. 21 Educational Opportunities: Secular and Religious

Readings: Baskin, pp. 182-201, 222-242; Umansky and Ashton, pp. 59-101

Oct. 23 & 24 The Influence of Women's Organizations on Community and Home

Readings: Umansky and Ashton, pp. Middle of 109-middle of 114, 127-138;

140-152, 160-168

Oct. 28 & 30 The Holocaust: Women as Victims, Resisters, and Survivors

Readings: Baskin, pp. 243-264, Umansky and Ashton, pp. 171-180, 286-290, 306-314 and xeroxed materials

Oct. 31 & Nov. 4 (Re)Building the Jewish State — Jewish Women in Israel, Past and Present Readings: Umansky and Ashton, pp. 168-171, 216-218, 227; excerpt from Natalie Rein, *Daughters of Rachel: Women in Israel* (xerox) and Frances Raday, "The Concept of Gender Equality in a Jewish State" (xerox)

Nov. 6 & 7 Women as Ritual Experts — Traditional Religiosity in a Contemporary Setting

Readings: Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*

— *Women in Communal Religious Life: Participation and Leadership*

Nov 11-14 Women as Jewish Religious Leaders

Readings: Umansky and Ashton, pp. 156-160, 180-185, 228-229, 265-273, 276-285, 290-292 and Umansky, "Women's Journey toward Rabbinic Ordination," Janet Marder, "How Women Are Changing the Rabbinate," and Rabbi Elka Abrahamson, "Reshaping the Rabbinate" (xeroxes)

TERMS PAPERS ARE DUE BY FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14

Nov. 18 Women in Public Worship

Readings: Grossman and Haut, pp. 135-181..

Nov. 20-25 Feminist Reconceptualizations of Jewish Stories, Beliefs, and Identity

Readings: Judith Plaskow, "Standing Again at Sinai: Feminist Reconstructions of Jewish Memory," Rachel Adler, "I've Had Nothing Yet So I Can't Take More," and Rebecca Alpert, "In God's Image: Coming to Terms With Leviticus" (xeroxes) and Umansky, pp. 221-222, 292-298

Dec 2 & 4 (Re)Imaging the Divine


Readings: Umansky, pp. 230-242 and Marcia Falk, "What About God?" and "Toward a Feminist Jewish Reconstruction of Monotheism"(xeroxes). Dr. Falk will be speaking on Dec. 4 in class and at 7:30 p.m. in the Quick Center.

Dec. 5 Creating New Rituals

Readings: 247-265, 314-321

Dec. 9 Equal Access and/or Transformation? Looking Towards the Future

Readings: Grossman, pp.297-305, Umansky, pp. 215-216, 321-334, and Judith Plaskow, "Beyond Egalitarianism" (xerox)

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/women_in_judaism-umansky.html

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