

**Hartford International University for Religion and Peace**

**Introduction to Judaism DI-511**

**Fall 2025**

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**Monday 5pm-6:50pm**

**Office Hours: Thursday 9:30-12 and by appointment**

(preliminary syllabus, subject to change)

**Course Format:**This course is designed in hybrid format, requiring three hours of direct contact hours per week. Students meet together (some in person and some via Zoom) for two hours weekly. The third contact hour is spent participating in online discussion forums, watching videos, and occasionally, collaborating with a classmate. The Canvas website will provide the most accurate and up-to-date instructions for all aspects of the course. If you have difficulty accessing or navigating the site, call the Canvas Support Hotline: (877) 249-4494..

**Course Description:**

This course examines the variety of elements that coalesce to define Judaism as both a civilization and a religion. The course uses Jewish historical phases such as the biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern periods, as backdrops against which Judaic theology, practice and ritual are examined. The primary means by which Judaism is analyzed is via the study of biblical, rabbinic and modern Jewish texts.

**Course Objectives:**

Completion of this course will enable students to:

1. Articulate the relationship between Jewish practice, theology, identity and history, and explain ways Jewish history has informed and continues to inform Jewish practice, theology and identity.
2. Explain how the Hebrew Scriptures have been understood within the classical rabbinic tradition, and in modern academic exegeses.
3. Assess the role of rabbinic law within Jewish tradition.
4. Articulate how Jewish practices have sustained Jewish identity.

 **Learning Outcomes:**

1. At the level needed to take part in substantive dialogue, demonstrate knowledge. of the roles of the scriptures and sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (MAIRS)
2. At the level needed to take part in substantive study, demonstrate knowledge of the theological and legal traditions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (MAIRS)
3. Express your ideas and perspectives clearly in oral and written communication.
4. As captured in the BCCI competencies, students will be able to use the intellectual, interpersonal, and professional skills needed to provide chaplaincy care in complex, pluralistic environments. (MAC)
5. Demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage the religious pluralism of contemporary American society through exposure to the teachings of other faiths and those who practice those faiths. (DMin)

**Required Texts:**

Access to an English translation of the Hebrew Bible

John Efron, ed., *The Jews: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2016)

**Course Requirements and Assessment:**

1. **Regular Attendance and Active Participation (10%)**

Active attendance in class is required. Synchronous students must keep their videos on for the majority of the class time. Students should come to class prepared for discussion.

1. **Discussion Board (25%)**

**Raising Questions and Comments**Students will post a significant question, comment or analysis in response to a prompt which responds to elements of the week’s Module. This original post should comprise about 1-2 paragraphs and is due by **XXX *11:59pm of the previous week.***

**Responding to Questions and Comments** Students will substantively engage with a fellow student’s original posts (Raising Questions and Comments) by ***the subsequent XXX 11:59pm***Keep in mind, this course engages in cooperative study of text. As such, students should remain cognizant of their peers’ perspectives so that we continue to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue.

1. **Two Review and Reflection Essays (40%)**

**Peer Review (10%)**

The essays should be 3-4 pages in length and explore a religious, socio-cultural, or historical topic in Judaism addressed in one of the Modules. The essays should include a brief summary of the major issues relayed in the readings, a critique or reflection on some of the modules’ readings, and a personal perspective.

Essays One is due ***TBA***. Upon submission, the essay will be graded partially and commented on by the professor. If they so choose, students may modify their essay and resubmit it for revised grading. Students are by no means required to do so.

Essay Two is due ***TBD*** to a **peer reviewer** (assigned by the professor). The peer reviewer will comment substantively on the essay and return the draft to the student ***TBD***. The student may choose to revise the essay or keep it as is. On ***TBD***, the student should submit their original essay (with the peer reviewer’s comments included) and their final draft, to the professor. Students will be graded only on their final drafts, and on the substantiveness of their peer reviews. Students will ***not*** be graded on their original drafts.

1. **Slide Show Presentation (15%)**

Further instruction to follow.

**Late Assignments:**

Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor. Otherwise, late assignments will be reduced by ½ letter grade per each week that the assignment has not yet been submitted.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity and AI Policy:**

Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one’s own previous work used in another course.

 AI is permitted for brainstorming and for editing (for instance, via Grammarly). If AI provides a new idea, students are requested to include in a footnote the prompt that triggered it.

**Grading Scale:**

A (95-100) Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.

A- (90-94) Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.

B+(87-89) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.

B (83-86) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.

B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.

C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.

C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.

F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

Grades range from A to C and F; A+’s and C-’s are not part of the grading system.

On a 4.0 GPA scale -- A(4.00), A-(3.66), B+(3.33), B(3.00), B-(2.66), C+(2.33), C(2.00) and F(0.00). A grade point average of no less than B- (2.66) is required to maintain good standing. The minimum G.P.A. required for graduation is 2.75.

The DMIN Grading Scale: High Pass(95-100), Pass (83-94), Low Pass(70-82), and Fail(below 70)

**Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

(Readings Subject to Change)

**Biblical and Late Antique History**

1. **Defining Judaism; Torah; Israel’s Biblical History**

Efron, pp. 1-32

Mosh Halbertal, “Canon and Meaning,” in *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (1997), pp. 11-44.

Marc Brettler, “My Bible: A Jew’s Perspective,” in *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* ed. Marc Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel Harrington, pp. 21-66.

David Ariel, “The Meaning of Torah,” in *What Do Jews Believe?* (1996) pp. 134-158.

1. **Moses, Exodus and Revelation at Sinai**

Samuel Atlas, “Moses in the Philosophy of Maimonides, Spinoza and Solomon Maimonides, *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1954), pp. 369-400.

1. **From Judges to Kings**

Dan Cohn-Sherbook, pp. 38-72 (part 1)

Pinchas Kahn, “Shofetim, The Book of Judges: Anarchy Versus Monarchy,” Jewish Bible Qarterly,” 44 (2016), pp. 21-28.

Meir Soloveitchik, “King David,” *First Things* (2017)

1. **Israel’s Exile and Prophetic Reconsiderations**

Dan Cohn-Sherbook, pp. 38-72 (part 2)

Frederick Greenspahn, “Syncretism and Idolatry in the Bible,” *Vetus Testamentum* 54 (2004), pp. 480-494.

Jacob Neusner, “Resentment and Renewal: Toward a Theory of the History of Judaism,” *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 16 (2013), pp. 41-48

1. **The Persian Period, Esther, Ruth and Ezra**

Efron, pp. 32-57

Tamara Eskenazi, “The Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah,” Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period, ed. Oded Lipschitz (2006), pp. 509-529 (DTL)

1. **Hellenism, the Book of Maccabees and Hanukkah**

Efron, pp. 58-79

Esther Tucker, “The December Dilemma,” *The Reconstructionist* 37 (1971), pp. 16-20.

Shaye Cohen, “Jews and Gentiles” in *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, pp. 19-37

**Religion and Law**

1. **Rabbinic Judaism: The Emergence of the Mishnah and Talmud**

Efron, pp. 131-148

Moshe Halbertal, “Authority, Controversy and Tradition,” in *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (1997), pp. 45-89

Leo Trepp, “Of Oral Torah,” in *Judaism Development and Life* (1982) pp. 218-223

1. **The Sabbath Command**

Telushkin, pp. 661-668,

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, “The Dream and How to Live It: Shabbat,” in *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, pp. 127-181.

1. **Kosher, Ritual Purity**

Telushkin, pp. 699-702

Jacob Milgrom, “Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System,” *Interpretation* 17 (1963), pp. 288-301

Zev Eleff, “The Orthodox Family” in *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History* ed. Zev Eleff

Dana Evan Kaplan, “The Acceptance of Gays and Lesbians” in *American Reform Judaism* (2003) pp. 209-232

1. **Circumcision, Marriage and Divorce**

Telushkin, pp. 671-697

Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, pp. TBA

1. **Prayer and the Synagogue**

Telushkin, pp. 705-736

Dana Evan Kaplan, The Worship Revolution in the Synagogue,” in American Reform Judaism (2003) pp. 79-112.

David Ariel, “Prayer,” in *What do Jews Believe?* (1996) pp. 211-246

**Modern Judaism**

1. **The Land of Israel and Jewish Identity**

TBA

1. **Antisemitism**

Efron, pp. 406-483

Selection from Eli Wiesel, *Night* (2006)

1. **Pluralism**

Efron, pp. 287-324

Zev Eleff, The State of Orthodox Belief in *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History* ed. Zev Eleff (2016)

Dana Evan Kaplan, “An Introduction to Reform Jewish Belief,” in American Reform Judaism (2003), pp. 27-43

**Recommended Readings:**

1. Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History* (Pearson, 1982)
2. Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism* (New York: Harcout, 1974)
3. Menahem Mansoor, Jewish History and Thought: An Introduction (Hoboken: KTAV, 1991)
4. Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays* (Simon and Schuster, 1993)
5. Martin Goodman, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)
6. Jacob Neusner, The Way of the Torah: An Introduction (Belmond: Wadsworth, 2004)
7. Nahum Glatzer ed.,The Judaic Tradition: Jewish Writings from Antiquity to the Modern Age (Northvale, Jason Aronson, 1987)
8. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Judaism: History, Belief and Practice (New York: Routeledge, 2003)