Jewish Studies

Website (http://www.northeastern.edu/jewishstudies)

Lori H. Lefkowitz, PhD
Ruderman Professor and Director, Jewish Studies Program

450 Renaissance Park
617.373.8437
617.373.2942 (fax)
Jennifer I. Sartori, Associate Director, j.sartori@northeastern.edu

Jewish studies offers the opportunity to explore Jewish history, religion, and cultures. Because of the geographic, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of the Jewish people, as well as the long timeline of Jewish history, Jewish studies provides students with rich possibilities for cross-cultural and comparative study. Jewish studies is an interdisciplinary program embracing history, music, literature, political science, international affairs, sociology, gender studies, religion, philosophy, Hebrew, and more. The program also explores the evolving interactions between Judaism and other religions and offers exciting courses in both Israel studies and the history and cultures of Diaspora Jewish communities around the world.

The Jewish studies program offers both a minor and a preapproved template for a combined major. A unique feature of the minor is the Jewish studies module, in which students create an original project that brings an aspect of Jewish studies together with an aspect of their major field.

Jewish studies classes seek to help students develop a more critical and analytical understanding of the religious and secular world around them. They are designed to prepare students for any field that requires critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding, including careers in education, social services, politics, museums and archives, and Jewish communal organizations, as well as for graduate and professional studies.

Study abroad, either through the Dialogues of Civilization program in Israel, Germany, and/or Poland or through traditional study-abroad programs, is a significant aspect of Jewish studies. Experiential learning in the Jewish studies program includes these study-abroad opportunities, as well as internships or co-ops at organizations such as the Jewish Community Relations Council, Facing History and Ourselves, the Jewish Women’s Archive, and the Israeli Consulate. The Ruderman merit-based scholarship supports selected Jewish studies majors and minors; the Gideon Klein award supports a student in research on the arts and the Holocaust.

For more information, visit the department website (http://www.northeastern.edu/jewishstudies).

Academic Progression Standards

Same as university-wide standards described under “Academic Status (http://catalog.northeastern.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies-procedures/progression-standards/#status).”

Pre-approved Template Program in Jewish Studies

Jewish studies offers a preapproved template program that may be paired with another preapproved template program to create a combined major; to see a list of current preapproved template programs, visit the combined majors webpage (http://www.northeastern.edu/registrar/major-2.html).

Students may request admission to such a combined major via the Combined Major Approval form (http://www.northeastern.edu/registrar/form-maj-comb.pdf), which requires approval by both disciplines/colleges together with an approved curriculum. For additional information on preapproved template programs, see “Student-Requested Combined Major (http://catalog.northeastern.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies-procedures/degrees-majors-minors/#stu-req).” For template program requirements, visit the myNEU web portal (http://www.myneu.neu.edu), click on the “Self-Service” tab, then on “My Degree Audit.”

Programs

Bachelor of Arts

• Jewish Studies and Religion (http://catalog.northeastern.edu/undergraduate/social-sciences-humanities/jewish-studies/jewish-studies-religion-ba)

Minor

• Jewish Studies (http://catalog.northeastern.edu/undergraduate/social-sciences-humanities/jewish-studies/jewish-studies-minor)

Courses

Jewish Studies Courses

JWSS 1285. Jewish Religion and Culture. 4 Hours.
Explores the basic features of Judaism in the ancient, rabbinic, and modern periods. Employs an historical critical approach to the formative texts and their interpreters. Analyzes Jewish practices within specific historical contexts and discusses the ways in which practices relate to the texts and history of Judaism. Examines the rich varieties of Jewish cultural expressions. JWSS 1285 and PHIL 1285 are cross-listed.

Examines cultural, religious, political, and economic developments in European Jewish life between 1750 and 1945. Emphasizes the diversity of Jewish experiences in Europe and the significant changes in Jewish identity that occurred as many Jews became increasingly integrated into their surrounding populations. Includes topics such as “Haskalah,” or “Jewish Enlightenment”; the development of Reform Judaism; political and economic emancipation; changes in gender norms; Zionism; and anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Includes films, memoirs, and cartoons and graphic novels, as well as important texts in Jewish history. HIST 1294 and JWSS 1294 are cross-listed.

JWSS 1520. Jewish Film. 4 Hours.
Explores major themes and issues in American Jewish life—assimilation and intermarriage, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust—through the lens of popular film. Includes weekly screenings of films such as Annie Hall and The Producers and readings, lectures, and discussions.

JWSS 1575. Jewish Film and Fiction. 4 Hours.
Examines books and short stories with Jewish themes, such as Goodbye Columbus and The Chosen, and some of the films based on those works. Offers students an opportunity to develop critical knowledge of key issues in modern Jewish identity—immigration, assimilation and intermarriage, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust—through the lens of fiction and film. CLTR 1575 and JWSS 1575 are cross-listed.

JWSS 1990. Elective. 1-4 Hours.
Offers elective credit for courses taken at other academic institutions. May be repeated without limit.
JWSS 2259. Sex and Gender in the Jewish Experience. 4 Hours.
Explores how sexuality and gender have shaped Jewish culture and religion throughout history. Studies how ideas about masculinity and femininity have varied dramatically over time and place within the Jewish community and have often departed considerably from those of non-Jewish society. Begins with the role of Biblical texts in the construction of Western conceptions of gender and sexuality and continues through medieval and early modern Europe, up to contemporary feminist Judaism and current Jewish ideas about “queerness” and non-normative ways of living. Uses a wide range of primary sources (memoirs, fiction, religious texts, etc.) and secondary literature from multiple disciplines. Seeks to answer: Does ethnicity have a sex? Is religious identity gendered? What do “Jewish femininity” and “Jewish masculinity” mean? JWSS 2259 and WMNS 2259 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2269. Jews and American Popular Culture. 4 Hours.
Examines why Jews, despite their small numbers, have had such a central influence on American popular entertainment. Jewish "moguls" essentially created the American radio, film, and television industries. Other Jews assumed prominence in the fields of popular song, jazz, folk music, vaudeville, Broadway, literature, literary criticism, stand-up comedy, as well as comic strips and books. Jews excelled in sports, particularly baseball, basketball, and boxing, and Jewish gangsters made an indelible mark on the dark side of the American imagination. Jewish department store moguls, fashion designers, and toy manufacturers helped shape the American Dream. Explores social history as well as works of popular culture to perceive the nuanced Jewish influence operating at the heart of Jewish-American creativity.

JWSS 2285. America and the Holocaust. 4 Hours.
Examines the American response to the Holocaust, in terms of both contemporaneous knowledge and actions and the lasting impact on policy and culture. Starts with early twentieth-century events, such as the Armenian genocide, that shaped later attitudes. Explores the prewar period, particularly U.S. immigration and isolationist policies. Assesses Americans’ knowledge of European events as the extermination campaign unfolded and fights ensued over rescue possibilities. Examines changing depictions of the Holocaust that emerged in the postwar period as a result of critical events such as the Eichmann trial and popular television and film portrayals. Finally, considers how perceptions of the Holocaust have shaped subsequent U.S. responses to genocide. HIST 2285, JRNL 2285, and JWSS 2285 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2300. Race, Religion, Ethnicity: The Example of Jewishness. 4 Hours.
Explores the relationship between Judaism and race from ancient times, through the birth of modern anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century and the Holocaust in the twentieth, to the resurgence of biologically based ideas of Jewish identity in recent decades. Seeks to answer the questions of what Jewishness is—race, religion, or ethnicity—and how and why Jews, along with other groups such as Italians, Irish, and Slavs, moved from being seen as racially “other” in nineteenth-century America to being considered “white” in the twentieth century. Through the lens of the Jewish experience, offers students an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of the historically changing meanings of such important concepts as race, ethnicity, and peoplehood. HIST 2300 and JWSS 2300 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2313. Exploring the Jewish Diaspora—From Mountain Jews to Crypto-Jews. 4 Hours.
Explores vibrant Jewish life in foreign lands, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and South Africa, as well as unusual Jewish communities in places such as Uganda and northeastern India. Covers topics such as how Jewish religion and identity are reshaped by other cultures, the emergence of secret Jews who fled the Iberian peninsula more than five centuries ago, and a brief history of Jewish life in the modern diaspora. Includes presentations and discussion of diaspora art, literature, film, and music. JWSS 2313 and PHIL 2313 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2431. Immigration and Identity in the American Jewish Experience. 4 Hours.
Examines Jewish political, social, and cultural history from the arrival of the first group of Jews at New Amsterdam in 1654 to the present. Themes include immigration, adaptation, family life, religion, anti-Semitism, Zionism, the Holocaust, and American-Israeli relations. HIST 2431 and JWSS 2431 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2500. Zionism and the Challenges of Jewish Statehood. 4 Hours.
Examines the birth and development of political, religious, cultural, and social movements that gave rise to the modern state of Israel in 1948 and continue to shape Israeli society and politics today. Readings are drawn from Zionism’s founders and early opponents in nineteenth-century Europe (Herzl, Ha’Am, Buber, etc.); the state’s founders, leaders, and critics (Ben Gurion, Kook, etc.); and ends with contemporary thinkers in Israel and the United States (Morris, Hartman, Eisen, etc.). Emphasizes historical context as well as comparative analysis with other forms of nationalism, other movements of Judaism, and more.

JWSS 2610. Contemporary Israeli Literature and Art Abroad. 4 Hours.
Explores contemporary Israeli culture through literature and art. Focuses on the tensions, pains, and pleasures of existence from various Israeli points of view. Takes place in Israel during the summer term, offering students an opportunity to meet with contemporary Israeli writers, visit sites of the literary settings, and explore art galleries and museums. Readings include short stories and poetry by major Israeli and Palestinian writers from 1948 through the present. ENGL 2610 and JWSS 2610 are cross-listed.

JWSS 2990. Elective. 1-4 Hours.
Offers elective credit for courses taken at other academic institutions. May be repeated without limit.

JWSS 3447. Topics in Jewish Studies. 4 Hours.
Covers special topics in Jewish studies. May be repeated without limit.

JWSS 3678. Bedrooms and Battlefields: Hebrew Bible and the Origins of Sex, Gender, and Ethnicity. 4 Hours.
Considers stories from Hebrew Scripture in English translation, beginning with the Garden of Eden through the Book of Ruth, asking how these foundational narratives establish the categories that have come to define our humanity. Analyzes how the Bible’s patterns of representation construct sexual and ethnic identities and naturalize ideas about such social institutions as “the family.” ENGL 3678, JWSS 3678, and WMNS 3678 are cross-listed.

JWSS 3685. From Kafka to Kushner: Modern and Contemporary Jewish Literature. 4 Hours.
Surveys Jewish literature from the late modern (1880–1948) and contemporary (1948–present) periods. Considers themes of immigration and cross-cultural influences and issues of religious, ethnic, and gender identity. Emphasizes American and European literatures to begin to define an international Jewish literary canon, including Yiddish poets and playwrights, Russian Jewish writers, and modern writers. ENGL 3685 and JWSS 3685 are cross-listed.
**JWSS 3990. Elective. 1-4 Hours.**
Offers elective credit for courses taken at other academic institutions. May be repeated without limit.

**JWSS 4660. Jewish Studies Module. 1 Hour.**
Permits specialized Jewish studies topics to be studied as part of more general courses. Restricted to junior, senior, or graduate standing. May be repeated without limit.

**JWSS 4992. Directed Study. 1-4 Hours.**
Offers students an opportunity for special readings and research in Jewish studies. May be repeated for up to 8 total credits.