

WINTER 2026				
COURSE	COURSE TITLE	DISTRO/FD	INSTRUCTOR	TIME/DAY
GERMAN 404 (taught in English, also COMP LIT 487-0-20)	Holocaust Writing and its Discontents		A.Parkinson	M 1:00 – 3:50pm
HEBREW 111-2-20	Hebrew I		R. Alexander	MWF 9:30 – 10:50
HEBREW 121-2-20	Hebrew II		R. Alexander	MWF 11:00 – 12:20
HEBREW 216-0-1	Hebrew III: Jerusalem	VI	H. Seltzer	MW 2:00 – 3:20
HEBREW 316-0-1	Hebrew IV: Biblical Stories and Poems; Canonical Biblical Texts through the Lens of Modern Hebrew Poetry	VI	H. Seltzer	MW 11:00 – 12:20
HISTORY 200-0-24 (also MENA 290-4-1)	Jerusalem: History, Memory, Fantasy	IV	Y. Petrovsky- Shtern	TTH 2:00 – 3:20
HISTORY 203-1-20 (also JWSH_ST 203-1-1)	Jewish History I: 750 – 1492	IV	D. Shyovitz	MW 11:00 – 12:20
HISTORY 393-0-24	What is Antisemitism	IV	D. Shyovitz	MW 2:00 – 3:20
JWSH_ST 279-0-1 (also MENA 290-6- 3/COMP LIT 270-0-1)	Exploring Hebrew Literature (in Translation): Past, Present, and Future	VI	G. Ehrlich	MW 11:00 – 12:20
JWSH_ST 280-4-1 (also HISTORY 300-0- 24/MENA 290-4-3)	Violence in Israel/Palestine: A History	IV	S. Pinhas	TTH 12:30 – 1:50
JWSH_ST 350-0-1 (also COMP LIT 305-0-1)	Representations of the Holocaust in Literature & Film	VI	G. Ehrlich	TTH 11:00 – 12:20
RELIGION 220-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 220-0-1)	Introduction to Hebrew Bible	V	B. Wimpfheimer	TTH 9:30 – 10:50
RELIGION 230-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 230-0-1)	Introduction to Judaism: Jewish Texts	V	S. Schwartz	MW 11:00 – 12:20
RELIGION 339-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 339-0-1)	The Art of Rabbinic Narrative	V	B. Wimpfheimer	TTH 2:00 – 3:20
SESP 323-0-20	Holocaust Memory, Memorials, and Museums		D.M. Cohen	TTH 12:30 – 1:50

What is Jewish Studies?

Jewish Studies refers to the study of Judaism, Jewish history, Jewish identity, and Jewish culture over time and around the world. Our professors rely on tools of historical research, textual analysis, ethnography, political science, and more as they seek to understand and teach these topics.

Jewish Studies is truly an interdisciplinary way of analyzing and understanding the world. Jewish Studies courses are open to students of all backgrounds. While some students who take our classes are Jewish, many are not. We offer a major and minor for anyone looking to go deeper into the study of Jewish experience. On the other hand, if you're just looking for something a little different from what you usually study, you'll be glad to know that many of our courses satisfy Weinberg distribution requirements.

Jewish Studies also partners with Middle East and North African (MENA) Languages to provide Hebrew language classes, which are offered at three levels.

For more information: www.jewish-studies.northwestern.edu

Jewish Studies Winter 2026 Course Descriptions

GERMAN

GERMAN 404 (also COMP_LIT 487-0-20): Holocaust Writing and its Discontents

A.Parkinson, M 1:00 – 3:50pm

Described as a fundamental "break in civilization" (Dan Diner) or a caesura in Enlightenment humanism, the term "Holocaust" now designates the systematic persecution and murder of over two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. More than half a century later, a vast body of fiction and non-fiction writing has been dedicated to recording, imagining, extrapolating from, and attempting to comprehend these catastrophic events. It has been argued that the Holocaust cannot be represented (aesthetic limitations), that it should not be represented (Bilderverbot/ban on graven images), and that it must be born witness to and never forgotten (ethical imperatives). So, what exactly is Holocaust writing? This course seeks to answer this question through the analysis of canonical and lesser-known variants of autobiographical as well as fiction writing about and by Holocaust survivors. We will explore genres, styles, and tropes associated with the Holocaust examining the use of irony, satire, and hyperbole (Hans Keilson, Hannah Arendt), as well as the grotesque in fiction (Edgar Hilsenrath), through to the essay form (Jean Améry, Primo Levi); up to the event's ongoing impact in the field of continental philosophy (Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben). Other topics that may be addressed include the question of authenticity and identity (the Benjamin Wilkomirski affair, Benjamin Stein); the "era of the witness" and the status of testimony (Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Annette Wieviorka); metatextimony (Ruth Klüger) and postmemory (Marianne Hirsch); and, finally, what might be called Holocaust writing of the second degree (W.G. Sebald).

HEBREW

Students with prior knowledge of Hebrew (learned either through school or at home) will need to take the Hebrew placement exam before registering, unless they have previously taken Hebrew at Northwestern or have permission from the instructor. For more information, please contact Hanna Seltzer at hanna.seltzer@northwestern.edu

HEBREW 111-1-20: Hebrew I

R. Alexander, MWF 9:30 – 10:40am

The three-quarter first-year course in Hebrew is designed to develop all four language skills (listening comprehension, reading, speaking, and writing) as well as to provide cultural foundations of the Hebrew language. The course is based on “Hebrew from Scratch”, a comprehensive textbook with grammar and interactive exercises for the beginning adult learner. In Hebrew 111-2, taught in the winter quarter students will learn foundational adjectives, the direct object (unique to Hebrew!), and the infinitive forms of בניין פעל (of verbs like אוכל, לומד, כותב, קורא) and also broadening cultural knowledge about central places and themes in Israeli culture such as houses and museums, navigating websites in Hebrew and more. By the end of the winter quarter, students will be able to initiate social interactions using modern Hebrew and ask for basic information such as where is the library, where can one buy food, etc.; they will also be able to convey information about themselves (such as what they like and don’t like, and daily and weekly routines) to any native speaker of modern Hebrew; New words and structures will be integrated into short texts and lively conversations as part of the class's engaging environment. Students will have ample opportunities to practice and expand all skills, using various techniques and EdTech tools. Prerequisites: Hebrew 111-1 or equivalent/ placement exam.

HEBREW 121-1-20: Hebrew II

R. Alexander, MWF 11:00am – 12:10pm

Second-year Hebrew is a three-quarter sequence covering comprehensive grammar structures and extensive vocabulary of modern Hebrew that are weaved into cultural themes of communities in Israel. The class will consist of interactive exercises for the intermediate learner, readings of level-appropriate difficulty with more information on Israeli daily life and reality and listening to songs and clips in Hebrew. In Hebrew 121-2 taught in the spring quarter students will continue working with various past tense forms and be able to use them in writing and speaking with appropriate time expressions. Other grammatical topics include compound prepositions such as the preposition ל (as לך, לנו...); Students will also have a chance to discuss various customs communities around the world have for their weddings and acquire more cultural knowledge on Israeli singers, bands and music in Israel. Students will also have the opportunity to engage in higher-level reading through weekly work with a graphic novel written in Hebrew. Class consists of exercises, discussions, presentations, and group/partner work. Prerequisites: Hebrew 121-1 or equivalent/placement exam.

HEBREW 216-0-1: Hebrew III: The Four-Dimensional Jerusalem

H. Seltzer, MW 2:00 – 3:20pm

Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world and has seen many victories and downfalls before her eyes. She is the subject of writing for poets and storytellers, Jews and non-Jews alike, and she is often the setting for many films and TV series that were produced in Israel. Jerusalem is immensely diverse, encompassing ultra-orthodox to secular Jews, and Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. In this class we will get a glimpse of these sectors as they are portrayed in literary and visual art. We will learn of Jerusalem’s ancient and modern history and how this history affects the current intricacies of this unique city. We will read poems by Yehuda Amichai (the poet who lived and died in Jerusalem and wrote about and to Jerusalem throughout his entire life) and a poetry slam by the artist Yonatan Blumenfeld about Jerusalem. We will watch clips from a dance project by dancer and choreographer Miriam Engel that brings to life love stories that took place in Jerusalem, and we will learn about the complex relationship between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem, the volatile situations and the unique projects of social organizations that strive to promote understanding and co-existence. All class materials, as well as class discussions, will be in Hebrew. This class is intended for students who have completed 2 years of Hebrew language learning at Northwestern (or the equivalent) and for students who placed out of the first two years Hebrew learning requirement at Northwestern. The class level is equal to third year Hebrew.

HEBREW 316-0-1: Hebrew IV: Biblical Stories and Poems; Canonical Biblical Texts through the Lens of Modern Hebrew Poetry

H. Seltzer, MW 11:00 – 12:20pm

Many define the Hebrew Bible as the best literature ever written. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible inspired numerous canonical novels and poems, not to mention paintings and sculptures, in Western culture. In the case of Hebrew literature, the connection to the Hebrew Bible is even more binding, as the biblical texts informed and inspired Zionist ideology and the revival of Hebrew as a modern language. In this class we will read a selection of biblical stories in their original language, biblical Hebrew, a reading which will enable us to see the immense influence of biblical Hebrew on Modern Hebrew language. We will then read Contemporary Hebrew poems that are based on the stories we have read. We will analyze both the biblical stories, the Hebrew poems, and the connections between them. The poems we will read in class are interpretations of the biblical stories; both the biblical texts and the modern poems are in Hebrew, but beyond the grammatical and periodical differences between the texts and the poems (Biblical Hebrew vs. Modern Hebrew), the poems can be political, ideological, social, or personal critique of or a dialogue with the biblical story. All course materials will be in Hebrew, as well as class discussions. This class is intended for students who are either heritage speakers of Hebrew or are in a very advanced level of Hebrew. The class level is equal to fourth year Hebrew.

HISTORY

HISTORY 200-0-24 (also MENA 290-4-1): Jerusalem: History, Memory, Fantasy

Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, TTH 2:00 – 3:20pm

This course appeals to students interested in broadening their vision of Jerusalem, the city deemed holy by the three Abrahamic religions. Students will deepen their knowledge of the contested narratives of Jews, Christians, and Muslims centered in Jerusalem and the "land called holy" and contextualize the role of Jerusalem in shaping broad political, religious, and cultural myths. Using the methodological principle of "history and memory," this course will explore the foundational texts that have shaped and continue to shape conflicting narratives of Jerusalem. Students will embark on a journey from the archaeological digs in the 10th-7th centuries BCE through the destruction of the first Solomon Temple and Jerusalem, through the Hasmonaean rebellion in 164 BCE, and Jerusalem's acquiring of a primordial place in classical Judaic and early Christian tradition in the 1st century CE. We will explore the city's transformation as the center of the Temple-based cult into the key holy locus in Jewish and Christian memory. We will focus on the earliest attempts of rising Islam to establish itself in the Judeo-Christian environment of the holy city of Jerusalem and explore the Muslim nomenclature for Jerusalem, Muslim construction on the Temple Mount, and the Arab reaction to the crusades and crusaders. We will focus on the expansion of Jerusalem in the pre-independence era and the rise of the military conflict of Jordan versus the State of Israel around the post-colonial city following the termination of the British mandate, the ramifications of Six Day War for the area, the rise of the PLO, and the emergence of Jerusalem as the national capital in the second half of the 20th century. We will discuss how Jews, Christians, and Muslims of various denominations and trends - and also pagan Romans, Persians, and Assyrians negotiate sacred spaces in real life and in political charters, how and why Jerusalem became divided and what the plans of various parties are regarding the future status of the city.

HISTORY 203-1-20 (also JWSH_ST 203-0-1): Jewish History I: 750 - 1492

D. Shyovitz, MW 11:00 – 12:20pm

This course surveys the development of Jewish culture and civilization in the medieval period, from roughly 750 (the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad) to 1492 (the expulsion of the Jews of Spain). We will explore the varied, rich, nuanced experiences of Jewish communities in Europe and the Islamic East, and trace the ways in which Jewish culture, thought, and socio-political life developed over a vast chronological and geographical expanse. We will consistently seek to situate Jewish experiences both against the backdrop of earlier Jewish history, as well as in relation to the contemporary Christian and Islamic cultures in which medieval Jews were embedded. The course will also trace some of the ways in which medieval Jewish history has been instrumentalized to further modern social and political agendas. Readings for this course include both primary documents (in English translation) and secondary sources. The goals of the course will include grappling with how historians use primary documents to reconstruct Jewish history and learning to read works of historical interpretation with a careful and critical eye.

HISTORY 393-0-24: What is Antisemitism

D. Shyovitz, MW 2:00 – 3:20pm

In modern political discourse, "anti-Semitism" is frequently invoked and infrequently defined. The imprecision with which the term is deployed leads to broad disagreements about the nature and scope of the phenomenon: Is it anti-Semitic to call a Jewish person a pig? To advocate for boycotts against the State of Israel? To work to criminalize infant circumcision, or kosher slaughter? To accuse George Soros of bankrolling BLM protests, or of conspiring to "steal" the presidential election? What kinds of critiques of Jews or of Judaism are fair game, and which cross the line into hate speech, or foment violence? More broadly, is anti-Semitism a form of racism? Of xenophobia? Of anti-religious animus, akin to Islamophobia? Is it a conspiracy theory? Does anti-Semitism assume that Jews constitute a religion? A nationality? An ethnicity? A "race"? One reason these questions are so hotly contested is because they are usually discussed ahistorically, in isolation from the extensive academic scholarship on the origins and development of anti-Semitism—both the actual phenomenon and the descriptive term itself. This course traces the historical trajectory of anti-Jewish rhetoric, violence, and discrimination from antiquity through the present. We will pay particular attention to the analytical concepts that historians have developed and deployed—including, but not limited to anti-Semitism, antisemitism, anti-Judaism, and Judeophobia. Rather than seeking to isolate an overarching definition of what is and is not anti-Semitic, we will explore the specific contexts in which anti-Jewish animus and violence developed, and the constantly evolving role "Jews" (as individuals and as a category) have played at key historical junctures.

JEWISH STUDIES

JWSH_ST 279-0-1 (also COMP_LIT 270-0-1/MENA 290-6-3): Exploring Hebrew Literature (in translation): Past, Present, and Future

G. Ehrlich, MW 11:00 – 12:20

This course seeks to provide a broad introduction to modern Hebrew literature and explore various literary generations, beginning with the rise of Hebrew Revival Literature in the early 20th century, moving through the later writers of the "1948 Generation," the subsequent generation of writers from the 1960s and 1970s, and culminating in the postmodern turn of the 1990s and the more contemporary literature of the 2000s. Throughout the course, we will read texts from both central and canonical writers – such as Yosef Haim Brenner, Dvora Baron, A. B. Yehoshua, David Grossman, Sayed Kashua, and Orly Castel-Bloom – and more marginal and contemporary writers like Maayan Eitan and Hila Amit Abbas. Additionally, we will examine aspects of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in Hebrew literature. Ultimately, this course will allow students to discover the beauty and richness of modern Hebrew literature. The literary works will be accompanied by films, academic articles, and theoretical texts. No previous knowledge of Hebrew or Judaism is required! All the Hebrew texts will be read in English translation.

JWSH_ST 280-4-1 (also HISTORY 300-0-24/MENA 290-4-3): Violence in Israel/Palestine: A History

S. Pinhas, TTH 12:30 – 1:50pm

“Guns don’t kill people, people kill people” (American proverb). “You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it” (Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, 179). These two sayings present diametrically opposed views of the relationship between weapons and society: one regards weapons as a neutral medium that merely executes violent human intentions, while the other attributes to their agency in shaping those very intentions. This course examines this tension through the history of violence and arms in Palestine/Israel, spanning the periods of the Ottoman Empire, British rule, and the establishment of the State of Israel up to the present day. Violence is a human experience unlike any other. It leaves deep emotional and physical imprints and sometimes transforms the very way people perceive and sense the world. To examine this, we will engage with poetry, music, and film alongside archival sources, inquiring about how violence has shaped the subjectivities of perpetrators, victims, witnesses, and bystanders across various times and contexts. Can violence form a collective identity or experience? Rather than considering these questions abstractly, we will situate them in the material realities of technology. We will analyze how changing forms of surveillance, policing, and bombing have shaped ideas of humanity, delineating who belongs to it and who is excluded from it. Throughout the course, we will ask: What made different people at different points in time decide to use arms or object to their use? How and to what extent did the materiality of arms – their production, dissemination, design, or operation – influence these choices?

JWSH_ST 350-0-1 (also COMP_LIT 305-0-1): Representations of the Holocaust in Literature and Film

G. Ehrlich, TTH 11:00am – 12:20pm

This course explores literary and cinematic representations of the Holocaust across languages, cultures, and genres. Through fiction, memoirs, diaries, and film (all in translation), we will examine how writers and filmmakers have grappled with the challenges of representing trauma, memory, and survival. Readings and screenings will include works by survivors and postwar artists, and we will consider questions of testimony, ethics, aesthetics, and the role of narrative in shaping Holocaust memory. The literary works and films will be discussed alongside academic articles and theoretical texts. All literary texts and films will be read and viewed in English translation.

RELIGION

RELIGION 220-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 220-0-1): Introduction to Hebrew Bible

B. Wimpfheimer, TTH 9:30 – 10:50am

There is no understating the significance of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in Western Culture. The Bible is a text that has been repeatedly turned to for spiritual guidance, for explanations of mankind's origins and as the basis of both classical art and contemporary cinema. English idiom is peppered with phrases that originate in the Hebrew Bible and many a modern political clash can be understood as a conflict over the Bible's messages and their implications. This course introduces students to the Hebrew Bible by reading sections of most of the Bible's books. But reading is itself a complicated enterprise. The Bible has been put to many different uses; even within the world of academic scholarship, the Bible is sometimes a source of history, sometimes a religious manual, sometimes a primitive legal code and sometimes a work of classical literature. This course will introduce students to the various challenges that present themselves within the study of the Hebrew Bible and the varied approaches scholars take when reading the Hebrew Bible. This course is a critical introduction to the Hebrew Bible.

RELIGION 230-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 230-0-1): Introduction to Judaism: Jewish Texts

S. Schwartz, MW 11:00am – 12:20pm

This section of Introduction to Judaism will serve as an introduction to Jewish textual sources. The course can explore a range of classical and contemporary Jewish textual genres, as well as Jewish textual objects, from Torah scrolls and Jewish type to digital commentary. Students will learn how to engage texts deeply through different hermeneutics, including through close-reading and in partnership with other students. Our approach will also pay attention to the media and materiality of Jewish transmission across different kinds of Jewish sources.

RELIGION 339-0-1 (also JWSH_ST 339-0-1): The Art of Rabbinic Narrative

B. Wimpfheimer, TTH 2:00 – 3:20pm

Rabbinic literature contains a large corpus of stories. In this course we will explore different methods of reading such stories. These range from naïve historiography to sophisticated historiography, from reading these stories as fables with didactic morals to reading them as windows onto a class-stratified and gender-divided rabbinic culture. Our analysis of these methods of reading rabbinic stories will be conducted in conversation with different literary theorists.

SESP

SESP 323-0-20: Holocaust Memory, Memorials, and Museums

D. M. Cohen, TTH 12:30 – 1:50

What is Holocaust memory? How has Holocaust memory changed over time, and how does the Holocaust continue to affect our understanding of trauma, atrocity, and human rights today? This course addresses individual memory, including survivor and witness testimony, memory and trauma, and the impact of the Holocaust on survivors' families and communities. We also explore collective Holocaust memory and the development of mainstream framings of Holocaust history. We consider Jewish, Roma, and other victim narratives, including national memorialization, rituals of commemoration, and the development of Holocaust memorials, museums, and institutions in the United States and around the world. And we study how we have come to remember the Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators. We draw on course texts, including film and fiction, to ask questions about the relationships between individual and collective memories, as well as between commemoration and education.