

Department: Modern and Classical Languages

Course No: Heb/Juds 1103 [103]

Credits: 3

Title: Literature and Civilization of the Jewish People

Contact: Roger Travis/Stuart Miller (Juds)

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 Non-International

Catalog Copy: 103. Literature and Civilization of the Jewish People

(Also offered as JUDS 103.) Either semester. Three credits. Miller. The major concepts, personalities and literary works of the Hebraic tradition from the Biblical and Talmudic periods to the present.

Course Information: This course introduces the student to the history, religion and culture of the Jewish people. Special attention is given to Jewish civilization as it is portrayed in the literature of the Jews, beginning with the Torah and continuing with the Talmud, Maimonides, and more contemporary writings. The central concern of the course is: Who are the Jews which is answered after the journey through Jewish civilization is taken.

Requirements: Reading assignments from both primary and secondary sources for each class. Students are expected to come to class with an understanding of the key background information. Class participation is encouraged even though the class is often large. There are two films, one The Disputation (an account of an actual, 13th cent. Debate between Jews and Christians) and the other, "The Chosen." Three exams including the final. Exams vary in style with both objective and essay questions.

Themes and Topics: Course is divided into three, organically related parts: 1. biblical and rabbinic roots of Judaism and Jewish Civilization. 2. Traditions, Customs, Practices derived from biblical and rabbinic sources discussed in Part I, and 3. Modernity and its affect upon all of the above: denominations, feminism, Holocaust, Zionism, Israel and contemporary anti-Semitism

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: The course actually addresses six (!) of the areas. It forces students to think about the origins of western civilization by giving them a firm background in its roots. The biblical and rabbinic ideas with which the course opens compel them to think in new ways about many ideas they have not thought about. The emergence of ethical monotheism in the context of Near Eastern legal and religious codes and ideas is explored, plus the refining of the idea as it defines Judaism through the ages. One of the main goals is to enable students to develop a keen understanding of who the Jews are and to appreciate the diverse cultures and traditions that comprise Jewish civilization.

CA1 Criteria: Biblical and especially rabbinic literatures are surveyed and their unique themes, ideas and influence are explored. The students learn to appreciate biblical as well as rabbinic modes of thought. Ideas such as ethical monotheism, covenant, and law are first explored. The students then get a taste of the exegetical-midrashic thinking of the rabbis in order to gain an understanding of how the rabbis transformed biblical religion into Judaism as we know it. Students are challenged to think "talmudically" along the way.

CA4 Criteria: 1. The course addresses a major lacuna in the study of western civilization: the role of the Jews. The course emphasizes the emergence of Judaic ideas and their influence on Christianity and western civilization. The students come away with a better appreciation of the distinctiveness of the Jews and especially an understanding of the roots of Christianity within Judaism and the subsequent separation of the two faiths. The Judeo-Christian tradition is thereby broken down into the sum of its parts, so that students understand the values and ideas that both Judaism and Christianity share as well as their distinctiveness. 2. Jewish civilization is surveyed through an examination of the diverse experiences of the Jews among Christians and Moslems both in the past and in the modern world. The Enlightenment and the eventual Emancipation of the Jews is discussed in the contexts of the challenges they posed to a people emerging from a traditional society. 3. Anti-Semitism is dealt with in the context of the Jewish experience. The students journey through the many lands and cultures with which the Jews, Ashkenazim and Sefaradim, have come into contact.

Role of Grad Students: The TA is supervised by the instructor, Stuart S. Miller. I have had on occasion a graduate assistant in Judaic Studies. The TA is responsible for helping with the grading and with some preparation of materials for the class.

Supplemental Information: This has been a successful Group V course which has reached a great number of students, both Jews and non-Jews who have shared with me that it has really enlightened them about a civilization they knew very little about or were misinformed about.