

# Add Course Request

Submitted on: 2012-11-02 12:17:10

1. <b>COURSE SUBJECT</b>	HEB / JUDS
2. <b>COURSE NUMBER</b> (OR PROPOSED NUMBER)	3301
3. <b>COURSE TITLE</b>	The Jewish Middle Ages
4. <b>INITIATING DEPARTMENT or UNIT</b>	LCL
5. <b>NAME OF SUBMITTER</b>	Susan L Einbinder
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12. Departmental Approval Date	10/05/2012
13. School/College Approval Date	10/16/2012
14. Names and Dates of additional Department and School/College approvals	
15. Proposed Implementation Date	Term: spring, Year: 2013
16. Offered before next printed catalog is distributed?	Yes
17. <b>General Education Content Area</b>	Content Area 1 Arts and Humanities Content Area 4 Diversity and Multiculturalism
18. <b>General Education Skill Code (W/Q).</b> Any non-W section?	None No
19. Terms Offered	Semester: Fall Spring Year:
20. Sections	Sections Taught: one
21. Student Number	Students/Sections: 20
22. Clarification:	
23. <b>Number of Credits</b>	3 if VAR Min: Max: credits each term
24. <b>INSTRUCTIONAL PATTERN</b>	

three periods per week, mixed lecture and discussion	
25. Will this course be taught in a language other than English?	No If yes, then name the language:
26. Please list any prerequisites, recommended preparation or suggested preparation: None	
27. Is Instructor, Dept. Head or Unit <b>Consent Required?</b>	No
28. Permissions and Exclusions:	
29. Is this course <b>repeatable for credit?</b>	No If yes, total credits allowed: Allow multiple enrollments in same term?
30. <b>Grading Basis</b>	Graded
31. If satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading is proposed, please provide <b>rationale</b> :	
32. Will the course or any sections of the course be taught as Honors? AsHonors	
33. Additional Details:	
34. Special Attributes:	
35. <b>REGIONAL CAMPUS AVAILABILITY:</b> The course will only be offered at the Storrs campus. There is no other course covering this material or faculty who cover it.	
36. <b>PROVIDE THE PROPOSED TITLE AND COMPLETE CATALOG COPY:</b>  HEB/JUDS 3301, Jewish Middle Ages. Survey of literature produced by Jews in the medieval period, sacred and secular, from the major centers of European settlement and a wide variety of genres.	
37. <b>RATIONALE FOR ACTION REQUESTED</b>  There is currently no course in Judaic Studies or Medieval Studies covering Jewish history or cultural production in Europe between 600-1800; this course fills some of that gap. In addition to providing a necessary component of a solid Judaic Studies curriculum, it also strengthens offerings for students interested in religious and/or ethnic minorities in medieval Europe, primarily Spain, France, Provence, Germany, England, and Italy. Students will be exposed to issues of minority/majority confrontation and adaptation; literary responses to new cultural trends and tensions; questions of tradition v. "modernity"; and historiographical problems that arise in the representation of both renaissance and persecution in the Jewish past. It is open to all students and therefore will hopefully increase awareness of some of the multicultural aspects and tensions of medieval societies, and create interest in other courses in Judaic Studies, Medieval Studies, Religion, History, Human Rights, and cognate literatures. The impact on other departments (as just listed) is not one of conflict or overlap, but should enhance the current array of offerings. There should be no effect on regional campuses, which do not offer a similar course.	
38. <b>SYLLABUS:</b>	

Online URL: ( [https://web2.uconn.edu/senateform/request/course\\_uploads/anp05007-1354118210-HEB JUDDS 3301 expanded syllabus.docx](https://web2.uconn.edu/senateform/request/course_uploads/anp05007-1354118210-HEB JUDDS 3301 expanded syllabus.docx) )

**39. Course Information: ALL General Education courses, including W and Q courses, MUST answer this question**

39. A. This course surveys a broad expanse of the medieval Jewish experience both under Islamic and Christian rule, roughly spanning the period from 600 and the Arab conquest to 1500 and the final expulsions of Jewish communities from Christian Europe. It thus begins prior to the appearance of major Jewish settlement in Europe, offering a backdrop of Jewish life and writing in early medieval Palestine and Iraq, then follows the rise of Jewish communities and cultural production in Islamic Spain and Christian Europe. The readings are drawn from sacred and secular genres: poetry, chronicles, mystical, ethical and legal texts, folklore, rhymed prose romances and animal tales. Some comparison and contrast with corollary illustrations from Arabic or Romance writing is offered. Questions of minority/majority literature and social interaction are critical to the course, as are the ways these interactions have been represented in recent scholarship. One of the course goals is thus to enhance reflection on the difference (or similarity) between “then” and “now”; on the greater or lesser adaptability of minorities to outside cultural forces, or greater or lesser resistance to outside cultural trends; the creative ways in which communities respond to pressure, innovation and persecution; the diversity of medieval Jewish experience and by extension the medieval European experience.

B. The format of the course is a combination of lecture and discussion. Assigned readings are both from (translations of) primary texts and some secondary literature; the latter is often selected to present contrasting perspectives on a set of primary texts. Periodic short written assignments require students to demonstrate that they have read the required texts and comprehended the issues at stake; assignments also include a request to compare/contrast more than one text or opinion and therefore demand synthetic thought as well. A final take-home essay spans the semester’s readings with a series of questions on the texts and themes covered.

C. Themes to be covered: the origins, movement and experience of Jewish communities in medieval Christian Europe and Islamic Spain; the relationship of Jewish minorities to Muslim or Christian majorities, historically and culturally viewed; the forms of writing that represent Jewish literary production over the medieval period and what constituencies they served; elite v. “popular” production; the diversity of Jewish responses to conditions of persecution or coexistence; intracultural and intercultural tensions; the limitations of literary records and the experience of those who did not write; historiographical trends in the representation of the Jewish past.

**40. Goals of General Education: All Courses Proposed for a Gen Ed Content Area MUST answer this question**

This course will expose students to the rich and varied experience of medieval Jewish communities in Europe, drawing on multiple sources and genres, many unfamiliar to English-language readers and some tantalizingly related to contemporary writing in host cultures. By raising questions of literary production and aesthetics as well as the relationship of minority to majority culture in times of harmony and times of sometimes brutal conflict, this course contributes to the overarching goals of the General Education program by emphasizing critical judgment, moral sensitivity, a greater awareness of oneself in a current setting by comparison to

the past; consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience; and the opportunity to enhance skills for analyzing and articulating responses to the materials in oral and written form.

**41. Content Area and/or Competency Criteria: ALL General Education courses, including W and Q courses, MUST answer this question.: Specific Criteria**

**a. Arts and Humanities:**

This course is appropriate for CA1 (Arts and Humanities) content because it explores “artistic, cultural and historical processes” in a context unfamiliar to most students but remarkable for its potential to generate awareness of different social configurations and possibilities and discussion of their immediate and longer-ranging consequences. The readings address the fluid boundaries between what is today often rigidly conceived as “secular and sacred” literature, “historical and fictional” literature, “high and low,” “ours” and “theirs.” What is “Jewish” and what is “non-Jewish” in a Hebrew sonnet or martyrological chronicle? What are the ways in which Jewish communities develop in Islamic and Christian settings and how do they respond to ecological, political, economic and social challenges? What is the role of literature in tracing the experience of these communities and how is the role of literature similar or different today? What do we mean by “identity,” and who determines its limits? How do communities put pressure on individual deviance or expression and what kind of traffic or movement exists between communities of different faiths or backgrounds? How do we read literature that comes from a different cultural, geographical and chronological world, and what kinds of factors may bias our reconstruction of their meaning? When possible, this course may also enlist supplementary visual (art historical) or musical illustration.

**b. Social Sciences:**

**c. Science and Technology:**

**i. Laboratory:**

**d. Diversity and Multiculturalism:**

This course is also appropriate for CA4 (Diversity and Multiculturalism) content, because it is by definition the study of a distinct ethnic, religious minority in a majority culture. The course asks why in some cases (10th-12th c. Islamic Spain or the 14th c. papal states) Jewish minorities were able to thrive and coexist in Muslim or Christian settings, while in other cases a steady trend toward discrimination, segregation and ultimately expulsion forced a very different set of responses to the pressures of a host society. How did medieval societies understand what we today call “rights” or “tolerance,” even “identities”? This means not only examining Jewish communities embedded in different majority cultures, but the diversity of Jewish communities themselves: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Provencal, North African, Iraqi, etc., as well as class and gender distinctions in individual communities. How did members of one confessional community relate to another and represent one another, and how do we today read their fantasies of conversion, vengeance or unification? What did it mean to move from one group to another? How did post-expulsion Jewish refugees surface in new communities and what kinds of factors permitted them to thrive or prevented them from doing so? What kinds of internal tensions characterized minority communities under stress? All of these questions, in addition to the sheer value of exposure to remarkable sampling of literature that is most likely new to these students, imply grappling with the core criteria of CA4 listings: the varieties of human experiences,

perceptions, thoughts, values and modes of expression; the social constructedness of cultural production; the similarities that may surprisingly exist even across hostile confessional borders; issues of rights, migration and tolerance; and an awareness of the political and historical forces that shape all of the above.

**43. International:**

e. **Q course:**

f. **W course:**

**42. RESOURCES:**

Does the department/school/program currently have resources to offer the course as proposed

YES

If NO, please explain why and what resources are required to offer the course.

**43. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**ADMIN COMMENT:**

Senate approved CA1 & CA4 12/10/12 // Det\_syll\_submitted\_Now approved by GEOCCA1\_112812AP. GEOC4app.GEOC1app\_contingent on rev\_APto emailproposers\_111512AP. newCA1CA4\_110212AP.

The Jewish Middle Ages

Dr. Susan L. Einbinder

Oak Hall, Rm. 256

**Office Hours: by appointment**

This course surveys the rich and varied literature produced by Jews in the medieval period, a formative period for modern Jewish theology, law, philosophy, as well as sacred and secular poetry and prose. We will look at samples of different genres from the major centers of Jewish life, ranging from the Middle East to Europe and North Africa. The readings are arranged roughly chronologically, although sometimes we will circle back to explore parallel developments in different parts of the world. The primary focus of this course is a European context, both with respect to Jewish life in Islamic Spain and North Africa, and in Christian Europe (France, Provence, Italy, Spain, Germany).

Readings are in English. If you can and wish to read the translated texts in the original Hebrew, please let me know.

**Requirements:**

- Preparation. This means that you have read primary and secondary readings and are able to summarize and discuss them meaningfully in class. (30%)
- Short reaction papers, 1-2 pages in length, assigned periodically. (15%)
- In-class midterm and take-home essay final. (25 and 30%, respectively).

## Readings, Texts:

- I. Introduction. The origins of medieval Jewish communities, their locations, historical trajectories, and cultural production – an overview with some comments on the kinds of sources we use to recover medieval Jewish life and writing, and the changing ways historians and scholars of literature have understood them. *The problems of continuity and difference in studying diasporic communities and culture; how the forms of Jewish culture and intellectual, aesthetic and social life exist in tension with those of a variety of host cultures; how that tension can be productive even in times of conflict. What are some of the challenges and ongoing questions that confront us in exploring these texts and the different worlds from which they emerge? What do they tell us about the interactions of Jews and the Christians or Muslims among whom they lived? What is the relationship between literary representation and cultural reality or fantasy? What are the implications of these discussions for other settings?*
  
- II. Late Antiquity – the chapter before the Middle Ages. *The liturgical hymns known as “piyyut” (from the Greek, poesis) have been called the closest thing to a “national Jewish art form.” What is piyyut, in what kind of cultural environment did it emerge and how does it respond to the needs and tastes of eastern Jewish communities in Palestine and Mesopotamia of the 4<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> centuries? How does this genre make its way to Europe and how did European Jews of very different cultural aesthetics revere or dismiss it? How did they adapt traditional forms of piyyut for new historical conditions? To what extent does piyyut, safely ensconced in the Hebrew liturgy, offer a forum for theological debate, or for anti-Christian (or anti-Muslim) iconography that would be unacceptable in more accessible genres? How do the piyyutim of Late Antiquity provide a template for later communities to respond to different kinds of pressure and change? How will they give way to more Europeanized tastes and forms?*

Readings: Laura Lieber, from *Yannai on Genesis*, pp. 445-464.

T. Carmi, *Penguin Anthology*, introd. Pp. 14-20; 207, 215-17, 223-24.

Peter Cole, *Poetry of Kabbalah*, 1-14, 34 (notice: notes are in back of book!)

- III. Christian Europe. Introduction and texts.

Please read Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, introd., chaps 1-3 and first half of chap. 5 (77-88). *What is the historiographical problem that undergirds Cohen’s study of Jewish communities under the rule of Islam and Christianity? What does he mean by the “myth” of convivencia in Islam versus the “lachrymose” experience of Jews in Christian settings, and what does he mean by the “counter-myth” of more recent scholarship that attempts to reverse these stereotypes? What are the critical features of Islamic and Christian societies that Cohen suggests contribute to their differing attitudes toward Jewish minorities in particular and all minorities in general?*

- A. Hagiography and poetry: *The tale of the Jewish martyr, Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, is preserved in multiple versions, but its most famous and familiar rendition, which found a home in the Jewish festival liturgy for the New Year, is by Ephraim of Bonn. Ephraim was a*

12<sup>th</sup>-century rabbi and scholar who spent his formative school years in northern France. We compare his martyrological narrative to a popular Christian martyr's tale, that of Saint Foi of Conques, an English translation of a French version produced contemporary to Ephraim's. How do the stories compare and differ? How do they represent the conflict of minority v. majority faith and community? How does Ephraim demonstrate his familiarity with the literary and aesthetic techniques that we see in the French legend, and how does he use them for similar or different ends?

Amnon of Mainz (my translation)

Brigitte Cazelles, "The Life of Saint Faith," from *The Lady as Saint*, 182-203.

T. Carmi, excerpts TBA.

- B. Prose Chronicle: *The Hebrew prose chronicles that record the anti-Jewish violence that devastated Jewish Rhineland communities during the First Crusade also show evidence of familiarity with the new techniques and realism of 12<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular narrative. How do we read the representations of Jewish martyrdom and suicide in these chronicles? What kinds of historiographical problems do they pose (Marcus v. Chazan) and how have historians used them to marshal competing views of the Jewish past? The multiplicity of genres that document the tragic auto da fe in Blois in 1171 offer a rich opportunity for exploring the ways in which genre limits or amplifies the ways it is possible to represent the tangle of socio-economic and political conflict with matters of faith. They also reveal some interesting differences in Jewish/Christian ideals of female heroism and behavior. How do the Blois prose texts systematically alter the role of the Jewish woman Pucellina and why? What do they nonetheless suggest about the engagement of Jewish women with their Christian neighbors in this period? What is trial by ordeal and what do the Blois texts tell us about Jewish legal recourse in royal France? How did Jewish communities communicate with each other and attempt to coordinate their responses in times of crisis? What role does literature play in that coordination?*

Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, appendix, 223-97.

Secondary readings (Ivan Marcus, TBA).

Susan Einbinder, *The Martyrs of Blois*, in *Head, Hagiography*, 537-60.

- C. Memoir, autobiography. *Another challenging text for modern readers, the story of "Herman the Jew" purports to be the author's autobiographical account of his journey from Judaism to Christianity in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. How do we read this account and what battles has it triggered in recent scholarship? Whether we believe it is an authentic account or not, what can we learn from its representation of the interactions of Jews and Christians, about the vigorous efforts of Christian elites to pursue the conversion of the Jewish elite in medieval Germany, and about the equally vigorous attempts of Jewish communities to control expressions of deviance and excessive interest in Christianity in their midst? How universal is the phenomenon of adolescent rebellion? Adolescent conversion? What does it mean to pass from one side of a cultural divide to another?*

Karl Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, "Herman Judaeus," 76-113.

- D. Mysticism (Ashkenaz Pietism and Kabbalah). *This set of readings aims to diversify the representations of Jewish life, values and beliefs that emerge from the more canonic readings we have sampled so far. Yassif's treatment of Jewish folk legends, homiletical exempla and demonology give us access to a wider cross-section of Jewish life in medieval Ashkenaz (Germany). What do they reveal about the easy travel of motifs and beliefs across the Christian/Jewish divide? What do they suggest about the gap between elite and popular beliefs in both cultures? Likewise, Cole's excerpts expose us to mystical poetry that has long been considered marginal to communal Jewish life and government. What is the place of a mystical minority within a minority? How does Jewish mystical activity threaten rabbinic attempts to control Jewish communities, and when does its language become useful? What does Jewish mystical expression have in common with the mystical trends in the Christian world and how is it different? How does its depiction of the exile of the Soul provide an explanation for the political and theological conditions of Jewish minority life?*

Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, 283-96; 321-42; 351-70.

Peter Cole, *Poetry of Kabbalah*, 89-96; 99-107; 125-35.

IV. Islamic Europe (and a bit of North Africa and the Middle East).

Please read Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, chap. 4, second half of chap. 5 (88-103); chaps. 8 and 10. *Let us review the criteria Cohen singles out for emphasis in this study, and then look specifically at how he treats the social, economic, political and theological treatment of Jews by Islam. In what ways does Islam's indifference to questions of supersession, its embrace of commerce, or its law-based theology, create a very different cultural context for minorities? How does the presence of multiple minorities in Islamic lands make a difference also? What are Cohen's concerns about using the language of "tolerance" in this context? Do any of the medieval monotheistic faiths have a modern concept of "tolerance?" of "humanity?" Do minorities wish to assimilate or do they also protect their differences from the majority?*

- A. Poetry, secular and sacred. *The "Golden Age" of Jewish poetry began in the cultural melting pot of medieval Andalusia (Islamic Spain). The readings in this unit explore the revolution in Hebrew poetry that accompanied the cultural adaptation of an Andalusian Jewish elite to the court culture of the caliphate. How do we understand the dynamic of adaptation v. resistance or particularity in this context? How does language itself play a role in marking the borders between cultures while assimilating new styles and tastes? How does "secular" co-exist with "sacred" in a minority culture that accepts and admires the cultural achievements of its host? How do science and philosophy become a curricular problem for the guardians of Jewish cohesiveness and "identity?" Here are a sampling of wine poems, hetero- and homo-erotic love poems, and a selection of religious poems (piyyut) that adapt the language of love and beauty for sacred purposes. How do we read the emergence of individual voice in these poems, and where does it clash with convention?*



Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women and Death*, excerpts.

“ “ “, *The Gazelle*, excerpts.

- B. Philosophy and Theology. *Maimonides' commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century legal code known as the Mishnah begins with the Mishnah's opening tractate, Pirque Avot (Sayings of the Fathers). His introduction to the commentary on this Mishnaic work is a rare example of a Jewish text entirely dedicated to "ethics." How does Maimonides deal with the challenge posed by Greek philosophy (Aristotle especially) to traditional Jewish belief? How does this text explain ethics and the role of Jewish religious law in the human search for enlightenment? What kinds of danger does he perceive in the failure to reconcile traditional Jewish law with the insights of Aristotelian philosophy, and what does this tell us about the kind of world he inhabited? Why does Maimonides have recourse to medical/scientific analogy to make his case? How did other, later, Jewish communities react to his argument and why did education and curriculum become such a focal point for struggles over Jewish assimilation and/or hostility to outside learning? How does curriculum continue to play a role in battles of cultural conflict today?*

Maimonides, *Ethical Writings* ("Eight Chapters").

- C. The Maqama – rhymed prose narratives. *Another genre imported from Islamic culture, the maqama thrived in medieval Jewish literary circles in Spain, Provence, and Italy as well as Egypt and Yemen. Its popularity is also felt in the Romance languages, where it influenced the rise of the picaresque. The examples below illustrate a variety of themes that the genre stretched to accommodate. "Asher in the Harem," perhaps the earliest Hebrew exemplar, offers an entertaining tale of the domestication of a crude young man accustomed to life on the town for married life to a proper Jewish woman. How do romantic love and social notions of "marriageability" work across cultures, mark the collision of cultures and/or cultures in transition? The al-Harizi excerpts, some clearly drawn from Arabic exemplars and adapted for Jewish use, bring into Hebrew a wide store of folk tales and literary material. The tale of Hever's deception of a peasant to get a free meal suggests one kind of class issue that may have translated across religious cultures. The tale of the ignorant cantor, on the other hand, is clearly articulated for a Jewish audience and raises fascinating questions of cultural survival in settings where the Hebrew language is no longer widely understood and where the life of the synagogue reflects social status more than learning. The Iberian Jewish observer in this tale also impatiently judges the aesthetic tastes of eastern Jews, raising questions about how diasporic communities relate to each other. How much does uniformity of religious culture play a role in cohering minorities across time and place?*

Stern and Mirsky, *Rabbinic Fantasies*, Ibn Tsaddiq, "Asher in the Harem," 253-69.

David Segal, transl., al-Harizi, *The Tahkemoni*, Gates 3, 22, 24, 30, 34.

- D. Animal Tales. *Ibn Sahula's maqama-like collection of tales consists of five "books," each an elaborately constructed set of tales within tales whose frame protagonists, as well as many of the protagonists of the inner tales, are animals. Clearly the history of animal*

*tales crosses a wide geographical and cultural terrain, and here provides an excellent and lively instance of the dynamic between “foreign” and “native” impulses in synchrony. Our excerpt consists of the entirety of Book I of this huge work, a set of tales that takes up themes of kingship and loyalty, minority assimilation and majority hostility to new cultural interlopers. The frame tale of the Lion, the Hart and the Fox has been read as referring to the court of Alfonso X el sabio and his advisors, and in various ways its narrative and inner tales related to the fate of Jewish courtiers in Alfonso’s inner circle, the rebellion of Alfonso’s nobles, the tensions created by Jewish success in the court as well as ongoing Jewish vulnerability. Again we return to the question of how possible it is to move across cultural borders defined by religion and what are the consequences of such movement for the individuals who attempt it and for their communities? How do medieval Jews or Christians in this setting imagine an ideal society and what tolerance for difference does that ideal include?*

Ibn Sahula, *Gan haMeshalim*, transl. Loewe, pp. 43-151.

- E. *The Voice of the Poor (begging letters). This course concludes with a sampling of documents that are neither “high” literature nor entirely the products of learned Jewish men. We read here a selection of “begging letters” written by a variety of supplicants to Jewish communal authorities in medieval Egypt. Some of the letters are from prisoners (kidnapped by pirates) seeking ransom, some by refugees, some by men or women who were living at subsistence levels until felled by disease, abusive spouses or debt. These documents offer a wonderful opportunity to peek beneath the world of the elite at a wider cross-section of Jewish life. What do these letters tell us about adaptation of their Islamic counterpart genre? About Jewish communal efforts to take care of their poor and provide for them? About the distinction local communities might draw between their obligations to their own versus foreign Jews? About the experience of poverty, dispossession, victimization, or illness across cultural and religious borders? About how medieval “haves” identified with “have nots”?*

Mark Cohen, *Voice of the Poor*, 15-31 and 83-94.

- V. *Conclusion – and a nod to what has been omitted! A review of the semester’s readings and themes, the questions we have raised about the permeability and resistance to permeability that characterizes the Jewish minority experience in medieval Christian and Islamic settings. Review of the changing landscape in the scholarly treatment of these different contexts and the overlapping and overarching historiographical and literary questions that connect them. How do our readings lead us to ask about the minority experience in general? What mechanisms did medieval societies evolve for protecting their minorities and why? Where were they uninterested in protecting them and why? What factors made it possible for Jewish minorities to thrive under Christianity or Islam, how did they consciously or unconsciously adapt the forms and tastes of a host culture to meet their particular needs, how did they see themselves and the people who ruled and surrounded them, and how did their neighbors and rulers see them? What do we mean by “identity” and where does our definition limit us in understanding other cultures and other times? What is the role of literature in exploring cultural boundaries and tensions? And whose literature is it?*