THE INVENTION OF MODERN JUDAISM

INSTRUCTOR: Beth S. Wenger
OFFICE: College Hall #320
OFFICE HOURS: Monday 12:00-1:30
and by appointment
PHONE: 898-5702
E-MAIL: bwenger@sas.upenn.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The varieties of Judaism that exist today reflect a two-hundred-year evolution that began in Europe with the dawn of the modern era. Judaism’s distinct movements (Reform, Orthodox etc.) grew out of the first Jewish encounters with political emancipation, the embrace of Enlightenment ideals, and the desire of Jews to create new religious identities suited to the modern world. This course explores the invention of modern Judaism in its social, political and cultural contexts. Utilizing both primary and secondary sources, we will trace the historical development of Judaism as a reflection of the ways that Jews have interacted with the cultures in which they lived. Throughout the semester, students will be required to complete many different types of writing assignments, to revise their work, and to work cooperatively with others in class to improve communication and writing skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This course focuses on developing writing skills and we will often conduct the class as a workshop. You are expected to participate actively in all aspects of the course, both inside and outside the classroom. In order for the class to function properly, you must prepare reading and writing assignments on time. We will create a writing community, so it is essential that you get to know your fellow students and work collaboratively toward the common goal of becoming better writers.

You will be writing and revising your work throughout the semester. The course requires three formal writing assignments, three informal writing assignments, and several in class writing exercises. (The formal writing assignments are detailed on the last page of this syllabus.) With the exception of in class exercises, all writing assignments should be completed and submitted at the class meeting indicated on the syllabus. I will often ask you to bring more than one copy of your paper for the purpose of peer review. At other times, I will ask that you circulate your paper to a small group of fellow students before class so that you can meet in groups to discuss each other’s work. Sharing and critiquing writing will be a regular feature of the course.

REQUIRED READINGS AVAILABLE AT PENN BOOK CENTER (130 S. 34th St.):


* A packet of all other required readings is available at Wharton Reprographics located in the basement of Steinberg-Deitrich Hall.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Sept. 11**  Introduction

What is modern about modern Judaism?

Introduction to the process of writing and revision

**IN CLASS WRITING EXERCISE**

**Sept. 18**  The Emergence of Modern Judaism


**INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: IMAGINATIVE JOURNAL OF MOSES MENDELSOHN (1-2 PAGES)**

**Sept. 25**  Emancipation and the Remaking of Judaism


**IN CLASS WRITING EXERCISE**
Oct.  2     Religious Reform and the Emergence of Orthodoxy


FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: FIRST DRAFT OF PRESS ANALYSIS DUE

Oct.  9     Hasidism: Origins and Contemporary Expressions


INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: 1-2 page reaction to Chabad movement

Oct.  23    Reform Judaism in America


FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: REVISION OF PRESS ANALYSIS DUE

IN CLASS WRITING EXERCISE

Oct.  30   Varieties of American Orthodoxy


**REVISION OF CHABAD ESSAY DUE**

**Nov. 6**

**Homosexuality and Jewish Tradition**

Film: *Trembling Before God* (screened in class)


**IN CLASS WRITING EXERCISE**

**Nov. 13**

**Conservative Judaism: European Precedents and the American Movement**


**FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: FIRST DRAFT OF FILM REVIEW**

**Nov. 20**

**Reconstructionist Judaism: An American Movement**


Excerpts from the Diaries of Mordecai M. Kaplan.

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, “Is Reconstructionist Judaism For You?”

INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: IMAGINATIVE JOURNAL OF MORDECAI KAPLAN

Nov. 27 Women and Judaism: From Traditional Practice to Modern Feminism


Ezrat Nashim, “Jewish Women Call for Change.”

* These essays will be made available later in the semester; not in initial bulkpack.

FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: REVISION OF FILM REVIEW

Dec. 4 Judaism: Future Directions?


FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

IN CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT
FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Formal Paper #1: Press Analysis (3-5 pages)

Select any issue/event in modern Judaism, past or present, and follow it in the press. Analyze the ways that the issue is presented, the rhetoric and tenor of the coverage, and the various interpretations offered about the event or issue that you choose. You may use Jewish newspapers and magazines and/or the national press (New York Times etc.) Since this is a short paper, you should choose a focused topic. Please consult with me about your topic.

FIRST DRAFT: DUE OCT. 2
REVISION: DUE OCT. 23

Formal Paper #2: Film Review (3-5 pages)

On November 6, we will view the film Trembling Before God. Write a review of the film, considering the approach of the filmmaker to the subject and the various themes raised in the documentary. A successful review does not summarize the film, but rather offers critical perspectives and insights.

FIRST DRAFT: DUE NOV. 13
REVISION: DUE NOV. 27

Formal Paper #3: Research Paper (4-6 pages)

At the conclusion of the semester, you will be able to write a research paper on the topic of your choice. You may revisit any of the issues we have covered in the course or choose to pursue one of the many topics that we did not have time to examine during the semester. You should rely on primary and secondary sources to enrich your analysis. Please consult with me about as you select your topic.

FIRST DRAFT: DUE DEC. 4
REVISION: DUE DEC. 13 (AT NOON IN MY HISTORY DEPT. MAILBOX)