

Master of Arts in Jewish Studies

Spertus Institute's Master of Arts in Jewish Studies (MAJS) is a sequenced, content-specific program that explores the evolving nature of Jewish civilization, the fundamental religious and intellectual outlook of Jews and Judaism, and the contributions of Jewish civilization to human civilization. The program is designed to provide inspiration and grounding for students who embrace and continue to explore both Jewish heritage and Jewish life today.

Throughout the program, students explore and examine Jewish texts—a traditional and effective mode of Jewish learning—to promote intellectual growth through discovery and inquiry.

Core Course Descriptions

Introduction to Jewish Studies— Supervised Independent Study Dr. Dean P. Bell | Course 3500

Jewish Studies as an academic discipline is in some ways a relatively new endeavor. As an interdisciplinary field, it draws from a broad range of scholarly methodologies, covers a dizzying array of topics, and utilizes many genres of source materials. As such, Jewish Studies is an amalgam that tells us quite a bit about Jews and Judaism, both past and present, as well as the current state of the Academy. At the same time, Jewish Studies writ large is a much older discipline—in the guise of Biblical study, exegesis, historical writing, and debate, for example. In this orientation to the MA in Jewish Studies program, you will examine the general lines of development of Jewish Studies in the Academy, with special emphasis on recent developments. You will take a close look at recent scholarship to understand central themes and current trends in Jewish Studies today.

Introduction to Biblical Hebrew I, II, III Dr. Anne Knafl | Courses 1221, 1222, 1223

This three-quarter course sequence introduces students to Biblical Hebrew grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, as well as the scholarly Hebrew Bible, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. The focus is on introductory grammar, including common verb patterns, essential grammatical features, and basic vocabulary. Students will begin to read passages from the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) immediately as provided by the textbook or instructor.

Many students find it beneficial to take the Biblical Hebrew Sequence early in their course work.

The Bible and the Ancient Near East Dr. Leonard Greenspoon | Course 3501

In this course students acquire general knowledge of the Hebrew Bible—its contents, as well as its historical, cultural, and religious contexts. Students learn to identify the basic genres of biblical narrative and biblical law and to appraise what make them unique, as well as common features within the context of the Ancient Near East. The course also covers the scholarly methods and discoveries of Near Eastern archaeologists, Jewish exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, and issues related to translation of the text.

The World of the Rabbis

Dr. Victor Mirelman | Course 3502

This course examines the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism in its Greco-Roman context. Class lectures and readings begin with the late Second Temple period and continue through the creation of the Mishnah, the Talmud, and early midrashic literature. Emphasis will be placed on the normative and imaginative religious world created by the early rabbis as they defined a Judaism that could survive the realities of the post-Temple world.

Medieval Jewish Experiences

Dr. Dean P. Bell | Course 3503

The medieval period in Jewish history stretched from the close of the Talmud in the sixth century CE to the beginning of the sixteenth century. During this long and complicated period, Jews and Judaism could vary tremendously based on many different factors, from settlement patterns and local conditions to relations with non-Jews. In this course, students are introduced to the richness of a period that defies easy categorization, but creatively continued from the rabbinic period and set the groundwork for Jewish responses to modernity. Students explore the politics and usefulness of periodization and learn about the key sociological, communal, religious, and intellectual developments that helped to define this period. Jewish relations with the external world, in the form of both acculturation and conflict, are also considered.

Early Modern Jewish Experiences

Dr. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern | Course 3504

This course explores the 300 years between the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and the first Jewish European emancipation, in France in 1791. Radical changes triggered the rise of more tolerant political and religious treatment of Jews. The course covers the rise of mercantilism that reshaped the Jewish community economically and culturally; the legalization of the process of readmission of Jews to urban centers from which they were expelled in medieval times; the spread of Jewish mysticism and the rise of Jewish religious revivalist movements; the impact of French Enlightenment on the rise of modern Jewish thought; the formation of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish identity; and revolutionary upheavals in the Netherlands, Britain, and France that sparked the process of emancipation and bolstered Jewish integration into the fabric of European society.

Modern Jewish Experiences

Dr. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern | Course 3505

The European Enlightenment dramatically changed the profile of western civilization and had a profound impact on European Jewry. Based on Enlightenment ideas, European states began integrating the Jews into the fabric of the state and society, seeking to eliminate the cultural and religious separateness of the Jews. This course covers the period from the French Revolution through the fall of the Berlin Wall. It highlights the plurality of models of Jewish integration and acculturation, the formation of new Jewish identities, the split of the traditional community, the rise of Liberal and Orthodox trends within Judaism, and the spread of Jewish political movements. In this course, students examine the problems of interaction between the general society and the Jewish minority that pointed toward the 20th-century transformation of modernity.

Contemporary Jewish Experiences

Dr. Ellen LeVee | Course 3506

This course is a survey of the intellectual, historical, and sociological events that have shaped and are shaping contemporary Jewish life. The main focus is on North American Jewry, most particularly the United States. However, one cannot meaningfully explore the contemporary American Jewish Community without touching on the relationship between US Jewry and Israel. This course covers the major events that have shaped the past half century of Jewish life: the Shoah, the Rebirth of Israel, the rescue of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Feminist and Gay Liberation movements. Students in this course study the unprecedented growth and change in North American Judaism in a period marked by decline in antisemitism and integration of Jews into all strata of American society. Current issues covered include interfaith marriage, non-affiliation, Israel as a source of conflict, Jewish life is outside of established institutions, fiscal strain on community resources, the shift to Israel as the center of Jewish life, and Israeli society in flux.