Course Description:
This course will examine the various contours of contemporary Jewish identities in a comparative perspective between Israel and the United States. Attention will be given to the constructs of Jewish identity in ethnic, national, and religious terms and to the most pressing in-group schisms that divide the Jewish people today. In this capacity, we will investigate topics such as the “who is a Jew” debate; denominational tensions and questions of recognition; religious and secular divides; and political/ideological rifts. The course will include weekly reading assignments, student-led interviews on the topic of Jewish identity, and a final paper.

The following is a tentative list of topics for each class and accompanying weekly reading. Note that the reading list may change. Notification will be given in class for all changes in readings.

Topics and Assigned Readings

Week 1

Monday, March 30: OVERVIEW –MAPPING OUT JEWISH IDENTITIES

Readings:

Wednesday, April 1: AMERICAN JEWISH DENOMINATIONALISM

Readings:

Week 2

Monday, April 6: THE JEW WITHIN

Readings:

5) Cohen, S. M., Landres, J. S., Kaunfer, E., & Shain, M. Emergent Jewish Communities and Their Participants. Read pg. 1-5 and 38-40, skim through the middle pages (6-37), reading headings and what catches your interest.

Wednesday, April 8: POST-DENOMINATIONALISM AND JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

Readings:


Week 3:

Monday, April 13: INTERMARRIAGE AND QUESTIONS OF JEWISH CONTINUITY

Readings:


Wednesday, April 15: RELIGIOUS, TRADITIONAL, SECULAR JEWISH ISRAELI IDENTITY

Readings:

Week 4:

Monday, April 20: ETHNIC JEWISH IDENTITIES IN ISRAEL

Readings:


Optional: For additional data on Jewish identity in the US, see the full PEW Report at: http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/

Wednesday, April 22 – no class during this time. Instead, you are required to attend an on-campus evening lection entitled “The State of American Judaism: Recent Demography”. The event will be on Thursday, April 23 7:30 - 9:00 PM (location TBA).

Readings:
No reading

Evening Event: “The state of American Judaism: Recent Demography”, Thursday, April 23, 7:30 - 9:00 ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY

**EVENT REVIEW DUE IN CLASS APRIL 27th**

Week 5:

Monday, April 27: DISCUSSION OF “STATE OF AMERICAN JUDAISM” TALK + DISCUSSION OF JEWISH IDENTITY INTERVIEW PAPER

Reading:


Wednesday, April 29: RELIGIOUS ZIONISTS AND HAREDIM (ULTRA ORTHODOX)

Readings:

Week 6:

Monday, May 4: HÅ’HESDER MOVIE

Readings:
No readings

**FILM REVIEW DUE IN CLASS MAY 6TH**

Wednesday, May 6: DISCUSSION OF THEMES IN FILM + RELIGIOUS SECULAR DIVIDES

Readings:


Week 7:

Monday, May 11: “WHO IS A JEW” DEBATE

Readings:


Wednesday, May 13: TRAUMA AND JEWISH SURVIVALISM

Readings:
No readings

**INTERVIEW ESSAY DUE IN CLASS, MONDAY MAY 18TH.
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS BEGIN ON MONDAY MAY 18TH AS WELL**

Weeks 8:

Monday, May 18: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Readings:
No readings
Wednesday, May 20: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Readings:
No reading

Week 9:

Monday, May 25: Memorial Day, no session

Reading:


Wednesday, May 27: SUMMARIZING COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES + TAKE HOME EXAM DISTRIBUTED

Reading week, no class

***TAKE HOME EXAM DUE MONDAY, JUNE 8***

Week 10:

Week 11: Finals Week

Monday, June 8th – Final paper due

Grading:

Film Review + Event Review 20% (10% each)
Interview Essay (Midterm paper) 35%
Final take home essay 25%
Participation 10%
Presentation 10%

Film Review (10%)
We will be watching the film “Time of favor” (Hahesder) in class for which you will be asked to write a review. It is important to note that a film review is not just a summary of the plot. In fact, I would discourage you from thinking in terms of describing the sequence of events or main parts. For this review what is important is a deep analysis of some of the themes raised in the film and your reactions to them. You do not need to discuss all aspects of the film, but rather focus on the themes that you find particularly interesting. A good review will 1) offer insightful analysis on the issues raised by the film that you chose to focus on, 2) integrate class readings and/or discussions when relevant, 2) be well written, clear and coherent. Include a bibliography of the readings you make reference to in your analysis. Reviews should be about 3 pages, 12 point-font, double spaced, standard margins.
Event Review (10%)
On April 23 at 7:30pm, we will attend a lecture at Northwestern entitled “The state of American Judaism: Recent Demography.” You will be asked to turn in a review of the event much in the same way as you did the film review. This review should not be a summary of the topics discussed by the speakers, rather it should be a focused discussion of themes that you found interesting and an analysis of them. Your analysis should integrate readings and class discussions when relevant. Include a bibliography of the readings you make reference to in your analysis. Reviews should be about 3 pages, 12 point-font, double spaced, standard margins.

Interview Essay (Midterm assignment) (35%)
As part of your midterm assignment you will be asked to conduct two interviews with people of Jewish heritage to learn about how they experience their Jewish identity. This will serve as a basis for your midterm paper which will focus on a comparative look at contemporary Jewish identities based on the interviews you conducted. Your paper will offer an analysis of the interviews through engagement with the readings and class discussions relevant to the comparative framework that you have chosen to compare Jewish identities (i.e. ethnic, cultural, religious, denominational, generational, national comparisons). Instruction regarding the interview format and additional guidelines will be discussed during the 5th week of class. The paper itself should be between 5-6 pages and will be due during week 8.

Final Take Home Essay (25%)
For your final take home essay, you will be asked to write a 4-5 page response to one of two or three proposed open ended discussion questions. In your response you must integrate relevant readings and class discussions. The topics will be distributed on the last day of class, Wednesday May 27th, and will be due at the beginning of finals week, Monday June 18th.

Participation (10%)
The benefit of small classes is that there is room for discussion. You will be expected to be part of these discussions. Moreover, time at the end of each class will be designated to sharing questions/issues that you found interesting in the readings. For each class, you should have ready for discussion some reflection about the reading to share with the class. This could be an open ended question that the reading raised for you, or something that particularly interested you in the reading, or a feeling that it conjured in you, or almost anything else that reflects your engagement with the text.
Note: Part of the participation grade is also being in every class and arriving on time. If you are unable to attend a class because of an emergency or illness, please email me ahead of time, if possible. Attendance will often be taken at the start of class.

Presentation (10%)
You will be asked to share your interview midterm assignment with the class in a brief presentation. This will be a rather informal presentation in which you will choose what aspect of this assignment you want to engage the class with. This could be related to the final conclusions of your analysis, the interviewing process itself, the process of choosing who to interview, or any other aspect. More details will be provided a couple weeks before the presentation dates.
Summary of Deadlines:

- Event Review due in class April 27th
- Film Review due in class May 6th
- Interview Essay due in class, May 18th
- Student Presentations (sharing of interview essays) will be on May 18th and May 20th
- Final take home essay due by Monday June 8th, send electronically to me by email

Policy Notes:

1) Late work will not be accepted. If you have an illness or emergency situation, and an exception is necessary, please see me to discuss options to turn in your work.
2) If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get notes from your classmates and stay updated with the material.
3) All assignments should be submitted through canvas. If you are having a problem with the system, send the assignment to me via email.
4) Small changes may be made to the syllabus. You will be informed in class and by email of such changes.
5) For all assignments, use 12-point font, standard margins, double spaced.
6) As in all courses, policies of academic integrity and plagiarism apply. Familiarize yourself with Northwestern’s policy at:
   http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/handbook/integrity/