ANTH 429 (CRN 26144):
JEWISH FOLKLORE AND ETHNOLOGY

What does it mean to be Jewish in cultural terms? This course focuses on the diversity of Jewish cultures, with an emphasis on Ashkenazic (East European) Jewish experiences and the contemporary Jewish diaspora in North America. A historical approach to identity explores the Holocaust and its representational controversies. Expressive culture, including narrative, proverbs, jokes, folk beliefs, rituals, holidays (calendrical and life cycle), food, customs, and music are analyzed with attention to tradition, innovation, and gender. Readings cover a variety of genres including scholarly articles, graphic novels, memoirs, journalistic articles and blogs, folktales, jokes, video clips and music. Guests and films supplement lecture and discussion.

I welcome questions and feedback via email, telephone, in writing, and in person during office hours. I have a comment bag available at every class. If you need accommodation for any reason, please contact the Accessible Education Center, 346-1155, uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Please turn off all mobile devices during class. Computer use is permitted for lecture and section related activities, such as note taking.

Academic Integrity:
The University of Oregon’s policies on academic honesty and plagiarism can be found at conduct.uoregon.edu. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. For example, students must properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas). This includes material from the Internet. If you submit plagiarized work, you will be penalized and reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. Additional information is available at http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism.

Respect for the instructor and fellow students is imperative. Some of the material in this class may be controversial. It is important that we listen to and respond civilly to one another, even when we don’t agree. I encourage everyone to participate and express their opinions freely.

The class utilizes a Canvas site. Under Modules, Course Documents you will find the course Syllabus and 2 Glossaries. Under Outlines you will find the class powerpoints, maps, and other handouts. Under Readings you will find the article readings. Note that journalistic and newspaper articles, blogs, videos, etc., are online via urls provided in the syllabus; some of these articles are also on Canvas. Please use the syllabus to distinguish between required and optional readings.

Canvas Discussions is a site to post comments, further materials, and to ask questions. Exams are posted via Modules and also Assignments.
Grading Rubric:
A – Outstanding performance relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at the highest level.
B – Performance that is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at a high level.
C – Performance that meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates an adequate understanding of course content.
D – Performance that is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.
F – Performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the course content.

Course Objectives:
- Identify the diverse conceptions of what it means to be Jewish in cultural terms.
- Trace the study of Jewish folklore historically and today.
- Interrogate the representations of Jews in popular culture and folklore.
- Analyze representations of the Holocaust.
- Analyze gender in Jewish culture in relation to questions of politics, power, ritual, and creativity.
- Analyze Jewish narrative, proverbs, legends, jokes, folk beliefs, rituals, holidays (calendrical and life cycle), foodways, customs, and music.
- Trace the dynamism between tradition and innovation in Jewish folklore.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance (10%). Late arrivals and early departures must be cleared with the instructor.
2. Participation (10%). Participation includes speaking in class, coming to office hours, and postings in Canvas Discussions. Points can also be earned by preparing and presenting about Jewish foods; a sign-up sheet will be available.
3. Fieldwork assignment (15%) due Feb. 24 in class (unless there is good reason for another date). A one paragraph proposal for this project is due Jan 15. See end page of syllabus.
4. Take-home midterm exam due Feb 10 in class (hard copy) via Canvas, and take-home final exam due Thurs. March 19, 2:45 PM via Canvas, (32%+ 33%). Exams are essay and short identification; they are distributed at least five days prior to the due date. Exams will cover lectures, readings, and films. The final exam will emphasize material from the second half of the course. Exams and assignments must be submitted on time—under no circumstances will make-up exams or extensions be given without a documented excuse. Points will be deducted for late exams and exams that exceed the page limit.

REQUIRED READING:
2 books (in the bookstore and on reserve) plus readings/films on Canvas and online are required:
Myerhoff, Barbara, *Number Our Days* (Touchstone, 1978 or reprints).
There are 2 optional books in the bookstore that may be useful for your further reading:

**Useful websites:**
- YIVO Institute for Jewish research: [http://www.yivo.org/](http://www.yivo.org/)
- Jewish Virtual Library [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)
- Exhibit: Jews of Tsarist Russia: [http://www.yivoexhibitions.com](http://www.yivoexhibitions.com) (listen to the sound recording)
- Pre-WWI Photographs: [http://yivo1000towns.cjh.org/default.asp](http://yivo1000towns.cjh.org/default.asp)
- East European Archives: [http://www.rtrfoundation.org/Archdta1.shtml](http://www.rtrfoundation.org/Archdta1.shtml)
- Jewish Ancestry and Genealogy: [http://www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)
- About Judaism: [http://judaism.about.com](http://judaism.about.com)

**The following local organizations sponsor events related to Jewish life:**
The Jewish Federation of Lane County [http://www.jewishfedlc.org/HTML/JewishLiving.html](http://www.jewishfedlc.org/HTML/JewishLiving.html)

- Temple Beth Israel (TBI), Reconstructionist, [https://www.tbieugene.org/](https://www.tbieugene.org/)
  Rabbi Ruhi Sophia Motzkin-Rubenstein; Nina Korican, Executive Director
  1175 E. 29th Ave.; *nina@tbieugene.org*; [www.tbieugene.org](http://www.tbieugene.org); 541- 485-7218

- Oregon Hillel, 1059 Hilyard Street, 541-343-8920, [www.oregonhillel.org](http://www.oregonhillel.org); Andy Gittelson, Director; *andy@oregonhillel.org*; [https://www.facebook.com/OregonHillelFoundation/](https://www.facebook.com/OregonHillelFoundation/)
  Shabbat services every Friday 6 PM. Mondays 3:30-4:30 with Rabbi Meir in Tykeson Hall
  [Rabbi@oregonhillel.org](mailto:Rabbi@oregonhillel.org)

- Jewish Student Union, EMU 109H, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/UOJSU/about/?ref=page_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/UOJSU/about/?ref=page_internal)


- CONGREGATION AHAVAS TORAH – Orthodox. [https://ahavastorah.info/index.htm](https://ahavastorah.info/index.htm) 541 844 1340, [ahavastorahheugene@aol.com](mailto:ahavastorahheugene@aol.com)
Or HaGan (Reform); Rabbi Jonathan Seidel; rabbi@orhagan.org www.orhagan.org

The Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education (PDX)
https://www.ojmche.org/ (503) 226-3600

JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER PORTLAND www.jewishportland.org

Local events:
Jan 12. Documentary Film: Shalom Bollywood and Bhangra dancing. TBI, 7 PM $10.

Jan 17. Lecture by Prof. Ana Lara (UO Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies) on Judaism and Social Justice. TBI, 7:30 PM.

Jan. 28. Lecture: Dr. Dana Hercberg (Folklore, Univ. of Penn) lecture, Narrative and Memory in Jerusalem: Seeking the Implicit in Ethnography, 5 PM 204 Condon.

Feb 17. Klezmer Concert: Beyond the Pale (from Toronto), TBI, 7PM.


March 9. Purim Celebration, TBI, 6:30 PM. Other Purim TBA.

COURSE OUTLINE:


Glance at maps on Canvas and http://easteurotopo.org/img/europe_map_large.jpg.


Read the Viewing Guide to *Image Before my Eyes* on Canvas.


**The Values and Culture of the Shtetl. Major forces in Shtetl life.** Be prepared to compare Konin, Life is with People, and Image Before My Eyes. What is the goal and the style of each book/film? What was new to you? What was familiar? What questions did each work raise? What are the strengths and shortcomings of each work?


Optional: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Coming of Age: Jewish Youth in Poland between the Wars
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVj6DPfliWQ&list=PLtPOkhh8R4wytB5bqJpYf vkce2xtDDyYd&index=11&t=0s&fbclid=IwAR2zOkDLVcgXxRf2hsGKV a1JJIKh7f3Vxp8Gkag n0CTkRGjQIh9BKJWJlpI1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVj6DPfliWQ&list=PLtPOkhh8R4wytB5bqJpYf vkce2xtDDyYd&index=11&t=0s&fbclid=IwAR2zOkDLVcgXxRf2hsGKV a1JJIKh7f3Vxp8Gkag n0CTkRGjQIh9BKJWJlpI1)

5. Jan 20. MKL Holiday


https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Circumcision  


*Contact* 2010, vol 12 (2), special issue on “New Jewish Rituals”. Read: 
Editor's Introduction By Eli Valley. p. 1  
The Courage to Reinvent Jewish Ritual by Vanessa Ochs, pp. 5-6  
Ritual and the Forces of the Free Market by Rabbi Hayim Herring p. 7  
How Women and Girls Revitalized Jewish Ritual by R. Handler and L. Lefkovitz pp. 8-9  
Creating Life Cycle Rituals by Rabbi Miriam Berkowitz, p. 14

LGBTQ Equality: https://www.keshetonline.org/about-us/

Optional: Oppenheimer, Mark. “In a Scandal, New Attention to Mikvahs.”  

Optional: Kershner, Isabel. “With Guile and Tiny Torah, Women Hold a Bat Mitzvah at the Western Wall”  


10. Feb 5. The Holocaust, continued. Controversies over documentation, representation, museums, and Holocaust analogies.

Creating POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JitO_KSiTeT4 (80 minutes; BKG lecture begins 8:20)

Optional: Poland’s Ruling Party Puts an Extraordinary Museum of Polish-Jewish History into Limbo by Masha Gessen. Sept 22, 2019  
https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-
columnists/poland's ruling party puts an extraordinary museum of polish-jewish history into limbo


Oprah Winfrey Network 2012. What It Means to Be Hasidic
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smZlZBaXTjs; Hasidic Traditions and Rules of Modest
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgnpSEfjOMg&t=54s; Hasidic Marital Customs and Matchmakers https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQWLJhsl-t4.

Former Hasidic Jews reveal hidden world. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQWLJhsl-t4

Optional: Modesty in Ultra-Orthodox Brooklyn Is Enforced by Secret Squads:


Read the collection of Hasidic tales on Canvas from Eliach, Yaff, Tales of the Holocaust (Oxford 1982) and from Mintz, Legends of the Hasidim.

Read Good Morning Herr Mueller (Hasidic Folktale):
https://hasidicstories.com/Stories/Of_Our_Times/good_morning.html
Optional: Read more stories at: https://hasidicstories.com/


Read The Lamedvovnik Tale and the Rich Man Tale on Canvas.

Video: *Number Our Days* (1983, 30 minutes)


Discussion: *Number Our Days*. Video: *Number Our Days* (30 minutes, 1977).


Read the Study Guide on Canvas.

17. March 2. Jewish Foodways. Film: *Deli Man* (91 minutes)

Read the Study Guide on Canvas.


18. March 4. Discussion about *In her Own Time* and *Deli Man*. Introduction to Purim. What is a Carnival? What is Liminality?


Optional: Purim Shpil- The Wonderful World of Shushan—Disney Parody 2020, by Johanna Seasonwein, jgseason@gmail.com.

Returning to Verbal Art: Narrative, Creativity and the Immigrant Experience.


**Final Due Thursday March 19, 2:45 PM via Canvas**

**FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT – 2-3 pp. double-spaced typed**
**Due Feb 24 in class (hard copy) and on Canvas**

**Option I**
Contact a member of your own family, a friend, or another person who was born in or grew up in an Eastern European Jewish environment, and discuss the following questions with them:

1. Where are you (or your relatives) from? What was the name of the town (exactly) where they grew up or lived (find it on a map)? Note the Yiddish name and the non-Jewish name(s).

2. What was the name of the country in Eastern Europe from which your informants or their relatives emigrated? Did the name of the country ever change? When?

3. What language(s) did they speak at home? To other Jews? To non-Jews?

4. What was it like growing up in your town?

5. FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION, designate the time period.

6. What are you (how do you identify yourself)? In what ways are you Jewish?

**Option II**
Contact a Jewish person of any age who is willing to talk to you about Jewish traditions:

1. Document the person's ancestry. Are there any foreign-born parents or grandparents? From where, when immigrated, etc.? Find this location on a map.

2. What are you (how do you identify yourself)? In what ways are you Jewish?

3. What holidays and life-cycle ceremonies do (did) you celebrate? How and why do you celebrate them?

4. In what ways do you consider yourself Jewish? What choices have you made about being Jewish?
**Option III**
Attend a Jewish celebration/event, e.g., a wedding, Shabbat, bar/bas mitzvah, Purim (carnival, e.g., Monday March 9 at TBI), and document the event. Interview at least one participant.

1. What are the roles enacted in this event? Who does what, when, and why?

2. What are the major symbols associated with the ritual?

3. What meanings does the event have for each of the participants?

**Option IV**
Attend a lecture on a Jewish topic.

1. What did you learn in this lecture?

2. Provide the context/history of this lecture.

3. Provide a short biography of the lecturer. If possible, interview the lecturer.