Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education  
EDUC 591: Teaching and Learning Jewish History  
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Course Description:  
History does repeat itself, albeit often in different guises and sparked by new catalysts. This course builds on that assumption and challenges students to approach history in a thematic, rather than a linear way. Each unit will trace one theme through different periods of Jewish history (with an emphasis on the American experience), exploring what that trend can teach us about these unique periods of time and the connections among them. This course will work on multiple levels to encourage simultaneous acquisition of pedagogic and content knowledge, as well as exposure to analytical skills and a variety of historical and sociological research methodologies. Typically, during each unit, students will be assigned one 'model' study (partial book or article length), a mini-lecture and related pedagogic articles. Those pieces will frame a group of exercises and interactive discussions which seek to model the pedagogy while more deeply exploring the content. Further, each unit will have integrated opportunities for application to all modes of Jewish educational practice, with a particular emphasis on using technology inside and outside the 'classroom.'

Learning Objectives - Students will:  
• Articulate the broad sweep of Jewish history and American Jewish history  
• Integrate Jewish history into their teaching, in a variety of settings  
• Draw relevant parallels between their students' contemporary Jewish lives and Jewish historical events, phenomena and institutions  
• Utilize technology in their settings to enhance all learning  
• Explore theories of teaching history, particularly Jewish history  
• Experiment with various pedagogies for teaching history  
• Consider how their pedagogic choices model the content being taught  
• Apply content and theoretical knowledge to current setting

Required Texts:  
Sarna, American Judaism, 2004  

Optional Texts:  
Fishman, The Way into the Varieties of Jewishness  
Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People

Assessment:  
• Course Participation, 45%  
• Course participation considers all Schoology work, including blog posts, responses, discussions, exchanges with classmates, etc.  
• Group and Individual Assignments, 20%  
• Final Project, 35%
Course Accommodations for Disabilities:

*Hebrew College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in programs. Accordingly, if a student has a documented disability, and as a result, needs a reasonable accommodation to attend, participate or complete course requirements, then he or she should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. For further information, see the Student Handbook at [http://hebrewcollege.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook.pdf](http://hebrewcollege.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook.pdf).*

If you require course accommodations because of a documented disability or an emergency medical condition, please email your instructor as soon as possible. We are happy to work with you on any issues you have to ensure that you can participate fully in the class and complete the course requirements. Please do not wait until the assignments are due for a retroactive accommodation, but discuss the situation with your instructor before you experience difficulty.

Course Structure and Unit Overviews:

**Unit 1**

**The Shape of American Jewish History**

Based on the reading of *American Judaism*, students will develop or find a graphic that best represents Sarna's conception of the shape of Jewish history. Before working together to create consensus around a shape which the group believes represents this text, students will reflect on how their chosen graphics (and readings of the text) may have been influenced by their own personal and/or professional Jewish path. Together, the class will consider how consensus building and personal reflection can be productively integrated in a variety of learning environments to help one's students clarify and articulate their perspective while assimilating those of their fellow learners.

**Unit 2**

**A Global Covenant? Jewish Responsibilities around the World (and to the World)**

This unit will begin to explore questions of a global Jewish collective. Using key turning points in Jewish history as case studies, the group will investigate how historical conceptions of *brit* (covenant) compare to contemporary American conceptions of obligation. Students will use Jewish legal texts, primary historical texts and artistic expression on questions of covenant for a nuanced understanding of philosophy and practice. Students will be challenged to consider whether or how external forces also shape the internal weight of Jewish responsibility.

**Unit 3**

**Jewish Pluralism in a Pluralistic America**

Did American Jews pioneer the *makhlokhet* (argument) for the sake of heaven? Our students may perceive a unique distance among the diverse practices of American Jews today, but we will explore dramatic variations of practice in earlier periods, including differences among Ashkenazim and Sephardim and the evolution of the wings of religious Judaism. Through readings, case studies and dialogue around our own experiences in pluralistic and non-pluralistic settings, we will grapple with how (or whether) to push the pluralism envelope in a variety of setting. While this unit will launch our considerations of pluralism in Jewish history and in our educational settings, this theme will undergird many units of the course.

**Unit 4**

**Federating Jewish Life and Jewish Continuity**

Though the Jewish federation is a uniquely Jewish American invention - and one that has deeply influenced general American philanthropic structures - historical Jewish communities pioneered their own structures to both serve and protect Jews' interest. We will use primary and secondary texts to understand those structures and to better understand the Jewish organizational landscape. How have protective instincts shaped Jews' construction of their political and philanthropic efforts? How have the agendas of these institutions changed in response to local, external forces, internal changes and global shifts (such as the founding of the state of Israel)? Further, this unit seeks to help students feel more 'organizationally literate' while building a bank of ideas for how to integrate institutional literacy into their students' skill set.

**Unit 5**

**Immigration, Symbolic Ethnicity and the New Jewish Identity**

Through social history, this unit will expose students to theories of immigration and assimilation into American culture, with a particular emphasis on using a gender lens to better understand history. We will use physical objects, or material culture, to explore how American Jews have contended with immigration and assimilation. The unit will encourage students to consider how to use material culture with their own students, as an accessible entry point to their personal Jewish history. Further, how can technology and an openness to using 'non-traditional' types of research help to create inclusive learning environments, vis-à-vis gender, ethnicity and special needs? As part of this unit, students will present video diaries that reflect on their personal Jewish histories.
Unit 6

DIY Shabbat and Hol (everyday)

Countercultural Judaism is not a product of the 1970's or of Reboot. Rather, it is at the core of rabbinic Judaism, the heart of which undergirds almost all streams of American Judaism. How could something that started out as completely countercultural morph into 'traditional Judaism?' We will consider how many ideas have moved from margins to mainstream in Jewish history, and consider contemporary do-it-yourself movements (havurot, independent minyanim). To truly experience working outside of mainstream structures and hierarchical leadership, students will be challenged to forge this unit on their own, using learning outcomes and assigned resources as the basis from which to construct key questions, exercises and assignments. This unit will also include deep reflection about what is gained and lost without a lead educator and how one's students might experience a 'change-up' in a variety of educational settings.

Unit 7

Destruction, Diaspora and Global Judaism

Tisha b'Av (the ninth of Av), either mythically or historically, 'owns' many of the major destructive moments of Jewish history. This unit will explore these traumatic moments - from biblical to medieval periods - as dramatic turning points in Jewish history, and understand how they connect with modern tragedies. How did the Spanish Inquisition, for example, and the Holocaust reshape Diaspora Judaism? Students will make use of online timeline and geographic tools to chart the redistribution of world Jewry after these events, and will consider how conceptions of peoplehood and global Judaism have changed in their wake. In particular, how do American Jews view their relationship to Israel and Zionism, and how has that relationship shifted in response to external forces and events?

Unit 8

Authenticity and the Jews Within

How has Jewish and American Jewish history shaped the dual-identities of most American Jews? We will explore whether the intensity of dual identification today is the context for a decline or a revival in Jewish experience in the United States and globally. Again delving deeply into the question of creating pluralistic learning communities, this unit will challenge students to reconcile their students' and their own perceptions of 'authentic Judaism.' How does this impact the pluralistic exercise? How does it impact the practitioners' teaching context?

Final Assignment:

Craft a non-linear history unit for students in an educational setting in which you currently practice, have practiced, or seek to practice. Incorporating and tweaking the model we have used in our course, bring several periods of Jewish history - in different parts of the world - into conversation with one another and with your students. Utilize technological and pedagogical methods which we have studied or experienced in this course, and use similar sources to research and integrate other pedagogies which fit thematically with your unit (both are critical to a successful project). What questions would you raise? Be clear about learning objectives, strategies, resources, adaptations, etc. Choose a topic that was not 'uncovered' during our course but that you think is critical to the development of your students.

While this unit will be the centerpiece of your final project, the accompanying narrative should expand on that original work. Some examples: Address how you would use the unit and how it could be adapted for other ages, educational settings and populations. Reveal the intentionality behind exercise, resource, and naming choices. Further, would your unit be optimal in a pluralistic setting or a particularistic one? Discuss why and how it would need to be shifted in other settings. Could your unit be integrated into a linear history course, and how? How is this reflective of your students' needs, learning styles, educational setting and your own teaching philosophy?