Course name: The Italian Jewish Culture: A Journey through History from the Renaissance to the Present Time
Course number: HIST 3005 FERR / RELI 3001 FERR
Programs offering course: Language and Culture
Language of instruction: English
U.S. Semester Credits: 3
Contact Hours: 45
Term: Fall 2019

Course Description

The course will examine the history of Italian Judaism, through its cultural and religious peculiarities. It will survey the history, from the Renaissance period to Modern times, the current condition of this cultural minority and its ties to Italy. The course will focus on the history of the Jewish communities of Ferrara and Venice, two notable examples of Italian Jewry, from the first Jewish presences to the golden Renaissance period, through the so-called “era of the Ghettos”. Furthermore, the course will provide the skills to analyse the Emancipation that characterise Italian Judaism, from the Fascist Regime to our times.

The course provides the students with basic notions of Judaism and it examines the evolution and development of the relationship with the cultural majority. It presents the major Jewish protagonists of Italian history and literature, such as Dona Gracia Nasi, Giorgio Bassani and Primo Levi. The city of Ferrara, the area of the former Ghetto, its monuments, the place and the Museum of National Judaism and the Shoah, will be an integral part of the lessons.

Learning Objectives

Learn basic notions of Judaism. Acquire the skills to analyse and recognise the religious, social and cultural peculiarities that characterise Italian Judaism.
Learn the impact of this cultural minority on Italian society; relate history of Italian Jews to the history of Italy.
Improve reading, talking and writing critically about Judaism and history of Italian Jews.
Become more familiar with the principal resources and tools for scholarly research in Jewish Studies (books, articles, web-sources).

Course Prerequisites

The course has no prerequisites.
**Methods of Instruction**

Lectures supported by PowerPoint combined with seminars (for which students are assigned weekly reading tasks), site visits and research challenges. Students will be encouraged to take part in discussion of Italian Jewish culture, history and social impact. Strong emphasis on the history of the Jewish communities of the city of Ferrara and Venezia.

**Online Resources**

All required readings, slides, supplemental digital resources and additional information will be available online at Canvas.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Oral presentation: 10%
2. Midterm exam: 25%
3. Final exam: 25%
4. Term paper: 15%
5. Class participation: 25%

**Course Requirements**

**Oral Presentation**

Students will have to select a topic, carry out a research and then provide a critical analysis of it for the other students (15 minutes), based on methods learned in class.

**Midterm Exam**

Students are required to answer essay questions on the material studied during the first half of the course, as well as comment on extracts for primary source documents. The exam will extend for 2 hours from the starting time.

**Final Exam**

Students are required to answer essay questions on the material studied during the first half of the course, as well as comment on extracts for primary source documents. The exam will extend for 2 hours from the starting time.

**Term Paper**

Students will have to carry out a case study of one aspect studied during the course. They will go further on the subject-matter selected for oral presentation, which deals with
a particular theme of the Italian Judasim and they will discuss it with the course instructor during office hours or in ad hoc tutorials.

Paper outline must include one-paragraph thesis statement and at least two printed secondary sources. All essays must be typed on a computer and double-spaced (c. 1,000 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography). Students are expected to print the term paper and also to send it to the instructor via email. Late submissions will be penalised by a grade for every day late. Extensions are granted only in special circumstances, such as serious illness or bereavement.

**Class Participation**

Students are expected to attend regularly and participate actively in class. If a student miss more than 2 lessons, he/she will be penalised by half a grade for each lesson missed. The instructor will keep a record of attendance throughout the course, which will include the results of the quick-write test administered at the beginning of each class. Students will be expected to do the readings and assessments in advance, so as to be familiar with images and artists and to be able to participate in the discussion.

Students are reminded that plagiarism (presenting another person’s work as one’s own) is completely unacceptable and if attempted will result in the student receiving a FAIL for the term paper. To avoid this, always make sure that references and other people’s ideas are cited correctly. If you are unsure about how to cite a reference, check with the course instructor.

Laptops, mobiles and other electronic devices are not allowed in the classroom.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Cluster I: Defining Judaism and the peculiarities of Italian Jews

Lesson 1

Introduction: Who is a Jew?

Lesson 2

Italian Judaism, the origins and the places of a peculiar minority

Reading: S. Simonsohn, Italy, in Jewish Art and Civilization, Hong Kong, 1972, pp. 92-110.
Week 2  
Cluster II: The Renaissance period, between persecution and prosperity

Lesson 3  
1492, the expulsion from Spain and migration routes


Lesson 4  
“A safe haven”, Ercole I d’Este and his liberal policies, the flourishing of Ferrara and the Sephardic community.


Week 3  
Lesson 5  
Doctors and bankers, Jewish occupations by choice and by law


Lesson 6  
A gate on the Mediterranean sea, Venice and his Jewish communities: Italian, Sephardic and Ashkenazi.


Week 4  
Lesson 7  
Day trip to Venice. Visit to the Jewish museum, the synagogues and the former ghetto area


The day tour is worth 2 lessons: if missed, it will be considered as 2 lessons missed
Lesson 8  Cluster III: The “age of the Ghettos”, geographic separation and cultural contacts

From the Venetian ghetto to the Papal Edict: history and politics of segregation


Week 5
Lesson 9  Midterm exam

Lesson 10  Life in the ghetto, an island with ties to the outside world
The lesson will be held in the area of the former ghetto of Ferrara.


Week 6
Lesson 11  Identity and assimilation, the problem of forced conversions


Lesson 12  Cluster IV: Emancipation, a new role in the Italian society

The Statuto Albertino and the campaign for the unification of Italy

Lesson 12  
Being Italian: the participation of the Jews to the social, cultural and the political life of the new nation.


Lesson 13  
Cluster V: From the fascist regime to the II World War

The rise of the Fascist Regime, Italian Jews and politics, between nationalistic aims and Zionism.


Week 8

Lesson 14  
Oral presentation

Lesson 15  
Racial Laws, the loss of rights, being “others” in their own nation. The history of Giorgio Bassani and the Garden of the Finzi-Contini.


**Deadline for the Term Paper outline** send by e-mail by Wednesday 23, 21 p.m

Week 9

Lesson 16  
Cluster V: From the fascist regime to the II World War

Persecution and deportation, the tragic days of the Italian Shoah: the roundup of Rome's ghetto, Italian internment camps

Reading: Roth C., *History of the Jews of Italy*, Philadelphia, 1946, pp. 536-550
Lesson 17  Jewish resistance: the role of Italian Jews in the partisan fight. The Jewish Brigade and the liberation of Italy.


Week 10  Cluster VI: A difficult return, life after war

Lesson 18  The tales of the survivors and their efforts to build a better nation. The figure of Primo Levi as witness and narrator, and his impact on the Italian society.


**Deadline for the Term Paper**

Lesson 19  Narrating the past, imagining the future: the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah, and his role in Italian society. The lesson will be held at the Meis museum, Ferrara.


Week 11

Lesson 20  Final Exam

**Readings**

Students are provided with a course reader which contains all the weekly reading materials. Students will be expected to bring their syllabus and readings to class. Students will have to do the readings prior to the lecture, in order to be familiar with the topics of the lesson and participate actively in the discussion.
Although the material may not always be of direct relevance to the essay topics, the articles are useful to read as examples of “how to write” about works of art and material culture in general.

**Books and essays included in the reader**


*Emancipation and Jewish Response in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Italy*, in European History Quarterly, n.16 (1986), pp. 403-439.


Levi P., *If this is a man*, 1991.


