


Undergraduate Council  
 New Course  Course Change  
 Core Category: Humanities Effective Fall 2008

or

Graduate/Professional Studies Council  
 New Course  Course Change  
 Effective Fall     

RECEIVED OCT 15 2007

APPROVED DEC 05 2007

- Department: RELS College: CLASS
- Person Submitting Form: Lynn Mitchell Telephone: 3-3213
- Course Information on New/Revised course:
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title:  
RELS / 2330 / Judaism
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Short Course Title (30 characters max.)  
RELS / 2330 / JUDAISM
  - SCH: 3.00 Level: JR CIP Code: 38.0206.00 01 Lect Hrs: 3 Lab Hrs: 0
- Justification for adding/changing course: To meet core curriculum requirements
- Was the proposed/revised course previously offered as a special topics course?  Yes  No  
 If Yes, please complete:
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title:  
  /  /
  - Content ID: 0 Start Date (yyyy3): 0
- Authorized Degree Program(s): RELS
  - Does this course affect major/minor requirements in the College/Department?  Yes  No
  - Does this course affect major/minor requirements in other Colleges/Departments?  Yes  No
  - Are special fees attached to this course?  Yes  No
  - Can the course be repeated for credit?  Yes  No
- Grade Option: Letter (A, B, C ...) Instruction Type: lecture ONLY (Note: Lect/Lab info. must match item 3, above.)
- If this form involves a change to an existing course, please obtain the following information from the course inventory: Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title  
RELS / 3310 / Judaism
  - Start Date (yyyy3): 20043 Content I.D.: 287394
- Proposed Catalog Description: (If there are no prerequisites, type in "none".)  
 Cr: 3. (3-0). Prerequisites: ENGL 1304 or equivalent. Description (30 words max.): Judaism from the post-biblical era to the present, including ancient and medieval and rabbinic literature, philosophy, and mysticism; Jewish responses to modernity and the Holocaust; American and Israeli Judaism.
- Dean's Signature:  Date: 10/12/07  
 Print/Type Name: S Fishman

U N I V E R S I T Y of H O U S T O N

CORE CURRICULUM COURSE REQUEST

Originating Department/College: Religious Studies / CLASS

Person making request: Dr. Lynn Mitchell, Director of RELS Telephone: 3-3213

Dean's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I. General Information:

Course number and title: RELS 2330 Judaism

Complete catalog description (NOT required if attached to CBM 003 form):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Category of Core for which course is being proposed (mark only one):

- Communication
- Communication: Writing Intensive Experiences in the Disciplines
- Mathematics
- Mathematics/Reasoning (IDO)
- Natural Sciences
- Humanities
- Visual/Performing Arts Critical
- Visual/Performing Arts Experiential
- Social/Behavioral Sciences
- U.S. History
- American Government

II. Objectives and Evaluation (respond on one or more separate sheets):

Call 3-0919 for a copy of "Guidelines for Requesting and Evaluating Core Courses"  
or visit the website at [www.uh.edu/academics/corecurriculum](http://www.uh.edu/academics/corecurriculum)

A. How does the proposed course meet the appropriate Exemplary Educational Objectives (see **Guidelines**). Attach a syllabus and supporting materials for the objectives the syllabus does not make clear.

*a. Please see course goals and objectives as stated in the syllabus.*

B. Specify the processes and procedures for evaluating course effectiveness in regard to its goals.

*a. Certainly the most effective measure of a course's effectiveness is student achievement on papers and exams. The grading criteria allow students to provide increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding and analysis,*

*thereby demonstrating the student's grasp of the material and the effectiveness of the course in achieving its goals. In the past, student comments on the formal University course evaluation forms have shed light on students' self-perception of learning.*

C. Delineate how these evaluation results will be used to improve the course?

*a. Each semester the instructor utilizes student performance on exams and papers along with the formal university course evaluation forms to further refine the course and increase the correlation between course goals and the methods for achieving those goals.*

**SVP. Effective 9/20/05. Replaces all previous forms, which may no longer be used.**

University of Houston  
Spring Semester, 2007

RELS 3396  
www.houstonhillel.org/RBI

## RABBINIC BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Rabbi Kenny Weiss  
713-526-4918 (Houston Hillel)  
kweiss@uh.edu

Tuesday - Thursday, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.  
M-115, Charles F. McElhinney Hall

### Learning Outcomes

1. Students will explore Rabbinic biblical interpretation in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts.
2. The class will consider the emergence of a distinctively Rabbinic approach to exegesis and the development of literary forms for its expression, while also investigating the place of Torah in the ideology of Rabbinic Judaism.
3. Students will focus on primary sources from Tannaitic and Amoraic Midrashic collections, and explore the role of Midrash in contemporary society. Students will demonstrate their understanding of these primary sources through the written exposition and argument that will include the basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in writing.
4. Students will also study trends in recent scholarship, and engage in theoretical discussions regarding hermeneutics, intertextuality, and the nature of interpretation.
5. Students will develop writing skills specific to biblical interpretation through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation.

### Required Texts

1. Norman Solomon, Judaism: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 1996.
2. A Bible of your choosing. (While I do not require a Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) please keep in mind that Christian Bibles number some verses differently.)
3. All other primary and secondary readings will be available at [www.houstonhillel.org/RBI](http://www.houstonhillel.org/RBI).

### Rabbi Weiss' Availability

Rabbi Weiss can be contacted by calling Houston Hillel, 713-526-4918, or via email, [kweiss@uh.edu](mailto:kweiss@uh.edu). He can meet with students after most class sessions and by appointment.

### Assignments and Grading

1. **Attendance & Participation (20%).** Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. A student who misses more than three class sessions will see a detrimental impact upon his or her grade. Students must be prepared to discuss and analyze the texts in class.
2. **Four Text Analysis Papers, 500-750 words each (15% each).** Each Text Analysis must consider the text's major themes, the flow of the material and its editing, the usage of prooftexts, and the manner in which the midrashic material adds meaning to the base text. Each paper should address the questions 1) What is the "problem" in the biblical text that gives rise to the midrashic interpretation? 2) How does the interpretation solve the problem? 3) How does the interpretation teach or tell us something beyond the biblical text, such as a general moral lesson, a way of behaving, or an insight into personality, character, or political context? Students will integrate the instructor's comments and submit a revision of the first two text analysis papers.
  - a. **Due February 6** – Genesis Rabbah 1:10
  - b. **Due March 1** – Pesikta De-Rab Kahana, Piska 15:3

- c. **Due March 27** – Sifre Devarim, Piska 13
3. **Three Response Papers (Required, but not graded).** Each Response Paper should be about 500-750 words (about 1 page, single spaced), and is intended to help you demonstrate that you are carefully reading the secondary sources, and to focus your thoughts on particular reading assignments. These papers are not meant to be finished, polished works. Rather, you should write about what you find interesting or exciting or provocative in a particular reading. You may also use the Response Papers to explain what troubles or bewilders you about a reading, but only if you also explain why.
- a. **Due January 25** – Boyarin, "Analogy Vs. Anomaly in Midrashic Hermeneutic"
- b. **Due February 22** – Stern, "Composition and Exegesis"
- c. **Due March 20** – Boyarin, "Old Wine in New Bottles"
4. **Take Home Final Paper in which you will compose a modern Midrash (1,500-2,000 words) and a text analysis for the Midrash you composed (also 1,500-2,000 words) due April 19 (35%).**

All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course. Letter grades have the following meaning:

- A **Well written**, accurate, intelligent, and creative contribution that not only integrates class discussions and the assigned reading, but also transcends that attribute with original thought, questions, conjecture and conclusions;
- B Accurate and complete grasp of the material covered but without creative contribution;
- C Adequate and correct, but not complete;
- D Close, but not correct or adequate;
- F Not even close.

All written work will be returned with the instructor's comments and critique with regard to content and style.

Failure to submit a writing assignment on time will result in the loss of 1/2 grade for each class period the assignment is late.

**All written work must be submitted to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) prior to the beginning of class on the day which the assignment is due.** To submit your assignments, log on to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). (If this is your first time using turnitin.com select "Create a user profile" at the top right of the webpage.) The class ID is "1754180" and the password is "MidrashS07" (without spaces). Contact me if you have difficulty submitting assignments.

Biblical citations, whether parenthetical or in the body of a sentence, should use a 3-5 letter abbreviation for the book in question (thus "Gen" for Genesis, but "Ruth" for Ruth), followed by a space, the chapter number, a colon, and the verse numbers. Consecutive verses are indicated with a hyphen or dash, non-consecutive verses with commas. Thus: "Gen 6:20" or "Ruth 12:2-4, 10-15." Separate non-consecutive citations should be separated with semi-colons. Thus: "Gen 6:20; 13:34-35; Ruth 4:15." When referring to an entire biblical book do not use abbreviations.

#### **Students with Disabilities**

Students who anticipate problems with fulfilling course requirements because of the way they see, hear, read, or get around campus should advise me within the first two weeks of class. Special arrangements will be made in cooperation with staff at the Center for Students with Disabilities.

Introduction to Midrash, the Written and Oral Torahs, Jewish Exegesis of Scripture,  
and the Nature and Function of Midrash.

Tuesday, January 16

Texts: Genesis 11:1-12:9  
Sefer Ha-Aggadah 32:8  
Marc Gellman, "Finding the Right Man" in Does God Have a Big Toe, pp. 47-51.

Thursday, January 18

Reading: Solomon, pp. 1-53  
David Stern, "Midrash" and "Aggadah" from Contemporary Jewish  
Religious Thought, Ed. A.A. Cohen and P. Mendes-Flohr, pp. 613-620.  
Handout: Faith vs. Reason

Tuesday, January 23

Reading: James Kugel, The Bible As It Was, pp. 1-36.  
Texts: Exodus 1:1-6:13  
Exodus Rabbah 1:26  
Marc Gellman, "Watching the Burning Bush Burn" in Does God Have a Big Toe, pp.  
69-71.  
Handout: Midrash Literature Chart

Thursday, January 25

**Response Paper due at beginning of class**  
Reading: Solomon, pp. 54-97  
Daniel Boyarin, "Analogy Vs. Anomaly in Midrashic Hermeneutic: Tractates  
Wayyassa and Amaleq in the Mekilta," Journal of the American Oriental Society 106  
(1986), 659-667.  
Texts: Exodus 15:22-16:36  
Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Tractate Vayassa, Exodus 16:14, 15:22

Tuesday, January 30

Reading: Solomon, pp. 98-135  
Barry Holtz, "Midrash" from Back to the Sources, Ed. Barry Holtz, pp. 177-204.  
Texts: Genesis 1:1-31, 18:1-15  
Genesis Rabbah 1:10, 48:18-19, 8:5 (and text analysis example)

Thursday, February 1

Reading: Joseph Heinemann, "The Nature of the Aggadah" in Midrash and Literature, Ed.  
Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 41-55.  
Text: Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 62b (Halakhah)

The Literary Forms of Midrash: The Petihta (Proem), The Mashal (Parable), The Ma'aseh (Anecdote  
and Sage-Story), HaSippur Hadarshani (Extra-Biblical Legend)

Tuesday, February 6

**Text Analysis Paper due at beginning of class**  
Reading: Marc Bregman, "Isaak Heinemann's Classic Study of Aggadah and Midrash."  
Texts: Bill Cosby - "Noah"  
Genesis 6:1-22  
Tanhuma, Noah 5

Thursday, February 8

Reading: Joseph Heinemann, "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study"  
in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22, Ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, pp. 100-122.

Texts: Genesis 1:1-5, 5:1-5  
Genesis Rabbah 1:5, 24:3

Tuesday, February 13

Reading: David Stern, "Midrash and the Language of Exegesis: A Study of Vayikra Rabbah, Chapter 1" in Midrash and Literature, Ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 105-124.

Texts: Leviticus 1:1-9  
Leviticus Rabbah 1:1 (found in Stern, pp. 108-109)

Thursday, February 15

Reading: Joseph Heinemann, "Profile of a Midrash: The Art of Composition in Leviticus Rabba" in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39 (1971), pp. 141-150.

Texts: Leviticus 24:1-9  
Leviticus Rabbah 31:4

Tuesday, February 20

Reading: Jacob Elbaum, "Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and his Attitude to the Aggadah," in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22, Ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, pp. 28-47.

Texts: Lamentations 1:1-6  
Lamentations Rabbah Proem 21  
Pesikta De-Rab Kahana, Piska 15:3

Thursday, February 22

**Response Paper due at beginning of class**

Reading: David Stern, "Composition and Exegesis," in Parables in Midrash, pp. 4-45.  
Texts: Eikha Rabbah 4:11 and parallels (found in Stern, pp. 24-29)

Tuesday, February 27

Texts: Genesis 2:1-4  
Bereshit Rabbah 10:9  
Eikhah Rabbah 1:1C  
Sefer Ha-aggadah 212:51 (Story of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai)

Thursday, March 1

**Text Analysis Paper due at beginning of class**

Reading: Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Who's Kidding Whom?: A Serious reading of Rabbinic Word Plays" in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55:4, pp. 765-788.  
Texts: Sefer Ha-Aggadah 233:146 (Story of R. Akiba)

Tuesday, March 6

Reading: Burton Visotzky, "Most Tender and Fairest of Women: A Study in the Transmission of Aggadah" in Harvard Theological Review 76:4 (1983), pp. 403-418.

Thursday, March 8

Texts: Deuteronomy 1:1-18  
Sifre Devarim, Piska 13

Tuesday, March 13

**NO CLASS – Spring Break**

Thursday, March 15

**NO CLASS – Spring Break**

**Literary considerations in Midrash: Intertextuality**

Tuesday, March 20

**Response Paper due at beginning of class**

Reading: Daniel Boyarin, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Intertextuality and Midrash" in Poetics Today, 8:3-4 (1987), pp. 539-556.  
 Text: from And God Remembered:  
 Sasso

Thursday, March 22  
 Reading: Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic" in Critical Inquiry 16 (Spring 1990), pp. 532-550.  
 Text: Marc Bregman, "Serach: The Recovery of Joseph's Bones" in Living Texts: The Journal of Contemporary Midrash 4 (1998), 12-17.

Tuesday, March 27  
 Reading: **Text Analysis Paper due at beginning of class**  
 Jeffrey Rubenstein, "From Mythic Motifs to Sustained Myth: The Revision of Rabbinic Traditions in Medieval Midrashim," in Harvard Theological Review 89:2 (1996), pp. 131-159.

### Modern Midrash

Thursday, March 29  
 Reading: Jonathan Kirsch, "Lot and his Daughters" in The Harlot by the Side of the Road, Ballantine, 1997, pp. 15-34.  
 Jonathan Kirsch, "The Rape of Dinah" in The Harlot by the Side of the Road, Ballantine, 1997, pp. 62-75.

Tuesday, April 3 **NO CLASS – Passover**

Thursday, April 5  
 Reading: Norma Rosen, "Midrash, Bible, and Women's Voices" in Judaism 45:4 (Fall 1996), pp. 422-445.  
 Texts: Genesis 12:1-22:19  
 Mark Kaiserman, "Why God Doesn't Try to Talk to Us Directly Anymore" in CCAR Journal (Spring 2000), pp. 37-44.

Tuesday, April 10 **NO CLASS – Passover**

Thursday, April 12  
 Reading: Marc Bregman, "The Limits of Midrash", paper presented at the Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, February 2005.

Tuesday, April 17  
 Reading: Susan Fendrick, "Entering Biblical 'Halakhah' to Create Contemporary Midrash Aggadah: A Bibliodramatic Exploration of Non-Narrative Texts" in Living Text: The Journal of Contemporary Midrash 4 (Winter 1998) pp. 29-33.

Thursday, April 19 **Final Paper due at beginning of class**  
**Student Presentations**

Tuesday, April 24 **Student Presentations**

Thursday, April 26 **Student Presentations**



**RABBINIC BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

## FINAL PAPER

**Instructions**

Complete Essays A and B.

You may study your notes, the assigned texts and readings, and consult with other students in the course or any other person. However, you must sit down by yourself to compose your essays. Please feel free to speak with me to determine if your ideas are consistent with the assignment.

**Submit your completed Final Paper in one file to [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com) by 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 19.**

There is no "right" answer for each essay. Rather, the questions are springboards to give you an opportunity to show what you have learned in this course, and to demonstrate your ability to understand, organize, synthesize, and think logically about the ideas presented in the course. Therefore, in answering each question, you should show that you have read the assigned readings, attended class, and grasped the main ideas presented in the readings and class sessions.

**Essay A** (1,500 - 2,500 words - 50% of your Final Paper grade.)

**Compose an original midrash on a subject of your choosing.** You need not limit yourself to Jewish Scripture or anything of Jewish content. For example, you may write a midrash based on a passage from the New Testament, or any other "text" of your choosing. However, keep in mind that if you choose a text outside of a normative canon, you may find it difficult (or you may have to be particularly creative) to demonstrate your grasp of some fundamental aspects of the midrashic process, such as the use of prooftexts.

You may choose any form for your midrash – a series of exegetical midrashim, a proem, an extra-biblical legend, or a combination of these and other types. You may utilize any number of midrashic literary devices, such as established Rabbinic hermeneutics, the transformation of myth into story, the use of prooftexts, the mashal, intertextuality, and others that we have studied in class and the assigned readings.

**Essay B** (1,500 - 2,500 words - 50% of your final exam grade.)

**Write a text analysis for the midrash you composed for Essay A.** Remember to write with the assumption that your reader is not familiar with either the texts you use or the midrashic process itself. Please provide in-line citations for all sources, particularly for those sources from which you learned various literary devices that you have incorporated into your midrash.