

**Research and Writing in Jewish Studies**  
**01:563:464:01**

**Spring 2021**  
**Tuesday / Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> period (4:30-5:50)**

**Prof. Jeffrey Shandler**  
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**Office hours:** by arrangement (see “Staying in touch,” below)

**Provisional Syllabus**

**Seminar: Jews, Religion, and Media**

Description

For the past two centuries, Jews' religious life has been transformed by a wide variety of new media, including photography, newspapers, sound recordings, movies, radio, television, video, cell phones, the internet. This seminar will examine a wide range of examples, focusing on American Jewry—from early sound recordings by cantors, to dissident Hasidim who lead “double lives” in secret online. Other examples include the role of various media in Jewish-Christian relations, such as ecumenical broadcasts of the mid-twentieth century and the role of various media in how Jews grapple with Christmas (the so-called “December dilemma”). The course will also consider how new media change the way that Jews engage with older media, from ancient parchments to 78 RPM discs.

Learning goals

This course will fulfill the following core requirements:

- Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision. [WCr]
- Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry; evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly; and analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights. [WCd]

Additional learning goals are as follows:

- Acquire an understanding of the role of various media in modern cultural practices, specifically those pertaining to religious life.
- Acquire an understanding of the dynamics of religious life in relation to the history of innovations in media technologies and practices.

Requirements

- Attendance and active participation in class Zoom sessions, including taking turns leading discussion of readings and media works.
- A research paper on a topic of the student's choosing, related to some aspect of religion and media. Students will present their work in progress in the final weeks of the semester and submit their papers during the exam period. Paper preparation schedule is as follows:
  - 2/9: submit paper proposal for approval
  - 2/21: submit preliminary outline and bibliography
  - 2/23-25: individual paper conferences
  - 4/8: first draft of the paper due
  - 4/20-4/28: class presentations
  - 5/6: final paper due

### Course grade

- Class preparation and participation: 25%
- Paper proposal and outline: 15%
- First draft and presentation: 25%
- Final paper: 35%

### Staying in touch

Our course consists of a mix of synchronous sessions on Zoom and asynchronous learning: reading and examining media works, which students do on their own. We usually meet once a week on Zoom. In addition, I want to make sure that we stay in regular contact throughout the semester. You will receive weekly schedules by email and reminders about deadlines for written assignments. During the semester, I am happy to "meet" with students individually to discuss any questions, problems, etc., on Zoom at a mutually convenient time. Please email me so we can arrange a meeting.

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class Zoom meetings; if you expect to miss one or two meetings, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/to> indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. *If you are unable to attend a synchronous session or complete course work on time due to illness, family emergency, or other situation, be sure to notify me by email as soon as possible.*

### Technology requirements

Students will need internet access and a computer or other device on which they can watch and listen to video and audio presentations, access readings, and complete writing assignments. All course materials, including weekly instructions for reading, viewing, listening and writing, will be on the course sakai site (see below). Please visit the [Rutgers Student Tech Guidepage](#) for resources available to all students.

*For additional information on **technology support, academic integrity, academic support, and***

*student wellness services, please see the **Syllabus Addenda**, a separate document attached to this syllabus.*

### Course Schedule

NOTE: During weeks 1, 13, and 14, the class meets on Zoom on both Tuesdays and Thursdays. During weeks 2-5 and 7-11, class meets on Zoom only on Thursdays; students will have readings and media to prepare on their own in advance of each week's Zoom meeting. During week 6, the professor will schedule individual Zoom meetings with students to discuss their paper proposals. During week 12 there is no group Zoom meeting. **Course schedule is subject to change. Be sure to check email for any announcements of changes in schedule.**

1. Introduction  
1/19, 1/21: Class Zoom meetings
  
2. Sound recordings and the cantorate  
Reading: Shandler, Ch. 1; Hoberman, Ch. 19  
Media: *The Cantor's Son*  
1/28: Class Zoom meeting
  
3. Transforming the prayer book  
Reading: Stolow, ch. 7  
Media: <https://www.artscroll.com>  
2/4: Class Zoom meeting with Prof. Jeremy Stolow, Concordia University
  
4. American ecumenical broadcasting  
Reading: Shandler, Ch. 2  
Media: Sample AJC broadcast  
**2/9: Submit paper proposal for approval**  
2/11: Class Zoom meeting
  
5. Videotaping life-cycle events  
Reading: Shandler, Ch. 4  
Media: Alan Berliner, *Family Album*  
2/18: Class Zoom meeting
  
6. Paper conferences  
**2/21: Submit preliminary outline and bibliography**  
Individual Zoom meetings the week of 2/22 – 2/26
  
7. Chabad's use of media  
Reading: Katz, Chs. 1, 4  
Media: <https://www.chabad.org>  
3/4: Class Zoom meeting
  
8. The "December dilemma"  
Reading: Shandler, Ch. 5  
3/11: Class Zoom meeting

[SPRING BREAK]

9. Religion on display: The synagogue as museum  
Polland (selection)  
Media: <https://www.eldridgestreet.org>  
3/25: Class Zoom meeting
10. Jewish Film Festival as Ritual  
Reading: Koven  
4/1: Class Zoom meeting with Karen Small, Director Rutgers Jewish Film Festival
11. Hasidic “double lifers” on the Internet  
Reading: Fader (selection)  
4/8: Class Zoom meeting with Prof. Ayala Fader, Fordham University  
**4/8: first draft of the paper due**
12. Religion on the Internet  
Readings: Campbell (selections)  
No Class Zoom meeting this week.
13. Student Presentations  
4/20, 4/22: Class Zoom meetings
14. Student presentations  
4/27, 4/29: Class Zoom meetings

#### Readings

[\$] = book to purchase

[#] = reading on course website

Campbell, Heidi. *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2015). [#]

Fader, Ayala. *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). [#]

Hoberman, J. *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds* (New York: Schocken, 1991) [#]

Katz, Maya Balakirsky. *The Visual Culture of Chabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). [#]

Koven, Mikel J. “‘You Don't Have To Be Filmish’: The Toronto Jewish Film Festival,” *Ethnologies* 21, no.1 (2003): 115-132. [#]

Polland, Annie. *Landmark of the Spirit: The Eldridge Street Synagogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). [#]

Shandler, Jeffrey. *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). [\$] ISBN-13: 978-081474068

Stolow, Jeremy. *Orthodox by Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). [#]