

ISS 2921: History of Ideas Colloquium: *Classics of Jewish Thought II*

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Term: Spring 2026
- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 30 residential students
- Tuesday 3:00 PM -4:55PM, Thursday 4:05PM – 4:55PM
- Location: CSE 461
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Alan Rubenstein
- Office: CSE 543a
- rubensteina@ufl.edu
- Phone: 352-273-3040
- Office hours: *Wednesdays 12 – 2pm*

Course Description

The colloquium in the history of ideas is designed to enhance student multidisciplinary knowledge through a particular lens, civilization, or time period. The subject and scope of inquiry will be determined by the instructor for each section.

Colloquia Topic

Classics of Jewish Thought, a two-part sequence of courses, aims to examine the major moral, political, and theological questions of the Jewish tradition and to understand how Jewish texts and thinkers have answered the larger questions of human life and existence. The main focus of Classics of Jewish Thought II will be reading philosophical and literary sources that shed light on the ways Judaism has adapted to modern conditions. In particular, how have the discoveries of modern science and the changed social conditions of the modern political regimes altered the landscape of Jewish ideas? The course will keep in focus the major events of Jewish history in the modern period, including the Holocaust and the founding of the modern state of Israel.

Required Readings and Works

- Required readings will be posted as PDFs to Canvas.

Course Objectives

Students will...

1. Understand major works of influential modern Jewish thinkers beginning in the Enlightenment.
2. Develop the ability to analyze and interpret these thinkers' contributions to modern Jewish thought.
3. Develop a nuanced understanding of central topics in premodern Jewish intellectual history, including politics, law, diaspora, philosophy, and toleration.

4. Investigate how Jewish thinkers have navigated the challenges and opportunities posed by modernity, including the idea of toleration and the historicization of Jewish thought.
5. Develop the ability to participate in informed, respectful, and thoughtful debates on issues related to Jewish identity, politics, and religion.
6. Understand the origins of liberal and orthodox Judaism, as well as secular and religious Zionism
7. Explore several important Jewish writers and poets, and understand how their art helps capture elusive elements of the modern Jewish experience.

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Attendance: 20%

a. Participation: 10%

An exemplary participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class; consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion; and listens considerably to other discussants. See participation rubric below.

b. Class Attendance: 10%

On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. Unexcused absences are not permitted. Documentation is required for excused absences, per [university policy](#). Excessive unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

2. One Page Papers: 20%

a. Each week students will be presented with reading questions focused on important theme in the upcoming week's readings. Students will choose one question and respond to the prompt with an essay of 500 words or fewer. The paper should focus on textual analysis.

b. There will be a total of 10 one-page papers over the course of a semester.

3. Analytical Papers: 50%

a. In Weeks 7 and 13, you will submit analytical essays answering a prompt about the reading assignments. The prompts will be provided by Week 2 and Week 8. Each essay must be between 1,000 and 2,000 words.

b. The professor will evaluate and provide written feedback, on all the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.

c. Students may want to access the university's [Writing Studio](#).

d. An additional writing guide website can be found at [Purdue OWL](#).

e. See writing assessment rubric below.

4. Oral Defense of Essays: 10%

a. After each essay is submitted, the student will meet one-on-one with the professor to answer questions that probe the argument of his or her essay. In conversation, the student should be able to draw in sources covered in class, beyond those that were used in the essay.

Policy on the use of generative AI tools

The learning that takes place in this course requires your unique perspective and human experience. Use

of AI would make it harder to evaluate your work. It is not permitted to use any generative AI tools in this course, and the use of AI will be treated as an academic integrity issue.

III. Weekly Schedule

WEEK 1: JEWISH THOUGHT CONFRONTS MODERNITY

Readings:

- Chaim Grade, *My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner*
- Baruch/Benedictus Spinoza, *Theological Political Treatise*, Preface

WEEK 2: SPINOZA'S THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE

Readings:

- Baruch/Benedictus Spinoza, *Theological Political Treatise*, chapters 1-7

WEEK 3: SPINOZA'S THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE (CONT.)

Reading:

- Baruch/Benedictus Spinoza, *Theological Political Treatise*, chapters 10-16

WEEK 4: CAN JEWS BE CITIZENS OF THE MODERN NATION STATE?

Readings:

- Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, section 2
- Clermont-Tonnerre's remarks in the French National Assembly Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship
- George Washington, "Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport," August 18, 1790.

WEEK 5: REFORMING JUDAISM

Readings:

- Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and its History*, Lectures I - III
- The Pittsburgh Platform, 1885

WEEK 6: REFORM'S CRITICS

Readings:

- Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Religion Allied to Progress" and *Nineteen Letters, selections*
- Ahad Ha'am, "Slavery in Freedom"

WEEK 7: JEWS AND POWER: A MODERN REASSESSMENT

(ALLAN ARKUSH VISIT)

Readings:

- Chaim Nachman Bialik, "In the City of Slaughter"
- Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State, selections*

- Hillel Halkin, "[What Ahad Ha'am Saw and Herzl Missed — And Vice Versa](#)"

WEEK 8: JEWS AND POWER: BEN GURION AND JABOTINSKY

Readings:

- David Ben Gurion, "The Monarchy and the Prophethood"
- Ze'ev Jabotinsky, "The Ideology of Beiter" and "The Iron Wall"

WEEK 9: JEWISH AND POWER: AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

Readings:

- Abba Kovner, "My Little Sister"
- Jacob Glatstein, "Without Jews", "Goodnight Wide World"
- Ruth Wisse, "How Not to Remember and How Not to Forget"
- Ruth Wisse, "The Logic of Jewish History"

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 11: ISRAEL AND JEWISH FAITH

Readings:

- Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Lamentation in Jerusalem: On the Death of Theodor Herzl"
- Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*, selections
- *Avinu Sh'Bashamim*, "The Prayer for the State of Israel"

WEEK 12: ZIONISM AND DIASPORA: TWO CASE STUDIES

Readings:

- Gershom Scholem, "The Myth of German Jewish Dialogue" and "Israel and the Diaspora"
- Louis Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem and How to Solve It"

WEEK 13: JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

Readings:

- Nostra Aetate. Vatican Council II, 28 Oct. 1965.
- Joseph B Soloveitchik, "Confrontation"
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island"

WEEK 14: MODERNITY AND THE JEWISH QUESTION

Readings:

- Leo Strauss, "Athens and Jerusalem"
- Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy"

WEEK 15: CIVILIZATIONS: JEWISH AND WESTERN

Readings:

- Cynthia Ozick, "Antiquities"

IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A–	90 – 93%		C–	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B–	80 – 83%		D–	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

A (90-100%)	Typically comes to class with pre-prepared questions about the readings. Engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others and consistently elevates the level of discussion.
B (80-89%)	Does not always come to class with pre-prepared questions about the reading. Waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.
C (70-69%)	Attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. Is only adequately prepared for discussion.
D (60-59%)	Fails to attend class regularly and is inadequately prepared for discussion. Is an unwilling participant in discussion.
E (<60%)	Attends class infrequently and is wholly unprepared for discussion. Refuses to participate in discussion.

Writing Rubric

	Thesis and Argumentation	Use of Sources	Organization	Grammar, mechanics and style
A (90-100%)	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the paper.	No errors.
B (80-89%)	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the text under consideration. May have gaps in argument's logic.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are incorporated but not contextualized significantly.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	A few errors.
C (70-79%)	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the text. Argument is weak, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are mostly incorporated but are not properly contextualized.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable but does not tie up all loose ends.	Some errors.
D (60-69%)	Thesis is vague and/or confused. Demonstrates a failure to understand the text. Argument lacks any logical flow and does not utilize any source material.	Primary and/or secondary texts are almost wholly absent.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear conclusion, and the paper just ends. Little or no employment of logical body paragraphs.	Many errors.
E (<60%)	There is neither a thesis nor any argument.	Primary and/or secondary texts are wholly absent.	The paper is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.	Scores of errors.

V. Required Policies

Please see <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies> for the most up-to-date online compendium of academic policies.