3-27-08

To: Jonathan Bremer and the Faculty Council

From: Leah Marcus

Re: Changes to Jewish Studies catalogue copy

The Program in Jewish Studies requests the attached changes in the Jewish Studies major and minor. The reason we need them is that there is a disconnect between the catalogue description of the program, which describes it as of interest to “students of all backgrounds,” and the following list of requirements for the major, which starts out by saying that elementary Hebrew is required for the major.

Jewish Studies majors are required to take elementary and intermediate Hebrew if they have not been exempted through examination. They may only count Intermediate Hebrew (JS 113a-113b) as credits towards the major. The present catalogue wording suggests that Hebrew is a prerequisite for any Jewish Studies course, which is emphatically not the case; very few of our courses require Hebrew. Non-Jewish students, reading the present wording, may feel that they are ineligible to sign up for any Jewish Studies course. Students, whether Jewish or not, may feel that they need to have Hebrew before they embark on the major, while our intent is that they have mastered intermediate Hebrew by the time they are finished with the major.

The same logic applies also to our changes in the catalogue wording for the Jewish Studies minor, with the addition that we would now like to accept Elementary Hebrew as counting toward the minor instead of requiring Intermediate Hebrew. The rationale, once again, is to make the program more accessible to non-Jewish students or students from a secular Jewish background with no previous knowledge of Hebrew.

The Faculty Council has raised questions in the past about how Vanderbilt programs define “proficiency” in the acquisition of foreign languages. The catalogue copy for the Program in Jewish Studies uses the word “proficiency” under item 2 for both the Major and Minor course requirements. We have not yet found any reliable standardized tests for language proficiency in Hebrew. There are not even AP exams in Hebrew. What we have done up to now is simply have the Lecturer who teaches elementary and intermediate Hebrew, Miriam Halachmi, evaluate each student individually by conversing with them in Hebrew and rating their
level of competence. If a good standardized test becomes available we will adopt it.

In addition, we have replaced JS 245 with a new course, already approved by the Curriculum Committee, JS 180 W, which will serve as an entry-level gateway to the major and minor and also help to meet the college-wide demand for 100 W courses.

If any of the changes we have made are still unclear, please let me know. We thank you for giving us this important opportunity to clarify our catalogue copy.
JEWISH Studies at Vanderbilt offers an interdisciplinary academic program that facilitates the critical study of Jewish history, religion, language, philosophy, politics, culture, society, music, art, and literature across continents and periods. Integral to understanding crucial moments in the formation of Christianity and Islam as well as distinct episodes in the cultures of the modern Middle East, Europe, and America, the program accesses the resources of the entire university to explore Judaism, its evolution and expression from biblical times to the present. This interdisciplinary program reflects Vanderbilt’s commitment to advancing the understanding of other cultures and traditions. Students of all backgrounds will find in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt a wide array of material and methodologies, presented by scholars from history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, philosophy, literature, and art. Students may focus on several areas of concentration and tailor the major to their academic and career interests. They will also have access to courses offered by the schools of business, divinity, education, law, medicine, and music; they will have access to the Zimmerman Judaica collection as well as the opportunity to study abroad, pursue internships locally or nationally, and do research in archives overseas. The interdisciplinary nature of Jewish studies offers excellent preparation for graduate studies and provides an outstanding academic foundation for a variety of rewarding career paths. Visit www.vanderbilt.edu/jewishstudies for more details.

Program of Concentration in Jewish Studies

The major in Jewish Studies requires a minimum of 30 hours.

1. **Foundational course**, 3 hours. JS 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies: Brothers and Others.
2. **Hebrew**, 6 hours. Intermediate Hebrew (Hebrew 113a–b). Proficiency at the level of Intermediate Hebrew can be demonstrated through testing.
3. **Focus courses**, 12 hours selected from 3 of 4 subfields of study:
   - Biblical Studies
   - Antiquity and the Medieval World
   - Modern and Contemporary Experience
   - Culture, Philosophy, and Literature
4. **Senior seminar**, 3 hours. JS 295, Senior Seminar, or JS 296, Senior Project in Jewish Studies.

Electives (minimum of 6 hours)

In addition to courses drawn from departments and the professional schools, non-traditional course work may also be selected, including archaeology at Tel Megiddo (Israel), service learning, and internships. Study abroad is encouraged and can be fulfilled with Jewish Studies in Prague and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Honors Program

The Honors Program in Jewish Studies affords superior students a more intensive concentration within their major field. The program requires:

1. 3.0 cumulative grade point average
2. 3.25 grade point average in Jewish Studies
3. Completion of the junior year
4. 6 hours in Honors sections (JS 298a–298b), including completion of thesis—these hours may count toward the major
5. Honors thesis to be completed by mid-spring of the senior year
6. Successful completion of an honors oral examination on the topic of the thesis

Minor in Jewish Studies

The minor in Jewish Studies provides a basic understanding of Jewish history and culture across continents and the past three millennia. The minor requires a minimum of 18 hours.

Core Requirements (15 hours)
1. Foundational course, 3 hours. JS 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies: Brothers and Others.
2. Language, 6 hours, Elementary Hebrew (111a-111b). Proficiency at the level of Elementary Hebrew may be demonstrated through testing.
3. Focus courses, 6 hours. (See major for categories)

Electives (minimum of 3 hours)

Special Topics courses or First-Year Writing Seminar courses dealing with topics related to Jewish Studies may be counted with the approval of the major or minor adviser.

LANGUAGE: 230 Advanced Arabic. Hebrew: 111a–111b, Elementary Hebrew (may not be counted towards the major); 113a–113b, Intermediate Hebrew; 201, Grammar and Composition; 289, Independent Study.

JEWISH STUDIES: 115F, First Year Seminars; 180W Introduction to Jewish Studies: Brothers and Others; 120, Islam and the Jews; 121, Introduction to Jewish History; 157, Modern Jewish History; 135W, Introduction to Hebrew Literature; 155, American Jewish Life; 156, The Holocaust; 194, Selected Themes in Jewish Studies; 235W, Hebrew Literature in Translation; 244, Freud and Jewish Identity; 245, Major Themes in Jewish Studies; 246, Berlin and Jewish Modernity; 250, The Problem of Evil in Judaism; 251, Mysticism and Myth in Modern Jewish Thought; 252, Social Movements in Modern Jewish Life; 253W, Witnesses Who Were Not There: Literature of the Children of Holocaust Survivors; 254, Jewish Literary Centers; 255, Zionism: Politics, Religion, and Ethnicity; 256, Power and Diplomacy in the Modern Middle East; 280, Contemporary Jewish Issues; 288a–288b, Internship (288a, Internship Training; 288b, Internship Research); 289, Independent Study; 290, Directed Readings; 294, Special Topics; 295, Senior Seminar; 296, Senior Project; 298a–298b, Senior Honors Research Seminar.


Introduction to Islam; 251, Islamic Mysticism; 254, The Qur’an and Its Interpretations; 260, Rabbinic Thought and Theology.


CULTURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND LITERATURE:

For additional curricular options, please consult the Jewish Studies Program Web site, www.vanderbilt.edu/jewishstudies.