Introduction to Judaism (RELG 383)
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Course description
Why do Jews eat crackers on Passover and why are they square? Is kosher food blessed by rabbis? How is Judaism different from Christianity or Islam? How does the Holocaust impact twenty-first century American Jews? Why are there so many Jewish stories on the Daily Show? We will approach these questions through the lens of the Haggadah, a ritual manual Jews read during Passover. This "living text", arguably the most popular Jewish book after the Hebrew Bible, will be our key to unlock a number of ideas that have shaped the Jewish experience such as the Oral Torah, the emphasis on prayer and social justice, sanctification of daily life, but also the impact of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, of feminism and gay and lesbian rights.

Learning outcomes
On successful completion of this course, students will be able to
- Identify basic elements of the history and writings of rabbinic Judaism
- Illustrate Jewish experiences at the example of the Haggadah
- Synthesize and analyze the variety of Jewish experiences
- Discuss the basics of “Judaism” in writing and in discussion

Please purchase
- JPS Commentary on the Haggadah, JPS Society, 2008
- Additional readings are available on Blackboard (BB)

Grade breakdown
- Participation (online quizzes, blogposts, in-class writing assignments etc.): 25%
- Syllabus quiz: 5% (January 12)
- First 1-page paper: 5% (January 17)
- 2-page book review, including presentation (5%): 15% (sign-up for review in second week of the semester)
- 5-page research paper: 15% (due April 10)
- Midterm: 20% (February 7)
- Final: 15%

Grading scale: 100-90=A; 86-89=B+; 80-85=B; 76-79=C+; 70-75=C; 66-69=D+; 60-65=D; < 59 =F

Overall structure:
Introduction
Welcome—who’s a Jew? What is Judaism? Can we talk of Judaism?

From Adam to Columbia, SC, a whirlwind tour through Jewish sacred history

The Haggadah—a Jewish ritual manual

Reading the story of the Exodus

Sacred Time

Holidays: it’s all about the Exodus

Shabbat: centering the week

Rabbinic Judaism

R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar ben Azariah, R. Akiva, R. Tarfon: Who are these guys and what do they want? The Oral Torah

The Oral Torah today—Eternal Law?

Daily Life

Jewish Prayer

Daily Sacred Acts

That’s not kosher! And: watch your mouth!

The Haggadah

Maggid: Writing the reader into the story of redemption

Social Justice

Messianism

Sephardic Passover. Jews & Muslims

Jewish food. Shulkhan Orekh: Eating it up or what’s so Jewish about matzah ball soup?

Jewish Music

Passover & Easter: tricky times for Jews & Christians

Ancient quarrels

Easter and Passover in the Middle Ages

Roundtable discussion: Comparing Haggadot.

Making it count: Passover (and Jews) today

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising on Passover, and on Hitler’s birthday

Jews and Christians celebrating the Passover together

Contemporary Christian uses of Passover