EXPOS 20: Jewish Identity in American Culture

What does it mean to be Jewish in America in 2016? At a time when a majority of American Jews does not belong to a synagogue and an estimated one-third of married American Jews are married to non-Jews, is there such a thing as a shared identity among American Jews? This course will examine representations of Jews in American culture in an attempt to understand how Jewish-American culture has evolved since World War II, as well as how shifts in the cultural conversation about minorities in America have affected our understanding of Jewish identity. As we consider recent works of literature, art, film, and television, we will question how they challenge and reinforce Jewish stereotypes, and how they continue to shape our ideas about assimilation, the Holocaust, ethnicity, and religious practice in America. We will begin by examining stories of assimilation by authors including Allegra Goodman, Philip Roth, and Nathan Englander. We will then consider arguments about how the Holocaust should be represented or commemorated, along with recent representations of the Holocaust, including Art Spiegelman’s Maus, Cynthia Ozick’s “The Shawl,” and Larry David’s Curb Your Enthusiasm “survivor episode.” In the final unit of the course, students will choose their own sources as they research and develop their ideas about Jewish identity in American culture.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Harvard Guide to Using Sources (usingsources.fas.harvard.edu)
Course readings (distributed in class)
PDF files available on course website
Book (available at the Coop and elsewhere): Art Spiegelman, Maus

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Overview
This course, like all Expos courses, is divided into three units based on specific assignment types and writing skills. While the focus of each unit will be on the writing skills, we will develop those skills through the themes of the course.

In Unit I we will look at short stories that grapple in some way with assimilation of Jews in American culture. Our writing goal in this unit will be to develop a close reading of a single text, the building block for much of the writing you do in your other classes. Although the texts we'll focus on will be fiction, we'll talk about how close reading skills apply when analyzing other texts as well. Short stories include Allegra Goodman's "Onionskin," Philip Roth's "Conversion of the Jews," and Nathan Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank."

In Unit II we will consider some recent theoretical writing about how the Holocaust has been viewed in the context of other atrocities, along with some texts in which American authors and artists consider the Holocaust. Our writing goal in this unit will be to develop an essay in which one text is considered in relation to another (sometimes called a "lens" essay or a "testing a theory" essay). Primary texts include Art Spiegelman's Maus, episodes of Curb Your Enthusiasm, and Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl."

Theoretical texts will include Lawrence Langer's "Preempting the Holocaust" and Philip Lopate's "Resisting the Holocaust."

In Unit III you will have the opportunity to choose your own topic related to how Jews are represented in American culture by examining a text in its cultural context. Our writing goal in this unit will be to build a research essay based on an original question, using appropriate sources to develop the essay.

As with all Expos courses, the center of this course is the writing that you will do. Just as each unit adds a new layer of questions to our study Jewish identity in American culture, each unit also presents a new writing challenge while building on the previous assignments. By the end of the term, you will have written three distinct and recognizable kinds of academic essays. In each unit, you will be required to complete a series of response papers that should help you write your papers. I also expect you to have done the reading and any written responding assigned for each day, to speak in class, to respond to drafts of other students as required on the day indicated, and, to come to class regularly.

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we will work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment.
Collaboration
All written work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is not allowed. Because this is a writing course, however, we will spend time in class developing and refining our ideas about the course material. Class members will offer feedback and suggestions in the context of peer review and workshop, and this type of collaborative work is allowed. You don't need to acknowledge these general discussions in your paper, nor do you need to acknowledge conversations with tutors at the Writing Center about your paper. If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, you can do so as a footnote at the beginning of the paper.

Grades
Essay #1 will count for 20% of your grade, essay #2 for 30%, and essay #3 for 40%. Your diligence in class, on response papers, and in drafting (a draft may not be polished but should always be a serious paper, not something dashed off) will count for 5%. The final 5% of your grade will come from the cover letters you write to me for essays 2 and 3 (more information on this will be provided when we begin Unit II).

For a given essay, an "E" is failing; a grade in the "D" range suggests more than one serious deficiency; a grade in the "C" range indicates a fair essay that is still deficient in some important area; a grade in the "B" range indicates a good essay, which has done fairly well what the assignment requires but has one or more weak spots; an "A" or "A-" indicates an outstanding performance: one that stands out from most essays in the class and so can be given to only a few in any batch--though it is attainable. I will hand out detailed grading guidelines.

Format for papers
Use a font not much bigger or smaller than this one (12 point is ideal), with margins of an inch on the top and an inch and a quarter on the sides. Put your name in the top right corner, with course number and hour a space below that, then the date of submitting below that, and below that name the assignment (e.g. Draft of essay 1, Revision of essay 3). Put your title at the top-center of your first page; generally, a title page will seem excessive for papers under 10 pages or so, unless your instructor asks for one. Your paper should be double-spaced.

Format for attached files
When you send a paper to me by email, please name the file in the following way:

Yourlastname/whichassignment/draftorrevision

So if I were submitting my revision of essay 2, I would call the file

Rosenzweigessay2final or Rosenzweig.essay2.final

If you upload your paper to the course website, it will be named automatically.

Participation
In a course like this, which involves a lot of small-group work and student-led discussion, you have a responsibility not only to yourself but also to your classmates to show up for class, to show up on time, and to show up prepared. When you work in small groups I expect you to be as prepared and articulate as you are in general class discussions. Class starts punctually at ten minutes past the hour. If you're more than ten minutes late to class, you'll be counted absent.

Conferences
We will have at least three conferences over the course of the semester to discuss your writing and ideas. I expect you to be prepared for these conferences— to have reviewed your draft or ideas and to have developed a plan of attack for revision. Remember: Conference weeks are busy, so if you miss a conference, I may not be able to reschedule. I will also hold regular office hours on Tuesday afternoons from 1-2 (during non-conference weeks), and I am always happy to make an appointment at another time if you wish to meet with me.

E-mail
I'll try to use e-mail as much as possible to relay information and to hold in-class announcements to a minimum. Please check your e-mail daily. You are responsible for any information I pass along electronically. I might also ask you to e-mail me certain assignments. I, too, will check my e-mail daily. Be advised, though, that I don't check email late at night and check it infrequently on weekends.

Writing Center
If you'd like extra help on your essays in Expos or other classes, make an appointment at the Writing Center by logging onto its Web site: writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu

Deadlines
All deadlines in this course are firm, but I do recognize that sometimes the press of work during a semester can become overwhelming. Thus each of you is entitled to one 24-hour extension for a draft or final draft of an essay, provided you tell me that you're taking your extension. (If a deadline is on a Friday, your "24-hour" extension is until noon Sunday. You choose if and when you're taking an extension.) Except in the case of medical or family emergency (in which case I need a notice from a doctor or a dean), I give no other extensions. If, due to such an emergency, you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible so that we may work out an alternative schedule of due dates and times.

There are serious consequences to missing deadlines. If you've already taken your 24-hour extension and you hand in a draft or final version of an essay late, your final essay grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a grade per day.
Expository Writing Policy on Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your peril. This letter will also be sent to your Freshman Dean and to the Dean of the College, so the college can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Freshman Dean, as you will also be required in the case of protracted or repeated illness. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Freshman Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Expository Writing Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Freshman Dean and the Dean of the College. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*
Policy on Electronic Submissions

You will submit at least some of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.