

MELC 0318 = RELS 0318 = URBS 0318

ABRAHAMIC FAITHS & CULTURES: TEACH A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Wednesdays, 7-10 PM
Fisher-Bennett 224

Course Description:

Students in this experimental course will pioneer the teaching of a middle school syllabus on Abrahamic Faiths & Cultures that was created by Penn students, in one or more West Philadelphia schools as a Social Studies Unit. The goal of the middle school syllabus is to expose students (and perhaps their families) to religious traditions with which they may be unfamiliar, spark their curiosity and sensitize them to the beliefs and practices of others. If it is logistically possible, we would like to arrange for outings by middle-schoolers to houses of worship.

As it will take several weeks for the Netter Center to arrange clearances for each Penn student-teacher, the weeks before entering the public school classroom will be spent in a seminar-style “crash course” on the cultures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This course will be arranged thematically, and the assigned primary and secondary sources will be explored in class, in student-led discussions.

Middle School classes will generally be taught by clusters of two or more Penn students. The schools’ Social Studies teachers will be present in the classroom as well, and available for mentoring. Once Penn students start teaching, we will use the weekly Penn class to share feedback about classroom interactions, discuss challenges encountered, whether related to the course content or to personal interactions, and brainstorm about possible improvements. Penn students will also share ideas for “game-ifying” the course content, and discuss optimal ways of ascertaining what the middle school students have learned and retained. Emphases will be placed on enabling middle schoolers to share what they know from their own families and experiences, and on encouraging them to take pride in their neighborhood. As middle schoolers will be expected to create and present their own end-of-unit group projects on Abrahamic Faiths and Cultures, Penn student-teachers will start working with them toward this goal several weeks before the last class.

Course Objectives: By taking this class, you will:

- Hone your ability to read a text/film closely.
- Gain familiarity with key features of Jewish, Christian and Muslim belief and practice, and with significant moments in the history of each faith tradition.
- Better appreciate the range and diversity of perspectives within each of the Abrahamic faiths.

- Develop sensitivity to the historical, political, economic, regional and cross-cultural factors that shaped the beliefs and actions of Jews, Christians and Muslims in different times and places.
- Experience the challenge of translating your knowledge into units that are not only accessible to middle school students, but of interest and relevance to them, as well.
- Learn from failures as well as successes, and make quick adjustments where needed.
- Understand your responsibilities toward students, and be aware of what you can, and cannot offer them.
- Be a good listener for your classmates as you work together to troubleshoot problems you encounter.

Course Requirements and Grading

Regular attendance at all seminar sessions, informed participation in discussions of course materials, and facilitation of occasional sessions. (35%)

Active participation in discussions of experiences in the middle school classroom. (10%)

*2 Film reviews, both due Oct. 30th. (15%)

Keep a journal of your experiences in the middle school classroom. This will be checked from time to time. (15%)

Incorporate the journal data into a final report. This will include reflections on what did and did not work along with suggestions for improving the course in future semesters. (25%)

Grading Scale

98–100: A+; 94–97: A ; 90–93: A-; 87–89: B+; 83–86: B; 80–82: B-; 77–79: C+; 73–76: C; 70–72: C-; 66–69: D+; 65–60: D

Course Materials:

Course materials are on the course CANVAS site under “Assignments”. (Film/s will be sent to your PennBOX.) Please rely on the syllabus, and not on the CANVAS site when figuring out the sources to prepare for class. (Some sources are NOT on Canvas.)

Print out all pages of the assignment, and annotate them with your questions & comments prior to class. To save money, feel free to print multiple pages on a single sheet.

*** Films: Select ONE film from each of 2 categories**

A) “The Chosen”; “Ushpizin”; “Hasidism in America” B) “The Return of Martin Guerre”; “The Two Popes”; “The Apostle”. C) “The Message”; “Malcolm X”;

<https://www.amazon.com/Religions-of-the-World/dp/B019R1370M>

--NO TEXTING DEVICES ARE PERMITTED IN CLASS--

NO CLASS ON OCT. 2nd, 16th, 23rd & NOV. 27th. SOME MAKE-UP CLASSES WILL BE SCHEDULED

Class attendance and participation; Absences

Since each seminar session will consist of a group discussion of the readings /viewings assigned for that day, with little lecturing on my part, your attendance, preparation, and active participation are crucial for the success of the course as well as for your success in it. Please complete the assigned readings before class, have them in front of you during class, and be prepared to discuss various points or questions they raise.

If you are ill and cannot attend a class, please send me an email ahead of time. Your specific situation will help me determine the type of remedial arrangement to suggest in order to prevent you from falling behind in your coursework.

Wellbeing

If you have respiratory symptoms but are able to attend class, please wear a mask. If you are experiencing course-induced anxiety, please let me know by email and I will work together with you (privately) to see if any accommodations can be made. If you have fallen behind in the readings, it is better, if possible, to attend class than to miss it. Please send me an email before class to let me know that you are facing challenging circumstances.

SYLLABUS

- 1) Aug. 28th: **Introduction, Goals of the Middle School Curriculum & Challenges**