

THIS SYLLABUS IS STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS!

NELC 0318 = RELS = URBS 0318

ABRAHAMIC FAITHS & CULTURES: DESIGN A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Spring, 2024

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Mondays, 1:45- 3:15

Course Description:

Students in this experimental course will collectively create a syllabus on Abrahamic Faiths & Cultures, designed for Middle Schoolers in West Philadelphia. In a future semester, the syllabus will be taught in certain Social Studies classes as a Penn ABCS course. In other words, we will be taking in different types of knowledge and “repackaging” it, selectively, into units that will engage a specific community of learners, spark their curiosity and sensitize them to the beliefs and practices of others.

The constituent components of this will enable you to (1) Acquire familiarity with basic features of Judaism, Christianity and Islam through the reading/viewing and analysis of primary and secondary sources. (2) Interrogate religious leaders and educators of West Philadelphia in order to gain their advice on engaging pupils in the neighborhood, and perhaps their families, as well. (3) Learn to transpose complex ideas into grade-appropriate units of knowledge, emphasizing games and group projects. (4) Brainstorm about projects that Penn, through its Netter Center for Community Partnerships, might launch to enhance pride in the neighborhood, drawing on the energies of pupils, their families, district educators and religious leaders, as well as the Penn student body.

There will be two types of assignments to prepare before most seminar sessions. (A) Critical reading/viewing and annotating of the assigned sources. Your investment in this process will be crucial to the quality of class discussions. (B) Every other week, you will produce a sample Middle School lesson plan on the content covered in class. The process will involve both data selection and the identification of group games, activities and projects to mediate the information in an engaging way. At the start of each class, the lesson plans, shared in advance, will be discussed, workshop-style, so that the class as a whole might collectively identify what to include in the final curriculum. In each of the final two class sessions, a team of students will present their collaboratively-constructed syllabi on designated topics the Middle School curriculum,

Weekend visits to houses of worship will be scheduled, along with other relevant experiential outings.

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.

--NO TEXTING DEVICES ARE PERMITTED IN CLASS--

NO CLASSES ON APR. 22nd & APR 29TH. MAKE UP CLASSES WILL BE SCHEDULED.

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.
- come to 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.
- practice “repackaging” complex units of factual knowledge into grade-appropriate units that will excite student curiosity.
- learn from, and incorporate the recommendations of community leaders who speak from experience.
- experience religious practices (including prayer) with which you may have been unfamiliar.
- evaluate written and visual sources for possible inclusion in a Middle School curriculum.
- work collaboratively with others in order to refine ideas and produce a single curriculum

Requirements & Grading: Your course grade will be based on these components:

- Class attendance and participation (20%)
- In 10 class sessions, present two questions/comments on the readings in order to spark discussion. Submit hard copies at the end of class. (20%)
- Create lesson plans to be workshopped by the class. (25%)
- Written 1-2 page reflections on visits to houses of worship & other sites (10%)
- Evaluation of middle school level fiction (5%)
- Presentation on 2 challenges faced by communities of faith (10%)
- Team creation and presentation of the Middle School syllabus on assigned units (10%)

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

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) Jan. 22: Intro to Syllabus, Goals of the Course, Workshop Format

How might a Middle School course on Abrahamic Faiths & Cultures contribute to the W. Phila community? Four stakeholders: pupils, their families, their faith communities, U of P.

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenges?

Discuss sample topically-sequence syllabus for Middle School course

Brainstorm A) questions to get Middle Schoolers thinking about Religion, Abrahamic Religion, and B) classroom activities to engage them in these questions.

2) Jan. 29: Conceptions of God & of the Divine-Human Connection

["God in Judaism"; "God in Christianity"; "God in Islam";
"Principles of Curricular Design for Middle School Social Studies classes"
"Crafting a Middle School Lesson plan"]

-Visit from educator in W. Phila schools

3) Feb. 5: Origins of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Beliefs & Sources of Authority

- Workshop lesson plans: “*Conceptions of God & of the Divine-Human Connection*”
- schedule outings to houses of worship

[Hebrew Bible; God- biblical monotheism; God-Torah-Israel; Jewish Nationhood; Exodus; Sinai-Hebrew Bible-Rabbis; Temple’s destruction; Messiah; Rabbinic Sources; New Testament; Christian Creeds; Life & Teachings of Jesus; Death & Resurrection; Christian global missionizing; 2nd Coming; Rapture
Quran & Quranic Recitation; Pillars of Islam; Islam’s Meaning; Islamic Beliefs; Shahada; Becoming a Muslim; Shariah; Day of Judgment]

- Visit from religious leader

4) Feb. 12: Areas of Overlap and Differences

- Workshop lesson plans: “*Origins Judaism, Christianity, Islam: Sources of Authority*”

[Create a chart/Venn diagram indicating areas of overlap (and non-overlap) between the 3 faiths. Be prepared to discuss: What utility is there to the notion of “Abrahamic Faiths”?
Levinson, “Idea of Abrahamic Religions: Qualified Dissent”]

- Visit from religious leader

5) Feb. 19: Where Religion is Practiced: Where & How People Pray

- Workshop lesson plans: “*Areas of Overlap and Differences*”

[synagogue; Jewish prayers and blessings
Power of Xan prayer; Catholic Prayers, Sacraments; Rosary; Way of the Cross; Protestant Prayers; Churches
Salat-daily prayer; Muslim call to prayer; Mosque, Minaret, Mihrab; Jumah-Friday Prayer; Islamic Calligraphy/Design]

- Interactive World Map of Religions
- Visit from religious leader

6) Feb. 26: Diversity Within Religious Cultures

Workshop lesson plans, “*Where Religion is Practiced: Where & How People Pray*”

[“Hasidism in America”; selections from *Autobiography of Malcolm X*;
Reform; Conservative; Orthodox; Ultra-Orthodox; Jewish Counterculture; Jewish political liberalism
Post-Vatican II Catholicism; Priests, Monks & Nuns; Orthodox Christian Churches; Protestantism; Evangelicalism-fundamentalism;

Shi'i-Sunni divide; Sufism; Islamism; Nation of Islam]
-Visit from religious leader

7) Mar. 11: Food & Life Cycle Celebrations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Diversity Within Religious Cultures*”

-discuss films watched over the break

[Kosher laws; *brit milah* (circumcision); *bar/bat mitzvah*; Jewish wedding; Jewish funeral & mourning;

Baptism by water & spirit; Marian devotion; Christian weddings; Christian funerals

Halal Food; Muslim Life Cycle]

- Group A presentation of audio-visual resources

- Presentations on the Middle School fiction you read & your evaluation of its value

8) Mar. 18: Holidays & their Practice in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Life Cycle Celebrations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*”

[Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur; Sukkot; Hanukkah, Purim, Passover & Shavuot; Advent & Christmas; Lent; Ash Wednesday & Easter;

Zikkr; Hajj & Eid al-Adha; Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr; Mawlid al-Nabi

- Group B presentation of audio-visual resources

- Presentations on the Middle School fiction you read & your evaluation of its value

9) Mar. 25: Significant Events in Jewish History

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Holidays & their Practice in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*”

[post-biblical Judaism; Diaspora; Kabbalah & Hasidism; Jewish Emancipation & engagement with modernity; antisemitism & Holocaust; Zionism& Israel;

10) Apr. 1: Significant Events in Christian History

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Significant Events in Jewish History*”

Birth of church; Catholic Church & communities; Protestant movement; Vatican II

11) Apr. 8: Significant Events in Islamic History

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Significant Events in Christian History*”

[Islamic Empires- history & geography; Muslim Reform Movements; Colonialism’s Impact on Muslims; Contemporary Middle East]

12) Apr. 15: Challenges Faced by Communities of Faith Today

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Significant Events in Islamic History*”

[Suburban Post WWII Jud; Challenge of Jewish assimilation; Feminism in Judaism; Islam in Us, post 9/11; Public vs. Private for Muslim Americans;

- Presentations on “Challenges Faced by Communities of Faith Today”

13) ? Apr. 19: Presentations on the Middle School Syllabus: A

-Workshop lesson plans: “*Challenges Faced by Communities of Faith Today*”

14) ? Apr. 26: Presentations on the Middle School Syllabus: B & Course Wrap Up