Proposal for the Creation of an Interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies

Rice University

Dr. Matthias Henze and Dr. Gregory Kaplan

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Jewish Studies is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses the texts, history, languages, philosophy, and culture of Jews and Judaism as they have endured over three millennia and throughout the world. Spread across the Humanities and Social Sciences, Jewish Studies broadly examines topics including the Bible and its impact on history, structures of myth and ritual, national identity in Diaspora, aesthetic representations of otherness, the relations of history and memory, philosophical discussion of God, and others. Investigating the foundations and development of these various topics as well as their interaction with and influence on other traditions provides an opportunity to explore the continuities and diversity of Jewish life and thought.

The interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies will organize undergraduate students and courses that are presently growing at Rice due to three factors: (1) the desire of several faculty members and administrators to create a robust Jewish Studies program at Rice; (2) the Rice–Israel Initiative spearheaded by the President and Provost, with a professor currently visiting in Political Science; (3) a multi-year foundation grant from the Posen Foundation (Center for Cultural Judaism) for developing an undergraduate curriculum for the study of secular Jewish culture.

Undergraduate students will benefit from a course of studying Judaism because of the interdisciplinary status of Jewish Studies which crosses boundaries between departments and even schools; the substantive contribution to human knowledge which a people and culture that has remarkably proceeded from one of humanity’s oldest traditions into an entirely contemporary one; and the intersection between academic study and engagement with local institutions (such as the Holocaust Museum Houston) and public discussions of some urgency.

A minor in Jewish Studies provides a complement to any other major at Rice. It adequately prepares students to pursue a variety of careers. Our classes meet student interests in Jewish experience and its importance for history, literature, art, politics, law, and philosophy.

Jewish Studies at Rice: A Distinct Intellectual Profile

Mindful of our geographical location, the intellectual focus of our program Borderlines and Boundary Crossings in Jewish Studies will be the interchange of the Jewish and the non–Jewish worlds, in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity. At present, we comprise a core faculty with specializations in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism, Jewish culture and Art History, Jewish Philosophy and modern Judaism – whose interests range from Dead Sea Scrolls to Yiddish illustrations to Baruch Spinoza. Faculty affiliated with the minor pursue a wide array of interests, including German–Jewish history and literature, Judeo–Arabic, Exile literature, the modern Middle–East, the Arab–Israeli conflict, Jewish mysticism, and Jewish autobiographies.

Due to rapid changes at Rice, in the field of Jewish Studies, and in the world at large, our program is uniquely positioned on a cutting edge. As Rice expands its national and international
profiles, Jewish Studies will offer ways to enhance connections between Rice and educational and political institutions. By taking advantage of our regional location, Rice presents Jewish Studies with opportunities to excel in the study of Latin American Jewish life, of Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim relations, of Jewish art and artists, and of Jewish contributions to the medical professions.

As the center of gravity in Jewish Studies shifts, Rice is poised to lead in several ways. In the past century Jewish Studies moved in focus “from text to context,” that is, from the exegesis of classical texts in Judaism to the explanation of how those texts fit into the social life of Jews. The future of Jewish studies is to explore the way in which non-canonical texts and other cultural products have disrupted the stable contexts, and those ruptured contexts have reformed textual exegesis. The questions of how texts, culture, and ideas intermingle with each other as well as distinguish groups and individuals have entered a new phase where theory and practice, tradition and innovation, religious and secular (Jewish) lives begin to take on new shapes and textures.

Rice enjoys a longstanding relationship with the USC Shoah Foundation Institute and their massive database of digitally recorded Holocaust survivor testimonies, which are used in many courses.

**Studying Judaism—Ancient, Medieval & Modern: An Integrated Curriculum**

Offering a minor in a self-contained interdisciplinary program boasts numerous successful models, including at Johns Hopkins, Princeton, University of Kentucky, Williams, and others (see Appendix #2).

The interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies at Rice is designed for students of all backgrounds. Several introductory courses are ideal for students with little or no previous knowledge, while more advanced students may elect to take predominantly upper-level courses, or even focus on the study of the Hebrew language, culture, and literature.

Our courses offer students the opportunity to explore a range of aspects regarding the academic study of Judaism, including Jewish history, philosophy, literature, religion and art. At Rice, we are fortunate to be able to draw on course offerings from a variety of academic disciplines represented in the School of Humanities and the Social Sciences in a program that integrates these different disciplinary perspectives of Jewish Studies in one integrated curriculum.

The degree requirements for the Minor in Jewish Studies are as follows:

- Students earning a minor must take at least one core course, chosen from among the following three: Jews and Art (HART 377); Secular Judaism (RELI 208 or 324); or God, Time, & History (HIST 385 or RELI 381), which may count for the next requirement.

- Students must take at least one course in each of the following categories (listed by course below in Appendix 1): history, language, and text; culture and literature; philosophy, mysticism, and ethics. If a course is listed in more than one category,
students can elect for which category the course counts, yet each course can only apply to
one category.

- No more than two courses in Hebrew or Biblical Hebrew will count towards the Minor.
- No more than two courses listed or cross-listed in Religious Studies will count towards
  the Minor.
- At least three courses must be at 300-level or higher.
- No more than three courses can apply from transfer credits.

The interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies draws on a variety of course offerings, with
complimentary contributions from the Center for the Study of Languages and various
departments in the Schools of Humanities and the Social Sciences. Below is a complete list of
courses that are currently offered regularly, if not annually, at Rice in Jewish Studies. The
authority over course offerings and the content of courses rests with the departments involved.

The Center for the Study of Languages

HEBR 101     Introduction to Modern Hebrew Language and Culture
HEBR 102     Introduction to Modern Hebrew Language and Culture
HEBR 201     Intermediate Modern Hebrew Language and Culture
HEBR 202     Intermediate Modern Hebrew Language and Culture

The Art History Department

HART 377     Jews and Art (Wolfthal: to be taught 2009-2010)
HART xxx     Art of the Book, East and West (Leoni and Wolfthal; to be
taught 2009-2010)
HART xxx     Multicultural Europe (Wolfthal; to be taught 2009-2010)

The German Department

GERM 121     From Kafka to the Holocaust: Discourse in Alienation
             (Weissenberger)
GERM 125     Between Resistance and Collaboration: Individuals
             Responding to National Socialism (Kecht)
GERM 322     Marx, Freud, Einstein: Forebears of Modernity
             (Weissenberger)
GERM 329     Literature of the Holocaust and Exile (Weissenberger)
GERM 340     Walter Benjamin: Aesthetics, History, and Politics (Steiner)

The History Department

HIST 204     Secularism and/or Judaism (Kaplan)
HIST 307     Imperial Rome From Caesar to Diocletian (Maas)
HIST 308     The World of Late Antiquity (Maas)
Program Structure & Plans for the Future

It is our expectation that, soon after its inception, the interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies will grow substantially and the number of course offerings will increase. To oversee the growth, an advisory committee has been formed. The make-up of the committee reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the minor. It is chaired by the director of the minor, Dr. Matthias Henze of the Department of Religious Studies. Other members are Dr. Gregory Kaplan of the Department of Religious Studies, Dr. Klaus Weissenberger of the Department of German Studies, and Dr. Paula Sanders of the Department of History and Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at Rice.

Three faculty members will serve as advisors. They are Dr. Matthias Henze, Dr. Gregory Kaplan, and Dr. Diane Wolfthal, a new faculty member in the Art History Department.

The interdisciplinary Minor in Jewish Studies is part of a much larger Jewish Studies Program (JSP) at Rice, which is now beginning to take shape. Rice’s JSP will sponsor visiting professors to give lectures, both on campus and in other institutions in town; it will offer undergraduate
awards for travel and research; it will sponsor new courses and offer internships with various institutions in Houston, such as the Holocaust Museum, the Rothko Chapel, and the extensive art collection at Temple Beth Yeshurun; it will offer a robust Hebrew language program that will be open to the community; faculty affiliated with Rice’s JSP have already shown great interest in the creation of an educational outreach program to synagogues and through the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies. Finally, Rice’s JSP will provide an ideal platform for affiliated faculty to collaborate with our colleagues. On campus it will intersect productively with the Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance and the Center on Race, Religion, and Urban Life at Rice. Beyond the hedges it will form a research triangle with the University of Texas in Austin and Baylor University, both of whom have vibrant Centers for Jewish Studies.

The three-year foundation grant from the Posen Foundation (Center for Cultural Judaism) for developing an undergraduate curriculum for the study of secular Jewish culture will fund a post-doc position in the Humanities for two academic years (2010–2012). Funding for these courses is guaranteed, but, since the first post-doc has not yet been selected, the courses do not appear in the list above. It is our hope to raise funds to endow the post-doc position in Jewish Studies at Rice permanently.

A number of Rice faculty have already expressed interest in teaching courses in Jewish Studies. For example, Dr. Luisa Kluger, originally from Argentina (Ph.D. 2006, University of Houston), currently a lecturer in the Center for the Study of Languages, is eager to offer courses in her area of expertise, Jews in Latin and South America and Sephardic Studies. Drs. Moshe Vardi and Gregory Kaplan are developing a new course titled “Technology and Biblical Religions.”

This is the first year during which the Rice–Israel Initiative has brought a faculty member from Israel to the Rice campus. Dr. Ranan D. Kuperman is currently teaching a course on the Arab–Israeli conflict. As part of Rice’s major capital campaign, efforts are under way to endow the Rice–Israel Initiative permanently.

As the program expands in future years and the number of affiliated faculty grows, we will think about offering more degrees in Jewish Studies at Rice. The next steps could include the creation of a major and a terminal masters degree. However, at present there are no plans in place to work towards establishing another degree.

**Appendix 1: List of Courses Currently Offered By Required Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature and Languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GERM 121</td>
<td>From Kafka to the Holocaust: Discourse in Alienation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GERM 329</td>
<td>Literature of the Holocaust and Exile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEBR 101 or 102</td>
<td>Introduction to Modern Hebrew Language and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEBR 201 or 202</td>
<td>Intermediate Modern Hebrew Language and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIST 381 or RELI 385</td>
<td>God, Time &amp; History</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELI 122</td>
<td>The Bible and Its Interpreters</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELI 125 or 126</td>
<td>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew</td>
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RELI 127 or 128 Intermediate Biblical Hebrew
RELI 209 Introduction to Judaism
RELI 243 The Book of Genesis
RELI 383 The Dead Sea Scrolls
RELI 483 or 583 Mysticism Before Mysticism
RELI 553 The Dead Sea Scrolls

History and Culture
GERM 125 Between Resistance and Collaboration: Individuals Responding to National Socialism
HART xxx Art of the Book, East and West
HART xxx Multicultural Europe
HART 377 Jews and Art
HIST 204 Secularism and/or Judaism
HIST 307 Imperial Rome From Caesar to Diocletian
HIST 308 The World of Late Antiquity
HIST 381 God, Time & History
POLI 376 The Arab–Israeli Conflict
RELI 164 Who Is (Not) A Jew?
RELI 204 or 326 Secularism and/or Judaism
RELI 208 or 324 Secular Judaism: Ancient and Modern
RELI 209 Introduction to Judaism
RELI 210 or 330 Ethics in Judaism
RELI 381 The Messiah
RELI 385 God, Time & History
RELI 410 or 510 Apocalypse Then & Now

Thought and Philosophy
GERM 322 Marx, Freud, Einstein: Forbearers of Modernity
GERM 340 Walter Benjamin: Aesthetics, History, and Politics
RELI 210 or 330 Ethics in Judaism
RELI 371 or 561 Modern Jewish Thought
RELI 373 or 562 Jewish Mysticism
RELI 443 or 565 Maimonides “Guide For The Perplexed”
RELI 461 or 563 Seminar in Spinoza
RELI 468 or 568 German–Jewish Idealism and Its Critics
Appendix 2: Other Schools with Comparable Jewish Studies Programs
Schools which only offer compatible minors in Jewish Studies include the following—

http://sites.jhu.edu/jewishstudies/index.html
http://www.princeton.edu/~judaic/
http://www.uky.edu/AS/JudaicStudies/index.html
http://www.williams.edu/jewishstudies/program/

Appendix 3: A list of Faculty Members Participating in the Jewish Studies Minor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Member</th>
<th>Center/Department</th>
<th>Courses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. David Cook</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>RELI 443/565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. April DeConick</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>RELI 483/583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Matthias Henze</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>RELI 122; 125–128; 243; 381; 383/553; 385/HIST 381; 410/510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Gregory Kaplan</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>RELI 164; 201/329; 204/326/His 204; 209; 210/330; 371/561; 373/562; 443/565; 461/563; 468/568</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Regina Kecht</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>GERM 125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Michael Maas</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>HIST 308; 381/RELI 385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Uwe Steiner</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>GERM 340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Klaus Weissenberger</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>GERM 121; 322; 329</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Diane Wolfthal</td>
<td>Art History</td>
<td>HART 377; plus two new courses</td>
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Appendix 4: Letters of Support

Dr. Gary Wihl, Dean of Humanities
Dr. Jeffrey Kripal, Chair of the Religious Studies Department
Dr. Klaus Weissenberger, Chair of the German Department
Dr. Joseph Manca, Chair of the Art History Department
Dr. Martin Wiener, Chair of the History Department
Dr. Wendy Freeman, Director of the Center for the Study of Languages
Article is related a critical study of 'Sarvadeshvritantsangraha' Sanskrit translation of Abul Fazal's Ain e Akbari. The language of paper is Urdu.

"Proposal for an interdisciplinary, case-study approach to the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum."

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