NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES & CIVILIZATION (NELC)

NELC 008 Critical Speaking Seminar
American political discourse, especially since September 11th, has often depicted Islam as an oppressive force from which both Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly women and gender/sexual minorities, must be saved. In this CWIC critical speaking seminar, we will investigate how oral and written narratives—such as political rhetoric, apologetics and historical sources—claim to establish unassailable “facts” about Islam, Muslims and the Middle East. We will also investigate how the notion of empire—both in its traditionally understood form in Islamic and European history, as well as in its iterations as US Military and soft power—privileges certain voices over others, and how we can reclaim the voices of the marginalized in both contemporary discourse as well as historical oral traditions.

Taught by: Rafii
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 014, GSWS 008
Prerequisite: None
Corequisite: none
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 009 Critical Writing Seminar in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations
This is a critical writing seminar. It fulfills the writing requirement for all undergraduates. As a discipline-based writing seminar, the course introduces students to a topic within its discipline but throughout emphasizes the development of critical thinking, analytical, and writing skills. For current listings and descriptions, visit the Critical Writing Program’s website at www.writing.upenn.edu/critical.
For BA Students: Writing Requirement Course
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 031 History of the Middle East Since 1800
A survey of the modern Middle East with special emphasis on the experiences of ordinary men and women as articulated in biographies, novels, and regional case studies. Issues covered include the collapse of empires and the rise of a new state system following WWI, and the roots and consequences of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Iranian revolution and the U.S.-Iraq War. Themes include: the colonial encounter with Europe and the emergence of nationalist movements, the relationship between state and society, economic development and international relations, and religion and cultural identity. Requirements: one paper and two take-home exams.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Kashani-Sabet
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: HIST 081
Activity: Recitation
1 Course Unit

NELC 032 Topics in 20th C. Middle East
If “the clash of civilizations” is the first image that jumps to mind when thinking about the modern Middle East, then this is the course for you. From the familiar narratives about the creation of modern nation-states to the oft-neglected accounts of cultural life, this course surveys the multi-faceted societies of the twentieth-century Middle East. Although inclusive of the military battles and conflicts that have affected the region, this course will move beyond the cliches of war and conflict in the Middle East to show the range of issues and ideas with which intellectuals and governments grappled throughout the century. The cultural politics and economic value of oil as well as the formation of a vibrant literary life will be among the topics covered in the course. Ty considering illustrative cultural moments that shed light on the political history of the period, this course will adopt a nuanced framework to approach the Arab/Israeli conflict, the history of the Gulf States, the Iran-Iraq War, and U.S. involvement in the region.
Taught by: Kashani-Sabet
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: HIST 084
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 036 The Middle East through Many Lenses
This freshman seminar introduces the contemporary Middle East by drawing upon cutting-edge studies written from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. These include history, political science, and anthropology, as well as studies of mass media, sexuality, religion, urban life, and the environment. We will spend the first few weeks of the semester surveying major trends in modern Middle Eastern history. We will spend subsequent weeks intensively discussing assigned readings along with documentary films that we will watch in class. The semester will leave students with both a foundation in Middle Eastern studies and a sense of current directions in the field.
Taught by: Sharkey H
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: CIMS 036
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 047 Magical Science: Sages, Scholars and Knowledge in Babylon and Assyria
From sympathetic rituals to cure sexual dysfunction to the sages’ esoteric creation of worlds through the manipulation of words, we will learn from the ancient writings of Assyria and Babylonia just what knowledge was, what it was good for, and how it was divided up. This interdisciplinary course will combine literary, anthropological, historical and cultural approaches to textual, archaeological and iconographic data to bring to life the world, words and beliefs of these ancient intellectuals.
Taught by: Tinney
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: Freshman Seminar
NELC 048 Introduction to Mesopotamian Civilization
This class provides a chronologically organized survey of ancient Mesopotamian culture and history from the dawn of urbanization to the advent of the Greeks. Material culture and primary texts in translation are discussed in their contexts, introducing alongside the history such topics as urbanization and state formation; the invention of writing and the development of education; the king and his scholars in the Assyrian empire; the epic of Gilgamesh and other major works of Sumerian and Akkadian literature. One class will be held at the Penn Museum and will include hands-on experience of cuneiform school texts.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Tinney
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 049 Myths of Ancient Mesopotamia
Iraq's ancient civilizations, Sumer, Babylon and Assyria, have emerged spectacularly from their ruin mounds over the last century and a half. In this class we will read the core myths of these cultures in translation and situate them in their literary, historical, religious and cultural contexts. The case of characters includes, among other, Enki, trickster and god of wisdom; Inanna, goddess of sex and war; and Marduk, warrior son, slayer of the sea, king of the gods and founder of Babylon. Themes range from creation to flood, from combat to the dangers of humans acting in the worlds of the divine, to the heroic peregrinations of Gilgamesh as he wrestles with monsters, fate and the pain of mortality.
Taught by: Tinney
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: Sometimes offered as a Freshman Seminar

NELC 051 History of Jewish Civilization I--Jews and Judaism in Antiquity: From the Bible to the Talmud
The course is an overview of Jewish history, culture, and society from its biblical settings through the Hellenistic-Roman, and early rabbinic periods. The course will trace the political, social, and intellectual-religious, and literary development of Judaism in its formative centuries, building from an awareness of the impact of imperial power on Jewish thoughts, politics, and culture. Topics to be covered include: the evolution of biblical thought and religious practice over time; Jewish writing and literary genres; varieties of Judaism; Judaism and Imperialism; the emergence of the rabbinic class and institutions.
Taught by: Dohrmann
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: HIST 139, JWST 156, NELC 451, RELS 120
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 052 Medieval and Early Modern Jewry
Exploration of intellectual, social, and cultural developments in Jewish civilization from the dawn of rabbinic culture in the Near East through the assault on established conceptions of faith and religious authority in 17th century Europe. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of Christian and Muslim "host societies" on expressions of Jewish culture.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Ruderman
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: HIST 140, JWST 157, RELS 121
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 053 The History of Jewish Civilization from the Late Seventeenth Century to the Present
This course offers an intensive survey of the major currents in Jewish culture and society from the late middle ages to the present. Focusing upon the different societies in which Jews have lived, the course explores Jewish responses to the political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges of modernity. Topics to be covered include the political emancipation of Jews, the creation of new religious movements within Judaism, Jewish socialism, Zionism, the Holocaust, and the emergence of new Jewish communities in Israel and the United States. No prior background in Jewish history is expected.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Ruderman
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: HIST 141, JWST 158, RELS 122
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 061 Literary Legacy of Ancient Egypt
This course surveys the literature of Ancient Egypt from the Old Kingdom through the Greco-Roman period, focusing upon theme, structure, and style, as well as historical and social context. A wide range of literary genres are treated, including epics; tales, such as the "world's oldest fairy tale;" poetry, including love poems, songs, and hymns; religious texts, including the "Cannibal Hymn"; magical spells; biographies; didactic literature; drama; royal and other monumental inscriptions; and letters, including personal letters, model letters, and letters to the dead. Issues such as literacy, oral tradition, and the question poetry vs. prose are also discussed. No prior knowledge of Egyptian is required.
Taught by: Houser Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 463
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 062 Land of the Pharaohs
This course provides an introduction to the society, culture and history of ancient Egypt. The objective of the course is to provide an understanding of the characteristics of the civilization of ancient Egypt and how that ancient society succeeded as one of the most successful and long-lived civilizations in world history.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Wegner
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: AFST 062
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 064 The World of Cleopatra
The figure of Cleopatra is familiar from modern stories, legends, and film. Was this famous woman a brazen seductress or a brilliant political mind? How many of these presentations are historically accurate? This class will examine the Ptolemaic period in Egypt (305-30 BCE), the time period during which Cleopatra lived, in an attempt to separate myth from reality. The Ptolemaic period is filled with political and personal intrigue. It was also a time of dynamic multiculturalism. Arguably one of the most violent and fascinating eras in ancient Egyptian history, the Ptolemaic period is largely unknown and often misunderstood. This course will examine the history, art, religion and literature of Egypt’s Ptolemaic period which culminated in the reign of Cleopatra VII.
Taught by: Houser Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 664
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 068 Art and Architecture in Ancient Egypt
This course will be an introduction to the art, architecture and minor arts that were produced during the three thousand years of ancient Egyptian history. This material will be presented in its cultural and historical contexts through illustrated lectures and will include visits to the collection of the University Museum.
Taught by: Silverman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ARTH 218, ARTH 618, NELC 668
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 101 Introduction to the Ancient Near East
The great pyramids and mysterious mummies of Egypt, the fabled Tower of Babel, and the laws of the Babylonian king Hammurabi are some of the things that might come to mind when you think of the ancient Near East. Yet these are only a very few of the many fascinating – and at time perplexing – aspects of the civilizations that flourished there c. 3300-300 BCE. This is where writing first developed, where people thought that the gods wrote down what would happen in the future on the lungs and livers of sacrificed sheep, and where people knew how to determine the length of hypotenuse a thousand years before the Greek Pythagoras was born. During this course, we will learn more about these other matters and discover their place in the cultures and civilizations of that area. This is an interdisciplinary survey of the history, society and culture of the ancient Near East, in particular Egypt and Mesopotamia, utilizing extensive readings from ancient texts in translation (including the Epic of Gilgamesh, "one of the great masterpieces of world literature"), but also making use of archaeological and art historical materials. The goal of the course is to gain an appreciation of the various societies of the time, to understand some of their great achievements, to become acquainted with some of the fascinating individuals of the time (such as Hatshepsut, "the women pharaoh," and Akhenaten, "the heretic king"), and to appreciate the rich heritage that they have left us.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Frame
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: ANCH 025, HIST 024
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 102 Intro to Middle East
This is the second half of the Near East sequence. This course surveys Islamic civilization from circa 600 (the rise of Islam) to the start of the modern era and concentrates on political, social, and cultural trends. Although the emphasis will be on Middle Eastern societies, we will occasionally consider developments in other parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Spain, where Islamic civilization was or has been influential. Our goal is to understand the shared features that have distinguished Islamic civilization as well as the varieties of experience that have endowed it with so much diversity.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Cobb, Sharkey
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: HIST 023
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Fulfills Cross-Cultural Analysis

NELC 103 Origin and Culture of Cities
The UN estimates that 2.9 of the world’s 6.1 billion people live in cities and that this percentage is rapidly increasing in many parts of the world. This course examines urban life and urban problems by providing anthropological perspectives on this distinctive form of human association and land use. First we will examine the "origin" of cities, focusing on several of the places where cities first developed, including Mesopotamia and the Valley of Mexico. We will then investigate the internal structure of non-industrial cities by looking at case studies from around the world and from connections between the cities of the past and the city in which we live and work today.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Zettler
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: ANTH 121, URBS 121
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Fulfills Cross-Cultural Analysis

NELC 104 Jerusalem through Ages
A study of Jerusalem, the sacred city for three different world religions, is fundamental to a rich understanding of the history and religions of the Middle East. Beginning in antiquity and continuing through the medieval and modern periods, this course will chronicle the rise, fall and reconstruction of Jerusalem many times over. Particular emphasis will be placed on the archaeology and architecture of the city, the phenomenology of sacred space, the meanings of Jerusalem in art, and the religious history of the city. We will investigate the meanings Jerusalem has had in the past and will also consider current questions about its future.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Offered through the College of Liberal and Professional Studies.
NELC 118 Iranian Cinema: Gender, Politics and Religion
This seminar explores Iranian culture, society, history and politics through the medium of film. We will examine a variety of cinematic works that represent the social, political, economic and cultural circumstances of contemporary Iran, as well as the diaspora. Along the way, we will discuss issues pertaining to gender, religion, nationalism, ethnicity, and the role of cinema in Iranian society and beyond. Discussions topics will also include the place of the Iranian diaspora in cinema, as well as the transnational production, distribution, and consumption of Iranian cinema. Films will include those by internationally acclaimed filmmakers, such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Asghar Farhadi, Bahman Ghobadi, Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Dariush Mehrjui, Tahmineh Milani, Jafar Panahi, Marjane Satrapi and others. All films will be subtitled in English. No prior knowledge is required.
Taught by: Entezari
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: CIMS 118, COML 120, GSWS 118, GSWS 418, NELC 618
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 119 Middle Eastern Cinema
In the past two decades, films from the Middle East have gained exceptional international reception. This course is designed to explore the reasons behind this reception through a study of the prevalent social, political, and historical themes and issues in Middle Eastern cinema. Questions such as women's laws, literature and its function, familial issues and gender roles, historical legacies and political tensions, and religion, will be discussed. This course assumes no previous knowledge of film studies or languages of the region. Films from Israel, the Arab World, Turkey, and Iran will be shown in subtitled versions.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: CIMS 119, COML 129
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 130 Introduction to the Qur'an
The goal of this course is to provide students with a general introduction to the holy scripture of the religion of Islam, the Qur'an. In particular, students will become familiar with various aspects of Qur'anic content and style, the significance of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition and religious practice, scholarly debates about the history of its text, and contemporary interpretations of it. Through close readings of a wide range of passages and short research assignments, students will gain first-hand knowledge of the Qur'an's treatment of prophecy, law, the Biblical tradition, and many other topics. No previous background in Islamic studies or Arabic language is required for this course.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S
Taught by: Lowry
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: RELS 140
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 133 Penn/Philadelphia/and the Middle East
This seminar explores the historic engagement of the University of Pennsylvania and its faculty, students, and graduates in the Near and Middle East. It does so while drawing on archives, rare books and manuscripts, and artifacts that are now preserved in the University Archives, the Penn Museum, and the Penn Libraries. Together we will consider how, beginning in the late nineteenth century, Penn scholars engaged in archaeological expeditions to celebrated sites like Ur (in what is now Iraq) and Memphis (in Egypt) and how some of these efforts influenced the late Ottoman Empire’s policies towards antiquities and museums. We will examine how Penn’s curriculum changed over time to accommodate Semitics, including the study of languages and biblical traditions, in light of or in spite of historic tensions at the university between secular and religious learning. We will assess how Penn responded to changing American popular attitudes and U.S. foreign policy concerns relative to the Middle East, including during the Cold War and post-2001 (post-9/11) eras. Finally, we will trace the stories or biographies of some individual objects in Penn collections in order to appreciate the university’s roles in collecting, preserving, analyzing, and disseminating knowledge about the region’s deep cultural heritage. Ultimately, by investigating and writing.
Taught by: Sharkey,H
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 134 Getting Crusaded
What did it feel like to get crusaded? In this course, we will examine the roughly two-century period from the call of the First Crusade in 1095 to the final expulsion of Latin Crusaders from the Middle East in 1291. Our examination will be primarily from the perspective of the invaded, rather than the invaders, as is usually done. How did the Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christians of the medieval Middle East respond to the presence of Frankish invaders from Europe?
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Cobb
Course offered fall; even-numbered years
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 136 Introduction to Islam
This course is an introduction to Islam as a religion as it exists in societies of the past as well as the present. It explores the many ways in which Muslims have interpreted and put into practice the prophetic message of Muhammad through historical and social analyses of varying theological, philosophical, legal, political, mystical and literary writings, as well as through visual art and music. The aim of the course is to develop a framework for explaining the sources and symbols through which specific experiences and understandings have been signified as Islamic, both by Muslims and by other peoples with whom they have come into contact, with particular emphasis given to issues of gender, religious violence and changes in beliefs and behaviors which have special relevance for contemporary society.
Taught by: Elias
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: RELS 143, SAST 139
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 145 Near Eastern Topics
Course topics will vary
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: Sometimes offered as a Benjamin Franklin Seminar.

NELC 150 Introduction to the Bible (The "Old Testament")
An introduction to the major themes and ideas of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), with attention to the contributions of archaeology and modern Biblical scholarship, including Biblical criticism and the response to it in Judaism and Christianity. All readings are in English.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: JWST 150, NELC 450, RELS 125
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 154 Women in Jewish Literature
This course introduces students of literature, women’s studies, and Jewish studies to the long tradition of women as readers, writers, and subjects in Jewish literature. All texts will be in translation from Yiddish and Hebrew, or in English. Through a variety of genres—devotional literature, memoir, fiction, and poetry—we will study women’s roles and selves, the relation of women and men, and the interaction between Jewish texts and women’s lives. The legacy of women in Yiddish devotional literature will serve as background for our reading of modern Jewish fiction & poetry from the past century. The course is divided into five segments. The first presents a case study of the Matriarchs Rachel and Leah, as they are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, in rabbinic commentary, in pre-modern prayers, and in modern poems. We then examine a modern novel that recasts the story of Dinah, Leah’s daughter. Next we turn to the seventeenth century Glikl of Hamel, the first Jewish woman memoirist. The third segment focuses on devotional literature for and by women. In the fourth segment, we read modern women poets in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. The course concludes with a fifth segment on fiction and a memoir written by women in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. “Jewish woman, who knows your life? In darkness you have come, in darkness do you go.” J. L. Gordon (1890)
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Hellerstein
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: GRMN 262, GSWS 162
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 155 ARCHAEOLOGY & THE BIBLE
The Hebrew Bible (Tanah) and archaeological research provide distinct, and at times conflicting, accounts of the origins and development of ancient Israel and its neighbors. Religion, culture and politics ensure that such accounts of the past have significant implications for the world we live in today. In this course we will discuss the latest archaeological research from Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan as it relates to the Bible, moving from Creation to the Babylonian Exile. Students will critically engage the best of both biblical and archaeological scholarship. Open discussions of the religious, social and political implications of the material covered will be an important aspect of the course.
Taught by: Zettler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 124, JWST 124, RELS 024
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 156 Great Books of Judaism
The Babylonian Talmud (Bavli), a product reflecting the collaborative effort of generations of sages, is the foundational legal and ethical document of rabbinic Judaism. Both the methods of interpreting this text—and their theoretical frameworks—have varied dramatically, evolving creatively throughout the generations. In the past century, theories of how to read the Talmud and hypotheses about its formation and redaction have opened up new avenues for understanding what the text says and, more importantly, how it works. Through in-depth examination of demonstrative legal passages, this course will contrast the insights generated by the major critical schools of the past century and with the interpretations of selected medieval scholars, the Rishonim. English translations will be provided alongside the original texts. Previous study of Talmud is helpful.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: COML 057, JWST 151, NELC 456, RELS 027
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 158 Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages in Translation
Course explores the cultural history of Jews in the lands of Islam from the time of Mohammed through the late 17th century (end of Ottoman expansion into Europe) —in Iraq, the Middle East, al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Primary source documents (in English translation) illuminate minority-majority relations, internal Jewish tensions (e.g., Qaraism), and developments in scriptural exegesis, rabbinic law, philosophy, poetry, polemics, mysticism and liturgy. Graduate students have additional readings and meetings. Spring 2015
Taught by: Fishman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 257, JWST 153, NELC 458, RELS 223
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 159 Modern Hebrew Literature and Culture in Translation
This course follows and analyzes the transformations in Israeli literature and cinema. The focus and the specific topic of the study changes from semester to semester. Topics include: The Holocaust; The Image of Childhood; Dream, Fantasy and Madness; Love and War; The Many Voices of Israel; The Image of the City, and other topics. While Israeli works constitute much of the course’s material, European and American literature and film play comparative roles. 5-6 film screenings per semester; The content of this course changes from semester to semester, and therefore, students may take it for credit more than once. This topic course explores aspects of Hebrew Literature, Film, and Culture. Specific course topics vary from semester to semester. See the Cinema and Media Studies (...NELC, JWST, ENGL, COML) website for a description of the current offerings.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Gold
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: CIMS 159, COML 282, ENGL 079, JWST 154
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: There will be five film screenings; the films will also be placed on reserve at the library for those students unable to attend. The content of this course changes from year to year, and therefore, students may take it for credit more than once.
NELC 166 The Religion of Ancient Egypt
Weekly lectures (some of which will be illustrated) and a field trip to the University Museum's Egyptian Section. The multifaceted approach to the subject matter covers such topics as funerary literature and religion, cults, magic religious art and architecture, and the religion of daily life.
Taught by: Silverman/Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 468, RELS 114
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 168 Women in Ancient Egypt
This class will examine the many roles played by women in ancient Egypt. From goddesses and queens, to wives and mothers, women were a visible presence in ancient Egypt. We will study the lives of famous ancient Egyptian women such as Hatshepsut, Nefertiti and Cleopatra. More independent than many of their contemporaries in neighboring areas, Egyptian women enjoyed greater freedoms in matters of economy and law. By examining the evidence left to us in the literature (including literary texts and non-literary texts such as legal documents, administrative texts and letters), the art, and the archaeological record, we will come away with a better understanding of the position of women in this ancient culture.
Taught by: Houser Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 568
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 180 Narrative Across Cultures
An introduction to literary study through a genre, either the short story or poetry. Versions of this course will vary widely in the selection of texts assigned. Some versions will begin with traditional stories or poems, including a sampling of works in translation. Others will focus exclusively on modern and contemporary American short fiction or poetry. This course is designed for the General Requirement, and is ideal for the students wishing to take an English course but not necessarily intending to major.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 125, ENGL 103, FOLK 125
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 182 Ancient Civilizations of the World
The archaeology of the complex societies of the Old and New Worlds from the end of the Paleolithic up to and including the earliest civilizations.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Zettler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 139, URBS 139
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 186 Jewish Mysticism
Survey of expressions of Jewish mysticism from Hebrew Scripture through the 21st century. Topics include rabbinic concerns about mystical speculation, the ascent through the celestial chambers - heikalot-, the Book of Creation, the relationship of Jewish philosophy and mysticism, techniques of letter permutation, schematization of the Divine Body, the prominence of gender and sexuality in kabalistic thought, the relationship of kabbalah to the practice of the commandments, Zohar, Lurianic kabbalah, Hasidism, New-Age Jewish spirituality and the resurgence of Jewish mysticism in the 20th century. All readings will be in English translation.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 102, JWST 126, RELS 126
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 201 Modern Middle Eastern Literature in Translation
The Middle East boasts a rich tapestry of cultures that have developed a vibrant body of modern literature that is often overlooked in media coverage of the region. While each of the modern literary traditions that will be surveyed in this introductory course-Arabic, Hebrew, Persian and Turkish-will be analyzed with an appreciation of the cultural context unique to each body of literature, this course will also attempt to bridge these diverse traditions by analyzing common themes such as modernity, social values, the individual and national identity-as reflected in the genres of poetry, the novel and the short story. This course is in seminar format to encourage lively discussion and is team-taught by four professors whose expertise in modern Middle Eastern literature serves to create a deeper understanding and aesthetic appreciation of each literary tradition. In addition to honing students’ literary analysis skills, the course will enable students to become more adept at discussing the social and political forces that are reflected in Middle Eastern literature, explore important themes and actively engage in reading new Middle Eastern works on their own in translation. All readings are in English.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Allen/Gold
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: COML 212
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Fulfills Cross-Cultural Analysis

NELC 218 Media and Culture in Contemporary Iran
This course is an introduction to the major cultural themes and trends of contemporary Iran. Through the lens of press, cinema, literature and drama, the course will examine the ways in which contemporary Iranian society has been subject to rapid change and transformation over the past century. This class is designed for both junior and senior students who are keen to better understand the cultural context of Iran as one of the most influential and significant countries in the Middle East.
Taught by: Shams Esmaeili
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 518
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
NELC 233 Arabic Literary Heritage
This course provides a survey of the genres and major figures in Arabic literary history from the 6th century up to the present day. Selections will be read in translation after a general introduction to the cultural background and a session devoted to the Qur'an and its influence, a sequence of sessions will be devoted to poetry, narratives, drama, and criticism. Each set of texts is accompanied by a collection of background readings which place the authors and works into a literary, political and societal context. This course thus attempts to place the phenomenon of "literature" into the larger context of Islamic studies by illustrating the links between Arab litterateurs and other contributors to the development of an Islamic/Arab culture on the one hand and by establishing connections between the Arabic literary tradition and that of other (and particularly Western) traditions.
Taught by: Fakhreddine
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 235 Food in the Islamic Middle East: History, Memory, Identity
In the tenth century, a scholar named Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq produced an Arabic manuscript called Kitab al-Tabikh ("The Book of Cooking"). This volume, which compiled and discussed the recipes of eighth-and ninth-century Islamic rulers (caliphs) and their courts in Iraq, represents the oldest known surviving cookbook of the Arab-Islamic world. Many more such cookbooks followed; in their day they represented an important literary genre among cultured elites. As one food historian recently noted, "there are more cookbooks in Arabic from before 1400 than in the rest of the world's languages put together". This course will take the study of Ibn Sayyar’s cookbook as its starting point for examining the cultural dynamics of food. The focus will be on the Middle East across the sweep of the Islamic era, into the modern period, and until the present day, although many of the readings will consider the study of food in other places (including the contemporary United States) for comparative insights. The class will use the historical study of food and "foodways" as a lens for examining subjects that relate to a wide array of fields and interests. These subjects include politics, economics, agricultural and environmental studies, anthropology, literature, religion, and public health. With regard to the modern era, the course will pay close attention to the social consequences of food in shaping memories and identities - including religious, ethnic, national, and gender-based identities - particularly among people who have dispersed or otherwise migrated.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: HIST 205
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 238 Introduction to Islamic Law
This course will introduce students to classical Islamic law, the all-embracing sacred law of Islam. Among the world’s various legal systems, Islamic law may be the most widely misunderstood and even misrepresented; certainly, misconceptions about it abound. Islamic law is, however, the amazing product of a rich, fascinating and diverse cultural and intellectual tradition. Most of the readings in this course will be taken from primary sources in translation. Areas covered will include criminal law, family law, law in the Quran, gender and sexuality, the modern application of Islamic law, Islamic government and other selected topics.
Taught by: Lowry
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: RELS 248
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 239 Migration and the Middle East
This reading-and discussion-intensive seminar examines the phenomenon of migration into, out of, within, and across the Middle East and North Africa. We will focus on the period from the late nineteenth century to the present, and will emphasize the cultural (rather than economic) consequences of migration. Along the way we will trace connections between the Middle East and other regions— notably the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Caucasus, and Western Europe. Readings are interdisciplinary and include works of history, anthropology, sociology, medical research, literature, political science, geography, and human rights advocacy. As students develop final projects on topics of their choice, we will spend time throughout the semester discussing tactics for research and writing.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ASAM 239, NELC 539, SAST 269
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 241 Iraq: Ancient Cities and Empires
This course consists of an analytical survey of civilization in the ancient Mesopotamia from prehistoric periods to the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C. A strong focus is placed on Mesopotamia (Iraq, eastern Syria) proper, but it occasionally covers its adjacent regions, including Anatolia (Turkey), north-central Syria, and the Levantine coast. As we chronologically examine the origin and development of civilization in the region, various social, political, economic, and ideological topics will be explored, including subsistence, cosmology, writing, trade, technology, war, private life, burial custom, and empire. Based on both archaeological and historical evidence, these topics will be examined from archaeological, anthropological, historical and art historical perspectives. Students will be exposed to a variety of theoretical approaches and types of relevant evidence, including settlement survey data, excavated architectural remains and artifacts, and written documents. The course aims to provide students with a strong foundation for further study in Near Eastern civilization.
Taught by: Zettler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 236, ANTH 636, NELC 641, URBS 236
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 242 Early Empires of the Ancient Near East: The Neo-Assyrian Empire
The Assyrians appear as destructive and impious enemies of the Israelites and Judeans in various books of the Bible and this view is reflected in Lord Byron’s poem: “The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, / and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold” (Hebrew Melodies. The Destruction of Sennacherib). In the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries BCE, Assyrian armies marched out from their homeland in northern Iraq to Iran in the East, Egypt in the West, the Persian Gulf in the south and central Turkey in the north, and they created the largest empire known up until that time. They built impressive palaces and cities, created great works of art and have left us a vast number of documents preserving ancient literature and scholarly knowledge. In the course we will look at the structure of the Assyrian state, Assyrian culture, the development of the Assyrian empire, and its sudden collapse at the end of the seventh century. While the course will emphasize the use of textual sources, archaeological and iconographic data will also be used to help us arrive at an understanding of the great achievements of the ancient Assyrians. The classes will be part lecture and part seminar.
Taught by: Frame
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AAMW 543, NELC 542
Prerequisites: NELC 101 or permission of the instructor.
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 244 Reading Ancient Mesopotamia
An introduction to the literature of Ancient Mesopotamia. The literature of ancient Mesopotamia flourished thousands of years ago in a culture all of its own, yet the survival of hundreds of thousands of written records challenges us to read it and make sense of it without simply approximating it to the realm of our own understanding. How can we learn to do this? Situating our understanding of how we read and how we understand culture within an interdisciplinary range of literary-critical and analytic approaches, we will approach this question by immersing ourselves in the myths tales and mentalities that made Mesopotamian literature meaningful. To give us a measure of our progress we will bracket the semester by reading Gilgamesh which is never less than a great story, but which will take on new layers of meaning as the semester develops and we learn to read the text in more and more Mesopotamian ways. As we journey through these mysterious realms we will reflect not only Mesopotamia and its immortal literature but on what it means to read and understand any cultures other than our own.
Taught by: Tinney
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 544
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 249 Myth in Society
In this course we will explore the mythologies of selected peoples in the Ancient Near East, Africa, Asia, and Native North and South America and examine how the gods function in the life and belief of each society. The study of mythological texts will be accompanied, as much as possible, by illustrative slides that will show the images of these deities in art and ritual.
Taught by: Ben-Amos
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 226, COML 357, FOLK 229
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 250 The Bible in Translation
This course introduces undergraduates and graduate students to one specific Book of the Hebrew Bible. “The Bible in Translation” involves an in-depth reading of a biblical source against the background of contemporary scholarship. Depending on the book under discussion, this may also involve a contextual reading with other biblical books and the textual sources of the ancient Near East. Although no prerequisites are required, NELC 250 is a perfect follow-up course for NELC 150 “Intro to the Bible.”
Taught by: Cranz
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 380, JWST 255, NELC 550, RELS 224
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 251 Dead Sea Scrolls
Exploration of the issues relating to the identification and history of the people who produced and used these materials as well as the claims made about the inhabitants of the Qumran site near the caves in which the scrolls were discovered, with a focus on what can be known about the community depicted by some of the scrolls, its institutions and religious life, in relation to the known Jewish groups at that time (the beginning of the Common Era). This will involve detailed description and analysis of the writings found in the caves -- sectarian writings, “apocrypha” and “pseudepigrapha” biblical texts and interpretations.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 225, NELC 651, RELS 225
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 252 Themes Jewish Tradition: Iberian Conversos: Jew-Christian?
Course topics will vary; they have included The Binding of Isaac, Responses to Catastrophes in Jewish History, Holy Men & Women (Ben-Amos); Rewriting the Bible (Dohrmann); Performing Judaism (Fishman); Jewish Political Thought (Fishman); Jewish Esotericism (Lorberbaum) Democratic culture assumes the democracy of knowledge - the accessibility of knowledge and its transparency. Should this always be the case? What of harmful knowledge? When are secrets necessary? In traditional Jewish thought, approaching the divine has often assumed an aura of danger. Theological knowledge was thought of as restricted. This seminar will explore the “open” and “closed” in theological knowledge, as presented in central texts of the rabbinic tradition: the Mishnah, Maimonides and the Kabbalah. Primary sources will be available in both Hebrew and English.
For BA Students: History and Tradition Sector
Taught by: Ben-Amos/ Dohrmann/Fishman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: FOLK 252, JWST 100, NELC 552, RELS 129
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
NELC 254 Jewish Humor
In modern American popular culture Jewish humor is considered by Jews and non-Jews as a recognizable and distinct form of humor. Focusing upon folk-humor, in this course we will examine the history of this perception, and study different manifestation of Jewish humor as a particular case study of ethnic in general. Specific topics for analysis will be: humor in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish humor in Europe and in America, JAP and JAM jokes, Jewish tricksters and pranksters, Jewish humor in the Holocaust and Jewish humor in Israel. The term paper will be collecting project of Jewish jokes.
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Taught by: Ben-Amos
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 259, FOLK 296, JWST 102
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 258 Jewish Folklore
The Jews are among the few nations and ethnic groups whose oral tradition occurs in literary and religious texts dating back more than two thousand years. This tradition changed and diversified over the years in terms of the migrations of Jews into different countries and the historical, social, and cultural changes that these countries underwent. The course attempts to capture the historical and ethnic diversity of Jewish Folklore in a variety of oral literary forms.
Taught by: Ben-Amos
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: COML 283, FOLK 280, JWST 260
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 266 History of Ancient Egypt
Review and discussion of the principal aspects of ancient Egyptian history, 3000-500 BC.
Taught by: Wegner
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 666
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 281 Topics In Anthropology and the Modern World
This course relates anthropological models and methods to current problems in the Modern World. The overall objective is to show how the research findings and analytical concepts of anthropology may be used to illuminate and explain events as they have unfolded in the recent news and in the course of the semester. Each edition of the course will focus on a particular country or region that has been in the news.
Taught by: Spooner
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: ANTH 100, ANTH 654, NELC 681, SAST 161
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 283 Introduction to Classical Judaism
This course will be a broad introduction for those with little or no knowledge of Judaism. It will be a sampling of several key themes in the religion, as well as several ways to think about both Judaism in particular and religion in general (what after all does it mean to "introduce" a religion?). We will read from several key texts in Jewish history, from Bible to Talmud, mystical and philosophical texts, and beyond. Practices and key concepts (i.e., sacred texts, law, ritual, diaspora, assimilation, Israel, interpretation...) will be studied as dynamic and changing institutions, against the background of historical change.
Taught by: Dohrmann
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 285 Jews Under Medieval Islam
This seminar will examine what Jews living in Muslim lands wrote during medieval times, focusing on a range of primary sources including poetry, Bible commentary, historiography and polemics. Through these sources we will develop an understanding of the place of this community in Jewish history as well as within the medieval empire of Islam.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S
Taught by: Goldstein
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AAMW 635, ARTH 235, ARTH 635, NELC 685, VLST 235
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 331 Iraq, Egypt, Algeria: Case Studies from the Arab World
This reading- and discussion-intensive seminar will use historical and political analyses, ethnographic studies, novels, and films to consider and compare the experiences of Iraq, Egypt, and Algeria in the modern period. Themes to be covered include the nature of local Arab and Arabic cultures; the impact and legacies of Ottoman and Western imperialism; the development of Islamist, nationalist, and feminist movements; the status of non-Arab or non-Muslim minorities (notably the Iraqi Kurds, Egyptian Copts, and Algerian Berbers); and patterns of social and economic change. The class will culminate in research projects that students individually design and pursue. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 531
Prerequisites: A university-level survey class in Middle Eastern and North African history.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
NELC 332 North Africa: History, Culture, Society
This interdisciplinary seminar aims to introduce students to the countries of North Africa, with a focus on the Maghreb and Libya (1830-present). It does so while examining the region's close economic and cultural connections to sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Readings will include histories, political analyses, anthropological studies, and novels, and will cover a wide range of topics such as colonial and postcolonial experiences, developments in Islamic thought and practice, and labor migration. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AFST 332, AFST 533, HIST 370, NELC 632
Prerequisites: A university-level survey course in Middle Eastern, African, or Mediterranean history.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 334 Africa and the Middle East
Taught by: Troutt Powell
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: AFST 373, HIST 412
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 335 Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Relations in the Middle East and North Africa: Historical Perspectives
A reading- and discussion-intensive seminar that addresses several recurring questions with regard to the Middle East and North Africa. How have Islam, Judaism, and Christianity influenced each other in these regions historically? How have Jews, Christians, and Muslims fared as religious minorities? To what extent have communal relations been characterized by harmony and cooperation, or by strife and discord, and how have these relations changed in different contexts over time? To what extent and under what circumstances have members of these communities converted, intermarried, formed business alliances, and adopted or developed similar customs? How has the emergence of the modern nation-state system affected communal relations as well as the legal or social status of religious minorities in particular countries? How important has religion been as one variable in social identity (along with sect, ethnicity, class, gender, etc.), and to what extent has religious identity figured into regional conflicts and wars? The focus of the class will be on the modern period (c. 1800-present) although we will read about some relevant trends in the early and middle Islamic periods as well. Students will also pursue individually tailored research to produce final papers. Prior background in Islamic studies and Middle Eastern history is required. Students must take a survey of modern Middle Eastern history or politics before enrolling in this class. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 102 or other relevant introductory courses on the Middle East.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 336 Nationalism and Communal Identity in the Middle East
This seminar views the phenomenon of nationalism as it affected the modern Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together we will consider the diverse components of nationalism, including religion, language, territorial loyalty, and ethnicity, and test the thesis that nations are "imagined communities" built on "invented traditions." At the same time, we will examine other forms of communal identity that transcend national borders or flourish on more localized scales. This class approaches nationalism and communal identity as complex products of cultural, political, and social forces, and places Middle Eastern experiences within a global context. Students must take a survey of modern Middle Eastern history or politics before enrolling in this class. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 536
Prerequisites: NELC 535
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 351 History and Civilization of Ancient Israel
This course is a study of ancient Israel from its pre-nation origins through the early Second Temple period. Topics include: methodological issues for the reconstruction of Israelite history; pre-Israelite Canaan - a bridge between empires; the patriarchal and Exodus traditions; Israelite settlement of Canaan; the rise of the monarchy; the Davidic dynasty; the states of Israel and Judah in the context of the greater ancient Near East; the fall of the Israelite states - the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles - and the return from exile in the Persian period. Special issues include: the development of monotheism; the role of the prophet in Israelite society; and the formation of Biblical corpus. Archaeological evidence from the land of Israel and other Near Eastern States, especially written material, will be utilized to supplement the Biblical sources.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 355 Ancient Interpretation of the Bible
Christianity and Judaism are often called “Biblical religions” because they are believed to be founded upon the Bible. But the truth of the matter is that it was less the Bible itself than the particular ways in which the Bible was read and interpreted by Christians and Jews that shaped the development of these two religions and that also marked the difference between them. So, too, ancient Biblical interpretation—Jewish and Christian—laid the groundwork for and developed virtually all the techniques and methods that have dominated literary criticism and hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) since then. The purpose of this course is to study some of the more important ways in which the Bible was read and interpreted by Jews and Christians before the modern period, and particularly in the first six centuries in the common era. We will make a concerted effort to view these interpretive approaches not only historically but also through the lens of contemporary critical and hermeneutical theory in order to examine their contemporary relevance to literary interpretation and the use that some modern literary theorists (e.g. Bloom, Kermode, Derrida, Todorov) have made of these ancient exegetes and their methods. All readings are in English translation, and will include selections from Philo of Alexandria, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Rabbinic midrash, the New Testament and early Church Fathers, Gnostic writings, Origen, and Augustine. No previous familiarity with Biblical scholarship is required although some familiarity with the Bible itself would be helpful.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 556, JWST 356, JWST 555, NELC 556, RELS 418
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 383 The Religious Other
Course explores attitudes toward monotheists of other faiths, and claims made about these “religious Others” in real and imagined encounters between Jews, Christians and Muslims from antiquity to the present. Strategies of “othering” will be analyzed through an exploration of claims about the Other’s body, habits and beliefs, as found in works of scripture, law, theology, polemics, art, literature and reportage. Attention will be paid to myths about the other, inter-group violence, converts, cases of cross-cultural influence, notions of toleration, and perceptions of Others in contemporary life. Primary sources will be provided in English.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 205, JWST 213, RELS 203
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 422 Intermediate Urdu Part II
This continuing second-year course allows students to continue improving their Urdu proficiency while also gaining a broad foundational understanding of Urdu society and culture throughout South Asia. The course provides students the tools needed to handle a variety of authentic written and spoken Urdu sources including film, music, media reports, folk tales, and simple literature. Students will also continue to increase their speaking and writing proficiency to be able to discuss a broad range of concrete, real-world topics. The course is designed for students with one year of previous Urdu or Hindi study or the equivalent proficiency.
For BA Students: Last Language Course
Taught by: Pien
Also Offered As: URDU 422
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 434 Arabic Literature and Literary Theory
This course will explore different critical approaches to the interpretation and analysis of Arabic literature from pre-Islamic poetry to the modern novel and prose-poem. The course will draw on western and Arabic literary criticism to explore the role of critical theory not only in understanding and contextualizing literature but also in forming literary genres and attitudes. Among these approaches are: Meta-poetry and inter-Arts theory, Genre theory, Myth and Archetype, Poetics and Rhetoric, and Performance theory.
Taught by: Fakhreddine
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 353, COML 505
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 437 Islamic Intellectual Tradition
This comprehensive survey of the traditions of rational thought in classical Islamic culture is distinguished by its attempt to contextualize and localize the history of what is best described as philosophy in Islam, including not only the Islamic products of the Hellenistic mode of thought but also religious and linguistic sciences whose methodology is philosophical. Reading history as a set of local contingencies, the course examines the influence of these different disciplines upon each other, and the process of the Islamic “aspecting” of the Greek intellectual legacy. The readings thus include not only the works of Hellenized philosophers (fasāfī) of Islam, but also those of theologians (mutakallimun), legists (fiqh scholars), and grammarians (nāḥw/lugha scholars). No prerequisites. Additional advanced-level assignments can be given for graduate credit.
Taught by: Lowry
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 450 Introduction to the Bible (The "Old Testament")
An introduction to the major themes and ideas of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), with attention to the contributions of archaeology and modern Biblical scholarship, including Biblical criticism and the response to it in Judaism and Christianity. All readings are in English.
For BA Students: Humanities and Social Science S
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 150
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 451 History of Jewish Civilization I--Jews and Judaism in Antiquity: From the Bible to the Talmud
The course is an overview of Jewish history, culture, and society from its biblical settings through the Hellenistic-Roman, and rabbinic periods. We will trace the political, social, and intellectual-religious, and literary development of Judaism from its beginnings through the Second Temple period to the formation and evolution of Rabbinic Judaism. Topics to be covered include: the evolution of biblical thought and religious practice over time; Jewish writing and literary genres; varieties of Judaism; Judaism and Imperialism; the emergence of the rabbinic class and institutions.
Taught by: Dohrmann
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: HIST 139, JWST 156, NELC 051, RELS 120
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 454 Spirit and Law
While accepting "the yoke of the commandments", Jewish thinkers from antiquity onward have perennially sought to make the teachings of revelation more meaningful in their own lives. Additional impetus for this quest has come from overtly polemical challenges to the law, such as those leveled by Paul, medieval Aristotelians, Spinoza and Kant. This course explores both the critiques of Jewish Law, and Jewish reflections on the Law's meaning and purpose, by examining a range of primary sources within their intellectual and historical contexts. Texts (in English translation) include selections from Midrash, Talmud, medieval Jewish philosophy and biblical exegesis, kabbalah, Hasidic homilies, Jewish responses to the Enlightenment, and contemporary attempts to re-value and invent Jewish rituals.
Taught by: Fishman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 320, JWST 520, RELS 321, RELS 520
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 456 Great Books of Judaism
The Babylonian Talmud (Bavli), a product reflecting the collaborative effort of generations of sages, is the foundational legal and ethical document of rabbinic Judaism. Both the methods of interpreting this text – and their theoretical frameworks – have varied dramatically, evolving creatively throughout the generations. In the past century, theories of how to read the Talmud and hypotheses about its formation and reduction have opened up new avenues for understanding what the text says and, more importantly, how it works. Through in-depth examination of demonstrative legal passages, this course will contrast the insights generated by the major critical schools of the past century and with the interpretations of selected medieval scholars, the Rishonim. English translations will be provided alongside the original
For BA Students: Arts and Letters Sector
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 156
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 458 Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages in Translation
Course explores the cultural history of Jews in the lands of Islam from the time of Mohammed through the late 17th century (end of Ottoman expansion into Europe) – in Iraq, the Middle East, al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Primary source documents (in English translation) illuminate minority-majority relations, internal Jewish tensions (e.g., Qaraism), and developments in scriptural exegesis, rabbinic law, philosophy, poetry, polemics, mysticism and liturgy. Graduate students have additional readings and meetings. Spring 2015
Taught by: Fishman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 257, JWST 153, NELC 158, RELS 223
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 463 Literary Legacy of Ancient Egypt
This course surveys the literature of Ancient Egypt from the Old Kingdom through the Graeco-Roman period, focusing upon theme, structure, and style, as well as historical and social context. A wide range of literary genres are treated, including epics; tales, such as the "world's oldest fairy tale," poetry, including love poems, songs, and hymns; religious texts, including the "Cannibal Hymn"; magical spells; biographies; didactic literature; drama; royal and other monumental inscriptions; and letters, including personal letters, model letters, and letters to the dead. Issues such as literacy, oral tradition, and the question poetry vs. prose are also discussed. No prior knowledge of Egyptian is required.
Taught by: Silverman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 061
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 465 Egyptian Artifacts
Detailed typological and chronological discussion of principal kinds of ancient Egyptian artifacts.
Taught by: Wegner
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 466 Archaeology and History of the Middle Kingdom
Taught by: Wegner
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 467 History of Egypt - New Kingdom
Covers principal aspects of ancient Egyptian culture (environment, urbanism, religion, technology, etc.) with special focus on archaeological data; includes study of University Museum artifacts. Follows NELC 266/466 - History of Egypt taught in the fall semester.
Taught by: Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AFST 467
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 468 The Religion of Ancient Egypt
Weekly lectures (some of which will be illustrated) and a field trip to the University Museum’s Egyptian Section. The multifaceted approach to the subject matter covers such topics as funerary literature and religion, cults, magic religious art and architecture, and the religion of daily life.
Taught by: Silverman/Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 166, RELS 114
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 469 The Archaeology of Nubia
The course will examine the archaeology of Ancient Nubia from Prehistory through the Bronze and Iron Ages, ca. 5000 BCE to 300 AD. The course will focus on the various Nubian cultures of the Middle Nile, and social and cultural development, along with a detailed examination of the major archaeological sites and central issues of Nubian archaeology.
Taught by: Wegner
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 481 Elementary Amharic I
The Elementary Amharic I course can be taken to fulfill a language requirement, or for linguistic preparation to do research on Ethiopia/Africa-related topics. The course emphasizes communicative competence to enable the students to acquire linguistic and extra-linguistic skills in Amharic. The content of the course is selected from various everyday life situations to enable the students to communicate in predictable common daily settings. Culture, as it relates to language use, is also part of the course content.
For BA Students: Language Course
Taught by: Hailu
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: AFRC 240, AFRC 540, AFST 240, AFST 540
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Offered through the Penn Language Center

NELC 482 Elementary Amharic II
Continuation of Elementary Amharic I.
For BA Students: Language Course
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: AFRC 241, AFRC 541, AFST 241, AFST 541
Prerequisite: Completion of NELC 481
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Offered through the Penn Language Center

NELC 483 Intermediate Amharic I
For BA Students: Language Course
Taught by: Hailu
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: AFRC 242, AFRC 543, AFST 242, AFST 543
Prerequisites: Completion of NELC 482 or permission of the instructor.
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Offered through the Penn Language Center

NELC 484 Intermediate Amharic II
For BA Students: Last Language Course
Taught by: Hailu
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: AFRC 243, AFRC 544, AFST 243, AFST 544
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: Offered through the Penn Language Center

NELC 489 Medieval Islamic Art and Architecture
An introduction to the major architectural monuments and trends, as well as to the best-known objects of the medieval (seventh-to fourteenth-century) Islamic world. Attention is paid to such themes as the continuity of late antique themes, architecture as symbol of community and power, and the importance of textiles and primacy of writing. Suitable for students of literature, history, anthropology as well as art history.
Taught by: Holod
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AAMW 435, ARTH 435, COML 415
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 518 Media and Culture in Contemporary Iran
This course is an introduction to the major cultural themes and trends of contemporary Iran. Through the lens of press, cinema, literature and drama, the course will examine the ways in which contemporary Iranian society has been subject to rapid change and transformation over the past century. This class is designed for both junior and senior students who are keen to better understand the cultural context of Iran as one of the most influential and significant countries in the Middle East.
Taught by: Shams Esmaeili
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 218
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 531 Iraq, Egypt, Algeria: Case Studies from the Arab World
This reading- and discussion-intensive seminar will use historical and political analyses, ethnographic studies, novels, and films to consider and compare the experiences of Iraq, Egypt, and Algeria in the modern period. Themes to be covered include the nature of local Arab and Arabic cultures; the impact and legacies of Ottoman and Western imperialism; the development of Islamist, nationalist, and feminist movements; the status of non-Arab or non-Muslim minorities (notably the Iraqi Kurds, Egyptian Copts, and Algerian Berbers); and patterns of social and economic change. The class will culminate in research projects that students individually design and pursue. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 331
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 534 Topics in Islamic Religion
Selected topics, such as Sufi texts or The Qur'an, in the study of Islamic religion.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: RELS 545, SAST 549
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
NELC 535 Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Relations in the Middle East and North Africa: Historical Perspectives
This class is a reading- and discussion-intensive seminar that addresses several recurring questions with regard to the Middle East and North Africa. How have Islam, Judaism, and Christianity influenced each other in these regions historically? How have Jews, Christians, and Muslims fared as religious minorities? To what extent have communal relations been characterized by harmony and cooperation, or by strife and discord, and how have these relations changed in different contexts over time? To what extent and under what circumstances have members of these communities converted, intermarried, formed business alliances, and adopted or developed similar customs? How has the emergence of the modern nation-state system affected communal relations as well as the legal or social status of religious minorities in particular countries? How important has religion been as one variable in social identity (along with sect, ethnicity, class, gender, etc.), and to what extent has religious identity figured into regional conflicts and wars? The focus of the class will be on the modern period (c. 1800-present) although we will read about some relevant trends in the early and middle Islamic periods as well. Students will also pursue individually tailored research to produce final papers. Prior background in Islamic studies useful.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 335, RELS 311
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 536 Nationalism and Communal Identity in the Middle East
This seminar views the phenomenon of nationalism as it affected the modern Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together we will consider the diverse components of nationalism, including religion, language, territorial loyalty, and ethnicity, and test the thesis that nations are "imagined communities" built on "invented traditions." At the same time, we will examine other forms of communal identity that transcend national borders or flourish on more localized scales. This class approaches nationalism and communal identity as complex products of cultural, political, and social forces, and places Middle Eastern experiences within a global context.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 336
Prerequisite: NELC 102 or other relevant introductory courses on the Middle East.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 542 Early Empires of the Ancient Near East: The Neo-Assyrian Empire
The Assyrians appear as destructive and impious enemies of the Israelites and Judeans in various books of the Bible and this view is reflected in Lord Byron's poem: "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, / and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold" (Hebrew Melodies. The Destruction of Sennacherib). In the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries BCE, Assyrian armies marched out from their homeland in northern Iraq to Iran in the East, Egypt in the West, the Persian Gulf in the south and central Turkey in the north, and they created the largest empire known up until that time. They built impressive palaces and cities, created great works of art and have left us a vast number of documents preserving ancient literature and scholarly knowledge. In the course we will look at the structure of the Assyrian state, Assyrian culture, the development of the Assyrian empire, and its sudden collapse at the end of the seventh century. While the course will emphasize the use of textual sources, archaeological and iconographic data will also be used to help us arrive at an understanding of the great achievements of the ancient Assyrians. The classes will be part lecture and part seminar.
Taught by: Frame
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AAMW 543, NELC 242
Prerequisite: NELC 101 or permission of the instructor
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 544 Reading Ancient Mesopotamia
An introduction to the literature of Ancient Mesopotamia.
Taught by: Tinney
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 244
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 550 The Bible in Translation
This course introduces undergraduates and graduate students to one specific Book of the Hebrew Bible. "The Bible in Translation" involves an in-depth reading of a biblical source against the background of contemporary scholarship. Depending on the book under discussion, this may also involve a contextual reading with other biblical books and the textual sources of the ancient Near East. Although no prerequisites are required, NELC 250 is a perfect follow-up course for NELC 150 "Intro to the Bible."
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COML 380, JWST 255, NELC 250, RELS 224
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: May be repeated for credit.
NELC 552 THEMES JEWISH TRADITION
Course topics will vary; they have included The Binding of Isaac, Responses to Catastrophes in Jewish History, Holy Men & Women (Ben-Amos); Rewriting the Bible (Dohrmann); Performing Judaism (Fishman); Jewish Political Thought (Fishman); Jewish Esotericism (Lorberbaum) Democratic culture assumes the democracy of knowledge - the accessibility of knowledge and its transparency. Should this always be the case? What of harmful knowledge? When are secrets necessary? In traditional Jewish thought, approaching the divine has often assumed an aura of danger. Theological knowledge was thought of as restricted. This seminar will explore the "open" and "closed" in theological knowledge, as presented in central texts of the rabbinic tradition: the Mishnah, Maimonides and the Kabbalah. Primary sources will be available in both Hebrew and English. When did the Bible become the Bible? What was the nature of canon and authority in early Israel and Judaism, and how did biblical communities think about their sacred texts? How and what did the Bible mean to ancient readers? The answers to these questions are varied and surprising. This course looks at early biblical and Jewish texts that both write and re-write the tradition's own central texts. We will think widely and creatively about ancient textuality, orality, interpretation, composition, and authority. Drawing on literary theory, the course will examine the ways that biblical and post-biblical literature from the Second Temple to the rabbinic period (with some forays into contemporary literature) manifest complex ideas about power, meaning, and religiously in early Judaism.
Taught by Ben-Amos/Dohrmann/Fishman
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 252, RELS 129, RELS 523
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 556 Seminar in Rabbinic Literature
Most of the foundational writings of rabbinic Judaism corpora of Midrash, Mishna, and the two Talmuds were in existence by the end of the sixth century CE. Yet, for several centuries thereafter, there is little evidence attesting to the lived nature of rabbinic culture and society. Course will focus on writings by Jews and about Jews, produced between the 7th and 10th centuries, complemented by secondary sources. Texts will include selections from archaeological inscriptions; Midrash; liturgical poetry; Targum; Masora; geonic responsa, writings by Muslims and by Church Fathers. While students must be able to read Hebrew, much class time will be devoted to the improvement of reading and comprehension skills. Undergraduates should seek permission of the instructor.
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: HEBR 557, JWST 553, RELS 557
Prerequisites: Proficiency in Hebrew and/or Greek recommended.
Undergraduates need permission to enroll.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit
Notes: May be repeated for credit

NELC 567 Seminar on Egyptian Archaeology and History
Specific topics will vary from year to year.
Taught by: Wegner
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 568 Women in Ancient Egypt
This class will examine the many roles played by women in ancient Egypt. From goddesses and queens, to wives and mothers, women were a visible presence in ancient Egypt. We will study the lives of famous ancient Egyptian women such as Hatshepsut, Nefertiti and Cleopatra. More independent than many of their contemporaries in neighboring areas, Egyptian women enjoyed greater freedoms in matters of economy and law. By examining the evidence left to us in the literature (including literary texts and non-literary texts such as legal documents, administrative texts and letters), the art, and the archaeological record, we will come away with a better understanding of the position of women in this ancient culture.
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: NELC 168
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
Notes: May be repeated for credit
NELC 614 Introduction to Persian Literature
This course, which requires no knowledge of Persian, aims to introduce students to the major trends and developments in the Persian literary tradition, which has spanned for more than a millennium. Introductory sessions will familiarize students with the history of Persian literature, especially the transition away from classical modes of representation, a tradition that was largely poetic, to modern genres and forms, including the novel, blank-verse poetry, and short stories. However, most of the course will be organized thematically rather than chronologically, and each unit will bring together literary texts from both the classical and modern traditions. Together we will examine how authors from different historical periods have utilized a limited number of motifs in order to represent and critique the dominant religious and social institutions of their time. We will conclude by considering the rapid politicization of Persian literature in the 20th century and recent efforts to control systems of representation, and especially the written word, in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Also Offered As: NELC 114
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 618 Iranian Cinema: Gender, Politics and Religion
This seminar explores Iranian culture, art, history and politics through film in the contemporary era. We will examine a variety of works that represent the social, political, economic and cultural circumstances of post-revolutionary Iran. Along the way, we will discuss issues pertaining to gender, religion, nationalism, ethnicity, and the function of cinema in present day Iranian society. Films to be discussed will be by internationally acclaimed filmmakers, such as Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Tahmineh Milani, Jafar Panahi, Bahman Ghobadi, among others.
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: NELC 118
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 632 North Africa: History, Culture, Society
This interdisciplinary seminar aims to introduce students to the countries of North Africa, with a focus on the Maghreb and Libya (1830-present). It does so while examining the region's close economic and cultural connections to sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.
Readings will include histories, political analyses, anthropological studies, and novels, and will cover a wide range of topics such as colonial and postcolonial experiences, developments in Islamic thought and practice, and labor migration. This class is intended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.
Taught by: Sharkey
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: AFST 332, AFST 533, NELC 332
Prerequisites: A university-level survey course in Middle Eastern, African, or Mediterranean history.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 633 Seminar in Selected Topics in Arabic Literature
This is the graduate seminar course in which a variety of aspects of Arabic literature studies are covered at the advanced graduate level. Students in this course are expected to be able to read large amounts of literature in Arabic on a weekly basis and to be able to discuss them critically during the class itself. Topics are chosen to reflect student interest. Recent topics have included: 1001 NIGHTS; the short story; the novel; MAQAMAT; classical ADAB prose; the drama; the novella; modern Arabic poetry.
Taught by: Allen
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 638 Approaches to Islamic Law
This course aims to introduce students to the study of Islamic law, the all-embracing sacred law of Islam. In this course we will attempt to consider many different facets of the historical, doctrinal, institutional and social complexity of Islamic law. In addition, the various approaches that have been taken to the study of these aspects of Islamic law will be analyzed. The focus will be mostly, though not exclusively, on classical Islamic law. Specific topics covered include the beginnings of legal thought in Islam, various areas of Islamic positive law (substantive law), public and private legal institutions, Islamic legal theory, and issues in the contemporary development and application of Islamic law.
Taught by: Lowry
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: RELS 648
Prerequisites: Some background knowledge about Islam is an asset.
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 641 Iraq: Ancient Cities and Empires
This course consists of an analytical survey of civilization in the ancient Mesopotamia from prehistoric periods to the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C. A strong focus is placed on Mesopotamia (Iraq, eastern Syria) proper, but it occasionally covers its adjacent regions, including Anatolia (Turkey), north-central Syria, and the Levantine coast. As we chronologically examine the origin and development of civilization in the region, various social, political, economic, and ideological topics will be explored, including subsistence, cosmology, writing, trade, technology, war, private life, burial custom, and empire. Based on both archaeological and historical evidence, these topics will be examined from archaeological, anthropological, historical and art historical perspectives. Students will be exposed to a variety of theoretical approaches and types of relevant evidence, including settlement survey data, excavated architectural remains and artifacts, and written documents. The course aims to provide students with a strong foundation for further study in Near Eastern civilization.
Taught by: Zettler
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 236, NELC 241
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit
NELC 651 Dead Sea Scrolls
Exploration of the issues relating to the identification and history of the people who produced and used these materials as well as the claims made about the inhabitants of the Qumran site near the caves in which the scrolls were discovered, with a focus on what can be known about the community depicted by some of the scrolls, its institutions and religious life, in relation to the known Jewish groups at that time (the beginning of the Common Era). This will involve detailed description and analysis of the writings found in the caves -- sectarian writings, "apocrypha" and "pseudepigrapha," biblical texts and interpretations.
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: JWST 225, NELC 251, RELS 225
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 664 The World of Cleopatra
The figure of Cleopatra is familiar from modern stories, legends, and film. Was this famous woman a brazen seductress or a brilliant political mind? How many of these presentations are historically accurate? This class will examine the Ptolemaic period in Egypt (305-30 BCE), the time period during which Cleopatra lived, in an attempt to separate myth from reality. The Ptolemaic period is filled with political and personal intrigue. It was also a time of dynamic multiculturalism. Arguably one of the most violent and fascinating eras in ancient Egyptian history, the Ptolemaic period is largely unknown and often misunderstood. This course will examine the history, art, religion and literature of Egypt's Ptolemaic period which culminated in the reign of Cleopatra VII.
Taught by: Houser Wegner
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: NELC 064
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 666 History of Ancient Egypt
Review and discussion of the principal aspects of ancient Egyptian history, 3000-500 BC.
Taught by: Wegner
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: NELC 266
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 668 Art and Architecture in Ancient Egypt
This course will be an introduction to the art, architecture and minor arts that were produced during the three thousand years of ancient Egyptian history. This material will be presented in its cultural and historical contexts through illustrated lectures and will include visits to the collection of the University Museum.
Taught by: Silverman
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ARTH 218, ARTH 618, NELC 068
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 681 Topics In Anthropology and the Modern World
This course relates anthropological models and methods to current problems in the Modern World. The overall objective is to show how the research findings and analytical concepts of anthropology may be used to illuminate and explain events as they have unfolded in the recent news and in the course of the semester. Each edition of the course will focus on a particular country or region that has been in the news.
Taught by: Spooner
Course usually offered in spring term
Also Offered As: ANTH 100, ANTH 654, NELC 281, SAST 161
Activity: Lecture
1 Course Unit

NELC 683 Theories of Myth
Theories of myth are the center of modern and post-modern, structural and post-structural thought. Myth has served as a vehicle and a metaphor for the formulation of a broad range of modern theories. In this course we will examine the theoretical foundations of these approaches to myth focusing on early thinkers such as Vico, and concluding with modern twentieth century scholars in several disciplines that make myth the central idea of their studies.
Taught by: Ben-Amos
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: COML 662, FOLK 629, RELS 605
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit

NELC 686 Topics in Mid East History
Reading and discussion course on selected topics in Middle Eastern history.
Also Offered As: HIST 640
Activity: Seminar
1 Course Unit