

Contemporary Antisemitism: Social Policy and Research

School of Social Sciences and Social Policy (Heller)

HS 125A-1 (cross listed with SOC, POL, NEJS)

Instructor

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(See bottom of syllabus for Prof. Saxe's bio.)

Office hours: By appointment

Prerequisites: None

Course goals

Antisemitism, a pernicious and persistent form of prejudice, has recently re-emerged as significant problem, both for Jews and for society. As in previous eras, its expression has evolved and there are multiple mutations of the antisemitism virus. The course focuses on present-day antisemitism and how to address its root causes and limit its impact on individuals and communities. The course is designed for undergraduate students with a broad range of backgrounds. Using social science theory and methods, students will be given the opportunity to engage critically with contemporary anti-Jewish hatred. The course will progress from understanding the current context in which antisemitism is expressed, to what we know – and what we need to learn – to shape social programs and policy to respond. This course will help students learn about how to distinguish antisemitism from free speech, how to evaluate claims about antisemitism in public discourse, how to respond to the problem in real world settings, and how to know if our responses are effective. The social science tools that this course offers will help students better understand other forms of discrimination and prejudice. The course is cross listed with POL, SOC, and NEJS; as well, it is part of the newly developed micro-credential in policy analysis and implementation.

Overview

The recent resurgence of anti-Jewish hate speech and violence threatens Jews and has become a divisive social issue affecting multiple sectors of society. This course is designed to help students understand contemporary antisemitism and explore ways to address both traditional and newly emerging forms of anti-Jewish hatred. Framed around social scientific analyses of the causes and expressions of antisemitism, course content will be drawn from history, law, political science, social psychology, and sociology and social policy. The course will engage students in the current academic and policy discourse about antisemitism, as well as efforts to address antisemitism and ameliorate the conditions that have fostered its spread. Course participants will have an opportunity (individually or in groups) to engage in original or secondary data collection.

The course syllabus is divided into two broad sections. The first half of the course focuses on understanding what antisemitism is and how it is manifested – both in the recent past and today. Using actual examples of hate speech and behavior, the course will progress from discussion of the historical and contemporary socio-political context in which antisemitism has emerged to survey-based discussions of trends in current attitudes and behavior, in particular, the social forces that are driving antisemitism. Our focus will include a detailed exploration of the complex relationship between antisemitism and views of Israel.

The second half of the course focuses on how to respond to antisemitism. This includes analysis of efforts to address antisemitism (in particular, on college campuses), the association of political ideologies and social groups with antisemitism, and the use of evidence to create effective programs and policies. The relationship of antisemitism interventions to those used to respond to hatred and acts of violence directed toward members of other racial and ethnic groups will also be considered.

No pre-requisites are required. Readings and course assignments will be designed to engage students with different backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Graduate students are invited to participate but should contact the instructor prior to enrolling.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the sources of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student. Violations of university policies on academic integrity, described in Section 3 of *Rights and Responsibilities*, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. The use of AI will be permitted, but students will need to note their use of specific tools. Further information will be provided in class.

Notice: If you have a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and require accommodations, please bring it to the instructor's attention prior to the second class meeting. If you have any questions about this process, contact Mary Brooks, disabilities coordinator for The Heller School at maryeliz@brandeis.edu.

Course Plan, Readings, and Assignments

Weekly reactions/commentaries

Students will be required to write brief weekly reports (ten across the semester) that react to the readings and class discussions. These short reports/memos are intended to stimulate active engagement with the course material. Students are invited to include their questions about the assumption and implications of the readings.

Film review

Antisemitism has been a frequent focus of documentary and historically-informed films. Students will be asked to select and view a film; then, write a brief review that assesses the film's lessons for our understanding of antisemitism.

Midterm Project

The project is designed to provide students with an opportunity to learn how others define and/or experience antisemitism and what motivates different interpretations. It will involve students developing and carrying out a small study that collects empirical data. The study is "educational" and is not intended as formal research. It will be an opportunity to utilize social science research to answer a central question about the current expression of antisemitism. The report will draw on coursework that covers various forms of antisemitism and how they present themselves in speech, social media, images, and more. Details will be provided in class/online.

Final Project

The goal of the final project is to apply what has been learned during the semester to developing more effective policy and programs to respond to antisemitism. It is designed as an opportunity for students to integrate what they have learned across the semester and, along with demonstrating what they have learned, to be creative in identifying ideas to diminish the expression of antisemitism. Details will be provided in class/online.

Assignments and grades

Course grades will be calculated using the following system:

Assignment	Grading method	%
Weekly reactions – complete at least 10	S/U	10
Film Review	Letter grade	10
Class participation and consistent attendance	Letter grade	10
Mid-term project	Letter grade	30
Final project	Letter grade	40

Classroom performance is based on both attendance and the quality of your participation in classroom discussions and activities. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and should not miss more than one class session without permission from the instructor. Grades for participation are also based on the quality of your contributions to discussion.

Readings

Readings for the class will include a variety of academic papers, book chapters, research monographs and news articles. All materials, including book chapters and academic papers, will be available on Brandeis Moodle. The readings are curated to present multiple perspectives related to social scientific and policy analysis of antisemitism. Fewer readings are assigned when students are expected to focus on the midterm and final projects.

Note: The course schedule and list of readings are preliminary. The antisemitism literature is growing rapidly and the readings will be updated to reflect changes in this dynamic knowledge base. Readings (and links) will be updated several times before January. Please email the [instructor](#) if you have questions or want to be notified of updates.

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism is hatred and discrimination towards others because they are Jewish. In the first part of the course, tools drawn from social science will be used to understand antisemitism's history, boundaries, prevalence and effects. The focus will principally be on the United States, but relevant research in other settings will also be discussed. Students are encouraged to use the syllabus as a starting point, not the end point of their exploration of antisemitism.

DATE	Topic	PRELIMINARY READING LIST
Week 1 Class 1 1/12/26	Why Study Anti-Jewish Hatred? Discussion of antisemitism will be framed in terms of what incidents that have been considered “antisemitic” by various groups and commentators. We will discuss what do we know about antisemitism, how we experience it, and the discourse about its contemporary manifestations. We will then consider how antisemitism is studied using social science methods and the ways in which a rigorous, data-informed understanding of antisemitism can help institutions respond to it more effectively.	Readings: Lipstadt (2019), Antisemitism: Here and Now. Chapter 1 Louis Brandeis on the Jewish Problem Beller, Steven. Antisemitism : A Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, Chapter 1

Week 1 Class 2 1/14/26	Antisemitism and Other Forms of Prejudice How do social scientists think about prejudice and discrimination? How do these ideas apply to studying of hatred and bigotry against Jews. How is antisemitism similar to and different from racism and other forms of prejudice?	Readings: Conerly et al (2021). Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism” from Introduction to Sociology. Houston, TX. (see, in particular, pp 292, 296-298. Twain, M. (1899). “Concerning the Jews.” Harper Magazine. Curtis, M. (2021). “Antisemitism—The Baffling Obsession.” In M. Curtis, Ed., Antisemitism in the Contemporary World. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (2016). What is antisemitism? Non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism. Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism Saxe, L., "Why Campus Antisemitism Matters." Tablet, February 6, 2024
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01/19/26	No class: Martin Luther King Day	

Week 2 Class 3 1/21/26	Origins of Antisemitism and the Holocaust Contemporary antisemitism is a unique expression of a long-standing hatred. We will briefly trace the historical trajectory of three “strands” of Antisemitism: Anti-Jewish views in Christianity, antisemitic beliefs about Jews and money/power, and world domination. We will explore how these views contributed to the 20th century expression of antisemitism, in particular, what led to the Holocaust.	Readings: Lipstadt (2019), Chapter 5 Wilhem Marr, Antisemitism Yad Vashem. (2011). “The Development of the Final Solution” Goldstein, P. (2012). A Convenient Hatred: The history of antisemitism. Chapters 14-16.
Week 3 Class 4 1/28/26	Social Science Methods for Studying Antisemitism This class will help students develop an appreciation and understanding of how social researchers study antisemitism and other forms of prejudice. Along with an overview of principles underlying qualitative and quantitative social science research, several examples of studies conducted of college campuses will be used to illustrate their application to describing and assessing contemporary antisemitism.	Readings: Chambliss and Schutt (2013). Making Sense of the Social World. Chapter 1: Science Society, and Social Research. Saxe, Wright, et al. (2016). Hotspots of Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Sentiment on College Campuses. Wright, Volodarsky, Hecht & Saxe (2023). In the Shadow of War: Hotspots of Antisemitism on US College Campuses Wright, Volodarsky, Hecht and Saxe (2019) Trends in Jewish Young Adult Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism in America 2017 to 2019.

Week 6 Class 9 2/13/26	Film/Documentary Reviews In class presentations/discussions	<u>Films</u> (examples) -A Gentleman's Agreement -Sophie's Choice -Schindler's List - Denial <u>Documentaries</u> -Nazi Town -Reckonings (link will be provided) -Defamation -Viral: Antisemitism in Four Mutations
2/16-2/18	NO CLASS, FEBRUARY BREAK	
Week 7 Class 10 2/23/26	Lab Session: Asking Questions about Antisemitism	Hersh, E., & Royden, L. (2022). Antisemitic Attitudes Across the Ideological Spectrum. Political Research Quarterly. Wright et al. Instrument from Fall, 2025 Study of College Student Views of Discrimination and Prejudice
Week 7 Class 11 02/27	Analyzing and Reporting Data	Readings: [Antisemitism on US Campuses 2025: Report being developed for publication 12/25]
Week 8 Class 12 3/2/27	Individual Meetings re Midterm Project	

PART 2: RESPONDING TO ANTISEMITISM

The second half of the course will focus on questions of social policy. How can institutions respond to antisemitism? What is the evidence for the effectiveness of particular programs?

Week 7 Class 13 3/4/26	Responses to Antisemitism Antisemitism on Campus: This class will cover issues that arise around concerns about antisemitism on the college campus. The class will review various high-profile events related to antisemitism on college campuses, and explore how they relate to antisemitism in other contexts, as well as public opinion data on the prevalence and nature of antisemitism in higher education.	Readings: Saxe, L. (in press). Toward an Evidence-based response to campus antisemitism. Chapter in a forthcoming volume by the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism. Wright, Hecht, Volodarsky, and Saxe (2024). Antisemitism on Campus: Understanding Hostility to Jews and Israel Samel, D. (2020). The manufactured campus antisemitism hysteria intensifies. Krasner, Weiner, Greenwald, Rothchild (2025). Between home and homelands: Jewish college students confront the Israel-Gaza conflict and campus divides. <i>Journal of Jewish education.</i> Abrams & Armeni, 2023, “The lived experiences of anti-Semitism encountered by Jewish students on university campuses: A phenomenological study.” <i>American Journal of Qualitative Research.</i>
Week 9 Class 14 3/9/26	“Lawfare”: Legal Responses to Antisemitism	Readings: Katz, R. (2025) “Campus Antisemitism,” Chapter 12(selected pages 549-647 in <i>Antisemitism and the Law</i>. [Commentaries, legal briefs re Title VI by Marcus, Schraub, Kornbluh, Lewin, Nelson, Chemerinsky and students. Selznick and Green.]
Week 9 Class 15 3/11/26	Social Psychological Theory This class discusses how social science researchers have thought about how to address social problems such as antisemitism. Theories drawn from social	Readings Elizabeth Kolbert – “Why Facts don’t change our minds” New Yorker journalist and author

	psychology that have been applied to reducing prejudice and bias will be emphasized. The readings deal with four issues: - Cognitive Bias - Contact Hypothesis - Relative Deprivation - Social Identity theory	Daniel Kahneman's <i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i>. Chapter 1 Robert Sapolsky – Contact Theory Youtube video [case studies of Israelis and Palestinians, and Northern Protestants and Irish Catholics. Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Trop – <i>When Groups Meet: The Dynamics of Intergroup Conflict</i>. Chapter 2: Does Intergroup Contact Typically Reduce Intergroup Prejudice. Thomas Edsall “How falling behind the Joneses Fueled the rise of Trump” <i>New York Times</i>. Henrey Tajfel, <i>Human Groups and Social Categories</i>. (selected excerpts).
Week 10 Class 16 3/16/26	Antisemitism and Contemporary American Politics The focus will be on the study of American political attitudes and behavior, and the challenges faced by political scientists who want to know not only <i>what</i> Americans believe about contentious political issues (in particular, antisemitism) but also how (if at all) those beliefs actually matter politically.	Readings: Wright & Volodarsky (2023): To understand American politics, you need to move beyond left and right. The Conversation. Wright, Hecht, & Saxe (2025) Antisemitism, Israel, and political ideology on the American college campus. <i>Politics, Groups and Identities</i>. Hersh & Royden (2023). Antisemitic attitudes among young Black and Hispanic Americans. <i>Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics</i>.

Week 10 Class 17 3/18/26	Government and Organizational Responses to Antisemitism This class will focus on long-standing efforts by the federal government and major Jewish organizations to address antisemitism.	Readings: US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism. Office of the President. May 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/25/us/politics/biden-antisemitismplan-hate-crimes.html Review selected websites for their strategy: -ADL [Anti-Defamation League] -American Jewish Committee: https://www.ajc.org/ How do we know if what we're doing is working?
Week 11 Class 18 3/23/26	Museums, Educational Programs This class will focus on the effectiveness of educational programs that teach about antisemitism (e.g., Holocaust, etc.). As well, the class will examine some recent efforts to provide antisemitism training.	Readings: Horn, D. (May 2023). Is Holocaust Education Making Anti-Semitism Worse? The Atlantic. Knowledge of Holocaust studies Antisemitism training curricula
Week 11 Class 19 3/25/26	Drawing the Line This class will continue exploration of how to distinguish between antisemitism and protected forms of speech. It will include discussion of the use of empirical data about perceptions of discrimination by the targets of prejudice and the role it plays in efforts to deal with antisemitism.	Readings: Wright et al. (2004) Drawing the Line: How US Jewish college students think about antisemitism. JJE. Volodarsky et al. (2025). What crosses the line? Understanding the boundaries of Antisemitism and Criticism of Israel. JJE. Katz et al.(2025). Unsettled Ground: How Jewish Undergraduates are Negotiating Identity Shifts and (Un)civil Campus Discourse after October 7. JJE.

Week 12 Class 20 03/30/26	Evaluating Antisemitism Initiatives #1 A brief overview of evaluation: research tools used to assess the impact and effectiveness of interventions designed to address antisemitism will be provided. Although not targeted at antisemitism <i>per se</i> , we will use an assessment of the impact of Birthright Israel as a methodological exemplar to explore how to study program impact..	Readings: Fundamentals of evaluation research Wright et al. (2024). Birthright Israel's impact in the Shadow of the Israel-Hamas War: Findings from the Summer 2023 Cohort . Brandeis University.
Week 12 Class 21 4/1/26	Evaluating Antisemitism Initiatives #2 This class discusses some examples of studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of programs to respond to antisemitism and other forms of prejudice or discrimination.	Readings: Chang et al. "Does Diversity Training Work the Way It's Supposed To?" Carroll, James (March 24, 2024). "This Easter, Is Christianity Still Promulgating Antisemitism," <i>New Yorker Magazine</i>.
4/6-8	NO CLASS, PASSOVER BREAK	
Week 13 Class 22 4/13/26	Final Project Workshop	

Week 13 Class 23 4/15/26	Working Dinner (Prof. Saxe's home, Newton)		
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Week 14 Class 24 4/22/26	Antisemitism and Free Speech		Readings: Nelson, C. Does academic freedom protect antisemitism: Social media, antizionism, and the end of academic freedom. <i>Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism</i>, 5(1). Goldstein, E. & Gutkin, L. (May, 22, 2025). "The great antisemitism debate." <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i>. Review of events on November 10, 2023 at Brandeis
Week 13 Class 25 4/24/26	Can Policy Changes Make a Difference? The federal government, local and state agencies, and Jewish organizations, are engaged in efforts to address antisemitism. Mostly, it's done in the absence of evidence. Class will focus on the use of knowledge to create more effective policy.		Readings: Lipstadt (2019), p 234-242. https://www.securecommunitynetwork.org/ https://www.ajc.org/Antisemitism/Report/2022 (how behaviors have changed) Kurtzer, How Oct 7 is reshaping the Zionist and anti-Zionist left in the US. Forward, Nov 30 2023.
Week 14 Class 26 04/29	Final Projects In class reports/discussion		Written reports due on May 7

Instructor

Leonard Saxe, Ph.D.

Leonard Saxe is the Klutznick Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Social Policy at Brandeis University. For more than two decades, he served as Director of Brandeis' Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute; as well, he served two terms as Director of the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. He is a social psychologist with broad interests in the application of social science to policy problems. His current work focuses on antisemitism, engagement with Israel, and issues of Jewish identity. Saxe's research on antisemitism is designed to provide an evidence base for policy and programs to address anti-Jewish hatred. He is an author/co-author of books about Birthright Israel and Jewish summer camping. In earlier phases of his career, he led major research programs on mental health issues and substance abuse. He has been a U.S. Congressional Science Fellow and was a Fulbright Professor at the University of Haifa. In 1989, he received the American Psychological Association's award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest (early career). In 2012, he received the Association for the Scientific Study of Jewry's Sklare Award for his contributions to the understanding of Jewish life.

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