2022-2023 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
Westport Campus

Students are encouraged to select a balance of courses from divisions A, B, C, and D over their four Merkaz years

DIVISION A: TEXT AND THOUGHT  DIVISION B: CONTEMPORARY TOPICS
DIVISION C: HISTORY AND SOCIETY  DIVISION D: THE ARTS AND LITERATURE
DIVISION R: SENIOR SEMINAR

- Course Divisions Are Included For Each Class With The Course Number.
  - For example, D3540 is a course that satisfies the “D” requirement.
- Courses are listed by semester and time and are in no particular order.
- Seniors are required to take the Choices on the College Campus Senior Seminar, Division R either in the spring.

Merkaz Wants You To Continue Your Jewish Studies
If Monday nights don’t work for you, we have other options. Independent studies, community service projects, and/or taking classes on the Bridgeport Campus on Tuesday nights are just a few of the ways we can make this work together.

If you have band, dance, a sport or an overwhelming schedule, don’t discount participating. We have made it work for so many students over the years. Let’s have a conversation and together we can find something interesting for you and keep you on track to graduate with your class.
Broadway & The Jews - Lisa Becker  D7555w
Grades 10-12   The history of American musical theatre is deeply interwoven with the history of American Jews. Would Broadway have been created or existed without Jews? We'll look at how Jews have been a part of Broadway on every level and in so many roles. No audition, singing, or dancing required.

Kippah Crochet Studio - Rabbi Ita Paskind  D1350w
Grades 8-12   Learn to crochet with Rabbi Ita while you make your own kippot. Enjoy crocheting while considering why we wear a kippah, when we might choose to wear a kippah, who can wear one, and whether a "head covering" even needs to be a kippah!

Where in the World - Media is Israel? - Israeli Emissary Ofek Moscovich B1300w Grades 8-12
Where do you go to find out what is happening in Israel? Tik Tok? Instagram? Celebrities? American politicians? All media has a bias, especially about Israel...Let's figure out how and where to get the best/least biased info out there. We'll learn things we never knew that we never knew about Israel.

Mindfulness and Meditation - Susan Roth  D1850w
Grades 8-12   If you're looking for a little peace and a chance to slow your busy mind, come learn about Mindfulness and Meditation. Through guided meditation practices and the study of Mindfulness concepts, you’ll gain skills to better handle the bad stuff and to more frequently take in the good. We’ll also examine the neuroscience of both Mindfulness and Meditation, so you can fully understand the benefits of both. No previous experience required, just an open mind and willingness to try something new!

Where did we come from? Genealogy and the Ashkenazi Diaspora - Josh Gruber  C7045w
Grades 10-12   Many Jewish-Americans trace their ancestry to Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated from Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. This course will look at the Ashkenazi diaspora and the affect it had on the decedents of those who fled persecution. In an effort to understand where we've come from, we'll be using online resources and family stories, to trace our own genealogy.
Propaganda and the Rise of Nazism - Josh Gruber  
**C7045w  Grades 8-12**
With misinformation, disinformation, and “fake news” unfortunately a common theme in today’s news cycles, the history of propaganda is more relevant than ever. This course will look at the rise of the National Socialist party in Germany during the 1920s and 30s, with a particular focus on how propaganda was used to assist in that rise, both to rally the population, and to condemn; a process that ultimately resulted in indescribable misery, death, and destruction into the Holocaust and Second World War.

Morality for Muggles - Susan Roth  
**A7525w  Grades 10-12**
Was Snape good or evil? Was Harry justified in starting Dumbledore’s Army? Was Dumbledore right in saying that our choices are a better test of character than our abilities? Using the Harry Potter text as a starting point, we’ll examine moral and ethical concepts such as good and evil, loyalty, making choices, friendship, breaking the rules, and more. We’ll see what Judaism has to offer on these topics, and examine how our own values are being shaped. Familiarity with the movies required. You’ll get even more from the class if you’ve read the books.

College Bound - Noah Nemitoff-Bresler  
**B8260w  Grades 8-12**
Grade 11 Only  Begin the college process with a college counselor who will take you through the college search and application process. Special attention will be paid to factors which Jewish applicants should consider when exploring, evaluating and choosing their schools. Issues like gap years, essays, internships and Jewish life will be discussed. Only open to 11th grade students.

Building a Government—Israeli Politics & the Knesset - Israeli Emissary Ofek Moscovich  
**C7075w  Grades 8-10**
120 members across 14 political parties, representing more than 9 million people - how do they do it? Israel has had 4 elections in the last 2 years and their 5th will be this coming November...We’ll learn how the system works and why it has been so hard to make an agreement then we'll see if we can build our own coalition to form a government.

Pop Culture Happy Hour - Rabbi Wiederhorn, Cantor Cattan, Seth Golob  
**B1700w  Grades 8-12**
This course examines the Jewish experience through the lens of popular culture. We’ll analyze the intersections of Jewish life and the modern American world. We’ll be thinking about how Jews and Judaism are portrayed over a range of media and topics, including music, movies, sports, film, Social Media, and more.
Merkaz 2022-2023 Westport Campus Course Descriptions
Spring Semester 7:00 PM

**The Fabric of Our People - Make Your Own Tallit -**
*Rabbi Jason Greenberg*  D1355w  Grades 8-12
In this course students will make their very own tallitot! The process will include dying fabric, selecting and stenciling Hebrew text, tying tzitzit, and examining passages and traditions related to four cornered garments and fringes.

**Choices on the College Campus - Noah Nemitoff-Bresler**  R1136w  Grade 12 Only
Discuss situations you may face on the college campus with a college counselor. Topics include: Hillel, Chabad, Greek life, drinking, drugs, anti-Israel & BDS movements, anti-Semitism, making friends, joining clubs and groups and much more.
*Required for 12th grade students.*

**What Does a Jewish Feminist Look Like? -**
*Lisa Becker*  A7325w  Grades 8-12
What do Lilith, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Natalie Portman, and David Schwimmer have in common? They are all Jewish AND they all are/have been fierce advocates for the equal treatment of women. There are so many questions that we will explore together...Can I be Jewish and a feminist? What do the Rabbis & the Torah have to say about women’s rights? Does feminism exist in Orthodox Jewry? Together we’ll explore these questions and so many more!

**History Through Jewish and Israeli Cuisine - Israeli Emissary Ofek Moscovich**  C7145w  Grades 10-12
Shakshuka, Burekas, Challah, Kugel and more are delicious Israeli food! But where do they come from? In our class we are going to research the origins of “Israeli food” and learn about the different Jewish people who live in Israel and around the world. Be hungry, because this history tastes good!

**Introduction to Mussar - Baba Lou Haber**  A1875w  Grades 8-12
Mussar, the Hebrew word for “ethics,” is a Jewish pathway to putting ethics into practice in our daily lives. At its heart, it is about self-improvement and ethical living. In this class we will discuss portions of classic Mussar texts and each student will develop their own Ner Tamid, or vision of themselves being the best they can be with regard to others in their lives.
Fiddler on the Roof of 2022 - Lisa Becker  B4255w
Grades 8-12  What does a Broadway musical from 1964, that is based on a 130 year-old book have to do with the world today? We'll ask Tevya, the milkman about it as we watch a little, (maybe) sing a little, and explore this family's journey through the past and how deeply intertwined it is with our world today.

Inside the Life of an Israeli Teen - Israeli Emissary
Ofek Moscovitch  B1900w  Grades 8-12
There is a lot going on in the lives and minds of American teens and the same is true for Israeli teens. But what is happening for these two groups? You bring the American and I'll bring the Israeli point-of-view. I expect that what we learn about the similarities and differences between the experiences of Israeli and American teens might surprise us all.

Acting it Out - Rabbi Greg Schindler  A1501w
Grades 8-12
In this course, we will use the techniques of improv theatre to explore the lives of Biblical characters. There is no audience, and our only script is the Bible’s own text - which serves as our launching-off point. As we inhabit these people’s lives, their dreams and their struggles, we will seek to gain insights into their lives, as well as into our own lives.
No theatre experience necessary!

The Bible Says What?? - Rabbi Jeremy Wiederhorn  D7615w  Grades 10-12
The Hebrew Bible contains a remarkable amount of sex and violence which makes scriptures highly entertaining and sometimes disturbing to read. We will find several “Rated R” themes that are not discussed in religious school classrooms. In tackling these issues head-on, students will have the opportunity to discuss, debate, and learn from each other.

Shalom Yoga - Baba Lou Haber  B1855w  Grades 8-10
While often associated with Eastern religions, Yoga integrates well with Judaism and Jewish spiritual practices and texts. Yoga is a spiritual practice that comprises mindsets, behaviors, poses, controlled breathing, concentration, and meditation to bring us into harmony with our true natures and each other while opening us up to God’s presence in the world. In each class we will practice Yoga while exploring how we can integrate Yoga into our lives as Jews.
*Baba Lou Haber is a certified Yoga teacher who has taught at Basil Yoga in Ridgefield as well as at synagogues and Jewish retreats.