

## Syllabus

### **PS 4850: Advanced Topics in Comparative Politics: The Politics of Being “Israel” from Abraham to Modern Democracy (Study Abroad)**

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#### The Chicago Principles

In this and every academic endeavor, I endorse the Chicago Statement (<https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>). “In a word, the University’s fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University’s educational mission.”

#### An Important Note on Recordings

To foster dialogue and allow for the free flow of ideas in an atmosphere conducive to learning, recording audio or video during lecture or discussion is strictly prohibited without prior permission of ALL members of the group.

#### Course Description

This is a study abroad course designed to familiarize the student with the political history of Israel from its inception as a nation to its status as a modern liberal democracy. Students will be provided with background readings that should be completed in advance of the thirteen-day trip to Israel, which is the core of the course. Topics covered in Israel range from historical accounts of the development of Israel as a nation, including discussions of the roles of well-known figures from ancient Israel to the challenges of modern democratic processes in a state enmeshed in political tension. As such, visits to historic sites in Israel will include discussions of significant figures and events in Judaism and Christianity as part of the historic account. The geography of Israel and the role location played in wars from ancient to modern is central to understanding Israel’s history and will be explored as well. Modern US-Israel relations will figure prominently in the discussions as well with a focus on the increasingly important, yet very tense, relationship between evangelical Christians and Israel. Students should gain a much richer understanding of both the history of Israel and the modern political drama that is Israeli politics, thereby making them more sophisticated consumers of information about the politics of the modern Middle East.

#### Required Readings

To be determined when itinerary is finalized.

#### Course Requirements

General Requirements for Study Abroad Programs (MTAbroad Office):

Students are required to purchase travel insurance (included in program fee).

Please note that you must complete all the forms required by MTAbroad to confirm participation in the education abroad program.

Financial requirements are listed on the program application along with deadlines.

Attendance at Pre-departure Orientation Session:

Attendance on all excursions within Israel:

We will be moving almost constantly within Israel, which does not allow students the flexibility to opt-out of excursions. Students will be required to remain with the group during scheduled activities. See “Notes” below for more details.

### Written Assignments:

Students will complete a pre-departure essay (administered online via D2L) assessing their knowledge of Israel and views of current events in the Middle East with respect to Israel. Students will keep a written journal during the trip and will be required to complete a follow-up essay (administered on D2L) assessing knowledge and evaluating changes in perspective after visiting Israel. Students will be asked to critically evaluate their own perceptions prior to the trip as well as modifications (if any) that occur as a result of the time in Israel. An ePortfolio will be utilized to showcase media and excerpts from written assignments.

### Grading criteria (for students seeking academic credit)

Activity	Weight	Evaluation Criteria
Pre-departure orientation participation	10%	Pass/Fail
Pre-departure Essay (D2L, due prior to departure)	10%	Essay will be evaluated with an emphasis on completeness and a comprehensive understanding of the assigned readings.
Journal	10%	Journal will be evaluated on completeness and thoroughness with an emphasis on cultural awareness as specified in SLO 6 above.
Post-travel Essay (D2L, due upon return)	10%	Essay will be evaluated with an emphasis on critical reflection as required by SLOs 2 and 5 above.
Participation in activities in Israel	60%	Pass/Fail

### MT Engage Designated Course

This is an MT Engage course. The MT Engage program promotes active engagement in learning across educational experiences. In this course, you will participate in a beyond-the-classroom activity and submit at least one assignment to the D2L ePortfolio. You will also answer some questions about your MT Engage experience in an end of course survey. You will receive important informational emails from MT Engage about ePortfolio training and how you can qualify for scholarships and cash awards. For more information, go to [www.mtsu.edu/MTEngage](http://www.mtsu.edu/MTEngage).

### ePortfolio Statement

As part of the MT Engage program, students will build an ePortfolio presentation showcasing their integrative learning. MT Engage offers ePortfolio training; see [http://mtsu.edu/mtengage/student\\_resources.php](http://mtsu.edu/mtengage/student_resources.php) for details. Students should be aware that ePortfolios are not to contain confidential personal information, and that use of proprietary and copyrighted materials is illegal.

### Why Travel to Israel?

There is no better way to understand the politics of Israel (ancient and modern) than to experience the **context** in which it occurs. Given the preponderance of ill-informed opinion about Israel in the U.S. media and academia, time on the ground becomes crucial as it allows one to find the reality somewhere between the extremes.

Geographically, the strategic importance of Israel during the times of empire is illustrated in travels through and between the various historic sites of the Roman empire, which also illustrates the importance of the region to the European imperial powers. Modern political discourse is shaped by geography as well—from water rights to contentious borders.

Culturally, being in Israel allows American students to begin to grasp the complexities of Israeli society. There is no monolithic Israeli state, nor is there an Israeli worldview. Israel is a very fragmented democracy, albeit a functioning one, caught in the middle of a conflict which captures the imagination of most of the rest of the world. Experiencing a society as it functions in such

circumstances provides students with the opportunity to be more nuanced in their evaluation of politics and conflict around the world and allows students to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the American presidential system and American cultural views of conflict. Note, however, this course does not attempt to present every possible perspective on the conflicts in the Middle East. This course is taught primarily from the Israeli perspective of the Middle East. Travel in Israel, in the words of T. S. Elliot, allows us to explore a place unknown “...And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time,” which is, I believe, the primary impetus for study abroad.

#### Notes

Study abroad in Israel, while safe, is not equivalent to a study abroad trip to another western country. As such, we ask that you commit to a different code of behavior than what you might use in the US or Europe. Security in Israel is not a joke and should not be taken lightly, which is part of the learning process as well. You may be subject to search when entering public buildings or private establishments. Searches of your personal belongings, metal detection devices, and even questioning are not uncommon and should be complied with willingly and without complaint. You will notice the presence of armed security personnel to be quite commonplace as well. During group excursions, which comprise the vast majority of your time in Israel, we ask that you remain with the group and respect the requests of security personnel including those traveling with us (if applicable). When on your own, exercise the same common sense and good judgment you would use when traveling anywhere. We will discuss this in detail during orientation. You will be provided emergency contact information for the program directors as well as an English-speaking contact in Israel.

Also, we will be on the move almost constantly in order to get the most out of our time in Israel. In many cases, physical activity will be extensive. We walk about 80 miles during the trip. In all cases, the heat will be intense. Proper hydration is extremely important in the summer in Israel and is your responsibility. Should you have limitations, we will do our best to accommodate you; however, that may mean that there are excursions that are not feasible for you. We do not have the personnel to provide alternative excursions; and, because we will not lodge in the same hotels each night, you will not have the option of remaining behind. Please consider this limitation before committing to the trip.