COURSE NARRATIVE:
The occult tradition is a coherent intellectual stream that has roots in religion, philosophy and history and which has tried to bring together widely disparate aspects of Creation within a complex structure of connections, sympathies and affinities. It would come to include the more supernatural elements of normative religion, such as providence, prophecy and millenarianism. At the bottom of all this was the firm conviction that the universe is alive, and that it has an underlying structure, and if only we understood it, not only would that knowledge make us happy, but we might even be able to manipulate its operation. Among the areas to be discussed are: Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, Theosophy and the beginnings of Fundamentalism.

LATTE is the Brandeis learning management system: http://latte.brandeis.edu. Login using your UNET ID and password. The items on this bibliography can be found there, unless a URL is indicated.

LIBRARY: The Brandeis Library collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty and staff. These include workshops, consultations, collaboration, materials and instruction on emerging trends in technologies such as machine learning, emerging trends in research such as data visualization, and emerging trends in scholarship such as open access. Librarians at the Circulation Desk, Research Help Desk, Archives & Special Collections, Sound & Image Media Studios, MakerLab, AutomationLab, and Digital Scholarship Lab are available to help you. https://www.brandeis.edu/library/about/index.html”

26 Aug: Introduction

31 Aug: Radical Religion, the Supernatural and the Occult I
• Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization', A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 5 (1972), pp. 119-136, especially 121-123, 135.
2 Sept: Radical Religion, the Supernatural and the Occult II

9 Sept: Religion, Culture and Other Special Things I
- Ann Taves, Religious Experience Reconsidered (Princeton, 2009), introduction

10 Sept: Religion, Culture and Other Special Things II

14 Sept: Supernatural Supplements to Christianity

16 Sept: The Hermetic Tradition in the Renaissance

21 Sept / 23 Sept: The Rosicrucian Enlightenment
- Fama Fraternitatis (Cassel, 1614) = http://www.sacred-texts.com/sro/rhr/rhr06.htm
- Confessio Fraternitatis (Cassel, 1615) = http://www.sacred-texts.com/sro/rhr/rhr07.htm
- Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz (Strassburg, 1616) = http://www.crcsite.org/wedding1.htm
- Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum (Milan, 1988), esp. chapter 45

30 Sept / 5 Oct: Millenarianism and the Fifth Monarchy Men
7 Oct: Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Radical Religion

12 Oct / 14 Oct: The French Revolution and the End of the World

19 Oct / 21 Oct: Freemasonry and Occult Conspiracy

26 Oct / 28 Oct: Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Swedenborgianism

2 Nov / 4 Nov: Occult Without: Spiritualism and the Re-Enchantment of Nature

9 Nov / 11 Nov: Occult Within: Psychologizing the Esoteric

16 Nov / 18 Nov: Theosophy and the Occult Passage to India
30 Nov / 2 Dec: The Occult (Re-)Turn to Religion: The Beginnings of Fundamentalism


Learning Goals:
1. To learn how to see the connections in the history of religion and ideas.
2. To develop research skills.
3. To appreciate the ethos of historical research and writing: never accept what anyone says until you have seen and understood the original source.
4. To be able to express the results of your reading and thinking in academic form and written in an approachable literary style.

Prerequisites: none.

Changes to the Syllabus … due to snow days, campus closures or the natural evolution of discussion in class. It is your responsibility to check your Brandeis email regularly for updates regarding assignments, discussion questions, and course meetings.

Summary of Requirements: Two short papers (5-7 pages) (30%); informed class participation, (30%); and final research paper of 15-20 pages (40%). RESEARCH PAPER DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF CLASS. Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.). As this is a seminar, lively discussion is crucial in order to make it a valuable experience. I expect you to come to class each day with a printed page on which you have written in no more than 50 words what you think are the key issues in each the texts we are reading. You may be called upon to share your thoughts with your fellow students. Furthermore, each session will have a designated ‘discussion leader’, someone who has read more carefully and thought more deeply about the day’s material.

Research Paper: Perhaps the most useful life-skill you learn by studying history is the ability to do research. This means not just looking up the subject on Google, but finding and exploiting the raw materials of history, both primary and secondary, organizing and crafting your findings into a well-written literary construction including footnote source citation in a uniform style. We will need to meet individually at least once to focus on a topic, and to agree on a basic outline. I will be available for guidance as your work evolves.
Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Professors develop a keen eye for nuances of language and tone that give away even the most subtle of cut-and-paste attempts. Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions (see section 20 of R&R). Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources (https://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=301723).

Attendance: This is a seminar: attendance is mandatory and will be recorded. Students will be permitted a maximum of two unexcused absences, after which the overall participation grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day missed. Excused absences, which require notes from University Health Services or resident deans, must be discussed with me. Please be on time, and don’t leave early. If it happens too often, it will affect your grade.

Classroom Health and Safety Measures: All students in this class are required to observe the university’s policies on physical distancing and mask-wearing to support the health and safety of all classroom participants. Face coverings must be worn by all students and instructors in classes with in-person meetings. Students and faculty must also maintain the appropriate 6 feet of physical distance from one another when entering, exiting, or being in the classroom and continue to sit in seats assigned by the professor to assist the university in its contact-tracing efforts. All faculty and students must also clean their work areas before and after each class session, using the sanitizing wipes provided by the university. (All classrooms will also be professionally cleaned by Brandeis custodial staff multiple times per day.)

ABOUT NOT LEAVING YOU TO YOUR OWN DEVICES: NO COMPUTERS IN CLASS. I notice that some students become very pious in seminars: they have their hands together and bow their heads, as if praying. I suspect they may be looking at their phones. Many students using laptops pretend to listen but are actually checking their email, looking at WhatsApp, scrolling through Facebook, and laughing at YouTubes of hamsters wearing hats. A study showed that students seated near laptop users were also negatively affected, like people sitting next to smokers. A study by a team of professors at the US Military Academy showed that students who used tablets or laptops did not do as well as students in sections where electronics were banned. There is much evidence showing that taking notes on your computer is not a good way to learn. If you have a documented learning issue for which you require a device, please come talk to me to discuss this.

OFFICE HOURS: My office hours are Wednesdays, 12-1 PM. That being said, and things being what they are, if those hours don’t work for you, email me and perhaps
we can find a time to meet that suits us both, on Zoom, for example. The best way to get in touch with me is by email: davidkatz@brandeis.edu.

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. In order to provide accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability of requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. The following resources are available to help with the many academic and non-academic factors that contribute to student success (finances, health, food supply, housing, mental health counseling, academic advising, physical and social activities, etc.). Please explore the many links on this Support at Brandeis page (https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html) to find out more about the resources that Brandeis provides to help you and your classmates to achieve success.