

JESUS AND THE GOSPELS

COURSE SYLLABUS

COLLEGE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION: Background of the New Testament, formation of the Gospels, non-canonical traditions, and the ministry of Jesus with particular attention to his teachings.

The course is part of the General Education requirement in the area of Ultimate Questions. Such courses consider questions, issues and responses basic to religious and philosophical traditions. The courses are designed to stress the relevance of such concerns to contemporary experience and self-understanding. The courses include the reading and analysis of original texts. One goal of the course is to enable students to think critically and intelligently – and to write clearly and effectively – about the matters covered in ways that demonstrate the student’s understanding and skill in knowing about, responding to and expressing oneself so as to indicate that the student is able to evaluate and critique her/his own analysis and conclusions as well as those of others.

COURSE GOALS:

1. to provide the student with a sound working knowledge of the material covered in class and the readings;
2. to acquaint the student with a range of views related to the course and the backgrounds of those views;
3. to provide the student with on-going incentives to continue the study of the questions, issues and responses raised in the course, and to be able to critique and evaluate positions that the student will encounter in the future;
4. to engage students in direct analysis and expression of materials covered through small group work and class reports; and
5. to encourage the student continually to examine and re-examine his/her own ultimate questions, nature of the issues, and developing responses.

PERSPECTIVES: *This is a history course that will also deal with philosophy, literary developments and interpretations.* Please keep in mind that the field of Religious Studies is an academic discipline. While none of us approaches “Ultimate Questions” and especially the subject matter of this course as a “neutral observer,” or without “pre-understandings,” the course is not intended to indoctrinate students either for or against any religious, social, or political tradition. Students will hear me speak in different “voices,” such as **instructor of basic academic “stuff,”** sometimes **defender of position and/or theory,** and sometimes as **critic of the same position and/or theory.** When I speak **knowingly in my own voice,** I will identify that voice, offer other views, and respect the views of students. **We** will be pushed to present our own interpretations and views **in light of the basic “stuff,” considered analysis, and mutual respect.** Any question that is asked honestly is not a “foolish question.” I may respond with questions that are intended to clarify and sharpen the questioner’s inquiry.

As a course designed to raise and think about “Ultimate Questions,” I will raise some of these and we will probe how the Gospels, 1st Century societies and our times have responded to the questions.

COLLEGE ADVISABLE STATEMENTS:

1. Any student who wishes to disclose a disability and request accommodations under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) for this course first **MUST** meet with either Ms. Laurie Roth in the Office of learning Services (for learning disabilities and/or ADD/ADHD) or Dr. Ronald Kline in the Counseling Center (for all other disabilities).”
2. Concerning Academic Honesty, please consult the relevant sections in the College Catalogue and the Student Handbook. Bottom Line: the work you do is to be your work. Essentially, by our being in the course together, you and I are in a covenant of trust with each other. Trust me to do my best with integrity and sound scholarship, and I trust you to do the same with the work that is submitted for a grade. I trust you. You may consult with one another, the internet, etc. – but woe to plagiarists and those who “lift papers” from the internet! **BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT**

INTERNET SOURCES IN RESEARCH!! If you have any questions about a source's accuracy/integrity or the extent of using a source without attribution, please see me first.

3. While the syllabus includes a grading grid, I reserve the right to make a **one way qualitative judgment** in developing a final grade. That means, for example, if you have a disaster on a test but do super work on most other factors, I **may** go beyond the end-term numerical grade. The qualitative judgment **will not reduce** the numerical total of graded factors in composing a final grade.
4. While the syllabus is intended to be similar to a contract between the student and the professor, there may be some changes or modifications, such as shifts of dates or changes in the anticipated subjects to be taken in class.
5. About Attendance. I intend to be on time at every class that the College is open, and I expect you to be there and on time, too. Legitimate reasons supported by credible evidence (from the Dean of Student's Office, etc.) will be acknowledged. **More than 3 unexcused "cuts" will reduce the "Participation" factor in the final grade.** If a religious holy day that you really observe and on which you are not to write or will be home for the observance, please inform me.
6. About "Participation." *Participation entails being present, plus keeping awake, alert, doing the readings being able to respond to questions, and making thoughtful contributions to class discussion.*

GRADING GRID: Total of 100 points. The results of which are:

- A = 90-100, Excellent, way beyond expectations, extra effort
B = 89-80, Very good, better than expectations, competent
C = 79-70, Average
D = 69-60, Below average but passing
F = below 60, Inadequate grasp of the material, failure

THIS COURSE:

Short Answer Test	10 points, Emphasis on Basic Terms
First Essay Exam	20 points, Emphasis on Synoptic Theories & Mark
Second Essay Exam	20 points, Emphasis on Matthew and Luke
Third Essay Exam	20 points, Emphasis on John
Final Exam	25 points, Emphasis on Others Gospels, Cumulative
Participation	5 points
TOTAL:	100 points

ABOUT THE EXAMS:

1. **Essay-style Exams** should be learning experiences. By studying and then responding, a person makes connections and is able to express herself/himself more maturely (as well as accurately) than in "objective quizzes."
2. I look for three factors in grading essays:
 - a. what did the student say that is expected (**accuracy**);
 - b. what did the student not say that is expected (**completeness**); and
 - c. how did the student say it (**style, spelling, grammar**).
3. I will distribute **the essay question choices** (including the Final Exam Essays) ahead of time. The same essay choices will be on the exams. I will provide review sessions in class prior to the essay exams' due dates. You may engage in conversations with each other, form study groups, and/or go it alone in preparing for the exams. But when exam times come, you do your own work. The three essay exams will be "take homes" with the exam that you write posted on the Blackboard computer program in the "Digital Drop Box" *by midnight of the Due Dates indicated.*

Due Dates For Tests:

Short Answer Test: Friday, January 25. In Class, Half Period

First Essay Exam: Friday, February 22: In Class Review: February 20

Second Essay Exam: Friday, March 31 In Class Review: March 28

Third Essay Exam: Wednesday, April 16 In Class Review: April 14

Final Exam: Dean's Choice In Class Review, April 25

REQUIRED TEXTS: We will really use these!

HarperCollins Study Bible with Apocryphal/Deutero-Canonical Books, New Revised Standard
Version translation. The Student Edition is in the Bookstore. This is the book we will use.
Please do not substitute other translations or "Study Bibles."

The Other Gospels, edited by Ron Cameron

Beyond Belief. The Secret Gospel of Thomas by Elaine Pagels

Christ The Lord Out of Egypt. A novel by Anne Rice

READING and EXAMS ROSTER

Material Distributed in class and on the Course's Blackboard Site are to be read!

ACADEMIC WEEK BEGINNING

**January 14: READ: Bible, Introduction; To the Reader; Exodus 12-17; Leviticus 19; 2 Samuel 7;
Psalm 2; Psalm 22; Psalm 107; Isaiah 7, 9, 40; 52-53; Daniel 7; Zechariah 9; 12; Malachi 3;
Wisdom 1-3. These passages are among those were used by the early Christian communities and
are reflected directly and indirectly in the canonical Gospels.**

January 21: READ: Bible, Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. Try one a day. Stress Mark.

February 4: READ: Bible, Matthew.

February 25: READ: Bible, Luke and ACTS.

MARCH 3 – 7: NO CLASSES

March 10: READ: Bible, Re-Read Matthew and Luke-Acts

MARCH 19-24: NO CLASSES

March 26: READ: Bible, John, and 1-3 John

April 7: READ: Beyond Belief by Pagels

**April 14: READ Cameron: Foreword through page 37, 107-130.
READ Rice. Christ the Lord Out of Egypt**

April 21: READ, READ, READ!

ABOUT THE TEXT BOOKS

The course deals with “Jesus and the Gospels.” That will include biblical scholarship, various interpretations of the “canonical Gospels,” and Gospels that were not accepted by the Christian community.

1. The translation and edition of the Bible

- a. to keep us together, we will use the New Revised Standard Version. No exceptions, please.
- b. The HarperCollins Study edition is required. Again, it will keep us together. Plus, it contains introductory and supplementary essays, charts, maps and notes that will be important and helpful.

2. Cameron’s *Other Gospels* is a selection of materials from legends and “gnostic sources.”

3. Rice’s *Christ the Lord* is a deliberate fictional work predicated on her observation that much of the future of understanding Jesus will be through books, movies and television shows like this or “scholarly” (note my quotation marks) that purport to tell the “real story.” Her novel uses material drawn from legend materials also used by Cameron. Before her return to the Roman Catholic Church, she wrote a series of novels on vampires.

4. Pagel’s *Beyond Belief* centers on the Gospel of Thomas, her theory of its validity, etc. and challenges to “normative” Christianity. The Gospel of Thomas is a “gnostic” work. She also tells about events in her life that led her to insights about gnosticism and the Gospel of Thomas. She is a fine, if controversial, scholar who appears frequently on television and has numerous books, including one on the Gospel of Judas (with Karen King).

ABOUT HANDOUTS, ARTICLES AND BLACKBOARD COURSE DOCUMENTS

1. Some handouts and Blackboard Course Documents are straight-forward academic materials.
2. Some handouts are articles related to “Jesus in the News” or similar items (e.g., the alleged Jesus Family Bone Box).
3. Some handouts and Blackboard Course Documents are articles that deal with matters related to “Ultimate Questions.” These are provided not because I accept or do not accept the positions taken (when positions are taken) but to stimulate thinking and discussion.

SOME “ULTIMATE QUESTIONS”

1. What does it mean to be human?
 - a. a human female
 - b. a human male
2. What is the value of a human life? Who decides? On what basis? At what cost?
3. What is the role of death?
4. What is evil, its sources, power, purpose and disposition – if evil “exists” (includes devils, demons, etc.)
5. Do humans have the power and ability to make, sustain, fulfill life: yes, no, maybe and sometimes?
6. What/Who/ for What is God – or not
7. What is the role of government in the above questions?

Questions such as these are part of the course as we consider how “Jesus and the Gospels” may be part of our responses and from persons (past and present) beyond our society. The questions may lead to even more questions and be recycled through our lives.