Moberly Area Community College
Common Syllabus

PHI253 Early Christian Sacred Texts

Instructor
Office Number
Office Hours
Contact Information
Classroom Information
Class Days and Times

Catalog Description: PHI253 *Early Christian Sacred Texts* (3-0-3)
Christians wrote and wrestled over many texts in their first 300 years. We will explore these texts as well as the conversations around them, leading up their adoption into or exclusion from what is known today as the New Testament. Emphasis will be upon the social and theological problems in these early communities that occasioned the crafting, curation, and reproduction of the texts.

Prerequisite/Corequisite: None

Texts:
Title: Exploring the Bible
Author: Harris
Publisher: McGraw Hill

Other Required Materials: Note for instructors – We encourage the use of peer-reviewed non-confessional materials to enhance your teaching of the class. Confessional materials are fine, so long as they are contextualized clearly as a confessional reading and not presented as singularly normative.

Additional topical resources will be provided and linked to within the course’s Canvas shell.

Purpose of the Course: Note for instructors – As a public institution, it is vital that this course not be taught from a confessional standpoint. We do not present any particular theological position (even non-religious ones) as normative. This class is primarily a historical and literary analysis class and should only employ the tools of those disciplines. While this isn’t a theology class, it does bump up against theology constantly. Given this, we want to allow for various engagements of theological readings (particularly among students) with respect and care without presenting any particular theological approach as normative.
Early Christians wrote a wide variety of texts in the first few centuries after Jesus. These texts were written to address particular needs of newly founded Christian communities. Some of the texts proved so useful to these communities that they were included in canons of sacred texts.

In this course, we will primarily focus upon the genres, composition, and themes of the gospels, the adventure novella, occasional letters, and apocalyptic texts in the canon. Secondary focus will be upon the surveying the connections between the books of the New Testament with the religious texts that early Christianity were in conversation with during the time between the start of Christianity and its legalization in the Roman Empire by Constantine. Tertiary focus will be upon texts of the same genres that were written and used by Christians of this period but did not make it into the canon.

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, students will

• Recall the basic features and organization of the New Testament;
• Classify a given passage with respect to genre;
• Situate, using historical criticism, a given passage or text within a historical and cultural context;
• Differentiate various theo-political conversations and points of view which are in dialogue with one another within the textual tradition of the New Testament.
• Appraise the use and appropriation of the New Testament in various religious traditions and political and cultural discourse;
• Apply knowledge of the New Testament and critical scholarship to analyze Christian non-canonical works
• Create an interpretive awareness guide for personal or institutional use appropriate for people with zero background knowledge of the New Testament.

Course Content:  Note for instructors – Feel free to customize the sections highlighted to best match your research interests and teaching expertise. What is paramount, as mentioned above, is to present and discuss the material in a non-confessional manner. Any confessional discussions and perspectives should be labeled as such. We welcome confessional perspectives, so long as they are presented as “a reading of the text” instead of the singular and normative reading

1. Introduction to criticism as a lens for study and understanding
   a. Historical
   b. Genre
   c. Narrative

2. Genre Analysis
   a. Narrative
   b. Sayings
   c. Philosophy
   d. Letters of Praise and Blame
3. Survey of Early Christian Literature
   a. Canonical texts (New Testament)
   b. Non-canonical texts
      1. Infancy Gospel of Thomas
      2. Gospel of Thomas
      3. Gospel of Peter
      4. Acts of Thecla
      5. Acts of Matthias and Andrew
      6. The Nag Hamadi Library

4. Handling of sacred texts
   a. Introduction to sacred texts and canon
   b. Handling texts from outside your theo-cultural tradition
   c. Handling texts from within your theo-cultural tradition in a non-confessional manner without denying one’s theo-cultural tradition

5. The cultural-historical backdrop of Greco-Roman culture and governance.
   a. Survey of Greco-Roman culture
   b. Emperor Cult and Christian counter-propaganda
   c. Upper- and Lower-class views of health and sickness
   d. Greco-Roman Adventure Romance novels
   e. Jewish Apocalypse
   f. Mystery Religions
   g. Gnosticism
   h. Platonism

Assessment of Student Learning: Note for instructors: Please customize the following to best meet your teaching style. Please be mindful of the rigor appropriate for a college intro class. Also, please ensure that the assignments collectively measure the course objectives.

Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to My Community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deutero-Canonical Passage Analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
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</tbody>
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Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>% Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>89-80</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>79-70</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>69-60</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59-0</td>
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Expected Study Time Commitments: Students should expect to spend approximately 2 to 4 hours per week studying, reading, and working on assignments for each registered credit hour. For example, 6 to 12 study hours per week may be expected for a 3-credit hour class.

Description of Major Assignments / Projects:

Exams (33%)
You will have 3 exams in this class, each worth 11% of your final grade. These exams will consist of objective and short answer questions designed to showcase your awareness and recall of major persons, organization, concepts, et cetera in the course.

Letter to Your Community (33%)
Drawing upon your knowledge of the rhetorical moves and structures of Gero-Roman and New Testament letters of praise and blame, you will create and annotate a letter of praise and blame written to one of the communities of which you are a part.

Passage Analysis (33%)
You will write a passage analysis of a passage from a non-canonical work and compare it with a canonical passage of the same sort. This comparison will draw upon genre, narrative, and historical critical methods to produce an informed discussion of the passage and its relation to canonical works.

Schedule of Student Assignments/Activities

Note for instructors: Please customize this as you see fit, matching both your research or teaching interests and your teaching style. Please be sure to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Handling texts in an academic setting &amp; structure of the text</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Introduction to genre &amp; survey of the New Testament</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Words that create worlds – propaganda and counter-empire</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Gospels, Part 1 – Problems and Composition</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Gospels, Part 2 – Synoptic Gospels</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gospels, Part 3 – Gospel of John</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gospels, Part 4 - Non-Canonical Gospels</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Review and Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Greco-Roman Letters of Praise and Blame</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pauline Letters, Part 1 – Early Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pauline Letters, Part 2 – Letter to the Romans</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Pauline Letters, Part 3 – Deutero-Pauline Letters
Other Letters
Apocalypse – making sense of the trauma of the righteous
The hermeneutic of suspicion and the recovery of the feminine
Appropriation, Remix and Syncretism

Statement to Connect Course with General Education Outcomes: In compliance with MACC’s General Education outcomes, the student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- **Higher Order Thinking:** Students will demonstrate the ability to distinguish among opinions, facts, and inferences; to identify underlying or implicit assumptions; to make informed judgments; to solve problems by applying evaluative standards; and to reflect upon and refine those problem-solving skills. This outcome involves creative thinking, critical thinking, and quantitative literacy.

- **Managing Information:** Students will demonstrate the ability to discern when there is a need for information; and to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.

- **Valuing:** Students will demonstrate the ability to understand the moral and ethical values of a diverse society; and to appreciate the values of diversity, equity, and sustainability.

Instructor Policies:

Tardiness: Per instructor’s policy

Make-up and late work: Per instructor’s policy

Extra-credit work: Per instructor’s policy

College Policies:

**Academic Dishonesty:** MACC board policy is as follows: “Academic dishonesty by students damages institutional credibility and unfairly jeopardizes honest students; therefore, it will not be tolerated in any form.” Forms of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to the following: violations of copyright law, plagiarism, fabrication, cheating, collusion, and other academic misconduct. Incidents of dishonesty regarding assignments, examinations, classroom/laboratory activities, and/or the submission of misleading or false information to the College will be treated seriously. The procedure for handling academic dishonesty is outlined in the Student Handbook (Policy Handbook, G.020). In cases of alleged academic dishonesty, the burden of proof is on the student, not on the instructor.
**Attendance Policy:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions for which they are enrolled. The College reserves the right to drop or withdraw students from courses due to lack of attendance.

Students need to be aware that dropping/being dropped from a course and their last date of attendance in the course may impact their financial aid.

MACC faculty are required to track attendance and report lack of attendance. An instructor must complete the appropriate steps to drop a student within one week following the student’s violation of the attendance policy. Additionally, a student’s attendance rate will be calculated based upon the first day the academic session begins (not the student’s date of enrollment in the course). If a student does not attend a course as defined below, the student will be dropped as “Never Attended.”

**Term Length Drop Calculations**

16-week: Any student who misses two (2) consecutive weeks of class will be dropped from the course by the instructor unless acceptable justification is provided by the student and the student still has the opportunity to be successful in the course.

8-week: Any student who misses one (1) consecutive week of class will be dropped from the course by the instructor unless acceptable justification is provided by the student and the student still has the opportunity to be successful in the course.

4-week: Any student who misses two (2) consecutive days of class will be dropped from the course by the instructor unless acceptable justification is provided by the student and the student still has the opportunity to be successful in the course.

Intersession: Any student who misses one (1) day of class will be dropped from the course by the instructor unless acceptable justification is provided by the student and the student still has the opportunity to be successful in the course.

Acceptable justification may include, but is not limited to, family emergencies, illness or injury, college-approved co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and religious holidays.

**Definition of Course Attendance**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>In Seat Course</th>
<th>Physically attending scheduled, face-to-face, class meetings</th>
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Virtual Course: Being present, via appropriate platform, for scheduled class meetings/activities

Hybrid Course: Physically attending scheduled, face-to-face, class meetings and active participation in the online portion of the course which may include any or all of the following:
- Completion of quizzes or exams during class meetings and online
- Submission of assignments during class meetings and online
- Participation in discussions during class meetings and online

Online Course: Active participation in an online course includes the following:
- Completion of quizzes or exams
- Submission of assignments
- Participation in threaded discussions

Simply logging into the Learning Management System (Canvas) and/or accessing the course and course related material does not constitute active participation for the online component of hybrid courses or for online courses. (*Policy Handbook, G.040*)

**Student Email:** MACC Mail is the official student email system at MACC. Official college communication is sent via this email system. Students are responsible for checking their MACC Mail account regularly. Students may also receive notifications and reminders from MACC through the online learning platform. However, students should remain aware that the online learning platform messaging system and MACC Mail (student email) system are two separate systems.

**ADA Statement:** Students who have disabilities that qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act may register for assistance through the Office of Access and ADA Services. Students are invited to contact the Access Office to confidentially discuss disability information, academic accommodations, appropriate documentation and procedures. For more information, please call either the Moberly office at (660) 263-4100 x 11240 or the Columbia office at (573) 234-1067 x 12120, or visit our web page at [http://www.macc.edu/index.php/services/access-office](http://www.macc.edu/index.php/services/access-office).

**Title IX Statement:** MACC maintains a strict policy prohibiting sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, and sexual violence. All MACC employees, including faculty members, are considered mandated reporters of sexual misconduct and as such are expected to contact the Title IX Coordinator when they become aware, in conversation or in writing, of an incident of sexual misconduct. For more information on this policy or to learn about support resources, please see [http://www.macc.edu/sexual-misconduct-policy](http://www.macc.edu/sexual-misconduct-policy) (links to an external site) or contact Ms. Cheryl Lybarger, MACC’s Title IX Coordinator, at 660-263-4110, ext. 11369 or CherylLybarger@macc.edu.