*CL 2401: Introduction to the New Testament:*

*History and Literature*

**Course Description**

This survey of the New Testament writings, including non-canonical sources of the early Christian movement, is a new addition to the study of the literature and cultures of Greece and Rome in the Department of Greek and Latin. The course approaches the New Testament in its historical and cultural context, as part of the wider Hellenistic literature of classical antiquity. The course introduces students to the critical study of the assorted literature that made it into the New Testament canon, and of the Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman cultural environment that shaped its composition. An overarching question of this survey is: How did a small group of Jews connected with a prophet named Jesus become a separate religion with its own rituals and literature about a "Son of God"? After a brief look at the religious and social environment of the first century, the course will examine the early Jesus movement, the first Christian writings (the letters of Paul), the production of "gospels" about Jesus, and the development of the early churches as institutions in the ancient world. The student will read the entire New Testament, as well as the apocryphal works such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Currently, there is no similar course listed in the Department or in any other academic unit of OSU. The only other cognate course would be CL 210 The Greek New Testament, but it focuses on translation (grammar and syntax) as a second-year Greek language class rather than a classical studies course offering a comprehensive survey of the early Christian writings to the beginning student in translation.

**This course fulfills the General Education**

**2. Breadth C. Arts and Humanities (1) Literature Goals and Learning Outcomes**

**and the**

**3. Historical Study Goals and Learning Outcomes**

**Arts and Humanities Literature Goals and Learning Outcomes**

**Goals:**

Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

**Expected Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students develop abilities to be informed observers of, or active participants in, the visual, spatial, performing, spoken, or literary arts.

2. Students develop an understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.

3. Students examine and interpret how the human condition and human values are explored through works of art and humanistic writings.

**Literature Expected Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students learn to analyze***,*** appreciate, and interpret significant literary works.

2. Through reading, discussing, and writing about literature, students learn to understand and

evaluate the personal and social values of their own and other cultures.

**Historical Study**

**Goals:**

Students develop knowledge of how past events influence today’s society and help them understand how humans view themselves.

**Expected Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students acquire a perspective on history and an understanding of the factors that shape human activity.

2. Students display knowledge about the origins and nature of contemporary issues and develop a foundation for future comparative understanding.

3. Students think, speak, and write critically about primary and secondary historical sources by examining diverse interpretations of past events and ideas in their historical contexts.

**Rationale for why the course fulfills GE Requirements:**

**Arts and Humanities Literature**

The New Testament, part of the Christian Bible, is a significant literary work having a huge impact upon the development of Western civilization and beyond. The New Testament in particular continues to hold religious authority on morality, personal and social values, and contemporary belief systems. Through reading, discussing, and writing about the New Testament writings in their ancient context, the student will learn essential critical thinking skills––how to analyze a text about which he or she may have considerable preconceived notions and beliefs. The course does not aim to promote or undermine any particular religion our worldview. Rather, its Religious Studies approach seeks to examine the Bible from outside the framework of any particular belief system. In the end, the main learning goal is to show the New Testament not to be a monograph but a collection of writings reflecting different literary styles, genres, and authors.

**Historical Study**

The expected historical learning outcomes of this course are the acquisition of foundational knowledge in (1) the social and religious environment in which early Christianity was born, (2) the evidence for and characteristics of the early Jesus movement, (3) Paul's career, thought, and communities, (4) the diverse images of Jesus and his followers found in the Gospels, (4) how institutional Christianity emerged, (5) the historical context and basic themes of each New Testament writing. These specific course goals aim to move the student toward critical thinking, having a multicultural perspective and an appreciation for multiple worldviews (ancient Jewish, early Christian, and Greco-Roman). The course emphasizes reflectiveness and value consciousness, especially as they develop from a critical reading of religious texts such as the Bible. This exploration invites the student into a historical understanding of biblical scholarship as an academic field of the humanities, and why every educated person ought to know about its findings.

**Course Requirements**

1. Class Attendance and participation, with class participation and/or use of office hours improving final grade. The goal of rewarding class participation is to encourage active rather than passive learning.
2. *Two essays*. One is a short (2–3 page) essay. The second is a longer (5–7 page) exegesis paper on a specific Synoptic Gospel parallel. Each paper will have a different focus, but both have the shared goal of evaluating students' abilities to identify and critically assess the particular themes and theological goals of particular biblical authors. These abilities include explaining the similarities and differences between the gospels, identifying sources in the sequence of stories, and obtaining mastery of the method of biblical interpretation known as redaction criticism. A sample assignment might be: "Compare and contrast the demeanor and portrayal of Jesus' death in Mark and Luke."
3. Two midterm exams
4. Final Examination.

The examinations will contain objective questions (multiple choice, identification of passages), vocabulary terms to define, and essay questions. A sample essay question might be: "What evidence is there that the Gospel of John used written sources for his work? Did the author of John know the other Gospels? What other sources can be detected behind his narrative?"