

Faculty End-of Course *Reflection* Summary

Purpose of this course

This New Testament course offers students a comprehensive exploration of the foundational texts of Christianity, providing a deep understanding of the life, teachings, and impact of Jesus Christ and the early Christian community. Through the study of the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation, students engage with themes of theology, ethics, and the historical context of the New Testament.

This course contributes to students' learning by fostering critical thinking skills, historical analysis, and a nuanced understanding of the religious and cultural contexts that shaped the New Testament writings. It is designed for a diverse student audience interested in religious studies, theology, or those seeking a broader understanding of the cultural and intellectual foundations of Western civilization.

Positioned within the program's major curriculum, this New Testament course serves as a vital component, offering valuable insights into the development of Christian thought and its impact on diverse aspects of human civilization.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

This course introduces the fundamental characteristics of the New Testament, exploring the Early Christian Movement in the cultural and historical context of ancient Palestine. After completion, students will be able to:

- A. Describe the atmosphere, evolution, and purpose of the New Testament through knowledge of early Christian traditions, demonstrated in its literary texts and their historical background in various assignments.
- B. Discuss the relevance of the New Testament in the postmodern era, gaining awareness of its role in modern life and understanding the human condition through literature analysis.
- C. Understand the origin and evolution of New Testament scripture.
- D. Discuss the compiling methods and primary units of the New Testament.
- E. Discuss major themes, lives of people in the New Testament, and the historical profile of Jesus and the Early Church. Explore the social context in which they lived and understand the Early Church's interpretation of Jesus.
- F. Discuss the impact of the New Testament on Christianity, Western civilization, and the world.
- G. Discuss significant transitions and elements in the history of Christianity.

H. Recognize significant events in the New Testament and discuss their impact on the lives of the first followers of Jesus.

Overall comments/impressions

This course was especially enjoyable because of the cohort of students enrolled this semester. They melded well personality wise, and most were curious about the subject even though the majority had taken the course to meet their GenEd requirement. Most students felt comfortable enough to ask questions and others offered their understanding, which prompted good discussions. There was a great deal of diversity in their knowledge of the New Testament with most having had almost no interaction with these documents.

What worked:

I made almost no changes in the way I taught the course from previous semesters; relevant New Testament scholarship seems a bit stagnate in recent years. I added more video clips to give students a better feel for the historical aspects (clothing, transportation, Roman presence, scrolls instead of books, no electricity, modes of transportation, etc.) of the New Testament period. This seemed to help the students who find reading an unpleasant task.

The presentation assignment *Unveiling the Unheard: Bringing Little-Known New Testament Characters to Life" - Exploring Characters of the New Testament* was very successful in that it allowed students to immerse themselves in the documents and explore characters and occasions that were not part of the lectures. It was based on research into the period and culture of Jesus' time while also allowing students to be creative and share their research with their classmates.

I regularly take time to collect feedback from students about the course structure, assignments, and overall experience. I use this feedback to make continuous improvements and any necessary changes. I try to meet with students who seem to be having difficulty early in the course to assess why they are having issues. Is it my teaching or lecture style? Do they hate the subject and material, etc.

What could be better:

I was particularly dismayed with the two students in the Honors section of this course. I had several other students who offered more insightful comments and observations and earned grades that were often better than these students. The research paper that fulfilled the extra assignment for the class was very disappointing. The sources were not scholarly, and the paper was mostly opinion. ***Students in general, but especially students in this program should be able to write a quality research paper before coming into my classroom.***

I recognize the diverse knowledge levels of students and try to provide resources or optional materials for those who may need additional background information. ***However, it is very difficult to ensure that everyone, regardless of their familiarity with the New Testament, can engage meaningfully.*** It is very difficult to cover the material for more advanced students without sacrificing time for those with little knowledge and willingness to put forth the necessary effort.

Suggested changes for this course:

I would like to see this course be re-invented as a more relevant offering. Even though we are a private Methodist university, our students are less and less familiar with religion in general and the sacred documents of their religion in particular. Staying within the description of the title of this course and relating the material to our students' careers and life is very restrictive. Of course, they learn ethical and moral precepts, however, they have so many opportunities for learning these in their chosen major courses.

Dr. Martinez and I have talked about making changes. We discussed changing the title of the course to spark interest from those who view it strictly as a boring required course. Something like, *Christianity Through its Sacred Scripture: New Testament (or Old Testament,)* *Foundations of Christianity: New Testament (or Old Testament.)* We thought this would allow bringing in more of a "why" or "so what" factor, making it easier to connect these works to our students lives. Instead of focusing on the documents and their content almost exclusively the focus would be to connect the documents outside their milieu.

I think this would allow us to integrate interdisciplinary elements by connecting New Testament themes with topics relevant to modern life, such as ethics, social justice, literature, philosophy, or psychology and show students how the principles from the New Testament can be applied in various fields.

Implications for technology, budget, etc.:

The library has so many wonderful offerings, but I would like to see the addition of a curated site that offers scholarly short videos (3-5 minutes) acceptable for religion courses. I spend hours trying to find appropriate materials online and then watching and researching the sources of the videos. I particularly like to offer videos in my New Testament and Introduction to Religion classes as it helps students orient themselves to the reading materials.