Bulletin Description

A critical study in the life and thought of Paul, his letters to the early Christian churches, his role in the expansion of the Christian movement, and his continuing influence today.

Course Summary

This course is an examination of Paul’s role as an apostle, teacher, wonder-worker, and legendary figure in the early centuries of the formation of Christianity. To this end, students read, analyze, and discuss a variety of primary source material, with an eye toward understanding it within the social and intellectual matrix of the first century.

During the first part of the course, we cover ancient accounts of Paul’s life, including the canonical Acts of the Apostles. We also look at two other legendary accounts, namely, the mid-to late-2nd century Acts of Paul and Acts of Paul and Thecla, as well as the Apocalypse of Paul, which was found among the Nag Hammadi Codices in 1945.

The second part of the course deals with texts attributed to Paul himself. We begin with his undisputed letters (1 Thessalonians, 1&2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians, Romans), the deutero-Pauline (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians), and the Pastoral Epistles (1&2 Timothy, Titus), followed by 3 Corinthians, the letter to the Laodiceans, and the alleged correspondence with Seneca.

Finally, the third part of the course explores some of the major interpretive trends in the modern study of Paul, from the 19th century to the present day.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the ancient texts used to reconstruct the life of Paul the Apostle as well as some of the issues related to this reconstruction;
- Conduct close-reading and analysis of the letters attributed to Paul with attention to the social, theological, and intellectual contexts that they suggest;
- Critically engage current debates about the life and letters of Paul;
- Explain why and how the study of Paul is significant within the academic study of religion.
**Textbook**


In addition to this textbook, students will need to have a copy of the letters of Paul. They may be found in any New Testament, but I recommend the Revised Standard Version (RSV) or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Other readings will be posted on Blackboard for students to download.

**Assignments, Requirements, and Grading**

- **Participation** (20% of the final grade): Each reading assignment will be paired with a set of 2-3 discussion questions that are distributed ahead of time. Students are responsible for thinking about these questions before class and being ready to discuss them.

- **Exam #1** (20% of the final grade): Take-home exam covering the material from the first part of the course.

- **Exam #2** (20% of the final grade): Take-home exam covering the material from the second part of the course.

- **Exam #3** (20% of the final grade): Take-home exam covering the material from the third part of the course.

- **Final Project** (20% of the final grade): Students will work alone or in groups to identify, research, and discuss a particular topic, issue, or text related to the course. Projects will be evaluated in terms of clarity, attention to detail, critical analysis, and ability to assess the project in terms of the academic study of religion. Further details provided in class.

**Grading Scale**

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:


**Attendance Policy**

In the case of an unexcused absence, students will receive no credit for that day’s participation. Students who accumulate three or more unexcused absences risk having their final grade lowered by ten points, in addition to having received no participation credit for that day. Students who anticipate needing to miss a class for any reason must contact the professor ahead of time via email or in person to receive permission to make up the work. Unless the absence is discussed ahead of time, or unless there is a compelling reason for not doing so, the student will not receive participation credit for that day.