**Sample Course Syllabus for Course on “Jesus and the Gospels”**

**Setting: Undergraduate Elective Course**

To incorporate as basic textbook John T. Carroll, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016)

This syllabus serves as a *sample only* to guide your instruction of *Jesus and the Gospels.* It references sample guides and assignments that you may or may not wish to incorporate into your course. Please customize it to fit the individual needs of your class. There are sections, marked in square brackets, that ask you to enter information tailored to your class.

**[INSERT CLASS NAME HERE]**

**Course Syllabus**

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us. (Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay [2d ed.; New York: Norton, 2004], 1924).

**Description and Purpose of the Course**

This course introduces students to the four New Testament Gospels, the cultural environment in which they arose, and appropriate methods for interpreting them in English translation. The course explores the historical setting, literary features, central themes, and contemporary significance of each Gospel narrative. Attention is also given to the challenge of constructing the historical career of Jesus. Throughout the course, students will have opportunity to develop mastery of methods of contemporary Gospel investigation and interpretation, and to consider ways in which study of the Gospels can speak to concerns of contemporary life and culture.

**Primary Course Goals and Learning Outcomes**

As a result of their participation in this course, students will be able:

1. To demonstrate a basic knowledge of the New Testament Gospels, the historical contexts that shaped them, their literary design, the distinctive themes of each, and diverse contemporary approaches to interpretation of these narratives.

* Attainment of this learning outcome will be assessed through a mid-term exam and a final exam.

To communicate their interpretation of a passage from the Gospels by employing appropriate methods of interpretation.

Attainment of this learning outcome will be assessed through a paper written on a passage chosen by the student with advance approval by the instructor.

To discern and articulate connections between a text or theme from the Gospels and contemporary life and culture.

Attainment of this learning outcome will be assessed through an essay written by the student on a topic approved in advance by the instructor.

To analyze and critically evaluate a work that presents an interpretation of the Gospels.

Attainment of this learning outcome will be assessed through a critical book review of an assigned book (Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*), or a critical analysis of a film about Jesus in light of study of the Gospels.

To contribute to the construction of knowledge in a collegial learning community.

Attainment of this learning outcome will be assessed through the student’s participation in seminar discussions, plenary and small-group class discussions, and online discussion forums.

**Assigned Reading**

* Gospel according to Mark
* Gospel according to Matthew
* Gospel according to Luke
* Gospel according to John
* John T. Carroll, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016) [= Carroll]
* Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006) [= Carter; portions related to the Gospels assigned]
* Daniel L. Smith, *Into the World of the New Testament: Greco-Roman and Jewish Texts and Contexts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) [= Smith; for students with less prior exposure to the subject]
* Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus As a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013) [= Powell; pp. 1–71 and 225–49 assigned; the rest of the book is recommended reading]
* Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (SanFrancisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007) [= Levine]
* Anthony J. Saldarini, “Reading Matthew without Anti-Semitism,” in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 166–84
* David Rensberger, “Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John,” a chapter in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels*, ed. William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 120–57

**Recommended Reading**

* April 2016 issue (vol. 70, no. 2) of *Interpretation*: “The Gospel of Mark” (essays by Suzanne Watts Henderson, Jaime Clark-Soles, Raj Nadella, and Brian Blount)
* October 2014 issue (vol. 68, no. 4) of *Interpretation*: “The Gospel of Luke” (essays by John Carroll, Richard Vinson, Amy-Jill Levine, Matthew Rindge, and Amanda Miller)
* October 2009 issue (vol. 63, no. 4) of *Interpretation*: “The Gospel of John” (essays by Alan Culpepper, Francis Moloney, Mary Coloe, and Adele Reinhartz)
* Essays on Matthew as indicated in course outline below

**Course Expectations and Assignments**

1. **Participation in class**: each student is expected to attend, prepare for, and participate thoughtfully in all class sessions. The student is expected to be familiar with the material under discussion in class sessions and to contribute to the process of teaching and learning. Discussions of required reading will presume that the reading has been completed prior to the class session in which it is discussed.

The student’s thoughtful preparation for and engagement in class discussions—informed by careful reading of assigned books, articles, and passages from the Gospels—will be the focus in the instructor’s evaluation of student participation in class sessions.

1. **Paper presenting the student’s interpretation of a passage chosen from the Gospels**, guided by the process of interpretation outlined in the “Guide to Interpretation of the Gospels,” available at the course website. This paper should be 1500–1800 words in length. Detailed instructions for the preparation of your paper are available at the course website.
2. **Paper presenting the student’s thoughtful, critical reflection on the connections discerned between a passage or theme from the Gospels and a concern in contemporary culture**.The topic will be chosen by the student with advance approval by the instructor. The essay should be 1000–1200 words in length. Suggested topics are posted at the course website, but students may propose other topics.
3. **Critical analysis paper – choose from ONE of the following two options:**

* **Critical review of the book by Amy-Jill Levine: *The Misunderstood Jew*.** Imagine that you have agreed to write this book review for a journal in the field of biblical studies (see examples in the “major reviews” section of the journal *Interpretation*). You should summarize the primary aims, method of approach, and main points or arguments of this book, then offer your critical evaluation (identifying strengths and weaknesses). The review should be 800–1000 words in length. Sample, model critical reviews of other books from previous courses are available at the course website.
* **Critical analysis/review of a recent or contemporary film about Jesus.**

Imagine that you are a film critic with a widely syndicated column *and also* a knowledgeable student of the Gospels and of historical study of Jesus. You have decided to publish a review of a film about Jesus that critically analyzes its use of the Gospels and other sources for constructing a cinematic portrait of Jesus. The analysis/review should be 800–1000 words in length. Examples of films you might consider for this assignment (others may be proposed for advance instructor approval): *Jesus of Nazareth* (dir. J. Franco Zeffirelli, 1977); *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*–*The Gospel According to Matthew* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964); *Jesus of Montreal* (dir. Denys Arcand, 1989); *King of Kings* (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1961); *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (dir. George Stevens, 1965); *The Last Temptation of Christ* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1988); *Jesus Christ Superstar* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1973); *The Passion of the Christ* (dir. Mel Gibson, 2004); *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (dir. Terry Jones, 1979).

1. In a **mid-term and a final examination**, students will demonstrate their mastery of the course material. Detailed guides, including sample questions, will be available to assist you in preparing for the exam; these will be posted at the course website two weeks in advance of each exam. For additional study aids related to your textbook, *Jesus and the Gospels* by John T. Carroll, please visit <http://JesusandtheGospels.wjkbooks.com>.

**Evaluation of Student Work for the Course**

1. Paper interpreting a passage from the Gospels = 15% of the course grade.
2. Paper probing connections between a Gospel passage or theme and contemporary culture = 15% of the course grade
3. Paper presenting critical review of Levine book = 15% of the course grade
4. Mid-term exam = 20% of the course grade
5. Final exam = 25% of the course grade
6. The quality of class preparation and participation = 10% of the course grade.

*Explanation of grading scale*:

Please refer to the college’s academic catalog, p. xxx. See **[Insert class grading scale, with reference, if applicable to the academic catalog and/or course website]**

To assist students in gaining clarity about the instructor’s expectations for assigned papers, a separate description of rubrics guiding the evaluation of student papers is available at the course website.

**Expectations for Academic Honesty**

I encourage and expect you to discuss the content of this class with your colleagues, whether in person, through discussion forums online at the course website, or elsewhere. All submitted papers and exams, however, are to be your own work.

Consult a standard bibliographic guide for questions regarding citation. The style outlined in the

Turabian guide is preferred; you may find a helpful “quick guide” online at

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html> .

When, in written work, one uses the ideas of another, due credit must be given. Typically,

in academic writing, this credit is indicated with a footnote or parenthetical notation. Stricter rules apply when the exact words of another are quoted in one’s writing. Exact quotations must be placed in quotation marks (for quotations shorter than three lines) or set in a block quotation, indented from the body of the paper (for longer quotations); and the exact reference (including page number[s]) of the quoted work must be given. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, even if there is a footnote or parenthetical reference to the work generally. Plagiarism is a violation of academic honesty and school policy, and will be dealt with appropriately.

For details of the college’s policy on academic honesty, please see the academic catalog at **[Insert location of school’s policy on academic honesty.]**

###### REL 305 – Jesus and the Gospels: Course Outline

## WEEK 1

1. First session: ***Introduction to the Course & Conversation about Previous Encounters with the Gospels***
2. Second session: ***Context Matters: The Gospels in the Setting of First-Century Judaism***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 1, pp. 3–14
* Smith, 1–38

## WEEK 2

1. First session: ***Context Matters: The Gospels within the Roman World***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 1, pp. 14–19
* Carter, 1–53, 64–71, 83–85, 92–103, 111–21, 129–34
* Smith, 39–54

1. Second session: ***Historical Study of Jesus***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 2, pp. 20–27
* Powell, 1–71
* Smith, 57–106

## WEEK 3

1. First session: ***Formation of the Gospels & the Synoptic Problem***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 2, pp. 28–36
* Study the passages highlighted in this chapter using the Gospel parallels available online: <http://sites.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/meta-5g.htm>

1. Second session: ***Method in Reading the Gospels***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 2, pp. 36–44

## WEEK 4

1. First session: ***Gospel of Mark*** (part one)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 3, pp. 47–64

1. Second session: ***Gospel of Mark*** (part two)

Read:

* Gospel of Mark (ideally in one reading session)

## WEEK 5

1. First session: ***Gospel of Mark*** (part three)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 3, pp. 64–88

Recommended reading:

* April 2016 issue of *Interpretation*: “Gospel of Mark,” especially essays by Henderson, Nadella, and Blount

1. Second session: ***Gospel of Matthew*** (part one)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 4, pp. 89–105

## WEEK 6

1. First session: ***Gospel of Matthew*** (part two)

Read:

* Gospel of Matthew

1. Second session: ***Gospel of Matthew*** (part three)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 4, pp. 106–38
* Smith, 107–38
* Saldarini, “Reading Matthew without Anti-Semitism”

Recommended reading:

## Barbara E. Reid, “Which God Is With Us?” *Interpretation* 64 (2010): 380–89)

## Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 101–10 (on the Sermon on the Mount)

## Barbara E. Reid, “Matthew’s Nonviolent Jesus and Violent Parables,” in *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 27–36: http://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/ParablesArticleReid.pdf

## WEEK 7

1. First session: ***“Reading a Passage for All It’s Worth”: Workshop on Interpretation***

Read:

* “Guide to Interpretation of the Gospels,” available online at the course website

1. Second session: **Mid-term exam**

## WEEK 8

1. First session: ***Gospel of Luke*** (part one)

Read:

* Gospel of Luke
* Carroll, chapter 5, pp. 139–58

1. Second session: ***Gospel of Luke*** (part two)

Read:

* Gospel of Luke

**WEEK 9**

1. First session: ***Gospel of Luke*** (part three)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 5, pp. 158–84

Recommended reading:

* October 2014 issue of *Interpretation*: “Gospel of Luke,” especially essays by Carroll, Levine, and Rindge

1. Second session: ***Student Presentations***

***Paper presenting your interpretation of your chosen passage due at start of class***

## WEEK 10: Fall/Spring Recess – No Classes

**WEEK 11**

1. First session:  ***Gospel of John*** (part one)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 6, pp. 185–231
* Smith, 153–66

1. Second session: ***Gospel of John*** (part two)

Read:

* Gospel of John

# **WEEK 12**

1. First session:  ***Gospel of John*** (part three)

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 6, pp. 231–39
* Rensberger, “Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John”

Recommended reading:

* October 2009 issue of *Interpretation*: “Gospel of John,” especially essays by Culpepper and Reinhartz

1. Second session: ***Reflections and Rumination on the Four Gospels***

Read:

* Carroll, chapter 7, pp. 243–47

*Bring your thoughts about the four Gospel narratives you have read this semester: new discoveries and insights, as well as lingering questions.*

## WEEK 13

1. First session: ***Reading the Gospels Today: Connecting Text and Culture***

Read:

## Carroll, chapter 7, pp. 247–57

## Carter, 137–43

1. Second session: ***Student Presentations***

***Paper probing connections between a Gospel passage or theme and contemporary culture due at start of class today***

## WEEK 14

1. First session: ***Review Session – Synthesizing Learning in the Course***

Read:

* Powell, 225–49

Bring your questions!

1. Second session: ***No class – Day for Reading, Study, and Writing***

Read:

* Levine, *Misunderstood Jew* (complete reading of this book)

## WEEK 15

1. First session: ***Review Panel – Student Presentations on A-J. Levine Book***

***Paper presenting the student’s critical review of the book by Amy-Jill Levine OR critical analysis of film about Jesus due at start of class today***

1. Second session (or during school’s formal exam period): ***Final Exam***

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Course ends: your learning continues!