

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE PROPOSAL
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **EXISTING** courses for review. If this course will be submitted for review in more than one category, submit a separate proposal for each category.

COURSE NUMBER:	FSEM 100HH		
COURSE TITLE:	LOST AND FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY		
SUBMITTED BY:	James E. Goehring	DATE:	1/24/2008
<i>This course proposal is submitted with the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			X
<i>If part of a science sequence involving two departments, both departments approve.</i>			

THIS COURSE IS PROPOSED FOR (check one).

First-Year Seminar <i>(indicate in the rationale if this will also count for major credit)</i>	X
Quantitative Reasoning	
Global Inquiry	
Human Experience and Society	
Experiential Learning	
Arts, Literature, and Performance: Process	or
	Appreciation
Natural Science <i>(include both parts of the sequence)</i>	

NOTE: See the report entitled "General Education Curriculum as Approved by the Faculty Senate," dated November 7, 2007, for details about the general education categories and the criteria that will be used to evaluate courses proposed. The report is available at www.jtmorello.org/gened.

RATIONALE: Using only the space provided in the box below, **briefly** state why this course should be approved as a general education course in the category specified above. *Attach a course syllabus.* **Submit this form and attached syllabus electronically as one document to John Morello (jmorello@umw.edu).** All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

The recent media frenzy surrounding the newly discovered *Gospel of Judas* offers entrée into the question of the diverse nature of early Christian belief and the various strategies employed in the creation of a Christian orthodoxy. Through the reading of a selection of such texts, students will explore together this diversity, raise questions about its origins, and reflect on the processes that led to the creation of orthodoxy.

The seminar is based on the reading of primary texts, which will serve as the basis for class discussion and debate. The mere existence of such texts, as well as their often seemingly strange contents, raises immediate questions. The class will work together to make critical sense of the diversity evident in these texts and its eventual loss. The requirements include a series of brief papers assigned throughout the semester, a research paper on a non-canonical text, and the presentation of the research to the class at the end of the semester.

This course will count towards the Religion Major. Its content could easily be turned into a Religion course and as such it fits into the major well.

LOST AND FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Freshman Seminar 100HH

Fall 2007

Professor Jim Goehring

Office: Trinkle 235 Extension: 1343

Office Hours: W 9:30-11:30, 1:00-2:00; TTh 11:00-12:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The recent media frenzy surrounding the newly discovered *Gospel of Judas* offers entrée into the questions we will confront in this first year seminar course. From where does this gospel come? Why isn't it in the New Testament? When and why was it lost? Who wrote it? What does it teach about Jesus? How reliable is its presentation of Judas? Why haven't I heard about it before? Texts like the *Gospel of Judas* were in fact very common in the early Christian centuries. Many of them survived through various means, and many more are known today only through fragments or references to them made by early Christian authors. We will explore a number of these texts together, asking questions about their origin, their Christian teaching, and their ultimate loss. We will ponder together the diverse nature of early Christian belief revealed in these texts and seek to identify strategies employed in the creation of a singular Christian orthodoxy (correct belief).

Paul Simon's song, "The Boxer," begins with the stanza

I am just a poor boy, though my story is seldom told.
I have squandered my resistance,
for a pocketful of mumbles, such as promises.
All lies and jest.
Still a man hears what he wants to
hear and disregards the rest.

In the song, the final sentence represents the boxer's later reflection on life. It offers as well a cautionary reminder to the listener that one generally hears and sees what one wants to hear and see. A critical approach demands an effort to see outside and behind one's own world view. As you read the assigned texts in this course, keep Simon's words in mind. Set aside your expectations and listen to the author. Seek to understand his or her words on their own terms. Strive to identify your own preset ways of reading and/or judging such texts. Avoid the trap of "hearing what you want to hear and disregarding the rest." Be willing to think outside the box, to ask hard questions, and to challenge yourself with respect to how you want to see things. Remember that to understand the other does not necessarily mean to agree with it. It does, however, invariably broaden and deepen your own understanding.

ASSIGNED TEXTS:

Required to buy:

Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
Richard Valantasis, *Gnosticism and Other Vanished Christianities* (New York: Doubleday Three Leaves Press, 2006)

Recommended to buy:

The Harper Collins Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version. While I recommend this bible because of its translation and notes, I will accept most modern translations. You should not use a bible with the King James Version of the text.

Additional Texts:

As assigned in class and made available on reserve in Simpson Library or on-line.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This seminar is based on the reading of primary texts, which will serve as the basis for class discussion and debate. We will work together as a class to make critical sense of the diversity evident in the texts and to explain its eventual loss with the rise of orthodoxy. As such, class participation and discussion are an essential component of the learning process and grade. Reading and writing assignments must be completed for the class period for which they have been assigned. A willingness to enter into class discussion and debate, including on the class blog, is expected.

In addition to discussions based on the readings, a series of five three-page papers will be assigned throughout the semester, building in complexity as both the number of sources you have read and your critical ability to interpret them grow. You must do the first and last paper assignment; you are free to select any two of the other three assigned papers. If you do all five, I will drop the lowest graded paper.

A research paper (10-12 pages) centered on a non-canonical text that we have not discussed in class will serve as your final examination. During the course of the semester, you will be asked to turn in a paper topic (1-2 pages) and a thesis statement (2-3 pages), each with a developing bibliography. We will talk about the nature of these papers as the semester unfolds, and I will expect you to see me individually at least two times in the course of the semester to talk about your research project.

These papers, together with your midterm examination will fulfill the writing intensive aspect of the course. You will develop critical writing skills aimed at presenting your arguments in an objective manner.

Papers must be turned in on the assigned date in class. Late papers will not be accepted without **prior** approval. Mark the due dates on your calendars. Note below that a missed paper costs 5% of your final course grade.

Grades will be based on the following percentages:

Class Participation, including Course Blog.....	30%
Four (of five) papers.....	20%
Midterm Examination.....	20%
Research Paper.....	25%
Research Paper Presentation.....	5%

Total100%

A mid-semester progress report of satisfactory requires a course average of C- or above. A passing grade requires a full (D- is unsatisfactory).

COURSE BLOG:

A blog has been set up for this course. We will use the blog for free and open discussion of the week's topics and readings outside of class. The aim is to share your thoughts, ideas, and questions with each other as you read and think about the materials before class. One person's idea or question may spark a response or counter point, and on the blog goes. Conversations on the blog will then flow into class discussion. Note that participation on the blog will count towards your class participation grade.

In order to participate on the blog, you will need to obtain a user name or create your own personal umwblog (which will give you a user name). To do this, go to the URL "umwblogs.org". On the upper right hand column, click on "Get a Blog!". You actually have to click on the short sentence below it that begins "Click here to sign-up..." Then follow the instructions, checking the box for a blog or just a user name. When you have done this, send an email to me (jgoehrin@umw.edu) to confirm it with me so that I can add you to the user list for the class blog.

The name of the class blog is "goeh". You can enter it directly by using the URL "goeh.umwblogs.org". Welcome (upper left) is the equivalent of the home page. Announcements (upper left) will be items that I add occasionally to remind you of assignments, etc. Weekly Discussions (top of right hand column) will be the pages on which we carry on our discussions. Open up the week's topic and leave a reply.

As this is my first class blog, we will be learning together. Be prepared to see things added to or removed from the blog page as the semester proceeds. Let's have fun with it.

SYLLABUS:

WEEK 1

Aug 27 Course Introduction
29 Christianity: One Religion or Many?
Read: Valantasis xvii-xxix, 1-8.

WEEK 2

Sept 4 **General Reading:** Valantasis, Chapter 2.
Judas in the Canonical Gospels
Read: Mark 14-16; Matthew 26-28; Luke 22-24, Acts 1:15-10; John 6:66-71, 12:1-8; 18:1-14.
Questions: What similarities and differences can you find in Judas's role in the four canonical gospels? Why did he betray Jesus?
6 Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*
Read: *Gospel of Judas*. Download the PDF file at http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf print it out, and bring it to class.
Questions: What function does Judas play in the *Gospel of Judas*? How does it differ from that in the canonical gospels? Why is it different?

WEEK 3

General Reading: Valantasis, Chapter 3.

11 *Gospel of Judas*
Questions: How do the various authors use or shape the figure of Judas? To what end? Can we recover the “historical” Judas?

Paper 1 Due: Briefly describe the *Gospel of Judas* and the role played by Judas in the story it tells. How does this Judas compare with the Judas in the four canonical gospels?

13 *Gospel of Thomas*

Read: *Gospel of Thomas* = Ehrman 19-28.

Questions: Is this a gospel as you understand the term? How does it differ? How does its literary form relate to its message?

WEEK 4

18 *Gospel of Thomas*

Reread: *Gospel of Thomas*.

Questions: Saying 1 states that “Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings

will not experience death.” Choose a saying, explore its relationship to the other sayings in the gospel, and be prepared to offer an interpretation of it. How does your interpretation allow you to “not experience death?”

20 *Gospel of Thomas*

Questions: See paper topic below.

Paper 2 Due: Write a paper that answers the following question. What does the author of the *Gospel of Thomas* mean by salvation and how does the reader obtain it? Use or refer to selected sayings in your presentation.

WEEK 5

25 *Gospel of Mary*

Read: *Gospel of Mary* = Ehrman 35-37.

Questions: What do you make of a gospel attributed to a woman? Does that fact affect its interpretation? How does gender impact the text?

*******Research Paper Topic (Idea) Due*******

27 *The Gospels of Judas, Thomas, and Mary*

Questions: Why didn’t they make it into the New Testament? Who gets the credit or blame? How does their absence affect our understanding of

Christianity?

WEEK 6

Oct. 2 Reflection and Review

4 **MIDTERM EXAM**

WEEK 7

9 *Acts of Thecla*

Read: *Acts of Thecla* = Ehrman 113-121.

Questions: What role does Thecla play in this text? Identify the gender of all the characters, including the animals, in the text. What role does gender play in the story? Can you explain it?

- 11 *Acts of Thecla*
Read: 1 Timothy.
Questions: Compare and contrast the role of women in 1 Timothy with Thecla's role in the *Acts of Thecla*. How do they differ? Does the difference tell us anything about the role of women in the authors' communities?
Paper 3 Due: Before writing your paper, compare and contrast the role of women in the church as espoused by these two texts. How do you explain it? Write up your explanation in the form of a thesis and its defense.

WEEK 8

- 16 **General Reading:** Valantasis, Chapter 7.
*****FALL BREAK*****
18 *Hymn of the Pearl*
Read: *Hymn of the Pearl* = Ehrman 324-27.
Questions: What is the pearl? How was it lost? How was it recovered? Unravel the metaphors.
***** Research Paper Thesis Due*****

WEEK 9

- 23 *Secret Book of John*
Read: *Secret Book of John* = Ehrman 297-306, paying particular attention to 297--303 paragraph 1.
Questions: Can you follow the drama as it unfolds in these pages? How does the author give credibility to his account? Who/what is Yaltabaoth? How does he relate to God?
25 *Secret Book of John*
Read: *Secret Book of John* = Ehrman 297-306, paying particular attention to 303 paragraph 2-306.
Questions: Who is the mother? How does this text present the nature of humankind? From whence does its constituent parts (body and soul) derive?

How

is this different from understanding of orthodox Christianity?]

Paper 4 Due: Summarize the story of creation as outlined in the *Apocryphon of John*.

-
- 30 *Secret Book of John*
Read: *Secret Book of John* and Genesis 1-4.
Questions: Compare and contrast the nature of humanity in these two myths of creation? How do the myths shape their followers' understanding of the human? How do the different understandings of being human shape the concept of salvation?

- Nov 1 *Secret Book of John*
Questions: See paper topic below.
Paper 5 Due: Consider how the author of the *Secret Book of John* uses the creation story in Genesis. Does he value it or reject it? Could he discover/write his account without Genesis? For your paper, take a stand (argue a thesis) on the importance of Genesis to the author of the *Secret Book of John* and his

community

	6	Student Presentations
	8	Student Presentations

	13	Student Presentations
	15	Student Presentations

	20	NO CLASS: American Academy of Religion Conference
	22	THANKSGIVING VACATION

	27	Student Presentations
	29	Student Presentations

Dec	4	Student Presentations
	6	Student Presentations

*******Research Paper Due*******

READING DAYS: December 8-9

FINAL EXAM: Research Paper Due December 6 (in lieu of final exam)