Foundational Traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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Office hours during term: by appointment

Purpose: In this introductory-level course, we will explore stories of the formation and early development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We will examine both traditional and historical accounts; compare and contrast common characteristics, e.g., founders, sacred sites, defining events, male and female figures, and embedded counter-narratives; explore ways in which the three religions’ stories dialogue with one another; discuss the traditional and contemporary function of authoritative narratives; and learn about their spiritual significance to religious practitioners.

Competence Objectives:
Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to
- Define and use basic terminology needed to study the foundational traditions in the course
- Describe core components of the foundational traditions of each of the three religious traditions
- Explain and apply theoretical concepts used to compare and contrast the traditions
- Articulate some of the complications of comparative study of religious traditions
- Discuss inter-relationships between the three foundational traditions
- Integrate new information into one’s evolving personal theology

Format: Spring term 2015, Thursdays 9:00 am-12:00 noon, January 22, 29; February 5, 12, 19, 26; March 12, 19, 26; April 2, 9. Course activities include lecture, discussion, student presentations and small group activities. Led partially by guest speakers (4 speakers for half a class each), we will explore each tradition in turn; then study together an account of their interweaving by a scholar of Islam.

Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate and Basic Degree (CTS; Diplomas; M.Div; MA)

Required reading:

(2) Primary source readings and one secondary source reading specific to each tradition, assigned by the professor and guest speakers, will be available on moodle.
**Assignments:** Attendance, reading, class participation, three short papers, final paper on a selected topic. Written papers will demonstrate fulfillment of the course competencies.

**Attendance:** Class attendance meeting VST policies.

**Reading:** Thoughtful preparation of the assigned readings before the class in which they are due.

**Class participation:** Includes careful listening and thoughtful responses to class lecture, discussion and reading; engagement in class activities, such as reflective writing or small group discussion.

**Short papers:** For each of the traditions, students will prepare a 3-page paper, recounting an aspect of a foundational tradition, connecting it with the students’ personal theology, and reflecting critically on the process.

**Final paper:** Approximately 10 pages, on a topic of the student’s choice, approved by the professor. The final paper should be based on a tradition studied in class; include appropriate outside reading; and demonstrate mastery of content and critical analysis, as described in the course competencies. Detailed guidelines will be found in the syllabus; ideas, examples will be discussed in class. The final paper is not required for Certificate in Theological Studies students.

**Prerequisites:** None

**Selected bibliography:**


