Sacred Texts and Oral Traditions

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan  
Phone: 604-827-4742  Email: ldkaplan@vst.edu  
Office hours during term: T,W, Th 1:00-6:00 pm & by appointment

Purpose: An introduction to sacred scripture and oral narrative in four traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Traditions. For each tradition, we will read selected primary and secondary sources in order to consider the content of these sacred teachings, their history and development, techniques of transmission, interpretive practices, and cultural significance. Together, we will develop a group understanding of the meaning of the word “sacred” in the phrase “sacred texts and oral traditions.” Two field trips to see embodied traditions and three featured guest teachers will enhance our learning.

Competence Objectives: Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:
• Summarize content and style of Tanakh, New Testament, Quran, and Indigenous Oral Narratives
• Explain and apply a variety of culturally appropriate interpretive techniques for each
• Explain the role that sacred narrative and text plays in each tradition
• Summarize how each scriptural or narrative tradition was initiated, developed and preserved
• Articulate a personal understanding of the sources of sacredness in sacred narrative

Format: Spring term 2016, Tuesdays 9:00 am - 12:00 pm, January 19, 26; February 2, 9, 16, 23; March 8, 15, 22, 29, April 5. Course activities include lecture, discussion, small group activities, and two field trips.

Field Trips:
• Tuesday January 19 (first class): Field trip to UBC Museum of Anthropology for “City Before the City” exhibition; we walk or drive together 10:30 am
• Saturday February 20, 10:00 am – 2:30 pm: Field trip to Or Shalom Synagogue, 710 E 10th Avenue, on the 9, 99, and 8 routes; short bus ride from Commercial Drive skytrain (instead of February 2 class)
• Possible additional trip TBA.

Guest speakers:
• Rev. Prof. Gerald Hobbs (February 23, 10:30am-12:00noon)
• Rev. Ray Aldred (March 15, 9:00am-12noon)
• Dr. Nasir Zaidi (March 29, 10:30am–12noon)

Required texts:
Background to lectures:
• Bible, any edition. Excerpts TBA.

For presentation assignments:
• Occasional shorter readings drawn from the selected bibliography, to be posted on moodle.

**Assignments:** For all students:
• Attendance in accordance with VST policies
• Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities
• Completion of assigned readings
• Two 750-word reflection papers demonstrating personal engagement, awareness of at least one interpretive approach, and mastery of relevant content
• One group presentation on a text or article, details and assignments on the first day of class.

Additional for Certificate-level students:
• A third reflection paper.

Additional for Basic-level students (MATS, M.Div, MAPPL, MAIIS):
• A 3000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving research (5 sources) beyond the assigned course readings.

Additional for Advanced-level students (Th.M.):
• A 4000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving significant research (10 sources) beyond the course readings.

**Prerequisites:** None.

**Topics** (specific topics and reading assignments TBA in the syllabus):
Jan 19, Introduction; Indigenous Oral Traditions at Museum of Anthropology
Jan 26, Hebrew Bible
Feb 2, no class
Feb 9, Hebrew Bible; Student presentation
Feb 16, New Testament
Sat. Feb 20, Visit to Or Shalom Synagogue
Feb 23, Student presentation; Guest speaker Dr. Gerald Hobbs; Reflection 1 due
March 2, No Class, Reading Week
March 8, Topic TBA
March 15, Indigenous Oral Traditions; Guest speaker Rev. Ray Aldred
March 22, Quran; Student presentation
March 29, Quran; Guest speaker Dr. Nasir Zaidi
April 5, Course closing; Reflection 2 due
April 15: Paper or final reflection due for graduating students
April 22: Paper or final reflection due for non-graduating students

Selected bibliography:


