

OLD TESTAMENT

July 1, 2016

I. Short Description

BITH/ARCH 211 equips students to understand the Old Testament as literature in its ancient historical context and to relate the message of the Old Testament to the contemporary world. Courses in this area will introduce students to the historical and geographical setting, cultural context, and transmission of the OT. Courses will also facilitate direct engagement with the OT book-by-book, with special emphasis given to questions of genre, literary structure, and theology. BITH/ARCH 211 will enable students to describe and evaluate approaches to biblical interpretation, and will encourage students to embrace the teaching of the OT as part of the Christian Bible.

II. Shared Core Learning Outcomes and Interpretation

A. Students will be able to....

1. describe in broad outline the historical and geographical context in which the OT was written and the significance of this context for interpreting the OT.
2. recount the basic content, major theological themes and grand narrative of the OT, identifying key people, places, events and dates of the OT.
3. interpret OT texts as ancient literature with reference to genre and compositional features.
4. apply basic principles of hermeneutics to interpretation and application of the OT.
5. relate OT teaching to reflection in other courses and disciplines.

B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements

1. Learning Outcome #1: Students will be able to describe in broad outline the historical and geographical context in which the OT was written and the significance of this context for interpreting the OT.

"historical and geographical context": historical context includes the peoples of the ancient Near East during the time of the OT, including all dimensions of their cultures that are broadly relevant for understanding the OT, and also the basic timeline of ancient near eastern history as it pertains to OT history; for understanding the geographical context of the OT, it is expected that students will work with maps of Israel and the ancient Near East. Methods employed in the study of the context of the OT include (but are not limited to) archaeology, history, philology and various social science disciplines.

"significance of this context for interpreting the OT": the ancient context of the OT will serve to elucidate various aspects of the OT, including the literary genre and nature of composition of OT books, the history described in the texts, the original significance of words and concepts, and possible applications of OT texts for today.

2. Learning Outcome #2: Students will be able to recount the basic content and major theological themes of the OT, identifying key people, places, events and dates of the OT.

"basic content": basic content refers to knowledge of what books are in the OT and what

essentially each book contains, the main stories and key prophetic/poetic/wisdom passages, and the overall OT story. As part of learning this basic content, students will become familiar with key peoples, places, events and dates of the OT.

"major theological themes": major theological themes of the OT include creation, blessing, atonement, divine presence, holiness, covenant, Torah, God's rule and wisdom. Such themes are significant for understanding the relationship of the OT to the NT.

3. Learning Outcome #3: Students will be able to interpret OT texts as ancient literature with reference to genre and compositional features.

"ancient literature": students will learn how the general skills they have developed as readers of literature can be applied with profit to OT texts as literature arising from the ancient near eastern world.

"genre": in exploring the "genre" of an OT text, students will be seeking to understand ancient literary forms and their original functions, so as to gain greater clarity with regard to reading them properly today.

"compositional features": "compositional features" are genre-specific literary aspects of the text that are integral to the basic design of the work as it was composed, including plot structure, repetition, dialogue, characterization, key words, themes, and so forth within prose, and also the poetics of poetry, for example parallelism and figurative language. Different types of OT literature, such as narrative, law, visionary reports, proverbs, and psalms have their own compositional features. The possibility that oral forms impact the nature of certain OT texts can also be explored.

4. Learning Outcome #4: Students will be able to apply basic principles of hermeneutics to interpretation and application of the OT.

"basic principles of hermeneutics": emphasis will be placed on principles and concepts relevant to helping Christians ascertain the message of the OT for today. Basic principles of hermeneutics are also significant for helping students evaluate intelligently and faithfully difficult issues raised by modern academic biblical studies.

5. Learning Outcome #5: Students will be able to relate OT teaching to reflection in other courses and disciplines.

"OT teaching ... other courses and disciplines": relevant to this outcome are (a) points where other courses and disciplines inform our understanding of the OT, and (b) ways in which the OT contributes to avenues of learning experienced in other disciplines and courses.

III. Guidelines

A. Expanded Description

Not applicable.

B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal).

1. Student learning outcome #1 expects students to understand, interpret and synthesize evidence related to the past in texts and material culture using a variety of methods, to evaluate theories on what conclusions to draw from this evidence, and to relate this information faithfully to interpreting biblical texts. This outcome connects especially with “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #1 and “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Goal #1.
2. Student learning outcome #2 focuses on knowing the content of the OT and also grasping major theological themes of the OT. Reflection on the theology of the OT is grounded in the OT itself but also places students in conversation with a theological tradition from antiquity to the modern study of biblical theology. This outcome relates especially to “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Goal #1 and “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #3.
3. Student learning outcome #3 requires students to recognize key literary features of biblical texts based on our best possible competence in the kind of literature each text represents, which is evaluated through close reading and also through comparison with cognate literature. All of this information must be assessed and synthesized with other information about the biblical text (e.g., cultural background) so as to enable students to read OT texts well. This outcome converges especially with “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #1 and “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Goal #1.
4. Student learning outcome #4 provides the setting for students to apply their study of the OT to their own lives, and to the full range of human concerns as experienced in the world and lived out in the church, from foundational questions of meaning to practical issues of society. Hermeneutical perspectives grounded in Scripture are appropriated using the interpretive and theological insights of Christian history and modern scholarship. This outcome dovetails with “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #3, “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Goals #2, #3, and #4 (interpretation requires “independent thought” and “imaginative and creative faculties”), and in some sense all of the Christian character goals, especially “Christ at the Core,” Christian Character Goal #1.
5. Student learning outcome #5 is to “relate OT teaching to reflection in other courses and disciplines.” This outcome as defined above coalesces with “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #2.

C. Examples of Assessment

A range of rigorous assignments could provide evidence that students have successfully achieved the five Student Outcomes given in section II.A. Depending on the structure of the course, one significant assignment might be relevant for assessing more than one outcome; in other cases a series of assignments will be more appropriate. A few examples and suggested approaches are offered here as *possible inspiration* of disciplinary appropriate and rigorous options, but **use of these exact assignments is not required**. Faculty are encouraged to go beyond these or substitute other creative assignments as they develop individual courses.

1. Assessment of Outcome #1: Evidenced by objective quizzes or tests addressing significant facts about the ancient context of the OT and the relationship between the OT and its context; an assigned essay that asks students to apply insights from the OT world to the interpretation of a

specific biblical text; an assignment that expects students to learn a map of the ancient near eastern world of the OT.

2. Assessment of Outcome #2: Evidenced by objective quizzes or tests that cover basic facts about the content and theological themes of the OT; a study guide or workbook in which students identify and explain key details of the OT; a book review that allows students to engage themes or issues in OT theology.

3. Assessment of Outcome #3: Evidenced by quizzes, tests, or worksheets that require students to explain textual details, resolve interpretive questions, or relate a biblical text to a specific issue in light of its literary form and features; an assigned essay in which students must address the literary features of a text as part of interpreting a specific OT passage.

4. Assessment of Outcome #4: Evidenced by an interpretation paper, essay exam, graded small group presentation, or other assignment in which students must apply interpretive principles to a specific OT text and elucidate the text's contemporary significance.

5. Assessment of Outcome #5: Evidenced by an essay assignment in which students apply insights from another discipline to an OT text, evaluate how the biblical materials inform the other discipline, and reflect on the process; interview professors from different departments on an issue raised by the study of the OT, reflect on their insights through the lens of OT studies, and summarize the results.

D. General

Not Applicable.