In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author’s context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ABRAHAM, HAGAR, AND SARAH: HISTORICAL AND CURRENT ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS

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Our listening creates a sanctuary for the homeless parts within another person.

-- Rachel Naomi Remen

I am a child whose teacher is love; surely my master won’t let me grow to be a fool.

-- Rumi

Course Rationale and Goals
This course will be taught in the style of a seminar: the overarching model is of a small group of students learning critical thinking skills through discussion, debate, and peer review. We will focus on skills needed to engage in productive civil discourse within interfaith contexts. We will figure out together how to make our classroom a safe space to explore and learn how to relate well to Others in the world at large.

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To that end, the course emphasizes two areas of personal development: (1) intellectual growth stimulated through increased interreligious literacy—both theoretical and historical, and (2) social and political agency developed through holistic relationships in the classroom and community engagement projects. The interreligious literacy piece of this course explores case studies of how members of the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have related to each other historically: their shared roots and how poorly or well they have subsequently understood, portrayed, argued with, or supported each other. The social and political agency piece builds up your skills in participating in productive civil discourse, perspective taking, public reasoning, and deliberating about the central question of this course: how might followers of these traditions live in peace: what has worked in the past? what has failed? what must we do now?

The course also incorporates five modules (one class each) that orient first-year students to college and academic life.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

- Have analyzed and discussed important moments of encounter, opposition, and interdependence in the history of the three Abrahamic faiths,
- Be able to critically analyze texts, viewpoints, and arguments by asking and answering relevant questions, applying basic principles of critical thinking, but also by actively listening and perspective-taking (this means taking seriously the ideas of others, and reframing those ideas by paraphrasing what you heard and imagining the way that others would approach an issue, and exploring the implications of an issue from multiple often contradictory points of view),
- Be better at participating responsibly in discussions of contested issues, and engaging in deliberative and collaborative efforts to find better ideas and creative solutions to whatever issue is on the table,
- Be able to offer useful analysis and feedback on another student’s oral and written work, and, last but not least,
- Understand the expectations of college students at Bridgewater and be able to set personal and academic goals.

**Required Texts**

- Supplementary Readings: Additional readings will be posted on Moodle (the course website).
Course Requirements

Reading Notes/Written Responses to Texts
This will help develop your critical reading skills by asking you to respond to historical sources and scholarly texts as well as other media. Critical reading is one of the primary skills taught in this course. You will be assessed based on reading notes and written responses to texts. The criteria for assessment will be:

- **Critical reading**, that is, basic comprehension + your ability to summarize and evaluate content
- **Analysis**, exploring the perspectives within texts, including the author’s, and your ability to formulate probing questions in response to texts and to pursue their exploration, and
- **Critical thinking**, that is, your ability to identify and assess the basics of logical argument (structure/fallacies) and weigh that assessment against other dynamics of encounter.

The reading load will *not* be heavy, but some of the material may be difficult for you. You may well need to read the same passage or chapter several times in order to truly understand it. Be prepared to spend at least 2 hours preparing for every class session by reading and preparing questions and comments to contribute in class discussion. Make sure to bring a print copy of the day's reading to every class, *as well as your notes on the reading*.

Engagement in Civil Discourse in Classroom Discussions, Discussion Leadership, and in the Community
Civil discourse and academic and social solidarity involve the ability to engage in constructive discussions, work towards common goals within a group, evaluate ideas through interaction with others, lead discussion in proactive and focused directions, and deliberate collaboratively to reach solutions.

Peer-Review and Revision

*Peer-Reviewed Writing* is a key tool that you will use to learn how to *apply* the critical skills of critical reading, analysis, and argument. You will *review each other’s work* on both oral and written assignments and *reflect* on group work and community engagement. You will satisfy this requirement by reviewing 10 pages of other students’ writing and *revising* 10 pages of your own peer-reviewed writing, including letters and dialogues.

Self-Authorship and Reflexivity

Over the course of the semester, you will learn how to pay attention to your own personal, intellectual, and ethical perspectives as they develop in our work together. I want you to develop your own unique voice, interests, and goals; to use your voice to articulate well-supported arguments, and, perhaps most importantly, develop the intellectual and personal resilience to be able to reassess and adjust arguments in light of the viewpoints of others and your relationship with them. This work will enable you to focus on your own personal vision of interfaith work for your final manifesto.
Assessment

- Reading responses (1 on Rowley/Taylor; 1 on one other text; 5 pp each, 10%)
- Peer reviews of Rowley/Taylor responses and reflections on civil discourse days (5%)
- Revisions of Rowley/Taylor responses and reflections on civil discourse days (10%)
- Engagement in civil discourse in the classroom (10%)
- Reflections on civil discourse days and discursive practices in the classroom (5%)
- Discussion leadership (of one of the primary texts we read in class, 10%)
- Written reflections on community work: Interview and JMU discussion (2-5 pp each, 20%)
- Final Exam = personal vision/manifesto (10 pp, 25%)
- Attendance at first-year modules (5%)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction to the Course

Week 1

Wednesday:
- Go over syllabus and introductions
- Define public discourse and civil discourse
- Collaborative establishment of guidelines for classroom engagement/safe space
- Share of overarching questions for each text and/or perspective studied in this class

Friday:
- Moodle: “Why Atheists Should Get Involved in Interfaith Discussions”
- Due: 1-page personal statements of “expanding identification” (counts as reading notes)
- In-class base group work: peer responses to 1-page statements of expanding identification

Religious Identities/Religious Groups: Orientations to Religious Traditions, Then and Now

Week 2

Monday:
- Interfaith Studies as the Study of an Infinite Number of Orientations to Religious Traditions
- Moodle: Patel, Kunze, and Silverman, “Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work” Also go to http://www.ifyc.org/ and poke around
- Due: 1-2-page response to storytelling article, answering one of the questions for reflection at the back
Wednesday:

- A Shared History: Promised Land, Christendom, dar al-Islam, Exile, Diaspora, Transnationalism
  Moodle: Rowley and Taylor, “Israel-Palestine Land Settlement, 4000 BCE – 1948 CE,” *Public Choice*

Friday:

- Due: 5-page response in the form of a trialogue between a Jew, Christian, and Muslim about this history
- In-class role-playing: acting out the trialogues

**Week 3**

Monday:

- Foundational Hebrew Bible Depictions of Others/Early Identity Formation Through Place and Peoplehood
  Moodle: Packet of Hebrew Bible Verses on Promised Land, Strangers, and Sojourners
- Discussion Leader: ______________________________________________________________________

Wednesday:

- Continuing discussion of definitions, categories, perspectives and responses to foundational Hebrew Bible Depictions of Others and time for peer review work (last 15 minutes of class)
- Due: your peer review of another student’s trialogue and your own revised trialogues

Friday:

- Moodle: Levenson, “Chosenness and Its Enemies”
- Discussion Leader: ______________________________________________________________________

**Week 4**

Monday:

- Discussion Leader: ______________________________________________________________________

Wednesday:

- Continuing discussion of definitions, categories, perspectives and responses to foundational New Testament Depictions of Others, incorporating ideas from Levinson article
- Moodle: Levinson, “Emerging Fictions of Identity in Late Antiquity,” first half, up to “God-fearers”
- Discussion Leader: ______________________________________________________________________

Friday:

- Continuing discussion – Moodle: Levinson, “Emerging Fictions,” second half
Week 5

Monday:
- Moodle: Foundational Qur’anic Teachings on “Family of Imran,” Ahl-Al-Kitab, Non-Believers
- Moodle: Packet of Qur’an surahs on (Non-) Believers, Hypocrites, People of the Book
- Discussion Leader: ________________________________

Wednesday:
- Continuing discussion of definitions, categories, perspectives and responses to foundational Qur’anic Depictions of Others

Friday:
- Moodle: Lamptey, “Thinking Differently About Difference”
- Discussion Leader: ________________________________

Week 6

Monday:
- Civil Discourse Day: Foundational (Religious) Texts: what are they good for?

Wednesday:
- First Year Module: “Academic Support Services” (Chip Studwell)
- Due: First Year Module: “Information Technologies” online tutorial

Friday:
- Discussion and Group Exercises on Basic Categories of Critical Thinking, Argument, and Fallacies
  Practice combining story and argument in groups

Week 7

Monday:
- Moodle: Excerpts from Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho (2nd century CE)
- Discussion Leader: ________________________________

Wednesday:
- Moodle: Halsell (Medieval Sourcebook), A Christian-Moslem Debate of the 12th Century
- Discussion Leader: ________________________________

Friday:
- Discussion Leader: ________________________________
**Week 8**

Monday:
- No Class

Wednesday:
- Civil Discourse Day: Dialogue, Debate, Discourse: what are they good for?

Friday:
- First Year Module: “Advising and WebAdvisor”

**Week 9**

Monday:
- Moodle: Sefer Toledot Yeshu, The Book of the History of Jesus (2nd -9th centuries)
- Discussion Leader: __________________________________________

Wednesday:
- Moodle: Early Christian Contra Judaeos texts and heresiological texts (2nd – 4th centuries)
- Discussion Leader: __________________________________________

Friday:
- Moodle: Excerpt from Kritzeck, Usamah: A Moslem View of the Crusaders (11th century)
- Discussion Leader: __________________________________________

**Week 10**

Monday:
- Civil Discourse Day: Satire, Polemic, Demonization, and Disgust: what are they good for?

Wednesday:
- In-class base group work: peer review of reflections on civil discourse days; sharing with larger group
- Due: Reflections on Civil Discourse Days

**Working Towards Mutual Understanding(s) and Common Good(s)**

Friday:
- Preparation for Community Interviews
- Interview Times and Dates TBD
**Week 11**

**Monday:**
- Moodle: Prophet Muhammad, The Constitution (Charter) of Medina (620’s – 630’s)
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________

**Wednesday:**
- Moodle: The Status of Jews and Christians in Muslim Lands, Jewish History Sourcebook (1772)
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________

**Friday:**
- Moodle: Theodor Herzl, selections from The Jewish State (1896)
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________

**Week 12**

**Monday:**
- Moodle: Nostra Aetate, Declaration of the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965)
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________
- Due: your peer reviews of reflections on civil discourse days and your own revised reflections

**Wednesday:**
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________

**Friday:**
- Discussion Leader: ____________________________

**Week 13**

**Monday:**
- Civil Discourse Day: Public Religio-Political Declarations: what are they good for?

**Wednesday:**
- Preparation for structured discussion with JMU students on your generation and interreligious engagement
- Discussion Date and Time TBD

**Friday:**
- First Year Module: “Career Services Module” (Sherry Talbott in Link 303)
**Week 14**

Monday:
- First Year Module: “Library” (Cori Stricker in the Library)

Wednesday:
- Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Friday:
- Thanksgiving Break – No Class

**Week 15**

Monday:
- In-class group work: dynamics of public discourse in JMU discussion

Wednesday:
- In-class group work: personal manifestos

Friday:
- Open Forum

**Week 16**

Final Exam: Date and Time TBD