Summary – Common Contexts – Biblical and Theological Canons

Old Testament

Fall 2004

For each new course above, please comment on
  a. the ways the course through its syllabus or instruction has (not) helped you understand the goals of the GE
  b. the ways in which the course has (not) contributed to these goals.

4. RS001H  “In the new GE Curriculum, this course falls under the rubric of “Common Contexts,” Each course in this category is intended to ground students in a body of material and explicitly to invite them into an understanding of the Christian liberal arts. In RS 1/LLOT the body of material is, of course, the OT. As we read it together we hope to increase your biblical and theological literacy, so that you will become familiar with its characters, stories, and themes. We also hope to provide you with essential resources for the integration of faith and learning throughout the curriculum. Because the course is interdisciplinary in nature, we shall explore connections with other fields such as political science, sociology, archaeology, anthropology, and philosophy. However, we shall focus primarily on three sub-disciplines within the field of OT study: history of Israel, literature of Israel, and OT theology. We shall examine how God acted in history to save (and sometimes to punish) Israel. We shall study how the faith of the Israelites is expressed in their literature (the Hebrew Bible). And we shall reflect on what the OT tells us about God and our relationship to him. In order to do this we must engage our minds as well as our hearts.

We hope you will sharpen your critical faculties as you learn to interpret the OT by raising historical questions, analyzing the forms of Israel’s literature, and thinking theologically about how to apply the OT to our lives today. Yet we are not only interested in your intellectual formation. We are also concerned about your spiritual formation and character formation. We hope that through reading the OT you will become more conformed to the image of God’s son, Jesus Christ.”

A. It is clear that this course offers skills and knowledge significant to other forms of study and life in general. Success in this class is based upon self-motivation, taking the
time to locate, read, and intelligently respond to new information, skills that are necessary for success in several fields.

B. Studying the entirety of the Old Testament is a daunting task, but I believe that Professor did an excellent job summarizing important concepts and touching upon “political science, sociology, archaeology, anthropology, and philosophy,” as his course syllabus suggests. Indeed, I feel more biblically literate and prepared to intelligently discuss theological concepts, historical information, and literary debates. We were expected to supplement our readings in a textbook with passages from the Bible as well as outside sources, and this significantly broadened my understanding of the material. In addition, the ten-page research paper allowed me to explore a topic of interest independently, selecting resources and integrating them into one final project. Overall, I am satisfied with the education I received in this class, and I suspect I am better equipped to write research papers due in part to the final paper.

6. RS 001 I don’t understand how a class helps to understand the goals of the GE program since they do not seem overly complex. Old Testament was a useful class as I have never had a class which supports Christianity and also because it answered several questions that I’ve had about the Bible. I didn’t always feel as though the explanations were good ones, but they are the best out there and it is helpful when there seem to be so many discrepancies. I also liked that he’d give us several explanations for each problem and allow us to make our own decisions rather than force feeding us his beliefs. It gave a good background without becoming difficult and requiring the knowledge of extreme details.

8. RS001H The professor did not explicitly state anything about this class regarding the GE requirements, but most Religious studies classes are self explanatory in that sense.
Spring 2005

RS001A
a. Dr. Longman made the goals of the GE very clear in his syllabus, as well as in his instruction. He made it clear the first day of class how important he thought it was for us as believers to recognize the importance of the Old Testament and how it relates to both the New Testament and our faith.
b. Dr. Longman was consistent with this theme throughout the course, and with every book we studied, he covered the biblical theological theme of that book and how it related to the New Testament. I now have a much better understanding of what the Old Testament means for us as Christians.

Fall 2005

12. RS 001
The GE description of the course fulfillment for Old Testament is simply that—The Life and Literature of the Old Testament. Although, once again, the purpose of the GE was not specifically discussed, the importance of understanding the Old Testament was emphasized over and over again throughout the course of the class. It was really an influential course for me in terms of gaining a great foundation for my faith, and a much deeper understanding of the basis for our Christian faith and the way God has worked through history. It became very apparent to me throughout the semester why such a class would be required, which I would consider to be a good indication that the course did a good job of contributing to the goals of the GE program.

14. RS-001
Dr. Nelson was a great professor. He really cared for us and made hilarious jokes which were sometimes greatly appreciated as we tackled such an overwhelming (but not impossible) amount of material.
Old Testament was more than just a history course about the OT. Dr. Nelson encouraged us in our walks to see the Old Testament as part of the whole of Scripture as opposed to just focusing on the New Testament which is so common in churches now.

One of the greatest things I learned in that class was the idea (the truth) that the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old. For me, it was kind of one of those things that was always known but then when we learned about it in class it really sunk in.

Spring 2006

4. RS 001
The stated purpose in the college catalog of the “Biblical and Theological Canons” category is to “increase students’ biblical and theological literacy, providing them with essential resources for the integration of faith and learning through the curriculum.” Judging from my experience, Longman’s Old Testament course meets these goals. Students read through nearly the entire Old Testament, an exercise which in itself does much to increase the students’ biblical, and, to a slightly lesser extent, theological literacy. The class is particularly successful because it combines this broad survey with detailed study of particular passages. Of particular importance is consideration of hermeneutical issues, such as consideration of the contexts in which these scriptures were written. Theologically, the class is meets the stated goals by allowing students to move towards a more complete understanding of redemption history. Consequently, students can better understand the New Testament and the current age in which we live and believe. My need in other courses, such as Christian Apologetics and a course in theological history while off-campus, for knowledge of the New and Old Testament, provides support for the need for this category of the GE program. The professor/course has effectively communicated the goal of theological literacy, as judged by the amount of class time spent on seeking to understand the theology of what is going on in the subject of inquiry. The required reading communicates the goal of biblical literacy. However,
because there is little on the tests that requires more knowledge than what is gained in class, the goal of biblical literacy is less clear.

7. RS-001
The syllabus for my Old Testament class, which the professor did discuss with the class at the beginning of the semester, rather effectively communicates the goals of the GE with respect to the class. The class has given me a much greater understanding of the Old Testament, which was formerly rather foreign to me. The Old Testament used to be somewhat unsettling for me because of the strange image of God it portrayed to me. It was always difficult for me to see how God in the New Testament and God in the Old Testament could be the same person. This class, however, has enabled me to understand the Old Testament on a deeper level and has also helped me to better understand God’s actions in it. I have come to love and trust God in a new way as I have been able to form a more solid image of God that is the same both in the New and Old testament.

9. RS 001
This course was very effective in communicating the goals of the GE because I believe that it is important for us as Christians to study the old testament. This was accomplished by broadening my scope of knowledge in regards to the old testament. The course was very effective in accomplishing the goals as I came away from it more knowledgeable on the important area of Christian belief.

**Fall 2006**

For each new course above, please comment on:

a. How effective has the course been in communicating the goals of the GE area(s) for which you are taking it? How, specifically, was this accomplished?

b. How effective was the course in accomplishing these goals?

RS 001
This course gave me an extremely comprehensive survey of the Old Testament. We learned the historical and theological background of the Old Testament, including important names, dates, and themes about each book. At the end of the semester, I felt prepared to write an essay supporting why Christians should still read the Old Testament even though Christ has already come.
In my class, we had four tests, each comprised of twenty-five short essay questions and one long essay. Because of the large amount of material, and the way we were tested, this class really challenged us to learn the information inside-out. Although it was very challenging, I enjoyed the class and feel much more knowledgeable about the Old Testament.

Spring 2007
RS 001

A. Tremper Longman’s Life and Literature of the Old Testament course has actually been one of the more informative and engrossing classes that I have taken in my time at Westmont. Exposure to Biblical and Theological Canons that I was not well versed in proved to be an enlightening experience. I learned a lot about the early history of Israel, as well as their worship and spirituality practices that can be integrated into our own. Finally, a more comprehensive understanding of Old Testament Theology is essential in understanding just who God is.

b) the courses lecture heavy style was the first time where that format worked for me, probably because of how interesting and informative the professor was, as well as how dogmatically he stuck to his handout outlines. Taking notes and reading adequately prepared me for the tests

RS001-3

a.) Though not as explicit as others, this course was effective at communicating the goals of the GE in light of a Christian Liberal Arts education. It stressed the importance of having a knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament as academic Christians in contemporary culture, and emphasized applying these Old Testament themes to both the New Testament and daily life.

b.) This course was effective in accomplishing the goals it set forth, as it encouraged students to apply learned biblical history and knowledge to their other learning and life experiences. As part of the GE program at Westmont, this course is substantial in contributing to a truly Christian general education.