

Date: September 30, 2022

To: the GE Committee

From: Sandy Richter, Gundry Chair of Biblical Studies

Topic: How does RS 155 “The Historical & Geographical Settings of the Bible” taught in Israel and Palestine fulfill the GE Common Inquires “Thinking Globally” and “Thinking Historically”?

RS 155 “The Historical & Geographical Settings of the Bible” is a critical addition to the RS curriculum as it is the only RS course we teach in Israel that addresses the geo-historical context from which the biblical narrative emerges.

This course brings students into direct contact with the particularities of Israel and Judea’s place and time via the topography, geography, and peoples of the Southern Levant as well as the artifacts, architecture, art and epigraphic remains of the peoples of the Bible from the Middle Bronze through the Roman Periods (see our attached itinerary). Students will engage with the formation and transformation of the cultures and civilizations of this region via the synthesized lens of anthropology, ecology, geology, primary source documents, current residents and their politics, and the students’ own lived experience. They will “think historically” about the real people who populate their Bibles, how and why their civilizations unfolded as they did, and “think globally” about the impact those people and their descendants have had on our current world. Our partner school, Jerusalem University College’s mantra is illustrative of this course: “Read the land. See the text. Live the Book.”

The “**Thinking Globally**” SLO states: *Students will be able to describe and analyze the dynamics of a particular artistic, economic, political, or social connection across cultural or regional boundaries.* In order to accomplish outcome, RS 155 students attend a full week of pre-departure class meetings in which they are introduced to and begin to analyze the dynamics of the Israeli/Palestinian and Jewish/Christian/Muslim relationships in the lands of Israel-Palestine. Learning activities include viewing documentaries, listening to lectures by Westmont faculty and representatives of each of these communities, and then engaging each other and these invited guests in directed dialogue.

Students then spend three weeks immersed in these cultures. They live in the Old City of Jerusalem among Arabs and Jews, Muslims and Christians, observing their lives, eating their food, attending their religious and military celebrations and engaging in conversation regarding their lives and religious commitments. Students travel to every region of Israel-Palestine, visit dozens of cultural sites and museums including Yad vaShem and the Israel Museum and the Druze communities in the north (see attached itinerary). They spend one evening in structured conversation with an Arab-Christian couple working among the Arab Christian community and Syrian refugees, another with a Messianic Rabbi couple working among Israelis near Afula, and another with a local Imam.

The array of culturally distinctive artistic presentations, the dramatic differences in economic structures and stability between neighborhoods, and the complex politics of the region will be an aspect of everyday experience for our students as they engage the culture and lifeways of these people groups current and past. Students will describe and analyze these dynamics in their daily journal entries which account for 15% of their grade, and in their written summary of the “50 Years War” six hour documentary, 10% of their grade.

Thinking Historically SLO states: *Students will be able to analyze historical sources with appropriate attention to their various contexts.* RS 155 is a course in historical geography. The stated objectives of the course are for the student to be able to identify, distinguish, compare and contrast important regional (geographical) aspects of Syro-Palestine, and to describe their bearing on patterns of human settlement, communication, defense and historical development, especially during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, the Iron Age, and the Greco-Roman period. Students are expected to describe relevant archaeological finds at selected sites which reveal how people in biblical times lived (private and public buildings, water supplies, defensive structures, etc.), and recognize, describe and illustrate the geographical and historical perspective from which the Biblical historians, psalmists, prophets and gospel writers wrote.

Students will spend twenty hours prior to departure mapping out the geographical and topographical history of Syro-Palestine with particular focus on the Southern Levant. There are seven regional maps (see samples attached), each of which is marked with history-shaping topographical features, trade routes, battles, and an array of other political events (see attached Regional Study Guide). This assignment accounts for 30% of their final grade.

Study of these mapped biblical narratives is augmented by primary source document readings in the Bible and epigraphic sources (e.g. the Lachish Letters, Siloam Tunnel Inscription, Dan Stele, Arad Letters, Moabite Stone).

It may be helpful for the committee to know that this particular course has been taught throughout the CCCU for over 45 years and has a long-lived reputation for excellence. It is recognized in the curriculums of Gordon College and Wheaton College as fulfilling GE historical and global perspective tags at these sister schools.