



BI509, CM509, or TH509 Independent Study

Full Syllabus

Instructor: To be arranged in advance

GCS mission statement

“Equipping the Saints for Pastoral Ministry.” We are committed to equip the saints for pastoral ministry through quality graduate-level distance education programs in biblical, theological, ministerial and pastoral studies informed by Incarnational Trinitarian faith.

Course description

This course allows students to study additional materials and perform additional research relevant to areas of interest, primarily in topics for which GCS does not have a specific course. This course may carry from one to four units.

Prerequisite: at least two previous courses in the discipline, with a grade of B or better.¹

¹ That is, if this course is taken for credit in the biblical studies domain, the student must have already passed two biblical studies courses. If the credit is to be used for a theology requirement, the student must have already taken two theology courses.

Purpose

Students will find this course useful for the following situations:

1. The student wants to study a topic that is not currently covered in a GCS course, or to study in greater depth a topic that is covered only briefly.
2. The student wishes to graduate soon, and needs hours in a specific discipline (theology, biblical studies or ministry), but the student has already taken all the courses being offered in that discipline in a given semester.
3. The student has received transfer credit, or credit for experiential learning, but the student needs one or two units to bring the total to a multiple of three, since our program is designed for courses with three units.
4. The student expects to be too busy during the next few months to be able to handle a three-unit course, but the student is confident of handling one or two units, perhaps by dedicating a few weeks to full-time independent study.

Required textbooks

The textbooks must be approved in advance by the instructor. The course requires a *minimum* of 300 pages of reading for each unit of credit. For examples of textbook lists, see Appendices D and E.

Student learning outcomes

Through this course, students will be able to...

For theology:

1. Describe the primary competing views on a particular theological topic.
2. Support a conclusion about the topic with evidence from Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.
 - Attainment of these outcomes will be verified by the final paper(s).

For biblical studies:

1. Describe the background and circumstances of one or more books of the Bible.
 2. Explain how the background and circumstances affect the interpretation of a specific passage in the book(s) being studied. This should include an analysis of how the passage is relevant for theology and contemporary application.
- Attainment of these outcomes will be verified by the final paper(s).

For ministry:

1. Describe the circumstances of one aspect of Christian ministry.
 2. Explain how the student may draw on theology, Scripture and experience to address the situation.
- Attainment of these outcomes will be verified by the final paper(s).

Requirements and assignments

1. Select the topics to be studied. For example:
 - a) Theories of the Atonement
 - b) Ecclesiology
 - c) Old Testament Writings
 - d) The General Epistles
 - e) Leading worship
 - f) Counseling the families of hospice patients
2. Select the textbooks. Your reading must
 - a) total *at least* 300 pages per unit of credit requested
 - b) include at least some material written within the last 30 years
 - c) include materials written by people with different perspectives on the topic.
 - d) be approved by the course instructor. Send the list of books, and the number of pages to be read, to the instructor before you register for the course. The instructor must be chosen from GCS faculty members, based on the field of study.

3. Reading reflection notebook. For every 25 pages of reading, make a one-paragraph summary of what the book has covered, and add another paragraph commenting on your reaction to this part of the book. These paragraphs should be brief, and may be only one half of a page, so a notebook for 300 pages of reading might be only 6 pages long. This should be done *while* you are reading the books. That is, read about 25 pages, pause, and write your reflections. The notebook will not only help you think about what you have read – it will also help us verify that you have done the reading.

4. One or more final papers, totaling at least seven typed pages per credit unit requested. If the course is taken for two units, the student may write a 14-page paper on one topic, or may write two 7-page papers. If the course is taken for three or four units, at least two papers should be written. These papers should demonstrate achievement of the student learning outcomes of the course (page 2).

Estimated hours

Assignment	Hours for one unit of credit	Hours for 2 units	Hours for 3 units	Hours for 4 units	Percentage of grade
Reading textbooks: 300 pages, at 25 pages per hour, for each unit of credit	12	24	36	48	0
Writing the reading and reflection notebook	6	12	18	24	30
Writing the final paper, at 5 hours per page	35	70	105	140	70
Total	53	106	159	212	100

Note: Most of our courses require 45-50 hours of student work per unit of credit; this one requires more time. Not only that, many theological and biblical books require more time than 25 pages per hour. However, for this generic course, we calculate our units based on a reading speed appropriate for the “average” graduate-level textbook.

Schedule

Work must be completed by the end of the semester in which the student has registered for this course. The textbook list is due *before registration*. One half of the reading and reflection notebook is due by the end of the fifth week; the other half is due by the end of the 10th week. The due date for the final paper(s) is the end of the 12th week. All work may be turned in ahead of time. If necessary, a seven-week extension may be obtained – see the *Academic Catalog* for details and fee.

Warning: In a course like this, without weekly assignments and reminders, it is easy to procrastinate. This course should be attempted only by those who have the self-discipline to manage their time well.

Library resources

For doing research and writing papers, you must use some modern scholarly books. Some students already have access to appropriate books; others will need to plan ahead, to obtain these books at a local seminary library, through interlibrary loan at a public library, or by mail from the GCS library.

You should also consult the document on our website, “Research Resources Outside a Campus-Based Academic Environment.” Go to the “Student Information” section of our website:

<https://learn.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=23> Look for “Research Resources.” While you’re there, look at the GCS library catalog, too.

Appendix A: Grading standards

Grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

- A to A- = Outstanding work: Above and beyond the requirements; outstanding effort and significant achievement are evident. Some measure of *remarkable* skill, creativity, or energy is also evident. Although most students in this class do great work, we cannot give an A to every student who does well.
- B+ to B = Above average work: Fulfills all aspects of the assignment and goes a bit beyond minimum competence to demonstrate reflection, research, and integration of the texts that show extra effort, achievement or improvement. This is a very honorable grade.
- B- to C = Average work: Fulfills all aspects of the assignment with competence. Assignments are completed as assigned. This is also an honorable grade.
- C- = Below average work: Below average either because some aspect of the assignment has not been fulfilled or because the number of errors interferes with clear communication. A grade of C- may also indicate failure to follow directions, failure to follow specific recommendations, or failure to demonstrate effort and improvement.
- F = Not acceptable, either because the student did not complete the assignment as directed, or because the level of performance is below an acceptable level for graduate level work.

The final grade will be calculated based on a 100-point scale. Letter grades are assigned as follows:

94 - 100 % = A	77 - 79 % = C+
90 - 93 % = A-	74 - 76 % = C
87 - 89 % = B+	70 - 73 % = C-
84 - 86 % = B	00 - 69 % = F
80 - 83 % = B-	

Appendix B: Course policies

Plagiarism is representing the words, ideas, or work of someone else as if they were your own. It does not matter whether this is done intentionally or accidentally. In general, any quote of more than five words in a row should be put within quote marks, and the source noted. The penalty for plagiarism is a grade of zero on the assignment. The penalty for a second infraction is a failure of the entire course. See the *Student Handbook*, section IX.A.

Appendix C: Student Learning Outcomes

Grace Communion Seminary has five core learning outcomes for its students. If this course is taken for biblical studies, it supports the first outcome: “Students will be able to explain the revelation of the Bible in its historical and cultural setting as it relates to God, Jesus Christ and salvation, and its application for faithful living today.” The attainment of this outcome will be verified by the reading reflection notebook and the final paper(s).

If this course is taken for theological studies, it supports the second GCS outcome: “Reason from a sound theological basis as new covenant Christians centered in Trinitarian Incarnational faith.” The student’s ability to reason theologically will be demonstrated by the reading reflection notebook and the final paper(s).

As with the other topics, the achievement of these outcomes will be demonstrated by the reading reflection notebook and the final paper(s).

Appendix D: Sample reading list – biblical studies

Example 1. Topic: The book of Hebrews (1 unit)

Pfizer, Victor C. *Hebrews*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997. Pages 19-208.

Trotter, Andrew. *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Guides to New Testament Exegesis. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997. Pages 15-222.

Example 2: The Epistles of Peter and John (1 unit)

Bartlett, David L. “The First Letter of Peter.” Pages 227-320 in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998.

Black, C. Clifton. “The First, Second, and Third Letters of John.” Pages 363-470 in Keck.

Charles, J. Daryl. “1, 2 Peter.” Pages 277-412 in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 13: Hebrews–Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006. Total, 165 pages.

Thatcher, Tom. “1, 2, 3 John.” Pages 415-538 in Longman and Garland.

Watson, Duane F. “The Second Letter of Peter.” Pages 321-362 in Keck.

Example 3: The Book of Revelation (1 unit)

Efird, James. *Revelation for Today*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989. Pages 1-139.

Fee, Gordon D. *Revelation*. New Covenant Commentary Series. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011. Pages 1-315.