

Friday, May 15, 2009

New summer course at OU focuses on the historic Jesus

Editor's Note: The following story is part of a series featuring Oakland University courses offered in the 2009 Summer Semester. It is designed to highlight diverse opportunities for students to continue their education year round. For more information, visit www.oakland.edu/summer.

By Amanda Benjamin, student writer

Running parallel with a surge of interest in books about Jesus Christ, the Religious Studies program at Oakland University is offering a new class this summer called Jesus and the Biblical Tradition.

Taught by John Kinkel, the course offers a non-denominational approach focusing on Jesus as a historical figure and what his followers wrote about him.

"We're drawing on a whole movement of literature," Kinkel said. Adding that he wants students to dig deeper and ask questions, he said, "I think it's important for people to reflect on fundamental issues."

Students will learn how Jesus fit in with the major religious groups, compare the gospels and explore significant themes and perplexing trends.

"Understanding ancient literature is a challenge," Kinkel explained. "Students will get out of the course its complexity and the ability to put a handle on that communication."

While this is not a Bible study course, students will learn about Jesus as a major figure in western civilization. "My expectations would be for students to know from a factual point-of-view who Jesus was," Kinkel said.

The course may be of interest to students considering divinity school, getting ordained or going into campus ministry or teaching, while others may enroll simply as result of general interest. In any case, Kinkel said he presents the material in a way that allows students to come to their own conclusions regarding the life of Jesus, based on the writings about him.

"You can't dispute the fact that this is what they said; this is what they claim," Kinkel said. "We would never teach a course that would offend religious beliefs."

Communication major Andrew Porter said he took classes within the religious studies program because he was interested in religion and had grown up in the church. "I just wanted to take some classes to broaden my knowledge."

He took History of Early Christianity with Kinkel and an online course called Religion in the Modern World with Charles Mabee. He said he enjoyed both classes because they were both thought-provoking, especially the final project in the History of Early Christianity class. Through this class, he said he learned about the history of the early church and traditions and was able to enrich his faith.

"I really enjoyed Dr. Kinkel," Porter said. "He's very knowledgeable." He also added that Kinkel was friendly, open-minded and welcomed differing opinions.

According to Porter, the religious studies program is good for students who want to learn more about their religions or different religions, as well as students with no religious affiliation. All gain a better understanding of the different faiths and potentially will be able to interact more effectively with people of other faiths.

Along with classes in Christianity, the Religious Studies program offers courses in Islamic and Jewish studies. It is an expanding program that serves other departments within the university with cross-listed classes. Students also can major in religious studies through an independent major. For more information, visit <http://www2.oakland.edu/religiousstudies/>.

SUMMARY

The Religious Studies program's offering of Jesus and the Biblical Tradition runs parallel with a surge of interest in books about Jesus Christ.

Created by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Friday, May 15, 2009

Modified by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Monday, May 18, 2009

Article Start Date: Friday, May 15, 2009