

Spring 2016 Comment Report

KELLI GIBSON

Course Sections

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BIBD 661 (01): Theo Expl:Contested Monotheism

Comments -

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- Excellent class. More "summative" readings would be helpful (i.e. intro to islamic history/theology)
- I benefitted from the times in the reading where Dr. Gibson provided questions to help guide the reading. This was helpful in finding a theme and made the reading much more manageable, for sometimes I felt that the reading was too technical. She clearly knows her information and does a good job answering questions in class. I wish that we would have spent less time in the Semester going over historical topics and more time going over the differences in how they viewed God, etc. I did as if the class focused more on the historical aspect than the theology sometimes. However it is very clear that Dr. Gibson cared a lot about what she was teaching and this came through in her teaching. She is a great lecturer and cares greatly about her students.
- Dr. Gibson was an excellent lecturer and facilitated class discussions in a fluid manner. Because she displayed an incredible amount of knowledge and interest concerning the class topic students were more engaged and interested in the class.
- I thought the instructor brought an enthusiasm as well a great knowledge base for the course that created an atmosphere for learning in the classroom. It is apparent this course was something Kelli was well suited to teach and she should be doing so for as long as she desires. I also appreciate her concern for the student's welfare outside the classroom as well.
- I think it might be helpful to provide a better introduction to the course at the beginning of the semester, and then really focus on fewer readings throughout each class meeting. For example, I often felt overwhelmed by the amount of primary sources that I had to read, and it was difficult to read and understand all of them. I'd recommend fewer primary sources, and add a secondary source. Then really focus on those examples, rather than doing a broad and/or brief discussion of each.
- One thing which would benefit students for the whole semester would be an introduction to Islam at the beginning. It felt like there was an assumption that everyone had had some sort of an introduction to this faith, and we didn't have any such introduction until the second or third week. Even if it's a reading before the first class session, it would greatly benefit those students who know nothing or next to nothing about Islam.
- The readings at the beginning of the semester were hard. I did not understand majority of it. Later in the semester it gotten a lot better and more interesting.
- Dr. Bryant-Gibson did an excellent job at wading through this new type of class and material, most of which was entirely new to the majority of the class. Encountering new material is always challenging, especially for graduate students who like to be good at things and know what they are doing; as this course continues to develop over the next few years, it would be great to see Dr. Bryant-Gibson provide a bit more of a theological connection to the historical material we read, especially at the beginning of class. Her excitement and enthusiasm definitely helped carry the class through some challenging readings.

What did the professor do that was effective? Be specific and name the actions that helped you as a learner. For example, you could mention specific handouts, AV presentations, particular lectures, presentations, discussions, assignments, or aspects of the syllabus. -

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- Implementing more class discussion was helpful; especially as the semester went on, it was very beneficial to talk with our tables about what we understood or did not understand in the readings and then talk to the group at large about them.
- Class discussion
- All of the handouts were particularly helpful, especially those that provided timelines and those that synthesized previously read material.
- Whenever she needed to, Dr. Gibson referred to other professionals who knew more than she did about topics under discussion. For example, she Skyped in a peer of hers who discussed the social implications of religious conversion, because that is what she's studying.
- Timelines were good and helpful to orient us. I enjoyed the conversation with your friend Anna. I liked the comparative readings (like the Bahira legends, Bashear legends) and when we compared how the different authors approached the same theological conundrum. The poetry/prayers were great, too!
- Bringing enthusiasm and a great knowledge base for the content taught. Use of visual aids, videos, handouts, etc. that helped with subject matter. Allowed students to make presentations in class after researching material for a specific topic. Encouraged group interaction and discussion. Showed concern for student's affairs/challenges outside the classroom.
- Pointing the students to relevant primary resources. Our reading material was also appropriate, I didn't think there was too little or too much.
- The handout with the prayer that used both Christian and Muslim language was incredibly helpful for me.
- When she introduced different authors and their background, it helped a lot in clearing up what we were looking for specifically. I also appreciated classroom discussions and group discussions in clarifying asking questions about the texts.
- The lectures where the professor provided the historical background for the theological developments being discussed were helpful. I really enjoyed doing the current event project because it gave students an opportunity to connect the historical matter to relevant circumstances and allowed students to reflect upon the theological developments they found most stimulating.
- Timelines/handouts and group discussions were great. Enjoyed the current event presentation.
- Splitting the class into groups to talk about a specific author/reading and then share with the class was very helpful.
- I enjoyed when we were put into groups.
- Great/interesting readings. Great passion for subject. The lecture on the veneration of the cross was excellent.

What specific recommendations do you have for the improvement of this course? Name particular actions that the professor could do to improve learning in the classroom. Name concrete ways the course could better meet student learning outcomes. -

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- More summative readings. Run more classes like the last week (i.e. sit around table, discuss specific reading, make students responsible for guiding discussion).
- I know she had mentioned this was her first year to teach the class and we were her ginnie pigs, but this semester was really hard to stay engaged. One of the challenges was that she was very soft spoken and it was hard to hear. Another challenge was there was no accountability for any of the work done, so it was easy to disengage. As a person coming into the class, I was lost and needed something to find my footing, but couldn't really do it.
- I would focus on fewer primary source examples each week.
- More guiding questions/intro material for the authors/readings would be helpful.
- I don't think the assignment of writing weekly questions to turn into the professor at the beginning of class was very effective. Most times the professor was not able to address the questions and the questions quickly devolved into ones that didn't inspire any discussion. I think it would be better if the professor clarified that the questions are meant to springboard discussion or come up with discussion questions herself. It would also be more helpful to have the historical background or context to primary sources before reading the sources themselves. It would make the readings more stimulating and make it easier for the student to follow along. Providing primary sources to read was very effective and stimulating, however, there were usually long lists of weekly readings which made the weekly assignments quite overwhelming. This made it difficult for the students to motivate themselves to read all the readings and also be able to engage with them critically. In addition, it came to a point where the students stop reading all the readings because we knew that we wouldn't even address all of the readings in class because there simply was not enough time in class. It might be helpful to narrow down the sources used to explore one topic. I also found the weekly reflection to be effective and thought it was fair that the professor did not require one for every week of the semester. However, I think it is a bit odd to have an assignment due on Saturday. It would be more effective to simply have the assignment due during the week while students are already thinking about homework. It is easier to forget an assignment that is due on Saturday than an assignment that is due on Friday.
- I thought the readings that weren't on pdf forms were very hard to access and added unnecessary layers of stress to trying to find the book, download the right chapter, read it correctly, etc. There was also a large plethora of reading material that sometimes bogged down the class in trying to understand ALL of it instead of just one or two texts that could have helped demonstrate the reason the text was selected. Topically was a way to divide up the class but I wonder what would have come from teaching classes based on authors instead - going through Abu-Qurah and clarifying his historical stature rather than always hearing a symphony of Arabic voices and knowing vaguely where they are or where they are associated. It would also give a sense to the specific individual style of each author in approaching polemical arguments. I appreciated the theological conversation but I thought it was sparing in the class. It seemed to more fit a Historical Explorations class. I think focusing on individual writers would allow theological reflection and evaluation to occur more systematically.
- The reading was at times a little too technical and hard to understand. It would help if we had questions to look for during the reading as well as background information on some of the people. My favorite times in class were when Dr. Gibson talked about her thesis and we compared the theology of several groups together.
- In the description of the course I would have appreciated an emphasis that the class leaned heavily into historical theology. Other than that, I also would have liked to know how my weekly reflections were graded in a timely manner during the semester.
- Can't think of any at this time.
- More orientation to the authors we are reading, and perhaps fewer authors but more readings from them.
- Uh... I think I did that in the earlier comments section.
- I think beginning the course with a critical introduction to the Muslim faith at the beginning of the semester would be extremely helpful. Additionally, more of focus directly on modern interreligious conversation would be helpful. Also, focusing more specifically on some modern theologians who are engaged in interfaith conversations would be great (i.e. Miroslav Volf).
- If possible have the hard reading mixed in with the easy ones.
- The class that stood out the most to me is when we parsed out the theological views of three different writers and compared them as a group; this was so helpful, engaging, and interesting. Cultivating more class sessions like this would help. Particularly, the class felt very heavy on the historical side and not on the theology side; the course could be improved by integrating these two more often as we did that day in class.