

**CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**  
**July 1, 2020**

**I. Short Description**

A Christian Theology course investigates the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. Part of the shared core, the course is taken after students have completed courses in biblical studies and is designed to build on those biblical roots so the student may be theologically formed.

**II. Shared Core Learning Outcomes and Interpretation**

**A. Students will be able to....**

1. articulate a survey level understanding of Christian doctrine, including its biblical, historical, cultural, and theological components, with attention to the distinctives of the evangelical tradition
2. engage complex biblical and theological questions with the aim of growing in love for the triune God, the global church of Christ, Holy Scripture, their neighbor, and creation

**B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements**

The learning outcomes above are in service to deepening love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ and the Spirit's testimony in Scripture.

1. Learning Outcome #1: Articulate a survey level understanding of Christian doctrine, including its biblical, historical, cultural, and theological components, with attention to the distinctives of the evangelical tradition.

This learning outcome is content focused. Given the identity of Wheaton College as an Evangelical institution that includes within its community Christians from the breadth and diversity of Evangelicalism, a Christian Theology course seeks to help students understand both the unity and diversity of Christian faith, with an emphasis on the faith's evangelical expression. Content of the course attends, especially, to those central doctrines that unite Christians across the church catholic, as well as to those Evangelical Protestant distinctives important to the identity of the Wheaton community. The course focuses far more on what unites Christians—core matters—than on those peripheral matters that divide Christians. Understanding core doctrines will help students to think theologically about the breadth and depth of the biblical witness. It will also provide students with the knowledge base expected from a survey course of this type.

2. Learning Outcome #2: Engage complex biblical and theological questions with the aim of growing in love for the triune God, neighbor, and world.

Doing theology is a critical and synthetic task. To this end, a Christian Theology course helps students to interpret and assess theological sources and to analyze theological topics with conceptual rigor and sophistication. It also encourages students to make connections between topics within the course and to connect course material to other areas of learning.

3. Learning Outcome #3: Integrate theological learning with other disciplines.

This learning outcome reflects Wheaton's identity as a Christian liberal arts college. Just as theology can illuminate the work of other disciplines, so also can other disciplines illuminate

the work of theology. Students will be encouraged to explore the connections between theology and other areas of study for the purpose of faithful and constructive engagement with the world.

### **III. Guidelines**

#### **A. Expanded Description**

A Christian Theology course introduces students to the content of orthodox Christian doctrine and is designed to help them formulate Christian ways of thinking about the academic disciplines and about the life of discipleship. Students will usually complete their Christian Theology course through Christian Thought (BITH 315) or Systematic Theology (BITH 374). Since Christian Thought is designed for students who are not majoring in Biblical and Theological Studies, this course will lay particular emphasis on the integration of faith with liberal arts learning.

#### **B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal)**

A Christian Theology course is unusual in the number of overall goals of the Christ at the Core program it addresses. Especially, the course relates to the following goals:

1. Student learning outcome #1 relates especially to “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #3: “understanding the contours of theological, cultural, and intellectual traditions” and to “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Learning Goal #1: “developing a substantive understanding of the Bible, theology, and the history of the church as a foundation for godly living and distinctively Christian learning.”
2. Student learning outcome #1, in its attention to Christian unity and diversity, will connect explicitly to “Christ at the Core,” Holistic Learning Goal #4: “engaging constructively with racial, cultural, social, and religious diversity with the goal of learning to treasure the breadth and scope of Christ’s church and God’s world.”
3. Student learning outcome #2 is substantially related to “Christ at the Core,” Wisdom Learning Goal #2: “applying biblical principles and theological perspectives and developing the virtues required to meet the myriad challenges of their lives.”
4. Student learning outcome #3, in its concern for the integration of faith and learning, relates to "Christ at the Core," Holistic Learning Goal #2: "pursuing varied approaches to knowledge with discernment and humility as they map both the rich connections and the conflicts among the disciplines," and Wisdom Learning Goal #2: "applying biblical principles and theological perspectives and developing the virtues required to meet the myriad challenges of their lives."
4. This course as a whole takes seriously “Christ at the Core,” Christian Character Learning Goal #4: “growing in their love for others, for the created order, for Holy Scripture, for the church of Christ across the world and throughout history, and for the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Triune God.”

#### **C. Examples of Assessment**

A range of rigorous assignments could provide evidence that students have successfully achieved the three learning outcomes given in section II.A. Depending on the structure of the course, one

significant assignment might be relevant for assessing more than one outcome; in other cases a series of assignments will be more appropriate. Baseline examples are suggested here as *inspiration* of disciplinary appropriate and rigorous options, but faculty may adapt assignments in disciplinarily appropriate ways.

Normally, courses will include two exams (or one major exam in combination with extensive writing) aimed especially at assessing learning outcome #1.

Minimally, courses will include one writing assignment beyond the exams. The specifics of writing assignments may vary among professors but will especially relate to learning outcome #2.

Faculty might require a short paper or an exam essay to assess learning outcome #3.

#### **D. General Advice**

To facilitate student understanding, the course uses an **introduction to doctrine textbook** (possible textbooks include but are not limited to Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*; Gunton, *The Christian Faith*; Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*; McGrath, *Christian Theology* or *Theology: The Basics*; *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*; *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*; Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine*; Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology*). Textbooks that advocate only one doctrinal tradition, rather than appreciating the breadth of Evangelical Christianity, are not appropriate as the introductory textbook for the course. In addition to the textbook, the course makes use of **primary source material** from the Christian tradition (e.g. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, a readings packet assembled by the instructor).