

Online Course Proposal Design Plan

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Executive Summary

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) is looking to further develop its online course offerings. However, the school is concerned with proactively and constructively addressing concerns for greater diversity at the school. This proposal describes the design of an online, primarily asynchronous course in Religious Studies that focuses on the history of the Christmas holiday. Some online courses saw significant enrollment increases due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this course proposal presumes the ability of asynchronous online courses to function just as effectively as “traditional, or face-to-face courses (Anderson et al., 2007; Asterhan et al., 2010; Kauppila et al., 2011). The design plan begins with analyses of needs, learners, and course technology. The course design pertains to all fifteen weeks of a single semester. Detailed activities are given for the first three weeks (and thus, the course’s first unit). The development plan was also explained briefly. Due to its content, this course is designed to be offered in the fall semester.

Needs Analysis

UTM is concerned with developing its diversity (Carver, 2020; WBBJ 7 Eyewitness News Staff, 2021). Just over half of the student body comes from a low-income background and qualifies for the Pell Grant (CollegeSimply, 2022); the median household income in Tennessee is \$54,833 (US Census Bureau, 2021b), but 51% of UTM's student body has a median household income of \$48,533 (CollegeSimply, 2022). Almost two-thirds of the student body is female (CollegeSimply, 2022), in comparison with 51.2% of the state (US Census Bureau, 2021b); 91% of the study body comes from in-state (CollegeSimply, 2022). Racial diversity is somewhat different. In Tennessee, 78% of the population is White (US Census Bureau, 2021b), as is 77% of UTM (CollegeSimply, 2022); it may be noteworthy that 64.1% of the United States population (US Census Bureau, 2021a).

Furthermore, international students comprise only 3% of the study body (CollegeSimply, 2022). The extent of religious diversity—or homogeneity—is difficult to gauge because there are no official numbers. However, of 11 registered student religious organizations, 9 are Protestant (82%), 1 Catholic (9%), and 1 Muslim (9%) (the University of Tennessee at Martin, 2022). In the broader state, however, 73% are Protestant, 6% are Catholic, and 1% are Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2014)—so, perhaps ironically, student religious organizations at UT Martin overrepresent their respective religious groups.

Due to its location, many online courses operate at UTM. Religious studies, where this course is located, is a compulsory subject of the Philosophy Major, and an online course for the Philosophy Major is already existing. The establishment of this online course will contribute to the enhancement and development of existing online majors.

A course on the global history of Christmas would provide several *fora* for exploring diversity. First, it would touch upon Christian groups wholly unrepresented at UTM, such as the Russian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. Second, by including a unit on Hanukkah and its relation to Christmas, the course will provide students with introductory material on Judaism, another religious group without representation at UTM. Third, as a global survey, it will move well outside of the state of Tennessee, as well as beyond the United States.

Learner Analysis

The course is intended to serve undergraduates of any level, as UTM is almost exclusively an undergraduate institution. There are approximately 6,700 students at the school. A minor in religion is offered. No prerequisites are envisioned for this course.

The curricular context of religion courses is underdeveloped. No religion courses have prerequisites, so there is no curricular context to work this course around. However, its content is unusual because the course aims at an international survey of diverse cultures and a broadly comparative analysis of Christmas with Hanukkah and, to a lesser extent, European folk religion (some of possibly “pagan” origin). Mostly, the religion minor is an adjunct to the philosophy major. Of the ten courses in the minor, five are cross-listed as philosophy courses, and one as a sociology course (although that course is no longer taught); just four courses are discrete to the religion minor—introductions to Religious Studies, the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and a historical survey of Christianity.

Most students are familiar with evangelical forms of Christianity, but this course introduces an international survey of Christmas traditions from many Christian denominations. Furthermore, its unit on Hanukkah will be one of the few opportunities students at the school have to learn about Judaism.

Course Technology Analysis

To complete the course, students must have access to a laptop or tablet and a stable internet connection. Course content is delivered asynchronously, but group work and one-on-one meetings with the instructor are conducted synchronously. The university provides Canvas as its sole LMS. All instructors are also able to create Zoom accounts through the UT system. The school has a Help Desk that is available seven days per week.

Course Design

Course Title: History of Christmas

Format: Asynchronous (mostly)

Length: full semester (NB: *fall semester*, since Christmas and Hanukkah are in December)

Learning Outcomes

1. *identify* and *describe* key events in the history of the Christmas holiday.
2. *develop* research skills by researching peer-reviewed academic literature on the history of Christmas.
3. *create* an annotated, five-song Christmas playlist that encompasses the holiday's religious, historical, and cultural breadth and depth.

Assigned books

1. L. Frank Baum, *The Life & Adventures of Santa Claus* (Penguin Books, 2015); ISBN: 9780143128533
2. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (ed.), *First and Second Maccabees* (Liturgical Press, 2012); ISBN: 9780814628461
3. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (OER); available online: <https://www.oercommons.org/courses/a-christmas-carol>

Material denoted (OER) is an open (that is, free) educational resource. The instructor will provide all other readings.

Semester Outline

NB: Lesson plan details are given for Weeks 1-3.

Unit 1: Christ Before Christmas

Week 1 – The Semester Begins

Weekly Goals

1. To create a warm and inviting academic environment
2. To introduce the instructor, the students, and the course content

Weekly Reading

1. None!

Videos Assigned

1. Welcome video
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 1 by introducing the instructor and explaining the theme and goals of the course
2. How to Complete the Reading Journal
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 2 by explaining the reading journal, which students will turn in most weeks of the semester. The reading journal example is shown in Appendix A.

Assignments/Assessments

1. Each student posts a personal introduction on the course discussion board
2. Each student greets two other students on the course discussion board
3. Each student schedules a Zoom meeting with the instructor (due by the end of week 2).

Prompt: Please introduce yourself on the Discussion Board by telling us: a.) your name; b.) your major and year; c.) how you will use the material from this semester's note-taking videos.

Responses: Please say hello (and anything else that is nice) to at least two of your classmates!

Week 2 – Jesus of Nazareth*Weekly Goals*

1. To introduce academic research
2. To introduce strategic reading
3. To introduce Jesus of Nazareth

Weekly Reading

1. C.P.E. Nothaft, “The Origins of the Christmas Date: Some Recent Trends in Historical Research,” *Church History*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (December 2012), pp. 903-911. Available via JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23358685>
2. Selections from the New Testament

Videos Assigned

1. How to Read a Journal Article
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 1 and introduces the concept of peer review
2. Workshop 1: Reading Nothaft
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 2 by introducing strategic reading (re: how to get a journal article); and Satisfies Weekly Goal 1 by introducing effective academic writing (e.g., thesis statement, use of evidence)
3. Webisode 1: The Birth of Jesus
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 3 by introducing Jesus of Nazareth

Assignments/Assessments

1. Read the journal article
2. Turn in the journal article worksheet (Please see Appendix B)
3. Turn in the weekly reading journal

Week 3 – Jesus as Lord*Weekly Goals*

1. To reinforce knowledge of academic research,
2. To reinforce strategic reading
3. To explain early Christian devotion to Jesus

Weekly Reading

1. Thomas C. Schmidt, “Calculating December 25 as the Birth of Jesus in Hippolytus’ “Canon” and “Chronicon,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 69, No. 5 (2015), pp. 542-563. Available via JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24754539>
2. Early Christian legends about the birth of Jesus

Videos Assigned

1. How to Read a Journal Article (watch it as a refresher)
2. Workshop 2: Reading Schmidt
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goals 1 and 2 by repeating key academic activities
3. Webisode 2: Legends of Jesus
 - a. Satisfies Weekly Goal 3 by offering an overview of early Christian literature

Assignments/Assessments

1. Read the journal article
2. Turn in the journal article worksheet
3. Turn in the weekly reading journal
4. Post on the discussion board (prompt below)
5. Take the unit quiz

Prompt: Review the assigned reading material from this week and last. How did early Christian literature expand the story of Jesus’ birth beyond the narratives found in the New Testament? Your post should be *at least 150 words* and quote the assigned readings *twice*. Please make sure that your post is free of spelling and grammatical errors.

Responses: Each of your responses should be *100 words* and should quote the assigned reading material at least *once*. Your responses should be free of spelling and grammatical errors.

Unit 2: Developments**Week 4 – The Liturgical Year***Weekly Goals*

1. To become familiar with early sources on the observation of Christmas

Weekly Reading

1. Select fourth- and fifth-century sermons on Christmas

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode #3: Christmas as Holy Day

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal

Week 5 – Christmas Hymns and Carols

Weekly Goals

1. To introduce caroling
2. To introduce the semester capstone project

Weekly Reading

1. Barry Cooper, “Christmas Carols” (via JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r1xq8.10>)
2. Sheila Whiteley, “Christmas Songs” (via JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r1xq8.11>)
3. Capstone: Christmas Playlist Assignment. Detail instruction is shown in Appendix C.

Music Assigned

1. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: [Hymns of the Nativity](#) (listen to two)
2. Andrew Gant: [Christmas Carols](#) (listen to two)

Videos Assigned

1. BBC/Archive of Recorded Church Music: [The Truth About Christmas Carols](#)
2. Anna Bridgland: [Wassailing](#)
3. Classical.FM: [The Surprising Origins of Christmas Carols](#) (article with videos)
4. Oxford Academic: [The History of Silent Night](#) (by Andrew Gant)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Post to the discussion board (prompt TBD—will be something about music).

Week 6 – National Variations

Weekly Goals

1. To look at diverse Christian approaches to Christmas

Weekly Reading

1. “Introducing the Ethiopian Christmas”: <https://tanaforum.org/introducing-the-ethiopian-christmas/>

2. Library of Congress: “Ethiopian Christmas and the Ethiopian Calendar System”: <https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2016/02/ethiopian-christmas-and-calendar/>
3. Al Jazeera: [Why Some Christians Celebrate Christmas on January 7](#) (with videos)
4. Medieval German Christmas plays

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 4: Regional Christmas Variations
2. Radio Free Europe: [Orthodox Christians Celebrate Christmas in Former Soviet Republics](#)
3. BBC News: [How Orthodox Christmas is celebrated around the world](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD—will give students the opportunity to discuss the capstone project)
3. Take the unit quiz

Unit 3: Folklore

Week 7 – Puritans

Weekly Goals

1. To introduce the first fractures within Christianity about Christmas

Weekly Reading

1. Select Puritan writings against Christmas
2. C.P.E. Nothhaft, “From Sukkot to Saturnalia: The Attack on Christmas in Sixteenth-Century Chronological Scholarship” (via JSTOR)

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 5: Opposing Liturgy—and Christmas

Assignments/Assessments

1. Meet with the instructor
2. Turn in the weekly reading journal
3. Turn in the Journal Article Worksheet

Week 8 – Santa Claus

Weekly Goals

1. To learn about Santa Claus

Weekly Reading

1. Material on St. Nicholas
2. Baum, *Life & Adventures of Santa Claus* (all)

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 6: From St. Nicholas to Santa Claus
2. National Geographic: [Who Was Saint Nicholas?](#)

3. National Geographic: [How Do You Become Santa Claus?](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD)

Week 9 – Krampus (and other monsters)

Weekly Goals

1. To look at the American reinvention of Germanic folklore

Weekly Reading

1. NONE!

Videos Assigned

1. *Krampus* (2015; see the IMDB page)
2. Storied: [Krampus: Origins of the Yuletide Monster](#)
3. Storied: [The Wicked Feline Murder Floof, a Yule Cat Story](#)
4. National Geographic: [Who is Krampus?](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD)
3. Take the unit quiz

Unit 4: Hanukkah

Week 10 – The Origins of Hanukkah

Weekly Goals

1. To introduce Hanukkah

Weekly Reading

1. 1 Maccabees

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 7: Hanukkah
2. National Geographic: [Hanukkah](#)
3. Chabad.org: [The Story of Chanukah](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal

Week 11 – The Americanization of Hanukkah

Weekly Goals

1. To look at how, in the United States, Hanukkah has been reinvented via Christmas

Weekly Reading

1. 2 Maccabees

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 8: Hanukkah in America
2. Saturday Night Live: [Adam Sandler on Hanukkah](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD)
3. Take the unit quiz

Unit 5: Seasonal, Sentimental—and Secular?**Week 12 – Yuletide Spirit***Weekly Goals*

1. To read Charles Dickens' Popular *Christmas Carol* and better understand its influence

Weekly Reading

1. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Stave 1 and 2
2. Philip Allingham, "Changes in Visual Interpretations of "A Christmas Carol", 1843-1915: From Realization to Impressionism" (via JSTOR)

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 9: Dickens: History and Legend
2. TED-Ed: [Why Should You Read Charles Dickens?](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Turn in the Journal Article Worksheet
3. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD—will give students the opportunity to troubleshoot their final projects)

Week 13 – Yuletide Peace (and War)*Weekly Goals*

1. To continue with Dickens (ergo, same as above)

Weekly Reading

1. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Stave 3-5
2. David Parker, "Dickens and the American Christmas" (via JSTOR)

Videos Assigned

1. *Joyeux Noël* (2005; see the [IMDB page](#))
2. Imperial War Museums: [The Christmas Truce of 1914: What Really Happened?](#)
3. Paul McCartney, "[Pipe of Peace](#)"

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal

2. Turn in the Journal Article Worksheet

Week 14 – Secularization?*Weekly Goals*

1. To introduce secularization

Weekly Reading

1. Joshua Taft, “Disenchanted Religion and Secular Enchantment in “A Christmas Carol” (via JSTOR)
2. Gallup.com, “[More Americans Celebrating a Secular Christmas](#)”
3. Lilit Marcus, “[The secularization of Christmas doesn’t make it any friendlier to non-Christians](#)”

Videos Assigned

1. Webisode 10: Christmas: Holyday and Holiday?
2. National Geographic: [How Christmas Trees are Made](#)
3. National Geographic: [Christmas Tree Harvesting Is Gravity-Defying](#)
4. TED-Ed: [Why do we kiss under the mistletoe?](#)
5. TED-Ed: [The Science of Snowflakes](#)
6. National Geographic: [How One Man’s Amazing Christmas Lights Have Spread Joy for 30 Years](#)

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in the weekly reading journal
2. Turn in the Journal Article Worksheet
3. Post on the discussion board (prompt TBD)
4. Take the unit quiz

Week 15*Weekly Goals*

1. To showcase final projects

Weekly Reading

1. NONE!

Videos Assigned

1. NONE!

Assignments/Assessments

1. Turn in your showcase assignment
2. Comment on two showcase assignments

Development Schedule

NB: It is presumed that scripts and their attendant research will be completed by the filming date. Because all videos are written and recorded by the instructor, who is already familiar with iMovie and ProTools, there is no need for any learner technology tool training.

Video	Filming Date	Notes
Welcome video	June 3	
How To: Complete the Reading Journal	June 10	
How To: Read a Journal Article	June 17	
Workshop 1: Reading Nothaft	June 24	
Workshop 2: Reading Schmidt	July 1	
Webisode 1: The Birth of Jesus	July 8	
Webisode 2: Legends of Jesus	July 15	
Webisode 3: Christmas as Holy Day	July 22	
Webisode 4: Regional Christmas Variations	July 29	
Discussion Board Prompts, Responses	August 5	
Syllabus, Rubrics	August 5	
Quizzes 1 and 2	August 12	
Webisode 5: Opposing Liturgy—and Christmas	August 19	
Webisode 6: From St. Nicholas to Santa Claus	August 26	

Quizzes 3, 4, and 5	September 2	
Webisode 7: Hanukkah	September 9	
Webisode 8: Hanukkah in America	September 16	
Webisode 9: Dickens: History and Legend	September 23	
Webisode 10: Christmas: Holyday and Holiday?	September 30	

Ethical and technical training will be provided as needed to those involved in designing and implementing this online learning course. Many course design factors support student success outside of the classroom experience (Stewart et al., 2013). Still, we research support services at UT Martin and attempt to reflect them in the course. The course actively adopts Universal Learning Design for the instructions and materials presented and considers accessibility with Canvas's accessibility check feature. In addition, closed captions are added to the video materials used in the course. Courses are evaluated before the start of the semester under [the University of Tennessee's Best Practices for Developing and Delivering Online Instruction](#) (2017).

Conclusion

This paper describes the outline of a full-semester course taught in a largely asynchronous format at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Although focusing on a Christian holiday, the class aims to expose students to a wide range of global cultural practices and the observance of Hanukkah. Lacking any prerequisites, any student can enroll in the course, which will be delivered through the school's LMS.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Weekly Reading Journal

Directions: Please answer each question below. The reading journal is worth 30 points.

1. Schedule. Please list this week’s assigned reading(s) below, noting the author(s), title(s), and the total number of pages. Then, make a schedule for how you will complete it. (4pts.)

Author(s):

Title(s):

Total pp.:

<i>Day of the week:</i>							
<i>Pages planned:</i>							
<i>Pages read:</i>							
<i>Total time:</i>							

2. Summarize. Write 2-3 sentences summarizing the text’s main idea. If a work has a thesis statement or purpose, please type it below with the page number. And, if there is more than one text, please write a summary for each text. (4 pts.)

3. Analyze. Select *four quotes* from the reading(s). They should not all come from the same chapter/selection! Type each quote below with its page number and explain how it relates to the text’s main idea. (10 pts.)

4. Connect. Write 2-3 sentences connecting this week’s reading(s) to other assigned readings and/or the lecture(s). (4 pts.)

5. Apply. Think about your own life. Where can you use/apply the knowledge gleaned from the reading? (4 pts.)

6. Reflect. Did you hold to your intended reading schedule? How did you improve from last week, and how will you improve next week? (4 pts.)

Appendix B: Journal Article Worksheet

Directions: To complete this worksheet, please do the following. First, watch the videos “How to Read a Journal Article” and “Workshop 1: Reading Nothafft.” Then, use JSTOR to research and read the assigned journal article. When you are done, please upload the completed worksheet to Canvas. Each question is worth 5 points.

1. *Citation:* Please copy and paste from JSTOR the full bibliographical citation for the article:

2. *Thesis:* What is the author’s thesis statement? Please give the full thesis statement below, together with the page number that appears on

3. *Evidence, I:* What kind of evidence does the author use (e.g., interviews, texts, observation, etc.)?

4. *Evidence, II:* How does the author’s chosen evidence help him/her make a compelling argument?

5. *Connections:* How does your article relate to the two articles assigned earlier this semester?

Appendix C: Capstone Project Instructions

Goal (per the syllabus): To *create* an annotated, five-song Christmas playlist that encompasses the religious, historical, and cultural breadth and depth of the holiday.

Background: Music is one of the more tangible manifestations of the Christmas holiday. Some Christmas music is secular; some is seasonal; some are religious, and some are nostalgic. For most of us, our listening preferences during the Christmas season will be a mixture of all four (and perhaps more!).

Directions: This project is a collaborative activity in a group of four people. You are to create an annotated playlist of five Christmas songs by doing the following:

1. Select five songs. Don't worry about copyright; if you can link to them via something like YouTube or Bandcamp, that is great, but if not, give us a link to the song via a website like Apple Music or Amazon.
2. For each song, you must write at least two paragraphs (at least four complete sentences), one personal and one academic. Tell us why you like it and why you find it meaningful for the personal paragraph. For the academic paragraph, discuss the song using literary sources. Consider answering the following:
 - a. Who wrote it?
 - b. Is there anything unique about the music?
 - c. Has the music been transformed over time—and if so, how?
 - d. Are there any primarily well-known—or much-hated—versions of the song?
3. You must have a bibliography with five academic (re: peer-reviewed) sources. The sources may be journal articles, book chapters, or even entire books. However, your five sources cannot overlap with the material assigned in this course.

Please note: This assignment is given in Week 5; you have a meeting the following with the instructor. Be proactive by having some ideas to discuss during that meeting!

Points: 100

DUE: Wednesday of Week 15, with responses due that Friday (see Canvas for the dates)