

Community Studies Signature Course Meadville Lombard Theological School Fall Semester 2011

Faculty:

- Dr. Mike Hogue—Associate Professor of Theology (mhogue@meadville.edu)
- Rev. Dr. Qiyamah A. Rahman—Director of Contextual Ministry, Senior Lecturer (qrahman@meadville.edu)
- Dr. Sharon Welch—Provost, Professor of Religion and Society (swelch@meadville.edu)

“Ministerial formation is an ongoing process throughout the professional life cycle. The healthy practice of ministry is based on deep and regular reflection on our experiences in ministry” [Unitarian Universalist Ministry Association CENTER News 2008-09.1].

“Service-learning supports the possibility that a person’s original intentions of generosity can be married to intellectually sharpened, academically probed skills and insights so that practice becomes praxis and sentiment can become strategy...we are more likely to act ourselves into new ways of thinking than think ourselves into new ways of acting” [Paul Fitzgerald, “Doing Theology in the City,” *Cross Currents* (Spring 2001), p.89].

Course Description:

This course is *attuned* to the contextual nature of learning and ministry; *aligned* with the values of Unitarian Universalism and the mission of MLTS; *alert* to the strategic roles, tasks, and callings of liberal religious ministry; *aware* of the need for contemporary liberal religious ministers to partner with communities and resources outside of congregations; and *attentive* to the complex cultural factors and dynamics that affect effective (mutually beneficial) community partnerships.

The overarching purpose of the course is to facilitate reflective integration of students’ practical site experiences with theoretical learning. Student experiences in the field serve as this course’s primary texts, and these will be critically examined in light of an array of multidisciplinary, multimedia secondary texts. There will be select assignments that engage spiritual practices and disciplines directly, but it is expected that students will cultivate their spiritual lives throughout (and of course beyond) the course.

Each semester of the seminar is designed to provide space and structure for (1) student *exploration of the tasks, challenges, and possibilities of community partnership within liberal religious ministry* and also for the (2) *negotiation of vocational identity, theological voice, and*

forms of religious community through reflection on the variety and range of human experiences in diverse social contexts (religious and otherwise).

The fall semester focuses on exploring, analyzing, and sustaining communities. The spring semester focuses on the meanings of religion and religious community, public theology, and vocation. In sum, the course is designed to facilitate a *praxis of solidary service* for liberal theology and liberal religious ministry.

Pedagogical Framework:

It has been said that if you want to learn something new, you must do things differently. As diversity of thought, style, history, preference and values are at the heart of a UU-based ministry, we believe your learning should be nested in such a reality. This course will therefore employ a variety of different strategies and methods, each designed to evoke new insights and ways of thinking/feeling and to lead you into experiences “outside your comfort zone.”

It is likely that many of us, your instructors included, will experience varying degrees of cognitive and affective “disequilibrium.” We look forward to this kind of experience (REALLY, WE DO!) not only as a challenge, but as an opportunity for growth and insight. The emphasis in this course is not primarily on the accumulation of *information* but the *formation* of ministerial disposition.

We will thus experiment and improvise and challenge and support one another throughout the course by drawing upon an integrative pedagogy for theological education and ministerial formation that addresses:

- the “knowing” dimension of learning (academic excellence and rigor, theological voice) through critical examination of multidisciplinary resources helpful to understanding the nature and tasks of contextual theology and ministry in a multicultural, pluralistic world;
- the “being” dimension of learners (ministerial formation, vocational identity, religious self-understanding, spiritual life) by nurturing student self-awareness as this emerges through collaboration with diverse cultures, service organizations, and faith perspectives and linking this to the ways we conceive, imagine, and embody our religious lives and vocations; and, finally,
- the “doing” dimension of learning (praxis) through exploration of approaches and resources for the wise, competent, and agile practice of leadership in ministry through community service partnerships.

Learning Objectives:

This course will help students to:

- 1) articulate the challenges and possibilities of contextual liberal religious ministry;

- 2) gain an understanding of the complexities of contemporary social issues;
- 3) learn basic skills of social analysis;
- 4) identify, develop and internalize analytic, imaginative, and interpersonal skills useful for ministry in diverse congregational and social settings;
- 5) analyze strategies to mobilize liberal religionists and the broader world to respond to, participate in, and/or to lead creative change;
- 6) acquire a range of multicultural competencies.

Expectations and Evaluation:

This course is a pass/fail course. Passing entails:

- Active participation in every aspect of the course and completion of all reading and writing assignments;
- Completion of the requisite number of on-site hours (exceptions must be negotiated with the Director of Contextual Ministries, Qiyamah Rahman);
- Engagement in ministerial formation as a mutual process—that is, showing a disposition to humility, charity, honesty and diligence, and a willingness to witness to and support the growing process of your peers;
- All other requirements as agreed upon with your Site-Supervisor and the Director of Contextual Ministries.

Note:

While our general disposition is to be flexible and respectful of the dynamics associated with “adult learning,” our accreditation as an institution of higher learning requires us to be strict in terms of workload and hours of participation. Therefore, failure to meet the basic requirements of the course – i.e., regular attendance in both small and large group formats, weekly site visits, and timely completion of assignments – will result in a failing grade. Note that this course is required for graduation from MLTS.

Distractions, absences, etc...:

We expect, from time to time, that life circumstances will complicate your participation in coursework. Our expectation is that you will be responsible and alert faculty or your Dialogue Partners of any shift in an agreed upon commitment. Should circumstances accumulate to a

degree that you are not able to participate fully in the course, expect that faculty will engage you in a discussion about the appropriateness of continuing.

Statement Regarding Adaptation or Accommodation

Students experience learning challenges for a variety of reasons. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because you are differently abled, please make an appointment with your instructor as soon as possible. Likewise, see your instructor if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel that you could be performing at a higher level, or have a learning style issue that provides a challenge. As instructors, our obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and accessible. Unless you come to see your instructor about these or other related issues, your instructor will assume your learning needs are being met.

Curricular Structure:

Weekly Seminars

Though we are not physically present with one another on a weekly basis, faculty are guiding and monitoring your formation experience. Each week, seminars will be co-planned and co-taught by your instructors. Through phone conversations, written feedback and videotaped “jaminars” (see below), faculty will serve in the role of instructors, mentors, and coaches in your educational experience. Because adult learning is predicated on the mutual negotiation of aims and outcomes, we expect that you will be full partners in this process.

Site Placement

Each student will work in a community service agency for a total of eight hours each week. Students will negotiate a “learning agreement” with Site Supervisors that encourages not only a wide range of growth and development, but also the expectations each has one for the other. Students are expected to meet with their Site Supervisors for at least one hour per month to process their learning. *Please refer to the Community Studies Handbook for more detailed information about the expectations for this aspect of the course.*

Dialogical Triads, Meetings, Weekly Memos

Students will be assigned to work in Dialogical Triads (DTs) which will meet weekly over the phone at a time agreed upon by the triad. The composition of the groups will shift roughly midway through the year to provide opportunities to learn from and hear different perspectives. These partnerships are intended to be locations where you can make sense of the day-to-day experiences on your site, encourage one another in your religious and spiritual lives, and also as a place for working through assignments and exploring ideas from class discussions and other various texts.

Each meeting will have a work agenda, set by the faculty. Care should be taken to ensure that each member of your team has sufficient time to share his/her work and that the group can also engage in general discussion. Meetings should be informal in tone yet still aim to accomplish tasks and to provide mutual support for one another. As a learning community separated by distance, it is critically important to carve out intentional spaces that support collegial and intellectual relationships. At the outset of each DT meeting, one person should volunteer to serve as recorder / time-keeper and one person should keep conversation on topic. (NOTE 1: *This feature of the course contributes to accreditation requirements to satisfy a set number of "seat hours," so failure to participate regularly puts you in jeopardy of not meeting basic requirements of the MDiv degree.*)

At the close of each meeting, the team should write a joint "memo" that describes the major themes of your discussion, insights that were surfaced, and questions you'd like to explore. This memo should be uploaded to LiveText by 5:00 pm each Friday. Assignments for these weekly meetings will be distributed in advance (through Livetext) to allow sufficient planning. (NOTE 2: *Students are welcome to append a "P.S." to their memos when they have questions/concerns about course content or logistics.*)

Jaminar:

Upon receipt of your weekly memo summarizing your discussion within your Dialogical Triad, one member of the faculty will read your joint memo and respond. Each of your memos will then be read by the rest of the faculty when we meet together on Mondays. On Mondays, the faculty will meet together to discuss student work and then videotape its informal response that the work by noting patterns, insights, connections and disconnections. This "jaminar" will be distributed through email to each of you through "Flipshare" (the distribution software for Flip videos).

Saturday Cohort Discussions

One Saturday per month (see the course calendar below), the entire Community Studies cohort will meet via telephone for two hours for discussions that revisit learning experiences and add layers of insight. These phone calls are required for all enrolled students. These calls will open with a brief full-group gathering that will include a chalice lighting, discussion of any "business" items, and sometimes focused sharing from select Dialogue Triads. After this initial full-group gathering, students will break out into small groups to which they will be assigned. These small groups are facilitated by one or another of the instructors for the course. We will use a Free Conference Call service for these phone calls and will provide you with the information you need at the beginning of the class.

Teaching Pastors

Students are expected to meet by phone or in person with their Teaching Pastors for at least one hour per month during the Community Studies course. Your Teaching Pastors

have been provided with a set of questions for “theological reflection” that can be used as a guide for your meetings, though you are also free to discuss other issues related to the course, to your emerging sense of ministry, and to your spiritual life.

Evaluations

Deep learning, especially integrated praxis learning, requires rich, layered forms of evaluation. With this in mind, this course provides evaluation of your work from multiple perspectives: from your Teaching Pastor, from your Site Supervisors, from your Faculty, your own self-evaluations, as well as a thorough, cumulative evaluation (the First Review whereby the faculty determines your eligibility for degree candidacy) by the Faculty at the end of the Spring semester. Teaching Pastors will use a document provided to them in their Teaching Pastor Handbook to evaluate your work through the year. This will be due by **April 1** of the spring semester. Site Supervisors will use documents provided to them to evaluate you by **December 15** of the fall semester, and by **April 1** of the spring semester. At the end of the spring semester, and perhaps at other times, students will be asked to complete self-evaluations, based on a rubric your instructors will provide. In addition to these several layers of evaluation, your instructors will request that you evaluate them and the course as a whole at the end of each semester (the appropriate document will be supplied by the faculty). In addition to these evaluations, students will receive brief feedback on their weekly memos.

Sample Weekly Flow

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	
Church, etc...	Faculty meets and posts Jaminar Begin work on new assignment View Jaminar	Work on assignment	Work on assignment	Meet with Dialogue group to discuss assignment	Post memo by 5pm	FREE TIME!!! (yeah, right...probably not!).	

Technology

As each of you has likely experienced, technology can be amazingly facilitative or a downright hindrance to getting work done. We fully expect both things to be true throughout the course.

We have explored a variety of technological vehicles that enable us to form a healthy learning community, and have settled on two formats for our fall work.

The first is the old-fashioned telephone! *Your Dialogue Triad* will meet weekly over the phone. There are several free conferencing services that may serve you well. (Google “free conference call” and make a choice.) *For our monthly Saturday seminars*, we will provide call-in #'s and passwords; look for the information on LiveText.

We will also use a cutting-edge e-portfolio software company, LiveText, which will house our course documents (assignments, resources, essays, forms and lists), and also provide a place for you to archive your individual work in this course. You will learn more about LiveText during fall convocation. We chose this particular company because of its outstanding record for customer service. They also have on-line tutorials (with great visuals) to help you figure things out as you go along.

To contact LiveText Technical Support with any questions, email support@livetext.com or call 1-866-LiveText (1-866-548-3839).

LiveText Tech Support Hours:

Monday to Thursday - 7:00am to 9:00pm (CDT)

Friday - 7:00am to 6:00pm (CDT)

Sunday - 2:00pm to 7:00pm (CDT)

Fall Calendar: (**NOTE: for the fall, you will need to purchase and read Alex Kotlowitz's book, *Never a City So Real*, Sharon Welch's, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, both of which are available through Amazon or other book dealers. You will also be expected to read other essays and text selections, from Carol Lee Sanchez, Iris Marion Young and James Baldwin, for example. We will post these to LiveText at various points.

September Theme: *Exploring Community*

Week of 9/5: Beauty Walk Spiritual Exercise: Read Carol Lee Sanchez, “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” (essay to be posted to LiveText); NOTE: we will explain this exercise during Fall Convocation. You will not write a collective memo for this exercise, but will write an individual memo and post it to LiveText (no later than Wednesday evening, 9/8). We will process these memos during our first Saturday conference call on 9/10. Your first DT phone conversation and collective memo will be due the week of 9/12.

Saturday 9/10: [11 am – 1 pm CST] Conference Call: Processing Beauty Walk

Week of 9/12: Mapping Coming of Age Community (early childhood - 21yrs)

Week of 9/19: Mapping National and Local Change, Rupture, Novelty

Week of 9/26: What is Change?

October Theme: *Analyzing Community*

Week of 10/3: Community Ecologies: Read Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain” (posted on LiveText); and, for Saturday, Alex Kotlowitz, *Never a City So Real*

Week of 10/10: Kotlowitz: Eco/Systemic (3rd person) and Idiocentric (1st person) Analyses of Community

Saturday 10/15: [11 am- 1 pm CST]: Conference Call

Week of 10/17: READING WEEK: NO COURSE ASSIGNMENT, but work at your site is still expected.

Week of 10/24: Kotlowitz; Community Vignette

November Theme: Agency in Community

Week of 10/31: Kotlowitz, Community Vignette II

Week of 11/7: Iris Marion Young

Saturday 11/14: [11am-2pm CST]: Conference Call

Week of 11/21: Thanksgiving Break

Week of 11/28: Iris Marion Young and James Baldwin

December Theme: *Sustaining Community*

Week of 12/5: Iris Marion Young and James Baldwin

Saturday 12/10: [11am-2pm CST]: Discussion of Sharon Welch, *Feminist Ethic of Risk*.

DECEMBER 15: First Site Supervisor Evaluations Due

JANUARY LEARNING CONVOCATION: (details to be provided).

SPRING SEMESTER: RELIGION, PUBLIC THEOLOGY and

VOCATION: Spring syllabus will be distributed during the January Learning Convocation; but *please put these dates for our Saturday conference calls (and other important dates) on your calendars NOW.*

Saturday 2/11: 11 am - 1 pm

Week of 2/27: reading week

Saturday 3/10: 11 am – 1 pm
Week of 3/26: spring break
Saturday 4/14: 11 am – 1 pm
Saturday 5/5: 11 am – 1 pm