**Community Studies**

**Meadville Lombard Theological School**

**Fall Semester 2017**

**Faculty:**

* Dr. Michael Hogue, Professor of Theology, [mhogue@meadville.edu](mailto:mhogue@meadville.edu)
* Dr. Sharon Welch, Provost, Affiliate Professor of Ethics and Society, [swelch@meadville.edu](mailto:swelch@meadville.edu)

“*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 Meadville Lombard Theological School; *alert* to the strategic roles, tasks, and callings of liberal religious leadership; *aware* of the need for contemporary liberal religious leaders to partner with communities and resources outside of religious liberalism; 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 practical and theoretical learning. Student experiences in the field serve as this course’s primary texts, and these will be critically examined through an array of multidisciplinary secondary texts.

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 leadership* and 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** will focus on social analysis and social justice in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The **spring semester** will focus on political theology and the resurgence of authoritarianism and threats to democracy.

**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 liberal religion, 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 on the *formation* of a disposition of servant leadership.

We will experiment, improvise, challenge and support one another throughout the course by drawing upon an integrative pedagogy 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 religious leadership in a multicultural, pluralistic world;
* the “being” dimension of learners (leadership formation, vocational identity, religious self-understanding) 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 through community service partnerships.

**Learning Objectives**:

This course will help students to:

1. articulate the challenges and possibilities of contextually engaged religious and community leadership;
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 leadership skills useful in diverse communal settings;
5. analyze strategies to mobilize the broader world to respond to, participate in, and 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 (e.g. dialogue group meetings, discussions, Saturday teleconferences, etc.) and completion of all reading and writing assignments;
* Completion of the requisite number of on-site hours (8 hrs/wk);
* 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.
* Evaluations
  + Deep learning, especially integrated praxis-based learning requires rich, layered forms evaluation. This course evaluates your work from multiple perspectives: your Teaching Pastor (for M.Div. students), your Site Supervisors, your peers, your Faculty, and through cumulative evaluation (i.e. the Annual Review letter whereby the faculty determine your eligibility for degree candidacy).
  + Teaching Pastors (for M.Div. students) will use a document provided to them in their TP Handbook to evaluate your work. You will need to post this to the Sig Docs page on Populi by **May 1**.
  + Site Supervisors (for all students) will use documents provided to them in their Handbooks to evaluate you. You will need to post this to the Sig Docs page on Populi by **May l**.
* Note: Distractions, absences:

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 – weekly dialogue group meetings, Saturday seminars, weekly site work, and timely completion of assignments – will result in a failing grade. Note that this course is required for graduation from MLTS.

We understand, 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, faculty will engage you in a discussion about the appropriateness of continuing in the course.

**Statement Regarding Accommodation**

Meadville Lombard is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, they must fill out the Request for Accommodation form found in the Appendix of the Student Handbook and submit it to the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Ken McHugh ([kmchugh@meadville.edu](mailto:kmchugh@meadville.edu)) (312) 212-0673. Please note that classroom accommodations cannot be provided without an approved Accommodations Form.

**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 throughout this course. Your primary text in this course is your site (e.g. the work you do in your site placement, the relationships you forge and negotiate), and your primary interlocutors are the members of your dialogue group. We have designed and sequenced weekly assignments that will help you to engage your site and your dialogue partners at a deeper level. These assignments usually entail some reading, and are often organized around several guiding questions. Brief descriptions of the assignment will be posted below. Longer descriptions will be posted under the “lessons” tab on Populi. You will read and reflect on each assignment individually, then discuss with your Dialogue Group (see below). On certain weeks, your Dialogue Group will be expected either to lead or respond on the course discussion board (see below).

Site Work

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 (*[*on the Meadville website*](http://www.meadville.edu/student-life.php)*) for more detailed information about the expectations for this aspect of the course*.

Dialogue Groups

Students will be assigned to work in Dialogue Groups which will meet weekly over the phone (through a conference call system or via Skype or Zoom) at a time agreed upon by the group. The composition of the groups may shift midway through the year to provide opportunities to learn from and hear different perspectives. These dialogue groups are intended to help you to make sense together of the day-to-day experiences at your sites, as well as to be a place for linking ideas from class discussions, texts, and faculty feedback. Care should be taken to ensure that each member of your team has sufficient time to share his/her thoughts 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 Dialogue Group meeting, one person should volunteer to serve as recorder / time-keeper and one person should keep conversation on topic.

Discussion Board

1. Leaders: Each week of the semester, select Dialogue Groups (assigned by faculty) will be responsible for leading a discussion on the Populi discussion board. The discussion will be based on the weekly assignment, as described on the syllabus and/or under the “lessons” tab on Populi. Each member of a Dialogue Group leading in a given week is responsible for posting a short reflective response to the assignment (e.g. 250-300 words). These must be posted by midnight every Thursday. Your reflection should be informed by the meeting you had with your Dialogue Group (e.g., via teleconference, Skype, Zoom). HINT: At the beginning of the semester, note on your calendars the weeks you are a part of a Leader Group.
2. Respondents: Each week of the semester, select Dialogue Groups will be tasked with responding to the reflective comments posted by the discussion leaders. Your responses are due by midnight every Sunday. Your responses should engage the content provided by the leaders through the lenses of your work on the weekly assignment and your Dialogue Group’s weekly discussion. HINT: At the beginning of the semester, note on your calendars the weeks you are a part of a Responder Group.
3. There will be some weeks when your Dialogue Group is neither a leader nor a responder. During these weeks, we expect that as adult learners you will still meet with your Dialogue Group to process the weekly assignment. Rather than leading or responding on the discussion board, you will be expected to learn by “lurking”. Experience teaches us that keeping a journal/log of your thoughts/experiences will be useful for your own learning.

Saturday Cohort Discussions

Several Saturdays each semester the entire cohort will meet via telephone for discussions that revisit learning experiences and add layers of insight. These phone calls are required for all enrolled students. Prior to each Saturday seminar, we will post call-in #’s and codes on Populi.

\*\***Mark your calendars with these dates and times now for the fall semester (note: all times are US central time zone): September 16, 9-11 am; October 28, 9-11am; and December 2, 9-11am. [Note: the call on October 28 will include students from the other Signature Courses (Congregational and Leadership Studies).]**

Teaching Pastors

M.Div. 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 and to your emerging sense of ministry.

**Course Schedule and Bibliography**

**\*Note 1: Fuller assignment details, including guiding questions for your Dialogue Group discussion, will be posted during the semester under the “lessons” tab on Populi.**

**\*Note 2: Because some weeks include more reading than others, plan accordingly (i.e. read ahead).**

1. Week of Sept 4: Beauty Walk Assignment
   1. Reading: Carol Lee Sanchez, “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” (PDF on Populi)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 1 and 2
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 3 and 4
2. Week of Sept 11: Mapping Assignment
   1. Reading: Doctrine of Discovery texts (on Populi)
   2. No discussion board this week because of upcoming Saturday Teleconference

\*\*Saturday Call Sept 16, 9-11am (Chicago, Central Time)

1. Week of Sept 18: Storying Assignment
   1. Reading: Thomas King’s, *The Truth about Stories* (purchase or borrow)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 3 and 4
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 5 and 6
2. Week of Sept 25: Postcolonialism:
   1. Reading: Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (purchase or borrow)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 5 and 6
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 7 and 8
3. Week of Oct 2: White Fragility, Racial Supremacy, and Internalized Oppression
   1. Explore Harvard’s “Project Implicit” website, including the FAQ’s. Take at least one implicit racial bias test. Further assignment details to be provided through Populi. Here is the website: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
   2. Readings: selections from Robin DiAngelo and Frantz Fanon (on Populi)
   3. Discussion Leaders: Groups 7 and 8
   4. Discussion Respondents: Groups 9 and1
4. Week of Oct 9
   1. Reading: Ta Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (purchase or borrow)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Group 9 and 1
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 2 and 3
5. Week of Oct 16: Communities of Change
   1. Reading: Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain” (on Populi)
   2. Discussion Leaders: 2 and 3
   3. Discussion Respondents: 4 and 5
6. Week of Oct 23: Spiritual Practices Check-In
   1. No reading
   2. No discussion board this week because of Saturday teleconference

\*\*Saturday Call Oct. 28, 9-11 am (Chicago/Central Time)

1. Week of Oct 30: On Structural Racism
   1. Reading: Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2(purchase or borrow)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 4 and 5
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 6 and 7
2. Week of Nov 6: On Systemic Oppression
   1. Reading: selections from Iris Marion Young (PDF on Populi)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 6 and 7
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 8 and 9
3. Week of Nov 13: On Social Analysis
   1. Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (purchase or borrow)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 8 and 9
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 1 and 2
4. Week of November 20: Thanksgiving Break, no assignment
5. Week of Nov 27: Thinking in Systems and System Change
   1. Reading: selections from Donella Meadows (on Populi)
   2. No discussion board because of Saturday teleconference

\*\*Saturday call Dec. 2, 9-11 am (Chicago/Central Time)

1. Week of Dec. 4: Sustaining Community
   1. Reading: Welch, *Feminist Ethic of Risk* (purchase or borrow); and Welch, chapter from forthcoming book (on Populi)
   2. Discussion Leaders: Groups 1 and 2
   3. Discussion Respondents: Groups 3 and 4

\*\*NOTE: YOU WILL NEED TO BE ON CAMPUS AGAIN JANUARY 4 AND 5, FROM 9AM-5PM. ON THESE DAYS WE WILL MEET FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING, COMMUNITY STUDIES COURSE CONTENT, AMONG OTHER THINGS.