**Religion & Media Keystone Course**

**January 5th-11th, 2014**

**Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg**

**Mary Hess & Kristin Largen**

**Rationale:**

This course was designed specifically to provide a foundation for students enrolled in the “Religion and Media” concentration of the MAR degree program. As such, it is designed to encourage theological reflection around the changes that have occurred in the ways people interact and develop community due to the exploding global media culture. These changes affect the way people view God, themselves and creation; and, correspondingly, they also affect the ways in which people live out their relationship to God and each other, and witness to God’s presence and activity in daily life. Accordingly, both lay Christians and public ministers need to be able to interpret and use various media technologies in promoting the gospel message in a needy world. In addition, this course also serves as a theological orientation for all MAR students, as it provides a solid theological foundation from which all students can build as they move through the program according to their own research interests.

**Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students will:

* Demonstrate an awareness of landscapes of media culture with an emphasis on active engagement in creation within those landscapes
* Define and describe the various theological loci, specifically as they are expressed in various public media contexts
* Develop and articulate one’s own theological arguments using the tools of various media technologies
* Demonstrate a capacity for theological reflection and spiritual formation within media culture

**Strategies:**

1. Required Reading:

*To Know as We are Known,* Parker Palmer

*Click2Save,* Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson

Other readings as assigned

1. Class Attendance and Participation:

Given that this course is a short intensive, attendance at all course sessions is mandatory, and absences will reflect negatively on a student’s grade. In case of emergency or illness, please notify the instructors immediately. Active participation, including in large and small group discussion, is required.

In this class, and in this seminary, we respect the rules of inclusivity, as stated in the academic catalog, pages 13-14. Please note that written work that does not conform to these standards will be returned for a re-write; and in the classroom, we will practice referring to both human beings and God in ways that are respectful of personhood and inclusive in terms of gender, race and class.

A word about laptop computers: we understand that people learn in varieties of modes, and that for some people multi-tasking feels both comfortable and effective as a form of learning. We reserve the right to ask you to close your electronic devices if anything you are doing is distracting to your colleagues, or appears to be interfering with your effective participation in the class.

1. Course Assignments

Timely completion of all assignments is expected of all students. Late work may or may not be accepted, at the instructor’s discretion. A reduction in the grade should be expected for late work.

**The following assignments are required:**

1. Begin a blog and post at least one entry for each weekday that we are meeting in person

**Assignment Notes: Blogging**

* Keep in mind that while the genre of “weblog” is still evolving, there are some elements that are beginning to emerge as fairly common. Weblog posts should be relatively short, most often no more than 250 words. Brevity is preferred (although it can be difficult to achieve)!
* You can use whatever blogging software you would like, but if you have never set up a blog you might want to try Wordpress software, which is a platform that is free and easy to use (<http://wordpress.com/>). Whatever software you choose to use, make sure that it contains the ability for people to use RSS to subscribe to it. In general almost all weblog entries should have at least one link embedded in them to some other thing on the web – a newspaper article, another post in a different weblog, an image, a petition, a video, etc. **You should aim for this as a minimum requirement.**
* **You should also reflect on each book (Drescher/Anderson and Palmer) at least twice.**
* Most blogs are also updated pretty regularly, which is why we are asking you to post every weekday (M-F). More and more blogs are read using a newsreader and RSS, so the title and (if you use one) the excerpt of your post is important. Choose something concise and evocative.
* Blogging is a conversation of some kind with someone(s) – even if that someone is only an invented audience – which means that weblog entries will pose questions and/or invite action of some sort. They will do something that allows the reader to *do something.*
* Most weblogs connect with the author’s passion in some way. Do not be afraid to take a stand on something, express joy or lament, point people to events happening off the web, and so on. Blog posts do *not* have to be definitive – feel free to “think out loud” and to change your mind in later posts.

**Some ideas for potential blog posts:**

* Reflect on the readings, reflect on ideas that emerged for you in class.
* What’s going on in the news today? How might you pray with something that you’ve encountered there?
* Find an interesting website or weblog that pertains in some way to your understanding of God’s activity in the world, and point people to it with a comment as to why they should care about it.
* Write an entry that takes an idea or website or something else that a colleague pointed to in their blog, and develop it further, link it to other relevant websites, etc.
* Ponder the lectionary texts for a specific day. How would you make them “come alive” in the context of popular culture? How might God be trying to “say something” in the context of pop culture that connects with the lectionary texts?
* Take a piece of popular culture that has no explicitly religious elements to it, and make an argument as to why it is in fact *deeply* theological.
* Trace a theological question or theme that is beginning to emerge in a television or YouTube series that you’re watching. How would identify that theme? Can you link to the specific episodes that contain the theme?
* Find an example of an effective use of the web (or other digital media) for missional outreach; point to it, and explain why you believe it’s so effective

**Notes on commenting on your colleague’s posts**

* Here what we are interested in are your reflections on your colleagues’ posts. These do not have to be lengthy or formal, but your reflection should make clear that you’ve read and considered the post, and you should write something that is not simply a “verbal bouquet” or a critique without substance. Try picking out a sentence from your colleague’s post that you really resonated with, and exploring its further implications. Or choose an idea that you disagree with, and point out why.

b) Choose an RSS reader and subscribe to your colleague’s blogs, and enough others to mean that you are subscribed to at least five blogs (beyond your fellow students you can choose whatever blogs you would like), and read them; comment at least once on each of your colleague’s blogs (not once on each post, simply once on each blog) [send the urls of the blogs outside of the class that you are using to fulfill this assignment to us]

c) Theological essay: write a 2-3 page essay that critically engages one specific aspect of media cultures from the perspective of one particular theological loci [doctrine of God, sin, anthropology, etc.] **Due January 17th, 2014**

d) Complete a final project that involves creative production in at least one digital mode (for example: a photo slideshow with accompanying music, a digital story, a website, and so on) and which serves as an introduction to *your* sense of at least one of the big questions in this degree program that you desire to engage . **Rough draft is due January 11th; final project due January 30th.**

**Assignment notes: Project**

* Take one of your favorite pop culture songs and read it theologically. Create a multimedia piece that attaches images and words to the song. It's easy to do this using iMovie on the Mac, or one of the Windows equivalents. Export the piece into a .mov (quicktime) file and publish it.
* Choose your favorite TV show and write a set of study questions for it that get at a particular theological concept. Embed both clips from the show and the study questions into a website.
* Put together a six week film series for theological reflection. Which films would you choose? What study questions would you use? What would be the rhythm for each session? Publish the whole thing on a website or as part of your weblog.
* Create the outline for an hour long adult study on a particular bible text. If you choose this idea, make sure that you preface the study by explaining what the best context for its use would be, and what method you're seeking to employ. Develop the content presentation pieces using digital tools.
* Create a liturgy for use on a particular day in the liturgical calendar -- perhaps a saint's commemoration, or a festival – and develop digital resources that support the liturgy. These do not have to be used necessarily *during* the liturgy, but they might be preparation, reflection, or continuing engagement resources.

1. Special needs

If you have any special learning needs that we can and should accommodate, please let us know as soon as possible.

1. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is any act that represents someone else’s work as your own. It is an offense against academic honesty, and as such, subject to disciplinary action. Various steps may be taken in response, and these are detailed in both the student handbook and the catalog. If you have any questions at all about how to handle a particular resource, please ask us. We’re happy to work with you on ensuring that your work has academic integrity.

**Assessment:**

Attendance: 10%

Blog Posts: 30%

Theological essay: 30%

Final creative project: 30%

**Course Outline:**

Seven course days, for a total 42 hours for the course. This schedule also assumes that students will have completed the reading in advance, and will have at least two hours a day for their own work on the course outside of our meeting times.

**Sunday, January 5th: “Knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are intertwined”**

**3:00-6:30 pm**

Assigned reading: entirety of Parker Palmer

Learning Outcomes: Students will demonstrate a basic grasp of the course argument, sense of familiarity with each other, able to distinguish between “instrumental” and “expressive” epistemological stances, media studies as reception studies

**Monday, January 6th: “The Good Creation” & The Mystery of Evil**

**9:00-12:00 am**

**1:00-5:00 pm**

Assigned reading: entirety of Drescher/Anderson

Learning outcomes: Students will be able to answer these questions: How do we understand human agency and divine agency? What is theological reflection? What is “consumerism”? What is a “culture of commodification”?

Learning outcomes: Students will evince a basic grasp of a theology of the cross, the ability to articulate a theological response to the problem of evil, an understanding what is meant by “reframing”, and some grasp of the challenges media culture present in terms of representations of evil.

**Tuesday, January 7th: “Theological anthropology, all humans are created in the**

**image of God” & “Christology: all theology is contextual”**

**9:00-12:00 am**

**1:00-5:00 pm**

Learning outcomes: Students will demonstrate a basic grasp of theological anthropology, recognition of systemic dynamics involved in race, class and gender representations in media, the ability to hold a “story circle” in a pastoral setting, and a basic grasp of storyboarding.

Learning outcomes: Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate from a Christian perspective why “all theology is contextual,” grasp “context collapse,” recognize how important soundscapes are to meaning-making.

**Wednesday, January 8th: “The Holy Spirit is at work” & “The Church”**

**9:00-12:00 am**

**1:00-5:00 pm**

Learning outcomes: Students will be able to grasp of the concept of “sanctification,” basic ability to use facebook and blogging media; familiarity with some examples of appropriate media use policies for churches.

Learning outcomes: Students will grasp how social justice enters into the work of the church, awareness of what “fair use” is, how to manage intellectual property issues, and will recognize the “wealth of social networks”

**Thursday, January 10th: “Word and sacrament, faithful proclamation”**

**9:0-12:00 am**

**1:00-5:00 pm**

Learning outcomes: Students will have a basic grasp of their own definition of “faithful proclamation,” be familiar with how church websites communicate, and be able to share several effective examples of digital tools being used for congregational or missional outreach.

**Friday, January 10th: “Religious pluralism & the Media”**

**9:00-12:00 am**

**1:00-5:00 pm**

Learning outcomes: Students will show an ability to answer the questions: What is a “theology of religious pluralism?” What is a “comparative theology”? Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate such from within their own tradition.

Learning outcomes: Students will examine the role of different media technologies in the public face of different religious traditions, as well as the use of media technologies to reform/reshape religious traditions.

**Saturday, January 11th: Course Wrap-Up & Discussion of Projects: Draft of Projects due!**

9:00-12:30

**Descriptive Report**

**4.400: MAR Keynote—Religion & Media**

**January 2014**

**STUDENT:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| **Course Objectives** | **Failure** | **Basic** | **Good** | **Superior** |
| Demonstrate an awareness of landscapes of media culture with an emphasis on active engagement in creation within those landscapes |  |  |  |  |
| Define and describe the various theological loci, specifically as they are expressed in various public media contexts |  |  |  |  |
| Develop and articulate one’s own theological arguments using the tools of various media technologies |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrate a capacity for theological reflection and spiritual formation within media culture |  |  |  |  |

**Comments:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Final Course Grade:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Instructors:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| **Rubric for Assessing Class Participation** | **Superior** | **Good** | **Sufficient** | **Failure** |
| **Reasoning** | Raises thoughtful questions which emerge from the assigned reading and lectures; is charitable to others in discussing issues. | Most positions are supported by evidence in the readings; comments and ideas generally contribute to class understanding of the material and concepts; is charitable to others. | Class contributions most often are based on personal opinion/anecdotes or fuzzy thinking. Comments suggest difficulty in following complex lines of argument; student’s arguments are convoluted and hard to follow. | Frequently resorts to extraneous comments which fail to connect in any recognizable way to the reading or lecture; illogical comments without substantiation are frequent; not charitable to others. |
| **Listening** | Deepens the discussion by drawing on other readings, or comments from others; Offers in depth analysis of complicated theological terms and ideas that aid in understanding. | Usually listens well to others as evidenced by clarifying questions, making connections to earlier readings and lectures; responds to comments of others in ways that open and deepen conversation | Has difficulty consistently listening well as evidenced by repetition of questions asked earlier or extraneous comments unrelated to the topic. Is occasionally distracted by electronic media. | Frequently appears distracted; distracted by computer or cell phone; shows no evidence of listening or understanding the comments of others |
| **Reading** | Student has carefully read and understood the readings, followed up on footnotes and outside sources and comes to class prepared with questions and critiques. | Student has read and understood all assigned material as evidenced by prepared questions. Contributes regularly and well. | Student has read most of the material but comments demonstrate little thought or misunderstanding some main points. Work demonstrates inconsistent preparation. Contributions are infrequent & inconsistent. | Unable to understand basic concepts and is frequently unprepared as evidenced by inability to respond to foundational questions or contribute. Consistently does not contribute. |

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| **Rubric for Assessing Papers** | **Superior** | **Good** | **Sufficient** | **Failure** |
| **Argument & Analysis** | Clear statement of the thesis and main conclusion of the paper. Thesis is well documented. Highly accurate and elegant. The argument is creative, compelling and elegant. Clearly breaks argument into relevant parts. | Thesis is obvious but not stated; the summary description is fairly accurate and has textual support. The argument is interesting and relevant. | Thesis is present but must be discovered, and is only somewhat relevant. The conclusion does little more than restate the problematic introduction.  Integrates some parts but other connections are muddy. | There is no coherent thesis.  Essay has no clear organizational pattern.  The argument is unclear, unsupported, and riddled with inaccurate statements. Parts simply reflect personal opinion rather than a reasoned argument. |
| **Sources** | Evidence is used from a wide range of sources, including lectures and course readings. Student also consults multiple scholarly books, websites, journal articles, etc. not explicitly discussed in class. | Evidence is used from many sources, but author relies heavily on a more limited set of sources. Effort has been made to go beyond material presented in class. | Uses only a few of the sources provided in class.  If outside sources are used, they are primarily non-scholarly (i.e., intended for a general audience) and/or web-based. | Poor use of sources in general; only minimally uses sources provided by instructor, and/or relies exclusively on non-scholarly outside sources. |
| **Clarity and Style** | All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. All information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper clearly has been spell-checked AND proofread, and contains no errors. | All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. All information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper clearly has been spell-checked AND proofread, and contains no more than a few minor errors, which do not adversely affect the reader’s ability to understand the essay. | A few sentences are grammatically incorrect or not clearly written. Several words are misused. Not all information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper contains several errors. Reader’s ability to understand essay may be compromised by these errors. | Paper is full of grammatical errors and bad writing. Many words are misused. Not all information is accurate and up-to-date. No evidence that the paper has been spell-checked or proofread, and contains numerous errors. Reader has a difficult time understanding essay because of errors. |