

**CL 8530: Gospel and Cultures**  
**Mary Hess / Gary Simpson**  
**Office hours by appointment**  
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**Fall 2010**  
**Fridays / GH306 / 8 am to 10:50 am**

This doctoral seminar explores the intersecting academic conversations of cultural studies, theology, and digital culture theory towards the end of supporting missional congregations. The seminar encourages interdisciplinary theological conversation among the participants focused on Gospel and digital cultures in the context of missional leadership.

Participants will:

- Ask how engaging practices of leadership with congregations offers new opportunities for these congregations to engage their communities and the world as public companions with God.
- Develop a working vocabulary and set of exploratory tools from within cultural studies, media studies, and theology for scholarly research that responds to the needs of contemporary religious communities as they arise within their wider environments.
- Problematize their own specific locations and communities by gaining a sense of the many ways in which theologies sensitive to cultural contexts reflect upon the subject matter of Gospel and digital cultures.
- Develop a familiarity with the ideas and concerns that cluster around the issue of “gospel and cultures,” particularly as related to public theology and congregational leadership in global society. They will then use that familiarity to situate themselves within a particular scholarly discourse and investigate that discourse for its utility in supporting congregational mission.
- Work collaboratively as a research team on the class subject matter through participation in the interdisciplinary research of the seminar sessions, and through continued editing of, and engagement with, the Wikipedia entry on missional leadership

**The essential questions this course takes up:**

What does it mean to be a missional leader in the context of digital cultures? How does confessing faith in word and deed in a public sphere occur – particularly amidst a world of digital cultural spaces -- and in what ways might leaders shape and engage Christian faith in such contexts? What resources and strategies exist for supporting these processes? What challenges and conflicts arise in doing so?

## **SEMINAR PRACTICES**

Collaborative inquiry (presenter, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> respondents):

Nearly every session of our seminar will be focused by a major presentation (20 - 30 minutes, accompanied by a 10-12 page paper and powerpoint/keynote presentation) that is a substantial inquiry by a member of the seminar into that week's reading, followed by questions and conversation led by two respondents. That presentation is due to all the seminar participants by 5pm on the Tuesday prior to the scheduled class (cf. sign-up sheet).

The first respondent will open up questions and lines of inquiry with the presenter by presenting a short response (a 3-5 page paper with an optional short powerpoint/keynote presentation, due to the class by Thursday evening of the night before the seminar) (cf. sign-up sheet).

The second respondent will open the conversation with the rest of the seminar, suggesting a place to begin in the conversation started between the presenter and first respondent and, in spontaneous collaboration with the course professors, continually "float" the conversation in fruitful directions (cf. sign-up sheet).

Inquiries:

At the end of each session we will offer a short set of questions to which we will invite brief anonymous written responses. These responses will then be transcribed and summarized to be handed out at the beginning of the next session as a way to retrieve our previous conversation, note briefly any issues that need to be clarified, and identify lingering questions and concerns which we want to continue to keep in front of the seminar.

Self-assessment and learning:

The previous session's primary presenter will also take 3-5 minutes the week following their presentation to reflect with the seminar participants on how his/her thinking on the topic has been changed or strengthened because of the previous session's work.

Wikipedia editing:

Each member of the seminar will become familiar with Wikipedia entries related to the class content, and will contribute throughout the term to at least one related entry. We will, as a seminar, tend the "missional church leadership" entry, but students may also choose to contribute to other entries for seminar credit as long as they alert the instructors to their edits.

## **REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION**

Each seminar participant is required to complete the following assignments (percentage of grade in parentheses):

- (20) Lead the seminar as the main presenter (along with 10-12 page paper and media presentation)
- (10) Function as the 1<sup>st</sup> respondent at least once during the term (along with a 3-5 page paper and media presentation)
- (10) Function as the 2<sup>nd</sup> respondent at least once during the term
- (5) Participate in tending Wikipedia entries
- (15) Prepare a case study drawn from their own context that will be an initial framing of a final research paper topic, and which will be used to focus discussion during our two online course sessions
- (30) Write a final research paper (20-30 pages, appropriately referenced and formatted)
- (10) Participate in another colleague's paper by being a collaborative assessor (for both their draft and final assessment)

## **STANDARDS**

The standards by which the successful achievement of the objectives will be measured are as follows. The successful seminar participant will be able to demonstrate his or her:

1. Ability to handle the basic categories and positions with precision and clarity. This includes reformulating classical and traditional language into one's own words and constructing a theological position that undergirds effective research and ministry.
2. Knowledge of basic vocabulary as demonstrated by fluent and intelligent use of it in theological discourse.
3. Capacities to discern and evaluate between conflicting viewpoints within a collaborative inquiry and conversation so as to clearly delineate issues in ways that foster further fruitful research and mission.
4. Ability to use digital technology in appropriate ways to pursue scholarly research, and to present such research effectively

## **SEMINAR PAPER AND ORAL EXAM**

Students will write a seminar research paper on a topic of their choice linked to the questions under consideration, subject to approval by the instructors.

The first step in the process of this paper will be to construct a case study, drawn from the student's field of study and context, that explores a specific cultural artifact (tv show, video game, news story, popular song, website, consumer product, etc. ) that poses challenges that can be engaged with seminar content. This case study will be explored in the online seminar sessions, and will be the starting point of the final research paper. All students must submit their case study online by November 2<sup>nd</sup>. (See the calendar of this syllabus for specific details.)

Following seminar work with the case studies, each student will write a research paper that critically examines at least one question raised by the case study AND which draws upon a scholarly work, figure, or line of argument introduced in the seminar. This paper should also keep in mind the student's vocation as a missional theologian and teacher of the church within a particular context. Students will be expected to carefully expost a major subject, scholarly work, or figure from those surveyed in the course. This exposition should demonstrate ample attending to the source materials before engaging in overt critique and constructive integration into a line of argument. Papers shall be typed, double-spaced, 20-30 pages in length, and prepared in accordance with whichever style manual is in use by a journal in the student's field to which such a paper might be submitted.

Seminar participants will submit a draft to the seminar for critique by December 10, which will then be discussed in class on December 17. Seminar participants will arrange a final one-hour oral exam on the completed paper with the instructors and at least two other members of the seminar by December 22.

### **Deadlines:**

Rough draft: due to seminar by **Dec. 10th.**

Reflective conversation: students will discuss the draft in seminar on **Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>.**

Final oral exam (including final version of paper): must be completed by **Dec. 22.**

Failure to turn in the rough draft and/or final draft of the seminar paper by the deadlines will result in a penalty of one-half grade on the final grade for each deadline missed.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (Yale University Press, 2007).

Brown, D., Davaney, S. and Tanner, K. *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford, 2001).

Mitchell, Jolyon. *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, 2010).

Scharer, M., and Hilberath, J. *The Practice of Communicative Theology: An Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (Crossroad, 2008).

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Democratizing Biblical Studies*. (Westminster John Knox, 2009).

Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (Penguin, 2009).

Simpson, Gary. *Critical Social Theory* (Fortress, 2001).

Tanner, Kathryn. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Fortress 1997).

Ward, Graham. *The Politics of Discipleship* (Baker Academic, 2009)

Wesch, M. (video) *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube*  
([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4\\_hU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU))

## SEMINAR CALENDAR

Note: Please come to the seminar having completed the reading assigned for that session, including the presenter paper and 1<sup>st</sup> response (which should be received by all seminar members by the Tuesday of the week under consideration).

### **Sept. 10:** Introductions and orientation

Basic terms in use in the course, particularly “Gospel” and “cultures.” Primary pedagogy for the course.

Read Schussler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies*, prior to coming to class. In light of the course description, write no more than 500 words raising three lines of inquiry that you would like to discuss with Schussler Fiorenza if she were present.

### **Sept. 17:** Cultural studies and theology, opening the conversation

Read Brown/Davaney, et. al., *Converging on Culture*, part one, pp. 1 – 87.

(Gary will present, Mary will respond)

### **Sept. 24:** Cultural studies and theology, charting a path

Read Brown/Davaney, part two, *Converging on Culture*, pp. 89 – 197.

(Mary will present, Gary will respond)

### **Oct. 1:** Theology and political theory in the context of cultures

Read Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*

### **Oct. 8:** Exploring notions of “culture” in historical context, and theological responses

Read Tanner, *Theories of Culture*

### **Oct. 15:** Communicative practice in the midst of social theorizing

Read Simpson, *Critical Social Theory*

**Oct. 22:** Digital culture and emerging social organization

Read Shirky, *Here Comes Everyone*

Watch Wesch, *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube*

**Oct. 29:** Catch-up week (due to AAR)

No class, thoroughly read Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*, and prepare your case study for online discussion.

**Nov. 5:** First week of two weeks of online course meetings. Your case study must be posted to MyLutherNet by November 2<sup>nd</sup>. By November 8<sup>th</sup> all students must post an initial response to each case study that notes two key questions the study raises, and lists at least two pertinent quotations from class readings that might engage these questions. The instructors will respond to this input by November 12<sup>th</sup>.

*Choose a cultural artifact drawn from your particular missional context, and offer a thick description of this artifact (in light of Ryle's essay, found here: "The Thinking of Thoughts: What Is 'Le Penseur' Doing?" [http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/CSACSA/Vol14/Papers/ryle\\_1.html](http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/CSACSA/Vol14/Papers/ryle_1.html)).*

*Analyze and propose responses. That is, what theological questions emerge relative to this artifact in light of the Church's confession of the Gospel? In addition, what claims would you make in light of that confession, and in what manner(s) would you make them?*

*12-15 pages, posted to the MyLutherNet website by Nov. 2*

**Nov. 12:** (Missional church consultation begins) Second week of online course meetings. Further instructions for this week's postings will be provided online, based upon the discussion that has taken place to date.

**Nov. 19:** Media studies and Christian theology, a specific exploration using media violence as the focal point

Review Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*

**Nov. 26: Thanksgiving Break**

**Dec. 3:** Social organizations, networking, and the implications of each for leadership in missional congregations

Read Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*

(Mary will present, Gary will respond)

**Dec. 10:** Communicative theology in media culture

Read Scharer/Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology*

(Gary will present, Mary will respond)

**Dec. 17 Final seminar discussion of participant papers.**

**Dec. 20 Final papers due.**

**Dec. 20-22 Oral exams.**



## SEMINAR PARTICIPATION SCHEDULE

- Sept. 10**            *Orientation*
- Sept. 17**            *Presenter: Gary Simpson*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Mary Hess*  
*2nd Respondent: Scott Nelson*
- Sept. 24**            *Presenter: Mary Hess*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Gary Simpson*  
*2nd Respondent: Tim Snyder*
- Oct. 1**                *Presenter: David Hahn*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Tim Snyder*  
*2nd Respondent: Maria Hurni*
- Oct. 8**                *Presenter: Tim Snyder*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Catrina Ciccone*  
*2nd Respondent: Ingrid Rasmussen*
- Oct. 15**            *Presenter: Dinku Bato*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: David Hahn*  
*2nd Respondent: Scott Nelson*
- Oct. 22**            *Presenter: Catrina Ciccone*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Dinku Bato*  
*2nd Respondent: Tim Snyder*

**Oct. 29** (no class, catch-up week)

**Nov. 5**            *Case studies*

course meets online — all respond, all present

**Nov. 12**            *Case studies, cont.*

course meets online — all respond, all participate in the discussion

**Nov. 19**            *Presenter: Maria Hurni*

*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Scott Nelson*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Respondent: David Hahn*

**Nov. 26** (no class, Thanksgiving break)

**Dec. 3**            *Presenter: Scott Nelson*

*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Ingrid Rasmussen*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Respondent: Catrina Ciccone*

**Dec. 10**            *Presenter: Ingrid Rasmussen*

*1<sup>st</sup> Respondent: Maria Hurni*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Respondent: Dinku Bato*

Rough draft of participant papers are due.

**Dec. 17**            *Collaborative discussion of paper drafts.*

**Dec. 20, 21, 22**            **Oral exams scheduled, final papers due Dec. 20.** Times will be made available during these days for oral defense of papers.