EL4515: Proactive Ministry in a Media Culture
Spring 2011

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Thursdays, beginning February 10th to May 12th
NW232
8:00 am to 10:50 am

Essential Understandings

- We are thoroughly embedded in a variety of mediated environments
- God can reveal Godself amidst our practices of meaning-making
- Our faith is revealed in our practices as well as our beliefs
- Pastoral leaders need to be adept and agile meaning-makers – "gardener" leaders
- Living with popular media means engaging and making meaning with these media
- We have a mission to learn, and to create disciples (learners) in the world

Course description

Emerging scholarship within media studies has begun to discard an instrumentalist perspective on media — one which emphasized a picture of media as trucks carrying messages — in favor of a culturalist perspective which emphasizes the ritual aspects of communication and perceives media as providing elements from which, and within which, people construct meaning in myriad ways.

Among the consequences of such a shift in paradigm is an appreciation both for the meaning-making resources resident within popular cultural contexts, as well as for the ways in which mediated commercial culture can flatten and constrict our symbolic inventories and narrow the focus of our attention.

This postmodern shift in sensibility highlights new opportunities for communities of faith within media culture. In the past religious communities have been quite adept at situating ourselves, particularly through the embedding of faith practices from a tradition, within a specific cultural context. Our deepest and most powerful resource in this postmodern context may be precisely our ability to construct context, to embed our beliefs in ways of knowing and being that support them. Such embedding occurs not simply in doctrines, or other "content-oriented" frames, but within body postures, ritual practices, and other multi-sensory experiences. This process is at the heart of religious education and in a media culture context requires taking seriously the spiritual resonance of people's experiences within popular cultural practices.

Course goals

1. Provide an intellectual and experiential context in which relationship with God in the midst of mediated popular cultural practices is respected, honored, and critically engaged.

2. Provide conceptual and experiential connections between emerging scholarly discourse at the intersection of "media, religion, and culture" and theology that takes culture seriously.

3. Learn basic production skills in a variety of media, and practice public articulation of faith in the process.

4. Locate and explore denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith resources and programs for engaging media in communities of faith.

Required texts

Please note: there are a variety of required pieces available on the web – attend carefully to each week's assignments in the calendar below. In addition, there are three books we will read this term, as follows:

Hess, M. (2005) *Engaging Technology in Theological Education.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Scharer, M., Hilberath, J. and Hinze, B. (2008) *Communicative Theology.* Crossroad.

Shirky, C. (2009) *Here Comes Everybody.* Penguin.

Course calendar

February 10 / Introductions and orientation

February 17 / Representing religion, and thinking pedagogically

   Read Chaps. 1- 5 in Hess

   Additional resources:
   Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media and the Supernatural,* Oxford University Press, 2005.
   Mary Hess, ed. *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity,* Ashgate, 2004.
   Stewart Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age,* Routledge, 2006.
   Stewart Hoover, ed. *Media, Home and Family,* Routledge, 2003.
   David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religion Images,* University of California Press, 1999.

February 24 / Social media and the transformation of institutions

Read Shirky.

Additional resources:
Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, Yale, 2007.
Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, Penguin, 2010.
David Weinberger, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*, Basic Books, 2003.
David Weinberger, *Everything is Miscellaneous*, Holt, 2008.

March 3 / Communicative theology, an introduction.

Read Scharer and Hilberath.

Additional resources:
Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, Abingdon, 2006.
Jolyon Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Christian Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life*, Eerdmans, 2008.
Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, Eerdmans, 2000.

March 10 / Communicative theology, continued.

Review Scharer and Hilberath.
Read Christian Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life*, Chap. 7, "Leisure and the arts" on e-reserve.
Read Scott Cormode "Multi-layered leadership: The Christian leader as builder, shepherd, gardener," found online at http://arl-jrl.org/Volumes/CormodeFA02.pdf

March 17 / Social context and social media

Read Hess Chap. 6
Read danah boyd, "White flight in networked publics?" found online at http://www.danah.org/papers/2009/WhiteFlightDraft3.pdf

Additional resources:
danah boyds' general publications site at http://www.danah.org/papers/

March 24 / Media education

Read "Enhancing child safety and online technologies," found online at http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/ISTTF_Final_Report.pdf

Read Henry Jenkins, "Confronting the challenges of participatory culture," found online at http://tinyurl.com/3y553d.

WACC No Nonsense Guides, found online at:
http://archive.waccglobal.org/publications/no_nonsense_guides

Read Renee Hobbs, "Digital and media literacy: A plan of action," found online at http://www.knightcomm.org/digital-and-media-literacy/

Search for your particular denomination or faith community's policies on media education and/or internet safety and post them on your blog. If you can't find a particular policy, post at least one social statement or other document that you believe is relevant.

Additional resources:

Douglas Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed*. Or Books, 2010.

MIT Press free series on Digital Media and Learning, found online at http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/dmal/-/1

Jolyon Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics,* Cambridge University Press, 2010.

March 31 / Media ethics: sharing and copyright issues

Read Chap. 7 in Hess
Read *Love to Share* found online at http://www.feautor.org/id/12060144352

Additional resources:

Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks,* Yale, 2007.

Jolyon Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics,* Cambridge University Press, 2010.

April 7 / Storyboarding

This week we will begin presentations of storyboards, with rounds of critique and engagement.

Additional resources:

Digital Storytelling Cookbook, Center for Digital Storytelling, found online at:
http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook_fce.pdf

Chapter on storyboarding from *iMovie: The Missing Manual*

The Current's production resources, found online at:
http://current.com/participate/resources.htm

Nora Paul, *The Elements of Digital Storytelling*, found online at:
http://www.inms.umn.edu/elements/index.php

Eileen Crowley, *A Moving Word,* Augsburg, 2006.

April 14 / Storyboarding, round two

      Further presentations of storyboards.

[April 21 – Easter Break / no class]

April 28 / Digital storytelling, worship, and other ritual contexts

      Explore the set of worship and media websites that will be found on the course website.

      Additional resources:
      Eileen Crowley, *A Moving Word*, Augsburg 2006, and *Liturgical Art for a Media Culture*, Liturgical Press, 2007.
      Len Wilson and Jason Moore, *Digital Storytellers*, Abingdon Press, 2002.

May 5 / Sharing videos

May 12 / Sharing videos

Course requirements

This course is designed to facilitate an integration of the print and digital materials under consideration with experiences and ideas that come out of students' most immediate personal and professional contexts. While I (Prof. Hess) will provide substantial class presentations that direct our explorations and structure our collaboration, it is up to each student to prepare appropriately for our work together, and to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue. Towards that end, class participation is vital, and requires not only physical presence, but diligent and thoughtful preparation. If you have any learning challenges that require accommodation or intervention, I invite you to sit down with me early in the term so that we can take appropriate steps to support your learning.

The following assignments are required for successful completion of the course. If any of these assignments pose insurmountable challenges, please contact me as soon as you discern the problem so that we can arrange for appropriate alternatives.

1.   Create a Facebook page and participate in Facebook

Each student will create a Facebook page (or continue to explore the one they already have). If you'd like to do so, you may create a page or group for an organization or church, rather than work on your own personal page. You should learn how to write status updates, figure out what it means to "like" something, and establish your own privacy settings. A minimum requirement is to publish one status update a week, and upload at least one photo other than your profile picture. If you can figure out how to get your blog entries to post automatically to facebook, they will count as your status updates.

2.   Write a blog and read other blogs

Each student will keep a weblog for the duration of the course, and read every other student's blog from the course (preferably using an RSS reader of some sort). There are two primary goals for this blog. First, to keep a running record of your engagement with the readings and other content of the course; and second, to keep your eyes and ears open for "glimpses of grace" in the wider world. For the first element, you should write at least one entry a week that comments on the readings. In weeks when there is no required reading, then you should be commenting on the presentations made in class. For the second element, you can blog about whatever you'd like that evokes "glimpses of grace," but you will be evaluated based on whether any (or how many) of your posts attract comments. While your colleagues from the class are of course free to comment on your posts, you should consider that they have their own posts to write, and try to write in a way or on topics that invite comments from other people. At a minimum you should write two posts a week that contain at least one hyperlink each.

3.   Create a storyboard still image presentation

This is an assignment that will be used to build toward the final assignment. Most people will use a program like *Keynote* or *PowerPoint* to do this, but you're welcome to use whatever software you prefer. The goal is to practice telling a story about or for the MN Without Poverty project using images and narrative/text by creating a storyboard for your final video. These presentations should be between 3 and 7 minutes long. Part of the learning goal is to experiment with combining images and narration/text, and to learn what impact such juxtaposition has on telling a story. This piece will be due in class on April 7th.

4.   Create one short multi-media piece

This piece may be done in a variety of ways, but its final form must be submitted in video format (.mov files are preferred, but .mp4 is also acceptable). More details will be forthcoming in class, but this video will tell a story about or for the Minnesota Without Poverty project, and be due in class on May 5th.

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 (including digital resources such as pictures or music), please ask me. I'm happy to help you ensure that your work has academic integrity.

Notes about 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, and not much more than 3 or 4 sentences.

You can use whatever blogging software you would like, but if you have never set up a blog you might want to try posterous (https://posterous.com/). Posterous is a site that allows you to set up a blog for free, and our Learning Design and Technology office is willing to support you in the use of that site. My own blog runs using Wordpress software, which is another 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 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.**

Most blogs are also updated pretty regularly, many every day, but in this class I'm only asking for two posts a week. More and more blogs are read through RSS using newsreaders, so the title and (if you use one) excerpt of your post is important. Choose something concise and evocative.

Blogging is a conversation of some kind with someone(s) – even if the 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.

Notes on blogging on the required readings

Here what I am interested in are your reflections on the readings for the week. These do not have to be lengthy or formal, but they should make clear that you've read the assigned texts, and your reflections should not be simply "verbal bouquets" or critiques without substance. Try picking out a sentence that you really resonated with, and exploring its further implications. Or choose an idea that you disagree with, and point out why. Make sure that you create a hyperlink in your blog post to the book itself (you can do this most easily via google.books, the author's webpage, or if all else fails, one of the online bookstores.

Ideas for blogging on "glimpses of grace":

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 grace, and point people to it with a comment as to why they should visit 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 pop 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 the television or film series that you're watching. How would identify that theme? Can you link to the specific episodes that contain the theme?