In this capstone course, students will engage in a process of coming to understand themselves as life-long theological readers and writers in service to whatever form their life and ministry may take after seminary. Through encounters with classical and contemporary Christian theological themes, students will have ample opportunity to grapple with and articulate their own constructive theologies in conversation with others. These conversations will be supported and enabled through regular written assignments, class discussion, and prayerful disciplines. The course will culminate with a final essay. This course is taught from a commitment to liberative pedagogy (see bell hooks and Paulo Friere) and is a blend of active learning, discussion, and interactive lecture where students’ voices and journeys are valued. This is a required course for ABSW students nearing the end of their degree program. Students from other GTU schools are most welcome and encouraged to participate in this course.

**The Mission of ABSW**

As a required core course, Constructive Theology is offered in a manner that seeks to support and advance the mission of this seminary.

ABSW is a Christ-centered school that trains men and women for leadership in the church of the twenty-first century who are:

- Prepared to minister in a multicultural and multiracial world
- Rooted in evangelical heritage and tradition
- Equipped for ecumenical partnership in ministry
- Informed theologically and biblically
• Skilled in the practice of ministry for personal, ecclesial, and social transformation
• Committed to the justice demands of the Gospel

**COURSE GOALS**

The goals of this course are:

• To help each participant in this learning community to construct and articulate her/his own theological beliefs through intentional, vigorous conversation with classical and contemporary theological traditions.

• To allow each participant in this learning community to seek and grow in wisdom (Luke 2:52). “For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

• To cultivate spiritual disciplines in tandem with vigorous theological reflection in order to draw each participant in this learning community into the experience of theology as doxology.¹

• To establish vigorous theological reflection as an integral part of the lifelong journey of faith.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In relation to the goals described above, this course has four interrelated learning objectives. In this course the student will:

• Express an understanding of classical and contemporary doctrines in Christian theology, which will be assessed through class discussion and written assignments.

• Construct her/his own theological positions in conversation with classical and contemporary theological traditions in a way that communicates thoughtfully in multiple contexts, which will be assessed through class discussion, written assignments, and the final project.

• Appraise the relevancy of vigorous theological reflection to Christian ministry in the twenty-first century, which will be assessed through class discussion, written assignments, and the final project.

• Practice vigorous theological reflection as a means of engaging everyday life, which will be assessed through class discussion and written assignments.

¹ “We are in a position to ‘taste and see the goodness of God’ and in our theologies to make the ineffable mystery of God a compelling wisdom and ultimately an occasion for praise giving. Doxology, which is the living language of faith in which praise is offered in gratitude for the abundance of God’s generous love, is the proper response to the revelation of God’s ineffable existence as self-imparting love and communion.” See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 324.
COURSE TEXTS

- Most of our readings will be posted to Moodle throughout the semester.
- Roger E. Olson and Adam C. English, _Pocket History of Theology_ (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).²
- Pam McAllister, _Standing in the Need of Prayer: Devotions for Christians in Prison_ (Louisville, KY: Criminal Justice Program, National Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church, USA, 1997).

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² A copy of the one required textbook will be available for your use in the cabinet on the fourth floor of Hobart Hall. Books for select core courses at ABSW are made available to you with a grant from First Baptist Church of Berkeley. These books are intended to help those whose own books have been delayed in arriving, or for those who, because of financial reasons, need to wait a while before purchasing books for themselves. These books must remain on the fourth floor and be returned to the cabinet—they cannot be taken home.
# Weekly Course Schedule

## Week 1

**Thursday, September 8**  
*Beginning the Journey Together*

**Assignments Due:**  
- Opening Semester Survey (in class)

## Week 2

**Thursday, September 15**  
*Hashtag Theology: Practicing Theology in Ordinary Life*

*In this session we will talk about the theology done by “non-experts;” the potential in Hashtag Theology, and how theology can serve as a resource to prevent burn-out among pastors, activists, and other Jesus-followers.*

**Assignments Due:**

- **Read:**
  - “Cluetrain Manifesto”
  - “New Clues: Sixteen Years after the Cluetrain Manifesto”  
    David A. Graham, “Beyond Hashtag Activism” *The Atlantic*

- **Optional Readings:**
  - Jeff Astley & Ann Christie, *Taking Ordinary Theology Seriously*, 1-7; 20-27. (Pages 8-20 are examples of ordinary theology. Scan these for understanding.)

- **Write:**
  - Learning Journal

- **Practice:**
  - “The Practice of Silence; Finding Spaciousness, Stillness, and Inner Peace,” 29-45. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).
Week 3

Thursday, September 22
Reading Theology to Pay Attention

This session we will explore what it means to practice reading as a theological discipline. We will also investigate the connections between reading & social justice.

We will welcome a guest speaker who will help us think more about our Prison Devotional Project:

Guest Presenter: Rev. Byung D. Min, Protestant Chaplain, Correctional Training Facility, Soledad, CA

Assignments Due:

Read:

View:
- Moodle Presentation on Reading

Write:
- Learning Journal

Practice:
- “The Practice of Silence; Finding Spaciousness, Stillness, and Inner Peace,” 29-45. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one Invitation to Practice and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

Week 4

Thursday, September 29
On Writing and Everyday Theology

This session we will explore what it means to practice writing as a theological discipline. We will also delve more deeply into Weil’s concept of praying attention, and consider again some of the ordinary (yet extraordinary) ways God shows up.

Assignments Due:

Re-Read:

Read:

Write:
- Learning Journal

Practice:
- “The Practice of Community: Discovering Support, Encouragement, and Interdependence,” 85-102. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one Invitation to Practice and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).
### Week 5

**Thursday, October 6**  
*Gaining Perspectives, Part 1*

This session takes a bird’s-eye view of the history of theology using the unique interpretive lens of a theatrical play with scenes, actors, conflict, dialogue, and so on. Take special note this week of the assigned learning journal exercise.

**Assignments Due:**

- **Read:**

- **Write:**
  - Learning Journal (with specific instructions)

- **Practice:**
  - “The Practice of Community: Discovering Support, Encouragement, and Interdependence,” 85-102. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

### Week 6

**Thursday, October 13**  
*Gaining Perspectives, Part 2*

This week we explore theology from more grounded (or we might say fluid) perspectives than last week’s bird’s-eye view. We will investigate theologies written from conscious social locations including Black Theologies, Dalit (Indian “untouchable” caste) Theology, Korean Minjung Pentecostal Theology, Queer Womanist Theology, and Asian American Theology.

**Assignments Due:**

- **Read:**
  - Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “In Witness to God’s ‘With-ness’: Dalit Theology, the God of Life, and the Path towards Justice and Peace,” 546-558.
  - Also Choose One:
    - Koo Dong Yun, “Pentecostalism from Below: Minjung Liberation and Asian Pentecostal Theology,” 89-114.

- **Write:**
  - Learning Journal

- **Practice:**
  - “The Practice of Hospitality: Inviting, Welcoming, Nurturing the Stranger,” 103-119. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).
### Week 7

**Thursday, October 20**  
*Solidarity of Others*

This week we delve more deeply into our own conscious social locations by exploring family histories, cultures, traditions, challenges, and fears. Using the spoken-word template “The Gospel and My People,” we will each “perform” our pieces in class together. We will let the reading by Anselm Kyungsuk Min guide us in our discussion about how to be particularly located but not atomistic, disconnected from others, or silo-ed off from one another.

**Assignments Due:**

- **Read:**

- **Write:**
  - Complete “The Gospel and My People,” and come prepared to share your spoken word piece with the class. (It does not have to memorized.)

- **Practice:**
  - “The Practice of Hospitality: Inviting, Welcoming, Nurturing the Stranger,” 103-119. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

### Week 8

**Thursday, October 27**  
*NO CLASS – READING WEEK*

**Practice:**

- “The Practice of Rest: Restoring Your Energy, Your Creativity, and Your Spirit,” 15-28. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

### Week 9

**Thursday, November 3**  
*Being Human Bodies, Bodies Being Human*

This session we will explore the centrality of the human body in theological meaning-making. We do so through investigating the connections between racism, eucharist, and black bodies via the womanist Catholic theologian Shawn Copeland, and the use of body as profound metaphor through Indian womanist Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar.

**Assignments Due:**

- **Read:**

- **Write:**
  - Learning Journal

- **Practice:**
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| **Thursday, November 10**  
**Trinity as Relationship, Part 1** |

In this session we will primarily focus on unpacking the reading from Catherine LaCugna as she gives us a revitalized way of understanding contemporary Trinitarian theology. Using the notion of God-Within-Us, LaCugna reminds us that, far from being an esoteric and abstract theology, Trinitarian theology has radical implications for how we live out our everyday lives. The reading from Madonado Pérez ties the images down to the earthy familia.

**Assignments Due:**

**Read:**

**Write:**
- Learning Journal

**Practice:**

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| **Thursday, November 17**  
**Trinity as Relationship, Part 2** |

In this session we will continue to explore LaCugna’s concept of Trinitarian theology, but we do so through the experiences of those living in L’Arche communities around the world. We investigate why weakness can be a liberating theological lens—and how power is too often defined in hierarchical, patriarchal, capitalistic ideologies that stem from misunderstandings of God’s identity.

**Assignments Due:**

**Read:**

**View Videos:**
- “The Heart of L’Arche”
- Jean Vanier: “Become Weaker” (links on Moodle)

**Write:**
- Learning Journal

**Practice:**
- “The Practice of Letting Go: Releasing Your Attachments, Your Past, and Your Future,” 67-84. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

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| **Thursday, November 24**  
NO CLASS – HAPPY THANKSGIVING |

**Practice:**
- “The Practice of Rest: Restoring Your Energy, Your Creativity, and Your Spirit,” 15-28. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one *Invitation to Practice* and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).
Week 13

Thursday, December 1
Beginnings & Endings

This session will explore the theme of eschatology (also known as Christian Hope) by mixing up how we usually tend to think about endings and beginnings. In class we will view the video Flatlanders, and a video about the tenth dimension (as proposed by string theory in theoretical physics). We use these as launching points to discuss what happens when our imaginations unleash new realities into the world.

Assignments Due:
Read:
- C.S. Song, “What About Beginnings and Endings,” 9-24

Write:
- Learning Journal

Practice:
- “The Practice of Letting Go: Releasing Your Attachments, Your Past, and Your Future,” 67-84. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one Invitation to Practice and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

Week 14

Thursday, December 8
Blank-Canvas Session

This session is left blank to provide flexibility in our course schedule. We may need to move sessions around if we decide to linger on a topic. Or we may come to this open session and decide together how we want to use it.

Assignments Due:
Write:
- Final Essay Due

Practice:
- “The Fruits of Practice: Living Gratefully, Humbly, and Compassionately,” 145-166. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one Invitation to Practice and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).

Week 15

Thursday, December 15
Theology of Enjoyment

Reflections back on the journey and Strategies for a Lifetime of Theological Reading and Theological Writing

Assignments Due:
Read:
- Additional Reading to be announced

Practice:
- “The Fruits of Practice: Living Gratefully, Humbly, and Compassionately,” 145-166. Read what you can of this chapter. Choose one Invitation to Practice and try it for the week (daily, weekly, your choice).
COURSE REQUIREMENTS (IN BRIEF)

- Attendance, Assigned Readings, Participation
- Learning Journals | 45%
- Prison Devotional Contribution | 25%
- Final Essay | 30%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (IN MORE DETAIL)

Attendance

An essential part of the learning experience is gathering together to reflect upon, explore, and develop ideas. Your presence is needed, not only for your own learning, but for your colleagues’ learning as well. Therefore, it is expected that students will attend all regular class sessions and participate actively (see Class Participation, below).

If you are unable to attend class for any reason, please make a reasonable effort to notify your instructor prior to the class session.

Because your presence in class is deeply valued, regular attendance and full participation at class sessions will positively impact your final grade. However, no more than three absences are permitted, and will result in a failing grade.

Assigned Readings

We will explore together throughout this course what it means to read theology. Through these discussions, the following approach will likely be expanded and nuanced. Nonetheless, this model of preparing readings for class provides for the most beneficial conversations in class. I hope that you will engage your readings for this course with a variety of critical hermeneutical approaches; namely, generosity (an empathetic reading of the text, attempting to inhabit the world of the author and understand the arguments from that point of view); open-minded engagement (noting the sound and compelling aspects of the author’s work); suspicion (noting elements of the language, analysis, and sources that may indicate blind spots in the author’s analysis); suggestive critique (commenting on incorrect or inadequate elements of the author’s arguments and offering suggestions for changes). All these “moments” are necessary in scholarly reading, and I hope you will find them a helpful way to approach texts.

Class Participation

It is expected that you will actively participate in class sessions by listening attentively to each participant, by asking questions and offering your own comments and insights, and by interacting thoughtfully with the assigned readings, showing evidence that you have completed them.

All participants in this course are co-learners. This requires everyone’s thorough preparation and reflection prior to each session, and everyone’s willing and dynamic participation in class
discussions. It also means paying attention to the dynamic in the classroom, and how you are contributing to it. If you have a tendency to jump in to be the first person to answer a question, or a tendency to speak for a long time, occasionally class participation for you will mean cultivating attentive listening, and inviting others to speak. Silence in the classroom, even in the midst of discussion, is beneficial and fruitful. Silence provides people with a moment to think, process, and gather their thoughts. On the other hand, if you have a tendency to hang back or not answer a question, occasionally class participation for you will be to contribute by venturing forth with your voice.

Participation also includes accessing and engaging in Moodle for this course. You will find all course readings, as well as some occasional videos, and links to other sites that you will be expected to engage. There are also plenty of optional resources on Moodle. These are always marked optional, and you do not have to engage them if you don’t want. If you do, they should enrich your experience in the course. The Moodle access code for this course is Theology4Life.

Finally, participation includes assigned writing during in-class activities. These mini-papers may be collected or used to engage in class discussion.

Learning Journals

The Learning Journals assigned for this course are a key element of the class. Learning journals are to be posted to Moodle every week. You should always write at least some initial reflections in your journal prior to each class session; however, some of you may find that you will write more fully after a class session. There will also be regular occasions when you will write in your learning journal during class. Learning journals are intended to be places where you summarize and grapple with the readings and weekly discussions. They are also intended to be places where you reflect on your own learning process.

Prison Devotional Contribution

The work we do in the classroom is only worthwhile if we can find ways to make that work relevant and meaningful to folks outside the classroom. We need to challenge ourselves to be able to articulate our deepest insights, struggles, and yearnings in ways that communicate to those beyond the seminary context. Your prison devotional contribution will seek to do just that.

Final Essay

Your final essay will ask you to delve more deeply into any one or two of the topics you encountered this semester. You will re-read the materials assigned for that week and reflect on the topic in a way that shows your continuing insights, struggles, and theological contribution.

Due Dates & Written Work

All coursework is due by the end of the semester (12:00 noon on the last day of the semester, December 16, 2016), except in cases where illness or other serious circumstances make this impossible. If an extension is needed (including extension for the final paper), you must secure the signature of the instructor and the Academic Dean of your school on a Petition to Take an Incomplete form before the end of the semester (i.e., before December 16, 2016). Deadlines for
the completion of incomplete work after each semester are found in the academic calendar. Up to three additional weeks are allowed. The forms for the Petition to Take an Incomplete are available from the registrar’s office.

**ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE, WRITING CONSULTANT, DISABILITIES RESOURCES, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION (TITLE IX RESOURCES), AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

**English as a Second Language**

Students whose primary language is not English will not be penalized for minor grammatical and syntactical errors provided the meaning is clear. Students are encouraged to make use of a proofreader who will go over your paper with you. See information about the Writing Consultant, below.

**ABSW Writing Consultant**

All students taking classes at ABSW have access free-of-charge to our writing consultant, Jeff Kunkel, a widely published writer and clergyperson. Jeff works with students at all levels to help improve and refine your written work. He can help with refining a thesis or with learning academic writing conventions. Jeff will hold regular office hours this semester in the adjunct faculty office. You can contact him directly at jkkunkel@gmail.com.

**Accessibility Policy & Disabilities Resources**

If you are differently abled and in need of accommodations to maximize your learning and success in this class, please access the consortium-wide “Students with Disabilities” policy that can be found in full at http://www.gtu.edu/admissions/life-at-gtu/students-with-disabilities. This link provides complete details, forms, and instructions. The GTU Dean of Students serves as the Disabilities Resource Officer (DRO) for the consortium. The DRO serves as a consortium-wide resource to develop expertise, provide information and consultation, and answer questions. The student is responsible for fully participating in the process and exercising due diligence to ensure the provision of accommodations is successfully accomplished. Students should request accommodations in advance of when the accommodation is needed. If you have already arranged accommodations through Disabilities Resources, please discuss them with me during my office hours. Please know that while I am happy to assist you, I am unable to provide accommodations until I have received verification from Disabilities Resources.

**Sexual Harassment and Discrimination (Title IX Resources)**

ABSW upholds a zero tolerance policy for discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. If you (or someone you know) have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, domestic or dating violence or stalking, we encourage you to tell someone promptly. For more information, please go to http://www.absw.edu/about-
Reporting Practices

While I want you to feel comfortable coming to me with issues you may be struggling with or concerns you may be having, please be aware that there are some reporting requirements that are part of my job at ABSW.

For example, if you inform me of an issue of harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination, I will keep the information as private as I can, but I am required to bring it to the attention of the institution’s Title IX Coordinator. Reports may be submitted online through the GTU Complaint and Intake Form (Link) or anonymously through Ethicspoint (Link).

If you would like to talk to the Title IX Coordinator directly you can reach Michelle Holmes at 510-841-1905 ext 225 or by email at mmholmes@absw.edu.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE, PRONOUNS, GENDER-NEUTRAL BATHROOMS & COMMUNICATIONS

Academic Integrity

Your voice, your perspective, your grappling with the materials in this course in relation to your context and ministry are the most valued things from my perspective. Therefore, all work submitted to fulfill requirements in this course is expected to be your own work. I want to know what you think. And I want to know it in the way you express it in your own words. Any quotation that is not original to you must be sited using Kate L. Turabian’s A Manual for Writers, 8th edition style guide. (See the writing guidelines for more details.)

Ideas and quotes from other authors that are not properly cited are considered to be plagiarism. Sometimes students plagiarize by accident, by forgetting to use quotation marks, by incorrectly citing sources, or by forgetting to cite sources at all. Sometimes plagiarism is intentional, where students lift significant portions of published material (from books or the internet) and attempt to pass the work off as their own.

One excellent web-based resource to help students better understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it is the Online Purdue Writing Lab, which can be found at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/. I am also always available for consultation if you have any questions about this at all. Consistent with the policy for plagiarism in ABSW’s Policies and Procedures handbook, plagiarism on an assignment leaves one liable to a failing grade on the assignment, a failing grade for the course, or even suspension by the Academic Dean from the academic program of the seminary.
Inclusive Language

All students in the course are requested to use gender inclusive language when referencing humanity unless one is directly quoting a text. Students are urged to use expansive language for God. In a course particularly intended to foster your own theological voice, I encourage you to stretch yourself even as I affirm that we are all at different places along our paths. Thanks be to God that God meets us where we are!

Pronouns

ABSW affirms the richness of diversity in our classrooms and expects that students practice civility and inclusion of all perspectives in respectful conversation and dialogue, which includes the use of students’ preferred names and pronouns. All students should be referred to by the names and pronouns they use for themselves (e.g., she, he, they, ze).

It is our responsibility to educate ourselves about gender neutral pronouns. Here is a good starting point if this is something new to you (or as a refresher for those who have already been exposed to this):

http://www.brynmawr.edu/pensby/documents/AskingforNameandPronouns.pdf

Gender-Neutral Bathrooms

There are several gender-neutral, single-use bathrooms in the main building (Hobart Hall) of ABSW. On the first floor, there is a gender-neutral bathroom by the main entrance just behind the stairs. On the second floor, there is one on the other side of the building (upstairs immediately about our classroom). On the fourth floor, there is a gender-neutral bathroom in the alcove off the main room. The third floor bathrooms are not gender-neutral.

Email & Texting Communication Policy

I welcome appropriate communication via email or text as questions arise. I will make every effort to respond in a timely manner; however, you should plan on about a 24-hour window for a response. Also, I will not be checking work email between 3:00 PM on Friday through 8:00 AM Monday morning.

I will occasionally use email to communicate with the class. It is your responsibility to check your email on a regular basis (preferably on a daily basis between Monday and Friday) in order to be sure that you are informed of any communication in a timely manner. Students for whom this presents undue hardship should partner with a colleague who agrees to relay communications to you.