Course Description:

In this online theology course, students will be introduced to the complex and diverse discipline of Christian theology, conceived as a living conversation that takes place across time and cultures. The course will encourage students to claim their own places in this living conversation, and to grow into their identities as valued, theological conversation contributors, self-aware of their own social and cultural locations. Students will engage various theological methods including ordinary theology, practical theology, liturgical theology, systematic/constructive theology, science and theology, and public theology. Students’ understandings will be assessed through primarily through written work, online discussion forums, and lesson completions. The course will be taught from a commitment to liberative pedagogy (see bell hooks and Paulo Friere) in which students’ voices and experiences are encouraged and valued. **This course is appropriate for MDiv, MCL, STM, and MA students, and satisfies the required core theology course for Junior Colloquium (Introduction to Theology) at American Baptist Seminary of the West.** Students from across the Graduate Theological Union are most welcome and encouraged to take the course.

Course Readings:


All other required and recommended readings will be posted to the course site.
Goals:

As a result of participating in this course, you will

• understand\(^1\) that you are a theologian by virtue of your baptism (though baptism is not required!)
• understand that theology is an ongoing, living and lively conversation to which your voice is a needed contribution
• commit to equipping others to claim their theological voices in this ongoing, living conversation
• understand the role theological reflection plays in the analysis of contemporary cultural and social conditions
• understand that all theology is contextual and is culturally shaped

Specific Objectives:

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

• identify qualities, merits, and risks of multiple methodological approaches to theological reflection (ordinary theology, practical theology, public theology, systematic/constructive theology, public theology, science and theology, and liturgical theology).
• thoughtfully appraise your own social and cultural location as a theologian
• practice employing at least one method of engaging in theological reflection
• articulate your emerging sense of your identity as a theologian

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\(^1\) In this course, the word *understand* involves the ability to engage in thoughtful explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge with regard to the topics and concepts discussed in this course. See Wiggins G & McTigee J (2005) *Understanding by Design* 2nd ed. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.
Course Format

**This is a fully online course.** The instructor and students are in physically separate locations. Learning will be asynchronous, meaning students are not required to sign in at the same time. Delivery methods rely on web-based resources and apps such as Moodle, VoiceThread, Zoom, YouTube, Vimeo, email, etc. The course will be taught from a commitment to liberative pedagogy in which students’ voices and experiences are encouraged and valued. For your greatest success in this course, mark out time each day that you can devote to classwork. Don’t always leave the work for this course at the end of your day or the end of the week when you are already worn out and tired. You will need to make slow and steady progress throughout the semester to keep up with the assignments. The following tables describe the two common rhythms you can expect for *most weeks* of the course. They should help you structure your time throughout the week.

Generally, the rhythm for week one of each module:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Watch and Engage Instructor’s Presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Read and Reflect on Course Materials (some completion of online lessons may be required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Prepare essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Post essay to Moodle by 7:00 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, the rhythm for week two of each module:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Watch and Engage Instructor’s Presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Read and Reflect on Course Materials (some completion of online lessons may be required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Engage in Threaded Discussion on Moodle Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Post Summary Reflections on VoiceThread</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Technical Requirements

- Headphones or earbuds
- Microphone (can be integrated with headphones/earbuds)
- Webcam
- Reliable, high-speed internet connection
- Computer that can download files, view video
- An active email account connected to Moodle that you check at least once every day.

Calendar of Topics and Schedule of Readings

Getting Started
September 3-9

At the end of this week, you will:
- have a sense of who your classmates and conversation partners will be for the semester
- be acquainted with the online learning environment
- have a sense of where you might face some challenges in online learning, and some strategies for the best way to meet them effectively
- become familiar with and try out the VoiceThread online tool that we will use throughout the course

View
- Introductory videos to the course site and course content
- Familiarize yourself with the course site

Post
- Introduce yourself using VoiceThread

Complete
- Online Learning Assessment Test

Submit
- Tell me what you learned in your assessment test about what challenges you might face. Let me know specific things you will do to help you better meet those challenges.

Plan
- Mark out time on your calendar each week that you will devote to this course
Setting the Table – Setting our Intentions
September 10-16

At the end of this week, you will be able to:
- examine your beginning assumptions and ideas about what it means to engage in theological conversation
- develop a plan for how you will approach your reading and writing assignments in this course by incorporating Melissa Browning’s insights in “Reading Basically

Engage in Conversation:
- Post to Discussion Forum: Examining Our Beginning Assumptions about Theology (Due Tuesday, September 11 by 9:00 PM)

View and Complete:
- Setting the Table – Setting Our Intentions Online Lesson Activity
- Video Lecture introducing “Reading Basically”

Read and Reflect:
From Reading Theologically
- “Reading Basically,” Melissa Browning, 15-30 (also posted to Moodle in case you have not received your book yet)

Submit:
- Your Plan for Approaching Your Reading & Writing Assignments this Semester (Due Sunday, September 16 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)

Ordinary Theology Module
At the end of this two-week module, you will be able to:
- explain both "where theology happens" and "what theology is" from the perspective of Ordinary Theology
- make meaningful connections between Groome’s five questions for theological reflection and ordinary theology as a method for doing theology in community
- assess the merits and risks of doing Ordinary Theology

Ordinary Theology Week 1
September 17 – 23

Read and Reflect:
From Reading Theologically
- “Reading Meaningfully,” Miriam Y. Perkins, 31-48
On Moodle

Submit:
- What is Ordinary Theology and Where does it Happen? (Due Sunday, September 23 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)

Ordinary Theology Week 2
September 24 – 30

View:
- Online lectures

Read:
  From *Reading Theologically*
  - “Reading Theologically,” Miriam Y. Perkins, 31-48

On Moodle:
- Dorothy C. Bass, “Practicing Theology in the Congregation” in *Congregations*.

Reflect:
- Complete Online Lesson Activity: “A Conversation with Dr. Tom Groome” (Allow 1 to 1 ½ hours for this lesson)

Engage in Conversation:
- Identify the merits and risks of Ordinary Theology (Your initial post is due by Thursday, September 27 at noon Pacific Time. Respond substantively to each of your colleagues’ posts and reply to everyone who responds to your initial posting from Thursday through Saturday.)

Synthesize:
- Post a two-minute VoiceThread telling us what you have learned this week about Ordinary Theology. (Post is due Sunday evening, September 30 by 7:00 PM)
Practical Theology Module
October 1 – October 14

At the end of this two-week module, you will be able to:

- explain both "where theology happens" and "what theology is" from the perspective of Practical Theology
- begin to thoughtfully appraise your own social and cultural location
- assess the merits and risks of doing Practical Theology

Practical Theology Week 1
October 1 – 7, 2018

View:
- Online lectures

Read:
  From Reading Theologically
  - Shanell T. Smith, “Reading Spiritually,” 125-135

On Moodle

Submit:
- What is Practical Theology and Where Does it Happen? (Due Sunday, October 7 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)

Practical Theology Week 2
October 8 – 14, 2018

View:
- Online lectures

Read and Reflect:
Submit:
- Social Location and Identity Reflection. See Moodle for specific instructions. (Due Tuesday, October 9 by 7:00 PM, Pacific Time)

Engage in Conversation:
- Identify the merits and risks of Practical Theology (Your initial post is due by Thursday, October 11 at noon Pacific Time. Respond substantively to each of your colleagues’ posts and reply to everyone who responds to your initial posting from Thursday through Saturday.)

Synthesize:
- Post a two-minute VoiceThread telling us what you have learned this week about Practical Theology. (Post is due Sunday evening, October 14 by 7:00 PM)

Theology & Science Module [One-Week Module]
October 15-21

At the end of this one-week module, you will be able to:

- explain how the conflict theory between science and religion started
- describe different ways (other than conflict) that science and theology can be engaged
- continue to thoughtfully appraise your own social and cultural location by reflecting on your history and your growing edges when it comes to science and its relationship to theology (Analysis Level)

View:
- The War Between Science & Religion?
- What Can We Learn from Science as Theologians?

Read:
From Reading Theologically
- “Reading Generously,” Gerald C. Liu, 65-74

On Moodle:
- Frederick Ware, “Nature and Science,” chapter 12 (181-195) in African American Theology
- Barbara A. Holmes, a selection from Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently
- Ian G. Barbour, “Four Views of Science and Religion,” chapter 1 (7-38) in When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners

Submit:
- Theology & Science Reflection Paper (Due Sunday, October 21 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)
I recommend that you glance ahead to next week’s unit and use the reading week to begin reading the systematic theologian that you choose from the options provided.

Systematic & Constructive Theology Module
October 29 – November 10

At the end of this two-week module, you will be able to:

- explain both "where theology happens" and "what theology is" from the perspective of Systematic and/or Constructive Theology
- continue to thoughtfully appraise your own social and cultural location
- assess the merits and risks of doing Systematic and/or Constructive Theology

Systematic & Constructive Theology Week 1
October 29 – November 4

View:
- Online Lecture

Read and Reflect:
  From Reading Theologically
  - “Reading Differently,” James W. McCarty, 95-107

On Moodle:

Choose only one of the Following:
- Dorothee Solle, “The Understanding of Creation,” chapter 5 from Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology

Submit:
- What is Systematic and/or Constructive Theology and Where does it Happen? (Due Sunday, November 4 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)
Systematic & Constructive Theology Week 2
November 5 – 11

View:
• Online Lecture

Continue to Read (or Re-Read) and Reflect
• Complete your reading of the theologian you chose last week. Then actually re-read the chapter again. Too often we read through complex material only once, when to understand it better (and potentially be transformed by it) we need to read it multiple times. Use this week to re-read as much as you can of the chapter. Draw on that experience in your forum posting this week. (In other words, talk about new insights you came to because you read the material more than once.)

Engage in Conversation
• Assess the Merits and Risks of Systematic and/or Constructive Theology in the Moodle Forum

Synthesize Your Learning
• Post a two-minute VoiceThread reflecting on what you learned in this module

Liturgical Theology Module
November 12 – 25, 2018

At the end of this two-week module, you will be able to:

• explain both "where theology happens" and "what theology is" from the perspective of Liturgical Theology
• continue to thoughtfully appraise your own social and cultural location
• assess the merits and risks of doing Liturgical Theology

Liturgical Theology Week 1
November 12 – 18, 2018

View:
• Online lecture

Read and Reflect:
From Reading Theologically
• “Reading Spiritually,” Shanell T. Smith, 125-135

On Moodle
• Jennifer W. Davidson, “Creation’s Groans and Spirit’s Sighs: Cultivating Attentiveness to the Spirit through the Practice of ‘Concerns and Celebrations,’” *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 199-211.


Submit:
• What is Liturgical Theology and Where does it Happen? (Due Sunday, November 18 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)

**Liturgical Theology Week 2**

**November 19 – 25, 2018**

View:
• Online Lecture

Read and Reflect:


View:
  Scenes from the film *Beloved*.

Engage in Conversation:
• Assess the Merits and Risks of Liturgical Theology

Synthesize Your Learning:
• Post a two-minute VoiceThread reflecting on what you learned in this module
Public Theology Module
November 26 – December 9

At the end of this two-week module, you will be able to:

• explain both "where theology happens" and "what theology is" from the perspective of Public Theology
• continue to thoughtfully appraise your own cultural and social location in a way that helps you identify your “publics”
• assess the merits and risks of doing Public Theology

View:
• Online Lecture

Read:
From Reading Theologically
• “Reading Critically,” Jacob D. Myers, 75-94

On Moodle:
• Leah Gunning Francis, “Jesus is in the Streets,” chapter 4 (43-59) in Ferguson & Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community.

Submit:
• What is Public Theology and Where does it Happen? (Due Sunday, December 2 by 7:00 PM Pacific Time)

Public Theology Week 2
December 3 – 9, 2018

View:
• Online Lecture

Read and Reflect:

Engage in Conversation
• Assess the Merits and Risks of Public Theology

Synthesize Your Learning:
• Post a two-minute VoiceThread reflecting on what you learned in this module
Seminary Standards

Due Dates & Written Work
All coursework is due by the dates and times written on the course site. With prior permission from the instructor, all outstanding work must be submitted by the end of the semester (12:00 noon on the last day of the semester, December 14, 2018), 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 14, 2018). Deadlines for the completion of incomplete work after each semester are found in the academic calendar. Generally, three additional weeks are allowed. Petition-to-Take-an-Incomplete forms are available from the registrar or the academic secretary.

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 from an ABSW instructor 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 their written work. He can help with refining a thesis or with learning academic writing conventions. You can contact him directly at jkkunkel@gmail.com.

Accessibility Policy
American Baptist Seminary of the West participates in 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. 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. Please see the link above for more complete details, forms, and instructions.

**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.

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/](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 required 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!

**Email & Texting Communication Policy**
I welcome appropriate communication via email and 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.

I will use email to communicate with the class. It is your responsibility to check your email on a regular (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. Please be sure that the email address connected to your Moodle account is one that you are checking daily. All course announcements will be sent to that email address. If you have questions about this, please contact our Moodle support person at [moodle@gtu.edu](mailto:moodle@gtu.edu).
I am also giving out my mobile phone number (510-734-2142) for you to be able to reach me via text. Please use this information responsibly. Depending on what is going on when you text, or time of day, I still may not be able to respond to you immediately.

Using Online Resources:

Information about how to access Moodle and where to find help if you need it may be found on the website at http://gtu.edu/library/students/moodle-help.

Evaluation:

Reading
You are expected to prepare each week by completing the assigned readings. I hope that you will engage these readings 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, sources that may indicate blind spots in the author’s analysis); embodiment and experience (remembering you are a body reading, taking breaks as needed, noticing bodily responses, and relating your own experience in strategic ways to the text); 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.

Weekly Written Engagements & Assignments
Each week students are guided through lessons, lectures, and/or assignments that engage the reading materials in that unit. Most weeks students will also need to respond to the question posed in at least one online forum. The most effective written engagements will directly address assigned reading(s) and show evidence of multiple critical hermeneutical approaches as described in the section above on reading. Rubrics for forum participation and written work are posted to Moodle.

Student Responses to One Another’s Work
In addition to your own posting, you will be required to write responses to the posts of your colleagues in your group. Your responses need to be substantive, though they can also be brief.

Deadlines
Students must post all assignments and forum discussions by the published deadline for each assignment in order to receive full credit.
Other Assignment Evaluations
Specific assignment details will be listed under each weekly topic. All assignments are accompanied by a rubric with specific details of how you’ll be graded.

Method of Determining Grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forum Participation</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Participation</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note for Students Auditing This Course
Students auditing this course are expected to complete all readings and weekly online work, including lessons, weekly postings, and responses. Auditors do not have to submit the theological essay or the final reflection paper.

Student Evaluations
It is very important for students to submit a course evaluation toward the end of the semester. Instructors do not see the student evaluations at all until after the instructors have submitted the students’ final official grades.