MTS Colloquium, Winter 2014

Overview of the course

I. Discussion planning and leadership (50%)

[to promote theological fluency, to engage in conversation about interdisciplinary scholarship, and to encourage students to consider the ways various topics in religion are and have been interpreted in the public square as well as the consequences of popular conceptions and interpretations].

*Each student will sign up to review and start the discussion on one book*. The student(s) assigned to the book will have two basic responsibilities.

 1. Post a 2-page critical summary and review of the book. Consider, in particular, how (and *why*) the author works across disciplines and how s/he responds to (correcting or nuancing/‘complexify’-ing) the way the topic is interpreted in the public square

2. To kick off the class discussion, please post and present (in written, audio, or video form): a ‘snapshot’ of where you see something in the book in the world (newspaper item/article, youtube video, song, piece of art, pop cultural expression). The language here is intentionally vague because I want you to be creative.

3. Close out the discussion and reflect on the conversation on Friday.

Central aspects of the colloquium to consider as you read and review:

a. Theological Fluency: Identify the spiritual and social complexities of the issue/topic in religion under discussion. How is the topic interpreted in the public arena? What perspectives predominate? Are there marginal voices we need to pay attention to? How is the conversation framed (by the media, the participants in the conversation)? What agendas are present? What is the history of the conversation? What is left out of the conversation? Where might we go to enrich the conversation? Where do you stand?

b. Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: “Interdisciplinary learning is characterized by the integration of multidisciplinary knowledge across a central program theme or focus. With repeated exposure to interdisciplinary thought, learners develop more advanced epistemological beliefs, enhanced critical thinking ability and metacognitive skills, and an understanding of the relations among perspectives derived from different disciplines.” What is the primary disciplinary ‘home’ of the author (e.g., biblical studies, sociology)? What is his/er training (check bios, websites, etc)? in the book, what other disciplines and/or conversation partners does s/he engage? Why? What do you think is driving the author to go beyond the bounds of his/er training? (often, scholars will use the preface and/or the conclusion of the book to reflect more personally on these questions and issues)

II. Weekly Book Discussion Postings (20%)

Reflect on the first post by the student discussion leader and consider the following prompt(s). Try to respond to 3 or 4 of these specific prompts over the course of the quarter:

1. an example of where I see *x* idea, highlighted in this book, in the world is….
2. something (specific) I learned in this book pertains/relates to my vocation in the following way….
3. Reading this book pushes me to think more deeply about what I know / thought I knew / what I have experienced
4. What I know/have experienced causes me to think more deeply about *x* aspect of the book
5. *x* aspect of this book made me angry or got me excited because…

Ethos of postings and discussion:

1. I want you to work to connect learning from various modes and forms of theological discourse with contemporary issues and questions, particularly those relevant your own professional practices and personal life.
2. This is not a purely academic exercise. One of the goals of the colloquium is to help you engage in larger conversations about religion. Another goal is to help you clarify your own personal questions about why you are at Iliff, pursuing an MTS degree. I encourage you to make personal connections with the readings. Use them to provoke you to think broadly (and again, personally) about how you fit into some of these larger conversations. What questions do the reading make you want to pursue? What make you angry? Made you jump out of your seat? Why? THINK SELF-RELFECTIVELY about what kinds of experiences have shaped your response(s)?
3. Alongside the reading, you will be thinking and writing about your thesis research ideas and interests. With each book, find a point of connection with your interests. It might be the way the author interacts with a popular (mis)conception of religion or the way a scholar presents his/er personal experiences in his/er writing (I’m thinking especially of Tim Beal and Diana Butler Bass), or how a scholar crosses disciplinary boundaries or approaches a topic or frames a question (in other words, not merely the *what* of the book but the *how* of the book). The topic itself may not be directly of interest to you, but I want you to find some point of engagement with your interests and questions (this is very much how I approach my own scholarship. I’m always reading outside my own discipline and finding points of contact with my work. I find this way of working – crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries in an engaged way - to be incredibly energizing).
4. Bring what your questions and learnings from other classes… Think about how your learning at Iliff relates to the contemporary issues in theological and religious studies that are raised through these readings.

III. Preliminary thesis research/planning (30%)

Finding thesis research partners or groups

If you know someone in the class with whom you think you would be compatible, talk with that person about partnering. If you don’t know your colleagues in this class, watch the video introductions and then contact someone whose research interests, academic/professional style, and/or approach to research seems to align with your own. You can also get into groups of three (but no more than three). This may feel a little match.com, but I think it’s better for you to choose a partner than for me to assign you one… Contact me if you’re having trouble finding a match! And I’ll try to facilitate something or find a group of two that would be open to taking a third.

Thesis journaling and group work: Processes and products

1. Individual work.

I suggest that you create a thesis research notebook where you can collect ideas and thoughts, free-write, revise, and plan. Schedule time to “journal” in your notebook every week (and try to incorporate the reading for the course, e.g., “I love the way Tim Beal incorporates his evangelical background and experience –in a strikingly positive way-- into his academic investigation” or “Diana Butler Bass’s way of affirming the instinct behind the commonly dismissed idea of spiritual but not religious is really cool – an approach/attitude I could model?”). I’ve created a structure you can use and follow but feel free to modify it or create your own with your partner/group. As long as you have a plan for defining and narrowing your research questions for your thesis, it’s fine with me. \*\*\*Please submit your schedule/plan to me by the end of Week 1.

2. Writing partners/groups

Please share every other week with your writing partner/group (Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8). You determine the process/structure/expectations of the interaction, and you can communicate with one another however you choose – via google hangouts, in person, by e-mail. Depending on needs/style, you can set expectations for writing or talk informally. \*\*\*Please submit your plan/process/expectations of one another to me by the end of Week 2.

3. Posting (3)

Share snapshots of the fruits of your journal/small group work with the rest of the class. Short posts (limit your postings to 3-5 sentences, please) are due at Weeks 3 (articulate driving questions), 7 (identify areas and/or topics of interest), and 10 (present fleshed out research questions, preliminary thesis idea/topic and faculty resources).

4. Responding (3x)

Respond to two or three posts briefly but substantially. By the end of the course, be sure you’ve responded to each member of the class (outside of your writing group).

Week 1.

**Introductions due Tues, Jan 7 at noon**.

Please introduce yourself to the rest of the class. We are going to use the Canvas embedded recorder for introduction. Click In the box below were it says Write a reply, then click on the green filmstrip icon in the editor toolbar. This will open up a window that will let you record a video introduction.  **In 3 minutes or less**, tell us:

* your name and location
* your research interests and questions
* your professional/personal goals (however ill defined they may be!)

\*Form research groups and submit research schedule/plan **by Friday 1/10 at 5 p.m.**

Week 2.

Due Wed (Jan 15) at noon – enter conversation on Levenson. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Jan 13). Critical review and first post on Levenson.

Week 3.

\*MONDAY, Jan 20 – Journal snapshot #1. Post driving questions

Due Wed (Jan 22) enter conversation on Beal. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Jan 20). Critical review and first post on Beal.

Week 4.

Due Wed (Jan 29) enter conversation on Sanders. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Jan 27). Critical review and first post on Sanders.

Week 5.

Due Wed (Feb 5), enter conversation on Prothero/Poole. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Feb 3). Critical reviews of Prothero and Poole. \*\*\*Students should get together to plan out the best way to structure a conversation about these two books. It could be a debate, a Talk of the Nation segment… get creative

Week 6.

Due Wed (Feb 12). enter conversation on Bass/Hunter. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Feb 10). Critical reviews of Bass and Hunter. \*\*\*Students should get together to plan out the best way to structure a conversation about these two books (see above on Week 5).

Week 7.

Due MONDAY, Feb 17. Journal snapshot #2 (identify areas and/or topics of interest and faculty [not adjunct] resources)

Due Wed (Feb 19), enter conversation on Lincoln. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Feb 17). Critical review and first post on Lincoln.

Week 8.

Due Wed (Feb 26), enter conversation on Butler et al. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Feb 24). Critical review and first post on Butler et al (review whole of book but focus on first two lectures).

Week 9.

Due Wed (Mar 5), enter conversation on Butler et al. By Friday, weigh back in on the conversation.

Due Monday (Mar 3). Critical review and first post on Butler et al (review whole of book but focus on second two lectures).

Week 10.

Due Wed Mar 12, journal snapshot #3 (present fleshed out research questions, preliminary thesis idea/topic, identified faculty). By Friday, respond to peer posts.