MTS Colloquium, Winter 2016

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 (by Monday at midnight!) 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 article, blog post, 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 Thursday.

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

a. Theological Fluency: Identify the social, political, and religious complexities of the topic 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, outsider scholars?)? What agendas can you discern? 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, history)? 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 relates to my vocation in the following way….
3. Reading this book pushes me to think more deeply about what I thought I knew or 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 readings make you want to pursue? What makes you angry? What made you jump out of your seat? Why? Where are you engaged and curious? 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, 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%)

*Individual thesis research and discussions: 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”). 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 Tuesday of Week 2.

2. Posting (4)

Share snapshots of the fruits of your research with the rest of the class. Short posts (limit your postings to 3-5 sentences, please) are due at Weeks 2 (articulate driving questions), 5, 8, (identify areas or topics of interest), and 10 (present fleshed out research questions, a preliminary thesis topic and faculty resources).

3. Responding (4x)

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.