**Learning Covenant**

*Academic, experiential and chaplaincy learning*

This is not simply a *theoretical* course on ministry and human sexuality that requires students to demonstrate knowledge. It is an intercultural spiritual care course where we will integrate theory and practice, often through experiential models of learning. You must be willing and able in all course assignments to work hard at demonstrating various competencies that are part of intercultural spiritual care. These competencies will be reviewed in week 1.

Given our diverse backgrounds and experiences, and the kind of learning we will do together, we need to agree on some important aspects of our learning covenant that establishes an intentional learning community – a safe and challenging space for each member to do the pastoral theological work they value most.

*Demonstrating knowledge and academic skills*

In order to function in academic and professional contexts, students need to be able to demonstrate knowledge according to academic and professional standards of good grammar, appropriate in-text citation using APA formatting (used through course material; also see writing center resources on APA formatting), and good writing skills. Forum posts and responses are expected to meet professional and academic standards, not the more casual standards of many kinds of online discussions. Points will be deducted for poor grammar, and inadequate proof reading or citations.

*Demonstrating a capacity to differentiate one’s own emotions, values, beliefs and practices from others*

The content of the course will elicit emotional responses, and we will each need to take responsibility for experiencing, interpreting, and channeling feelings in appropriate personal and professional ways, especially those arising from our personal experiences. Ultimately, we want to be able to experience our emotional/stress reactions as resources and not liabilities in our learning. You will need to work hard at demonstrating differentiation of self[[1]](#footnote-1) in all forum posts and responses and in the journal assignments and spiritual care conversations.

Given the emotional content of our course materials, there may be moments when we react strongly to each other and to the content and dynamics of the course. When this happens we need to first do an internal check-in with ourselves to process our reactions, before we write. Next, we need to judge whether a response would enhance group learning, or whether it is solely for the purpose of processing our own feelings. If the former is the case, we need to respond with an “I” statement that identifies our feelings, not a “you” statement, particularly one that implies a global assessment of the other person. If you are having difficulties processing your reactions and this is getting in the way of your learning, please contact faculty for a consultation. On no account can you share reactions/conflicts with students outside of the class forums: you must work with faculty on these issues.

Word limits for forum posts, responses, and assignments are designed to help students focus on the most salient and meaningful ways to communicate knowledge, self-reflection, and spiritual care responses. If you find yourself either going under or over word limits, you may be having difficulties processing your own experiences enough to share them in depth (going under word limits) or with too much detail (going over word limits).

*Confidentiality*

Personal disclosures are not to be discussed outside of class without agreement and permission. Students can, however, talk to people within their support systems about their own reactions, as long as the focus is on them and not the content of what class members share, and as long as any identifying information about other students is disguised. Keep in mind, however, that Iliff is a small community where others can be easily identified.

Faculty will abide by the bounds of professional rather than absolute confidentiality. Syllabus guidelines regarding Colorado reporting laws and practices will be followed.

*Levels of self-disclosure*

Each person is responsible for his or her level of self-disclosure. The purpose of self-disclosure (as with any self-disclosure in pastoral care conversations) is not to process our own experiences, but to enhance group learning. Students can use their support systems when they need to process their own experiences. Each student is expected to learn from class members’ reactions to what they disclose or choose not to disclose.

*Demonstrating intercultural capacities with each other*

We come to this learning experience with a range of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about ministry and sexuality, as well as religion and spirituality. In our forum posts and responses, we agree to demonstrate intercultural attitudes that respect what is unique and distinct about each other’s values, beliefs, and practices (demonstrating skills of respecting radical religious and spiritual differences, and the capacity to step into another religious/spiritual/existential world as respectful guests).

In order to build and maintain relationships of trust and dependability, everyone needs to abide by deadlines for group postings, responses and assignments. When students post late, this creates stress for students that post on time and want to be timely in their responses. If emergencies arrive that prevent ontime posting, students must notify faculty and members of their forum. Points will be deducted for late assignments.

*Availability of faculty*

Carrie Doehring is available for more personal concerns emerging from the course. She is available for support, clarification, and advice. She is not able to offer ongoing counseling or therapy but will offer support, and will help students evaluate the extent to which counseling may be helpful and make appropriate referrals.

*Language framework*

We use inclusive language, and language that respects all forms of religious traditions, theological, and political perspectives, and gender and sexual orientation diversity.

*Revising and monitoring ground rules*

It is important that we all share in monitoring and revising these ground rules if the class is going to have the safety and engender that trust that is required for positive learning.

1. Differentiation of self is a capacity that develops over time as people learn how to identify stress/emotional reactions in the midst of care conversations, and discern whether these reactions arise from within themselves (and their ‘lived theologies/orienting systems’); between them and the care seeker; and/or from intersecting aspects of either their of the care seeker’s social identities (i.e. implicit biases about race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on). To differentiate means to separate out one’s own reactions from the other’s emotions and/or the relational dynamics. Differentiation of self is needed for empathy---that relational experience of stepping into another’s world, while tracking one’s emotional and spiritual ‘stuff’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)