

ADVANCED SEMINAR IN RELIGION AND SCIENCE (T-672/CC-672)
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF URBAN NATURE

Instructor: Dr. Lea F. Schweitz, with discussion leaders and guest lecturers

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Office hours: By appointment,

Semester/Year: Fall 2016

Course Description:

The Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science is designed as a *research seminar for faculty, graduate students, and other professionals*. It will include guest lecturers, book/film discussions, and presentations and responses by seminar participants. The seminar is open to students in all degree programs. The requirements will be adjusted upwards for the most advanced students.

Urbanization is one of the inescapable forms of life in, through, and under which contemporary life takes place. Population models report dramatic growth in the numbers and percentages of urban dwellers in the last half-century. By 2050, it is predicted that two-thirds of the world's population will be located in urban centers. The urban context is a permanent aspect of our social imaginaries and an inevitable feature of our planning for futures that nurture living cities.

And, while both Christian thought and the philosophy of nature have a conflicted relationship with the city, recent scientific studies confirm and re-affirm the value of nature for human well-being. The lives of kids and grown-ups alike are enhanced by experiences with nature.

Given the planet's increasingly urban trajectory, if the church aims to maintain a theology of nature, it is clear that it will need to be applicable in the context of the city. This course will explore what it might mean to cultivate a theology of urban nature for the public church.

We will explore the book of urban nature through an interdisciplinary, action/reflection pedagogy. We will draw on urban nature writing, natural history, studies in urban ecology, theology, and the philosophy of nature to reveal the realities of urban nature, and we will cultivate experiences in urban nature through case studies, spiritual practices and nature writing.

This interdisciplinary course aims to give learners the resources to reclaim the urban context for thinking theologically about nature in order to expand our vision of nature, of God's creative activity, and of ourselves as created co-creators.

Course credit is available via registration through the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) or cross-registration through member schools of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS); the course number is T-672/CC-672. For more information about the Zygon Center for Religion and Science, please visit www.zygoncenter.org, email zcrs@lstc.edu, or call 773-256-0670.

Relationship to Enhancing Life: Despite the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of the future, current trends toward urbanization suggest that the future is sure to be an urban one. How can a public church respond to and effect positive change in ways that enhance the lives of city dwellers – now and in the future? This course explores the resources for enlarging theological imaginations and scholarship to engage the Creator God through experiences of nature in the city in order to re-envision ideas of nature and theologies of nature for enhancing lives – both human and nonhuman lives – in the city.

Course Rationale:

(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC's degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

As a 600-level seminar in theological studies, the Advanced Seminar in Religion in Science supports LSTC's advanced studies programs in theological studies; in addition, the Advanced Seminar is the cornerstone course for the Religion and Science concentration in LSTC's Advanced Studies program. The Advanced Seminar meets LSTC's curricular goals by providing learning opportunities for a student to develop and to demonstrate progress toward:

- Mastering a particular area of concern in the field of religion and science dialogue and its relationship to the discipline of theology (Th.M. Curriculum Outcome #1 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #2 and #5);
- Developing a research program and research methodology (Th.M. Curriculum Outcomes #2 and #3 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #1); and
- Engaging in scholarly discussion and presentation (Th.M. Curriculum Outcome #6 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #4).

Since 1965, an advanced seminar on religion in the context of the sciences has been offered for faculty, students, and professionals in the Chicago area. The seminar was founded by Ralph Wendell Burhoe under the auspices of the Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science (CASIRAS) and Meadville/Lombard Theological School. In 1970, CASIRAS affiliated with the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS). In the 1970s, Philip Hefner, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), joined Burhoe in directing the seminar. In 1988, the Zygon Center for Religion and Science was founded by LSTC and CASIRAS and began sponsoring the Advanced Seminar. From this tradition, the Advanced Seminar takes its shape as a multidisciplinary network of persons seeking to understand how the sciences and the religions engage each other and to interpret the fundamental issues that are posed in this engagement. The goal is to gain insight into the import of the sciences for the critical function of religion in its role as a cultural vehicle of ultimate values and concerns.

Course Learning Outcomes:

(What *difference* will this course make to students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

Learners will show progress towards:

- Demonstrating scientific literacy in the areas of natural history, philosophy of nature, and urban ecology;
- Formulating research questions that integrate this knowledge with contemporary theological concerns;
- Analyzing and assessing theological proposals in light of current scientific understandings;
- Constructing preliminary theological proposals that engage current scientific understandings; and
- Communicating research questions, analysis, assessments, and theological proposals in written and oral forms.

Strategies for Learning:

(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)

In order to deliver the outcomes listed above, we will:

- Dialogue with leading scholars addressing the agenda above; and
- Read and research in areas related to the seminar themes.

Students will be required to:

- Attend and participate in all seminar meetings;
- Develop and present one speaker response question;
- Write and workshop an original piece of nature writing. The writing may be in the style of a blog post and suitable for posting on the course website (see below for helpful resources on this genre);
- Participate in the nature writing workshops facilitated by Carol LaChapelle;
- Assist in leading a book discussion of one of the assigned course texts;
- Present a short reflection (10-15 minutes) on the themes of the seminar as part of a panel presentation during the final session of the seminar;
- Design a research question, in consultation with the instructor;
- Develop and submit a research bibliography, in consultation with the instructor;
- Write a final seminar paper addressing the student's research question and utilizing the student's research bibliography. At the Master's level, recommended length is 10-15 pages. M.Div. students are invited to apply the seminar topic to ministry themes and practices. At the Ph.D. level, recommended length is 20-25 pages.

Assessment:

(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

Attendance and participation (including, but not limited to, the speaker response question, the original nature writing, book discussion and the final presentation) account for approximately 25% of the final grade. However, primarily the final seminar paper determines the final grade. Students are encouraged to consult with the instructor and lecturers throughout the semester. Final papers will be given grades and comments by the instructor.

Students will be invited to provide assessment through speaker evaluations and a final course evaluation. LSTC requires students to submit a final course evaluation on LSTCnet before his/her grade is released. As part of the Enhancing Life Project, an additional course evaluation will be requested for the purposes of the grant.

Bibliography:

Required readings:

Baker-Fletcher, Karen. *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998.

Chase, Stephen. *Nature as Spiritual Practice*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011.

Garcia-Rivera, Alejandro. *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999.

Gorringe, T.J. *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

McFague, Sallie. *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997.

Sheldrake, Philip. *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA : Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

As a research seminar, students are expected to develop a research bibliography to connect his/her program of studies with the seminar theme.

Recommended readings:

Additional readings, links, and videos will be recommended throughout the seminar by the instructor and lecturers.

Helpful tips for writing a blog post:

www.problogger.net/archives/2008/08/12/how-to-craft-a-blog-post-10-crucial-points-to-pause/

Submitting Required Work:

1. All written work is to be submitted to the instructor in hard copy. Double-sided and recycled printing is encouraged!
2. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, using Chicago/Turabian bibliographic format. Citation guides may be found here:
 - a. Chicago Manual of Style quick guide: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
 - b. Turabian Style quick guide: www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html
3. This class abides by LSTC's academic honor system. Please see below.
4. Re: Final Research Papers: Hard copies may be submitted in Dr. Schweitz's inbox (Office #336). Email submissions will be accepted. You will receive confirmation that your paper has been received.

LSTC Academic Policies:

LSTC academic policies may be found in the *Student Handbook* and its academic supplements for LSTC's respective degree programs (located online on LSTCNet under "Student Services").

1. Students living with disabilities. LSTC is committed to assist students living with a disability to thrive in our academic and campus life together. Students are invited to discuss opportunities for living into this partnership with the instructor, and are encouraged to do so in the first two weeks of the semester. Please consult the *LSTC Student Handbook* for policies and procedures for course accommodations.

2. Attendance reports. At the outset of a course, faculty members are required to report students who do not attend the beginning class period. Faculty members also are required to submit reports of a second unexcused absence to the Registrar. The Registrar is required to forward this report to the Financial Aid Office.

3. Academic honor system. Instructors expect that students will present their own original work for evaluation, providing written acknowledgement of sources used in the writing of papers and examinations through footnotes, endnotes, and other kinds of acknowledgement appropriate to the subject being reported. Presenting another's work, from whatever the source (e.g., the Internet, a peer, or hard copy texts) as if it is one's own is called plagiarism, which is generally considered a serious offense in the academic community. Students needing assistance with avoiding plagiarism and learning about methods for proper citations have many sources of help: the JKM Library and its staff, particularly Barry Hopkins and Chris Wenderoth, who are trained in these areas, personal assistance at the Language Resource and Writing Center (LRWC) as well as many print and online resources. Students are encouraged to consult the latest edition of Kate Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. See also online resources, e.g., <http://www.eturabian.com/turabian/index.html>.