AREA IV: MINISTERIAL STUDIES

The biblical and theological heritage of Christianity finds focus in engagement with persons and structures of the church and culture. The revelations of the Bible and theology, by their very nature, require ever-renewed lodging and expression in the ongoing life of both the church and the world. The church and the world, by their natures, require ever-renewed rooting and direction in the Christian heritage. It is a lifetime vocation to learn to discern and guide the processes of this reciprocal engagement. Area IV aspires to find guidelines and impetus for this vocation. All courses in Area IV presuppose some personal experience with the occasions of ministry.

PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE

REL 804a, Practical Theology Seminar  Almeda Wright
This seminar offers an orientation to the field of practical theology and an overview of methodologies for doing practical theological reflection in a variety of contexts. As a field, practical theology is both old and new. Practical theology is concerned with the practices and actions, past and present, of God, individuals, and communities. Practical theology is also concerned with reflecting on these actions with an eye toward renewed or improved practices in the future. Thus, we utilize practical theological methods to help us explore the connections between our religious traditions and convictions and the way we do ministry and/or theological reflection in engagement with the world. This course fulfills the requirement for the practical theology proseminar for the M.A.R. concentration in Practical Theology and is open to other interested students. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 807a or b, Introduction to Pastoral Theology and Care  Staff
As an introduction to pastoral theology and care, this course explores the history, theory, and methods of the care of souls tradition, concentrating on the narrative, communal-contextual model. The course invites learners into the practice of particular pastoral care skills such as listening and responding in pastoral conversations; supporting families through life transitions; “reading” and engaging cultural contexts and systems of injustice in which care takes place; and the intentional uses of the self in spiritual care. The course introduces at a basic level key theoretical frameworks including narrative, intercultural/interreligious care; family systems; and grief and trauma theory. Teaching and learning methods include lecture, discussion, case studies, role plays, theological reflection, genograms, and visits to local ministry sites. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 810b, My Neighbor's Faith: Building Interreligious Community  Ian Oliver
As communities across the country and around the world engage religious diversity in a way they never have before, this seminar seeks to explore theoretical and practical issues in interreligious community building. The course surveys stories and research on the development of religious identity, examines how interreligious relationships and communities are formed, and considers theological and practical reasons to do interfaith work. Within traditions, we explore problems of representation and diversity. Between religious traditions, we examine white Christian privilege in America and sources of religious discrimination and conflict. The class defines the qualities of effective interfaith relationships and identifies common mistakes leaders can make. Guest religious leaders from different religious traditions make presentations, students conduct interviews across traditions, and a final project seeks to create an interfaith community education experience. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 823b, Trauma, Moral Injury, and Crisis Ministry  Joyce Mercer
This course invites participants into the study of three distinct but overlapping forms of human suffering. Trauma is a person’s experience of threat to one’s being and/or identity that exceeds resources for coping with the threat, and which resists integration. Moral injury has been identified more recently by scholars and clinicians as a psychological wound involving violation of conscience/deeply held values, either by someone in a position of legitimate authority or by one’s self, in a high-stakes situation. Crises are turning-point moments of extreme difficulty or distress that bring to the foreground fundamental questions about life matters such as relationships, purpose/vocation, and the existence and presence of God in human affairs. Engaging practical theology’s multidisciplinary approach to these three complex phenomena, we utilize perspectives from theology, psychology, sociology, biology, cinema, and art as frameworks for understanding and responding. We learn and practice basic skills of crisis intervention and trauma-informed pastoral care. Topics include collective trauma, transgenerational trauma transmission, PTSD, “secondary” trauma, post-traumatic growth, crisis theory, suicide, memorialization, and pastoral care in disasters. Area IV. Prerequisite: REL 807. 3 Course cr

REL 824a, Ministry and the Disinherited  Frederick Streets
There is a serious and vigorous public debate about the influence of religious values upon society. What ought to be our social responsibilities, particularly to those who are most vulnerable and in need of support, is a contested issue. The COVID-19 pandemic intensively and sharply reveals the public health crisis before us as well as some of the social and systemic inequities that structure our society and how those inequities impact the lives of people. This course has as its focus the effort to theologically reflect on, and discern from, an interdisciplinary approach to defining “the dispossessed.” Students explore aspects of the Christian dimensions of social and political reform movements; the contours of faith-based social services; the influence of religious values on individual behavior; and ideas about the role of the church and government in meeting human needs. Through the interests and research of students, the course addresses topics such as poverty; health care disparities; sexual orientation; ethnic, gender, and racial discrimination; hunger; immigration; homelessness; public education; and the welfare of children. Students are expected to develop an interdisciplinary approach from perspectives found in biblical scriptures, sacred texts, theological/religious beliefs and values, social work, sociology of religion, law, psychology of religion, political science, and social welfare theories. In that setting, students contextualize a theological understanding of the dispossessed and what might constitute a ministry that addresses the needs of these groups. The learning journey of the course
intentionally engages students on three overlapping themes or levels: theological frameworks, personal identity/sense of vocation, and practical tools one uses in living out one's ministry and/or sense of self in the world. Area IV and Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 856b, Pastoral Wisdom inside Prison: Fiction, Memoir, and Drama  Mary Moschella
This course explores pastoral themes and insights that emerge through reading particular works of fiction, memoir, poetry, and drama, and the practice of “writing back” to them. Ideally it is taught as an Inside-Out Prison Exchange course, bringing YDS students and incarcerated women together in the classroom. Through interactive exercises involving conversation, writing, and various forms of artistic expression, the class reflects theologically on the situations, emotions, beliefs, values, and practices prompted by this literature. Writing for the development of voice is emphasized. Area IV. Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor. 3 Course cr

PREACHING MINISTRY

REL 812b, Principles and Practices of Preaching  Carolyn Sharp
This is the introductory course in theologies and practices of preaching. Students explore a rich variety of approaches to preaching, learn skills for exegeting listening communities, develop their understanding of preaching as public theology, and more. Attention is given to compelling biblical exposition, development of a powerful and supple homiletical imagination, reflection on the preacher’s spirituality, and ways to engage all of the preacher’s gifts for communication. The course includes plenary instruction and preaching sections in which students prepare and deliver sermons. In the 2022-2023 academic year, this course will be offered only in the spring term. Area IV. none 3 Course cr

REL 845b, Preaching on the Gospel of Matthew  Carolyn Sharp
Since the earliest decades of the Christian movement, the majestic Gospel of Matthew has been cherished as an authoritative witness to the purposes of God revealed in the genealogy, birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew offers much of value for the preacher: narratives illustrating the continuity of God’s redemptive purposes for Israel expressed through centuries-old prophecies and their fulfillment in occupied Palestine under Roman rule; an intricately wrought tapestry of teachings about ethical, missional, and spiritual dimensions of the life of faith, elegantly structured in five great discourses; dramatic storytelling that underscores what is at stake for those who choose ways incongruent with the purposes of God. We read rich exegetical and literary studies of Matthew by New Testament scholars, and we learn from expert preachers who bring fresh angles from homiletical theory to their engagements with Matthew. Students design and preach sermons and micro-homilies that explore the power of the Gospel of Matthew for Christian communities of conviction. This course has no prerequisite; those for whom this will be their first homiletics course are welcome. Area IV 3 Course cr

REL 849a, Preaching for Creation  Carolyn Sharp
In this course, we consider ways to bear witness to the inherent value of Earth as a living and interconnected community that teaches us profound theological and ethical truths. In discussions and preaching structured around mutual witness and deep listening, we explore such issues as: ways in which Scripture passages testify to the intricate glories and stark vulnerabilities of creation as a site of God’s transforming work; the beauty, giftedness, intelligence, and relational sophistication of nonhuman creatures; human sin as a major vector for harms that cause untold suffering in creation; and grace as the divine intention not just for humanity but for all living beings, Earth, and the cosmos. Engaging contemporary homiletical theory and studying sermons from expert preachers, students develop their homiletical skills and capacity to imagine, honor, and advocate for the whole community of Earth and its flourishing. Together we listen for the Gospel in sermons focused on creation; we explore the potential of micro-homilies to build the capacity of faith communities for ecotheological reflection and creation care; and we attend to poetry and memoir writing as sources of wisdom. There is no prerequisite; those for whom this will be their first homiletics course are welcome. Area IV 3 Course cr

REL 862a, The Gospel in Lament: Preaching for a Suffering World  Carolyn Sharp
The Hebrew Scriptures have constituted a vitally important set of theological resources for Christian homiletics since ancient times. The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the New Testament traditions that grew up around him cannot be understood apart from the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. As resources for incarnational theology, the Hebrew Scriptures are unparalleled for their sustained attention to the suffering of believers and their articulation of ways in which ancient scribes responded to trauma through narratives, poetry, and other cultural forms that promoted resilience and renewed flourishing. This course is designed to help the Christian preacher proclaim the truth of the Gospel in ways that speak grace to those who suffer. Educators, activists, artists, and others in faith communities need to hear a Gospel that engages fruitfully with issues such as poverty and economic precarity; creaturely suffering and human responsibility; systemic injustice; spiritual resilience in the face of catastrophic injury, intractable pain, or terminal illness; the fragility and strength of the human spirit in community; benefits of spiritual practices for healing and tranquility; and artistic creativity and cultural memory as resources for addressing loss and trauma. Students engage homiletical theory, analyze sermons from expert preachers, and design and preach sermons that explore homiletical approaches to texts drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels. Area IV 3 Course cr

EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY

REL 801a or b, Marquand Chapel Choir  Alfred Gumbs
1 credit per term.

REL 802a or b, Marquand Gospel and Inspirational Choir  Mark Miller
0.5 credit per term. ½ Course cr
REL 806a, Leadership and Change  Sarah Drummond
“Leadership” and “change” are words that, in a time like ours, go hand in hand. Leaders in all varieties of organizations must work toward a vision of a reality that does not yet exist. The more quickly the world changes, the more communities of all kinds must adapt, whether they are ready or not. Community leaders must change with the times if they are to lead effectively. In this course, students learn about leadership and change in organizations that foster human transformation, such as churches, schools, and nonprofit social justice agencies. After taking the course, they will be able to define change leadership from various perspectives, analyze an organization’s efforts at change, and make sense of a multidimensional situation that calls for change. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 811a, Models and Methods of College and University Chaplaincy  Sharon Kugler
This course explores various approaches to college and university chaplaincy found in the United States in the twenty-first century. Drawing on a historical framework for the role of chaplaincy in the college setting from the middle of the twentieth century (when secularism became a heavier influence), and exploring the issues that confront the vocation in a pluralistic context of the twenty-first century, the course provides an overview of strategies needed to offer a creative, current, and engaging chaplaincy in higher education. Through a series of lectures, open discussions, site visits, short chaplaincy narratives, and guest speakers, the class encounters numerous perspectives and approaches to ministry in higher education. Area IV and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 815a, Radical Pedagogy  Almeda Wright
This course studies and employs radical pedagogy as a lens through which to explore the intersections of religious education and community transformation. In essence, the class explores the ways that education, particularly religious education, is powerful, political, transformative, and even radical. This course also pushes students to address questions about the goals of education. Many proponents of radical pedagogy embrace ideals of radical equality or democracy. To explore these issues, the class wrestles with contemporary questions about educational reform in public schools and considers what role religious education can play in addressing social justice concerns within communities. The foundational theorists and conversation partners in the course include public and religious educators, critical theorists, and community organizers. While this course directly draws upon experiences as persons of faith and experiences within religious communities, the cases and readings draw heavily on what might be called “secular” theorists and educators who focus on public educational arenas. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 828b, Theory and Practice of Faith Development  Almeda Wright
Can we develop faith? Does faith grow and mature in the same ways that we develop biologically and psychosocially as we age? How do we define faith? In this seminar, we explore these questions through the seminal work and conversation started by James W. Fowler.
In the 1980s, Fowler wrote Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning. This work offers a stage-based theory of faith development, which builds upon the stage theories of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and others. In addition to exploring Fowler’s work, we explore the work of others who have been in conversation with Fowler. These conversation partners have challenged some of his starting assumptions; have helped us to reflect more on the ways that gender, race, and power interplay with faith development; and have carried on the conversation of how faith develops in individuals, communities, and public life. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 848a, Educational Ministry in Schools and Colleges  Jere Wells
This course prepares students of all denominations for the ministry of working with adolescents and young adults, primarily in schools and colleges, but also in church settings. It begins with an analysis of where young people are today, their existential/spiritual concerns, and the current state of their religious practices. The course then considers the similarities and differences between ministry in church settings and in school settings, both secular schools and schools with some sort of religious affiliation. Our principal text is “What Schools Teach Us About Religious Life.” In our study of schools, students consider the issues of school mission, culture, and leadership, including the relationship between church-based schools and the host church/denomination. Issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality are considered throughout the course. Through required field trips, the course considers the particular problems and opportunities in inner-city schools and parish day schools. Area IV and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 875b, Advanced Topics in Educational Ministry in Schools and Colleges  Jere Wells
This seminar is designed to allow students to pursue, in depth, themes raised in the introductory courses. The course’s overall consideration is how an educational leader trained at YDS can effectively “minister” to students, colleagues, and other members of school communities. Readings and discussions cover a range of topics including the tradition of faith-based education, school mission, pedagogy, worship, service programs, and ethical leadership in the “business” of schools (admissions, budgets, fundraising). The seminar also makes extensive use of case studies and simulations. For the major research project, each student pursues a topic of particular interest related to schools and educational leadership. Research includes direct experience, fieldwork/campus visits, and review of scholarship. Issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality arise in connection with topics considered in this seminar. Area IV and Area V. 3 Course cr