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 interfath work. Within traditions, we explore problems of representation and diversity. The class defines the qualities of effective interfath 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 interfath community education experience. Area IV.  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 disinherited.” 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 disinherited 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 825b, Pastoral Leadership and Church Administration  William Goettler
Pastoral leadership and church administration require an understanding of the nature of leadership and the use of power within congregational contexts, as well as a range of administrative skills, including strategic planning, group dynamics, conflict resolution, personnel management, fundraising, budgeting, building and property care, and personal planning. This course serves as an introduction to those and other themes and is particularly aimed at graduating students who plan to enter congregational ministry. Three class sessions are held in the buildings of local congregations. Enrollment is intended for students who hope to work in congregational settings and who are in their final term of study. Area IV.  3 Course cr

REL 826b, Ministry and Addictions  Joyce Mercer
This course provides an introduction to the dynamics of substance abuse, addictions, and pastoral care in the lives of persons, families, and communities. The class surveys ecclesial, clinical, cultural, public policy, and historical perspectives on alcoholism and other chemical
abuse/addiction, as well as behavioral or “process addictions” such as gambling and Internet addiction, with a focus on contemporary understandings of the spiritual and theological implications of these perspectives. Attention to intersectionality and the impact of poverty, race, class, gender, and sexuality on substance use and its consequences is a theme throughout. Students also consider various frameworks for promoting recovery. The course includes some experiences outside of the classroom (e.g., visits to AA/Al-Anon/ACoA meetings) and utilizes discussion, lecture, film, and action-reflection pedagogies. Area IV. Prerequisite: REL 807. 3 Course cr

REL 856b, Pastoral Wisdom in Fiction, Memoir, and Drama Mary Moschella
This course explores pastoral themes and insights that emerge through reading particular creative works of fiction, memoir, poetry, and drama, and the practice of “writing back” to them. This year the course 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 that this literature suggests and evokes. Area IV. Prerequisite: interview with and permission of the instructor. 3 Course cr

REL 866a, Psychopathology and Pastoral Care Mary Moschella
This course brings together current medical expertise in psychopathology with pastoral theology and care practices. The basics of the DSM-5 are introduced, including the history, etiology, epidemiology, and symptoms of, as well as treatments for, the major psychiatric disorders. Literature in pastoral theology as well as films and memoirs are engaged in order to gain an experiential understanding of the conditions studied. Students engage in theological reflection and practice basic skills for ministry that support and empower persons afflicted with these conditions, as well as their families and faith communities. Area IV. Prerequisite: REL 807 preferred. 3 Course cr

REL 876a, Sacred Moments in African American Preaching Donyelle McCray
This course explores the sermon as an experience of race and time. The inquiry centers on key cultural and liturgical occasions in African American faith communities such as Mother’s Day, Easter, Juneteenth, and Watch Night. How might preaching on such occasions expand conceptions of time and space, shape identity, and nurture voice? The course offers responses to this question by drawing on the history of African American preaching and by mining insights from sermons, meditations, and homiletical scholarship. The course also explores pastoral responses to the tensions that special occasions present and examines theological resources for helping faith communities experience sermons as sites for memory, counter-memory, and freedom. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 877b, Performance and/as/in Preaching Donyelle McCray and Elise Morrison
Meaning is communicated through our words and through our bodies. Gathering the best wisdom of homiletics, theater, and performance theory, this course explores the relationship between preaching and performance. We study vocal techniques, survey strategies for managing performance anxiety, examine methods for internalizing sacred texts, and explore ways to express our convictions. Experimentation, improvisation, and risk play essential roles in our work together. Ultimately, the course aims to help students gain comfort and confidence in their bodies and draw on their own embodied knowledge in a range of faith-based leadership practices, such as preaching or presiding in liturgy, when engaged in social justice work, and in pedagogical settings. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 883a, Envisioning Shalom: 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; 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; explore the potential of micro-homilies to build the capacity of faith communities for ecotheological reflection and creation care; and attend to poetry and memoir writing as sources of wisdom. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 878b, Preaching on the Gospel of Mark Carolyn Sharp
Since the earliest decades of the Christian movement, the dramatic Gospel of Mark has been cherished as an authoritative witness to the purposes of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Mark offers much of value for the preacher’s consideration: narratives of the hiddenness and disclosure of Jesus as the Son of God and the Holy One of God; storytelling that underscores the urgency of discipleship and its
grounding in compassion for the Other; rhetoric about healings and exorcisms as boundary-crossing acts that defy and defeat cosmic forces of oppression; misunderstanding, conflict, and fear as inevitable dimensions of following Christ. Together we read rich exegetical and literary studies of Mark by New Testament scholars; we give sustained attention to Mark as a resource for theology informed by trauma theory; and we learn from expert preachers who bring fresh angles from homiletical theory to their engagements with Mark. Students design and preach sermons and micro-homilies that explore the power of the Gospel of Mark for Christian communities of conviction. 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 803b, Introduction to Religious Education  Almeda Wright
In this course we explore theories and practices of religious education within Christian communities. In particular, we explore and begin to formulate perspectives on the purpose, function, contexts, and methods of religious education. The course is guided by two essential questions posed by religious educator Mary Boys: What does it mean to be religious? What does it mean to educate in faith, to educate persons to the religious dimensions of life? Boys's guiding questions push us to think about how our understandings of religion and religious education are historically situated and how these understandings reflect specific theological and pedagogical commitments. Answering these questions also requires us to explore the perceived and real challenges to living and growing as persons of faith in our U.S. and global communities. For example, in this course we explore how persons and communities of faith educate in ways that foster theological reflection and constructive responses to myriad challenges such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, and social class disparities, among others. This course is primarily oriented toward the practices of religious communities and institutions, such as churches and para-church organizations. However, the issues and contexts explored can connect with a variety of settings including families, community organizations, and schools. 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 842a, Intentional Leadership  Sarah Drummond
This introductory course on religious leadership theory, taught from an open-minded Christian point of view, explores contrasting themes in leadership theory and places those themes in dialogue with each other. Religious leadership across different kinds of institutions requires continuous discernment: How do I do things right? What are the right things to do? Who else needs to be part of things I do? Where is God in all of this? Students who take this course have an array of theoretical frameworks from which to draw in religious leadership. Area IV. 3 Course cr

REL 848a, Leadership Ministry in Schools  Jere Wells
This course prepares students of all denominations for leadership positions in schools. It begins with an analysis of where young people are today and, in particular, the existential/spiritual questions they often ask, even without realizing they are asking them. Teaching about religion in secular schools—public and independent—is briefly considered. Then the course turns its attention to schools with some sort of religious orientation. After studying the heritage and tradition of such schools, students consider the issues involved in leading schools today. The roles of school head, chaplain (lay or ordained), the religion teacher, and the student are considered. Many aspects of school life are explored, including the pedagogical, pastoral, and liturgical. The difficulties and delights of educational ministry and leadership are identified and discussed. Naturally, issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality arise. 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 852b, Women's Ways of Knowing  Almeda Wright
Does gender make a difference? What difference does attending to the lived experiences and perspectives of women make as we theorize about knowledge, education, religions, theology, and Christian practices? This course attempts to explore these questions through works that take seriously the voices and practices of women as they relate to knowledge construction, education, and faith development within religious communities, particularly Christian communities. The course has three interconnected foci: feminist, womanist, and postcolonial epistemologies; exemplars of women's involvement in education as practices of freedom; and women's development in religious communities. The first two areas attempt to broaden the conversation about what counts as knowledge (and who gets to decide) and to explore ways that women have participated in liberation struggles in academic and public arenas. In the last area, students explore some of the ways that women's development has not been taken seriously in religious communities. In particular, this course explores examples of Christian theology and biblical interpretation that have at times thwarted the development of women and begins to open up approaches that empower women's development. Area IV.  3 Course cr

REL 875b, Advanced Topics in Leadership 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

SPIRITUALITY AND MINISTRY

REL 843a, Howard Thurman: Mysticism and Prophetic Witness
This course is devoted to the spirituality and prophetic witness of Howard Washington Thurman. Variously described as a mystic, prophet, philosopher, theologian, educator, pastor, and mentor to leaders of the civil rights movement, Thurman was one of the most significant twentieth-century religious figures in the United States. He left a legacy of writings, speeches, and sermons that articulate a spirituality integrating a sophisticated analysis of the inner life, mystical experience, a rich aesthetic of nature, and pointed social criticism on racism, colonialism, nonviolence, human suffering, and resistance to oppression. In this course we encounter Thurman’s work directly through some of his major writings and sermons. Through a sustained engagement with Thurman’s spiritual and social witness, we consider how he speaks to our own “inward journeys” and how spirituality and social action are integrated in our lives. Area IV.  3 Course cr