HONS 1340.02 THEOLOGIES OF COMMUNITY: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

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“The Other becomes my neighbor through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.” - Emmanuel Levinas

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” – Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39

Course Description

In this honors course, students will explore the religious and theological dimensions of community. Central to the course is the question of what it means to speak of the neighbor in a religiously diverse world. Just who is our neighbor and who is the stranger? Can the stranger become my neighbor? Drawing from philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, we can also ask, what is my responsibility to the neighbor and how does she “call me into question”? Together, we will consider related questions such as: How can community be created and fostered across religious difference? What is the meaning of religious pluralism and how can we foster it? How can we relate to “the other” in just, hospitable, and compassionate ways? Throughout the semester, we will seek to create an intentional sense of community in our classroom as we examine theologies of community from a variety of perspectives.

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1 In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author’s context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.
Course Objectives

► Explore and articulate the meaning of community from a religious and theological perspective
► Practice “being” and “doing” community within the classroom through class discussion and dialogue
► Identify the main challenges in building community and being a neighbor in a diverse world
► Explore theoretical and practical possibilities for overcoming these challenges, including interfaith dialogue
► Practice and develop skills of empathetic imagination, critical interpretation and analysis to engage religious concepts, ideas and texts
► Practice and develop oral communication skills
► Develop scholarly research and writing skills

Required Texts

► Other materials will be accessible on Canvas (our course website) or in the library.

Course Requirements

Participation

The quality of our class depends on the constructive contribution of every student as well as the instructor. To that end, it is imperative that all students come to class prepared to discuss the readings and assigned topics. This participation may take place in the context of the full class or small group discussions, and involves being attentive and engaged in the common conversation. In order to receive all 20 points for participation, students must consistently do the following: come to class on time, be prepared to discuss the assigned materials, participate in class discussions, and be attentive and engaged in class. Participation points will be deducted for lack of participation, inattention, or disruptive behavior.

Personal Reflection

This assignment helps me to get to know you. In about 2 double-spaced typed pages, you will answer several questions and turn in the hard copy at the beginning of class. I will hand out the instructions in class.
Twenty Discussion Board Entries

Starting the second week of class, you will enter a discussion post of 150-200 words on our course discussion board over each day's readings. You can think of these as short blogs. They give you the opportunity to engage the readings in a written format and allow you to see how others have approached the texts. Entries need to be thoughtful and use complete sentences. Each blog is worth 3 points. Note that there are 21 days of discussion but you are allowed to miss one without penalty.

For each post, please include the following:

- 1-2 points that you consider to be most important from the readings
- 1-2 questions the readings raise for you

Important! In order to get credit for each post, please follow these guidelines:

- Entries must be between 150-200 words; entries fewer than 150 words will not count.
- Please post by 9:00 am on our class days or you will not get credit; no late posts are accepted.

“What's Your Story?” Paper

For this assignment, you will have the opportunity to respond to Chris Stedman’s invitation at the end of *Faitheist*, when he writes about the process of telling his story and concludes: “I've told mine—now it’s your turn” (181). I will post specific instructions for the assignment on Canvas. The paper will be 3-4 double-spaced pages in length, due as a hard copy in class.

Exams

During the course of the semester, you will take several exams:

- In-class exam on introductory topics and Patel
- In-class mini-exam on Eck and Stedman
- Take-home midterm on topics covered in first half of the course
- Final exam is an in-class final that will include several essay questions based on readings and discussion from the semester

Research Paper

You will complete a 7-8 page research paper on a topic of your choice that is related to the content we study in this class. I will speak more about the papers as the semester goes on and post guidelines and a grading rubric on Canvas. The following assignments will be due throughout the semester:

- Paper topic, abstract and annotated bibliography due as a hard copy in class
- Outline of paper due as a hard copy in class
- First draft submission of research paper due as a hard copy in class
- Presentation of research-in-progress and peer discussion in class
- Final submission posted to Canvas and due as a hard copy in class
COURSE CALENDAR

Preface: Creating Community in the Classroom

**Week 1**

Tuesday: Welcome to the course!

Thursday: Creating a classroom community through democratic teaching and learning

- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69-84
- Steven Wolk, *A Democratic Classroom*, 51-65
- Personal Reflection due as a hard copy at the beginning of class

**Chapter 1: The Need for Neighbors and Pluralistic Responses**

**Week 2**

Tuesday: Hard realities—extremism, division and longing for community

- “Why I, a Christian mother of a Muslim daughter, fear our nation’s Islamophobia” (*Washington Post*, May 6, 2015)

Thursday: Eboo Patel’s story


**Week 3**

Tuesday: Eboo Patel’s story


Thursday: Eboo Patel’s story


**Week 4**

Tuesday: In-Class Exam

Thursday: Chris Stedman’s story

- Chris Stedman, *Faitheist*, xi-60 (Foreword and Chapters 1-3)
Week 5
Tuesday: Chris Stedman’s story
► Chris Stedman, Faitheist, 61-105 (Chapters 4-5), 136-158 (Chapter 7), 180-181 (Afterword)
Thursday: Diana Eck’s story
► Diana Eck, Encountering God, ix-21 (Prefaces and Chapter 1)
► “What’s Your Story?” Assignment due as a hard copy at the beginning of class

Week 6
Tuesday: Diana Eck’s story
► Diana Eck, Encountering God, 45-80 (Chapter 3)
Thursday: Diana Eck’s story
► Diana Eck, Encountering God, 166-199 (Chapter 7)

Week 7
Tuesday: Diana Eck’s story
► Diana Eck, Encountering God, 200-231 (Chapter 8)
► In-Class Mini-Exam over Stedman and Eck

Chapter 2: Encounters with Strangers and the Face of the Other

Thursday: The face of the other—Emmanuel Levinas
► Emmanuel Levinas, from Totality and Infinity, 194-middle of 201
► Andrew Shepherd, The Gift of the Other, 17-27

Week 8
Tuesday: Conversation in class with special guest, Dr. Amir Hussain
Thursday: Seeing the other as neighbor
► Arne Grøn, “Ethics of Vision: Seeing the Other as Neighbor,” 63-70
► Excerpts from Søren Kierkegaard’s Works of Love, 277-290

Week 9
Tuesday: The practice of hospitality—Christine Pohl, Making Room
► Christine Pohl, Making Room, 3-15 (Chapter 1); 16-35 (Chapter 2)
► Discuss research papers
Thursday: The practice of hospitality—Christine Pohl, Making Room
► Christine Pohl, Making Room, 61-84 (Chapter 4) and 104-125 (Chapter 6)
► Midterm questions distributed
Week 10
Spring Break – No Class

Week 11
Tuesday: Writing Day: Midterm due on Canvas by 5 pm
Thursday: Easter Break

Chapter 3: Practices and Frameworks of Neighborliness

Week 12
Tuesday: Musical polyphony—a framework for imagining diversity among neighbors
  - John Sheveland, "What Has Renaissance Polyphony to Offer Theological Method?" 264-275
  - Paper topic and annotated bibliography due as a hard copy at the beginning of class
Thursday: The practice of dialogue
  - Catherine Cornille, “Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue,” 20-31

Week 13
Tuesday: Dialogue case study and research paper conversation
  - The Pluralism Project (Harvard University), “An Invitation to a Tri-Faith Neighborhood”
Thursday: Ubuntu—a framework for understanding our relationship to our neighbors
  - Michael Battle and Desmond Tutu, *Ubuntu*, vii-27
  - Outline of paper due as a hard copy at the beginning of class

Week 14
Tuesday: The practice of compassion—Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*
  - Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, xi-60 (Preface, Chapters 1 and 2)
Thursday: The practice of compassion—Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*
  - Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 61-82 (Chapter 3) and 167-212 (Chapters 8 and 9)

Week 15
Tuesday: Research paper conferences

**Conclusion**

Thursday: Presentation and peer discussion of research in progress
  - Research paper draft due in class as a hard copy
**Week 16**
Tuesday: Presentation and peer discussion of research in progress
Thursday: Celebrations and conclusions

**Week 17**
Tuesday: Final exam in our regular classroom
Thursday: Final submission of research papers due to Canvas and my office by 5 pm