

IN346W Reading and Leading in Context: Methods, Media, and Entrepreneurial Practices

Wartburg Theological Seminary
Monday, 1:15-3:05pm, F208/ZOOM
Wednesdays, 9:30-10:20
Spring 2020

Course Instructors: David Hahn dhahn@wartburgseminary.edu

Course Description

The congregation is a generative locus of theology. An essential focus of the course is helping students cultivate the capacity and develop the skills needed to generate a "thick description" of congregation and communal contexts for the sake of faithful, truthful, and effective evangelical public leadership. In order to do this, students will explore, and practice using tools and resources from congregational studies and deepen their awareness and facility with basic social scientific tools and skills for interpreting contexts and leading through change. In addition, attention will be given to deepening the capacity for cultural exegesis, thus becoming more culturally savvy pastoral leaders.

Course Objectives

1. Students will learn to read and interpret complex contemporary contexts through a theologically, biblically, and theoretically informed lens.
2. Students will develop investigative skills drawing on social scientific methods to learn, discern, and effectively lead communities in context.
3. Students will reflect on their own capacity to lead communities innovatively and entrepreneurially in a multi-cultural, pluralistic world.

Bibliography (*all are available at the reserve desk in Reu Memorial library at Wartburg*)

Required Reading

Allen, Leonard. *Poured Out: The Spirit of God Empowering the Mission of God*. ACU Press, 2018.

Ammerman, Nancy T. and Carl S. Dudley, *Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Law, Eric H. F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993.

Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008.

Wheatley, Margaret J. *Who Do We Choose To Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2017.

Recommended

Studying Congregations: A New Handbook. Edited by Ammerman, Nancy, McKinney, William, Carroll, Jackson, and Dudley, Carl. Abingdon Press, 1998.

Hagley, Scott. *Eat What Is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation in Context*. Urban Loft Publishers, 2019.

Phillips, Nichole R. *Patriotism Black and White: The Color of American Exceptionalism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.

Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.

Learning as Conversation

It is doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things. Life happens when the tectonic power of your speechless soul breaks through the dead habits of the mind. Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present. --John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt: A Parable*

Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.
--David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*

Conversation is a significant mode of learning in this course. The conversation is to be progressive, reflective, and open. In a land increasingly uncivil and faith communities increasingly made up of individuals meeting their private needs, professionally trained persons must exceed the normal expectations of academy, faith community and society in their ability to engage with the other in this shared activity. Each course participant seeks to speak in one's own voice and listening with an attentiveness and openness to the other in a way that includes willingness to being changed by what one hears. This involves risking change in one's self and views while remaining committed to the values of this process. This is a collaborative rather than a competitive or adversarial process.

The conversation is exploratory – a journey, not a destination – and seeks avenues of inquiry open to us without demanding “answers” that are necessarily “right,” but instead “possible.” We will, thus, seek to be open to the emergence of novelty both within the conversation and within ourselves. This involves entering the conversation with an air of expectancy, but open to leaving with continuing questions and doubts. This anticipatory posture is more than openness to novelty, however. As students from a variety of diverse backgrounds theologically, ethnically, and socially the task is oriented to how we hold ourselves and others in a healthy balance of good-will and suspicion. This expectancy creates an openness to a new kind of future that we create and discern, and the seeks to remain faithful to the continuity of the past.

The conversation is disciplined. It has purposeful continuity – not simply and casually declaring our views but engaging others in their response to our views. The purpose here is to move the conversation forward, moving from where it has been and toward where it seems to be going, by contributing to the determination of where it goes. We are seeking freedom within discipline in our conversation like a concert pianist who works within the limits of the instrument and the composition and tries to realize them in a new way that speaks to the experience of both the performer and the audience. This view of the conversation of the course on which we are about to embark is one in which the activity of conversation is viewed as valuable in and of itself – it is how we constitute a learning community among ourselves. You will do well in this

conversational mode if you seek to understand as much as to be understood. We may come to some settled judgments along the way, some of which are surprising to us in terms of who we have been, but that is not the primary purpose of our activity. We will be in conversation with God, one another, our authors. We seek to listen to understand, and to free our voices, not only to our own thoughts and feelings, but the thoughts and feelings we hear others also communicating. In this way, we are partners in disclosing clarity for how we

Assignments/Projects:

Personal Journaling: Intermittently, students will practice journaling by reflecting on their work during this course. Journaling will include observational notes, and personal reflections from your course readings, course experiments, and personal reflections. The intent of journals is create a log of one's explorations as a journey alongside the reading, interpreting, and experimenting practices of the course. Use the following reflection questions to guide your *personal* journaling: (1) What has been new learning for you?, (2) What assumptions are being questioned for you?, (3) What has been challenging for you?, (4) What more learning would be helpful for you, and/or are you curious about?

Students will meet a 2-3 times during the semester, in groups of 3-4 (Lab time), and as indicated in the syllabus, to explore what they are hearing, feeling and thinking in their journals. Each group will collectively write a summary of what they are learning among themselves in their reflections. The learning may be around similarities or differences, topics or themes, struggles and/or joys.

Congregational Experimenting/Exploration: (choose one)

1. **Timeline Exercise:** During class students will be introduced to and practice a congregational timeline exercise. This exercise will give students an example of reading and interpreting from a *macro* perspective. Students will engage this in a community of faith of their choosing, and use it as an instance to read, and to interpret the congregation. *Please talk to the instructor about an alternative to this exercise if you are engaged in a track different than MDiv.*
2. **Congregational/Organizational Interviews:** During class students will be introduced to and practice doing congregational/organizational interviews. The exercise involves gathering 8 one-on-one interviews with congregational members. You will then code, analyze and narrate themes around a SWOC (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges) you read and interpret within the community.
3. **Dwelling in the Word Sessions:** Engage in a total of four dwelling in the Word sessions. See protocol as described in the Handout section of Castle Commons.

Community/Neighborhood Experimenting/Exploration: (choose one)

1. **Neighborhood Dwelling:**
2. **Interviewing Neighbors and/or Community Stakeholders:**
3. **Doubter's Dinner:**

Listening Experiments: (See Listening Experiment Protocols on Moodle) You may choose one Congregational experiment and One Community experiment. Each invites you to become participant observers in, and theological interpreters of your context. When you convene groups for this work you will capture the experiences using ethnographic techniques, and explore ways for understanding what the Spirit is up to in your settings. This work will be incorporated into your final project, and will help you to consider leading from out of these thick descriptions. This exercise will give students an example of reading and interpreting context from a *micro* perspective.

Final Project: For the final paper, students are to write an approximately 3,000 word (12-page double-spaced) paper that develops a working theology and practice of leadership in context at the intersection of particular voices and perspectives, including the local church or ministry, *and* its neighborhood community with which the student is familiar. *The paper will be written using WTS research paper standards, including the use of footnotes and bibliography.* The seminar project is where you will display your integrative learning through the course topic.

The final paper will be completed in three parts.

Section I: In 3-4 pages (750-1,000 words), and using the ethnographic data you collected in the congregation *and* neighborhood community, create a narrated, thick description. The narrated thick description (see Moschella, p. 197) will identify some particularities *and* themes that stood out to you as a participant observer into the lives of the congregation/ organization and their extended neighborhood community. This includes only your observations pre-judgment descriptions of what people are naming as such. If you chose to do Dwelling in the Word and/or Doubter's Dinner, consider this: how was doubt/dwelling received similarly/differently from the participants? What was the content of their discussion? How did they hold one another? Did you notice anything happening in you or among others over the course of the time you engaged these practices, i.e. hospitality, vulnerability, reconciliation? You may also offer things that surprised you (verbatim quotes are welcome).

Section II: In 3-4 pages (750-1,000 words) think about both of these contexts, macro and micro, and explore what you think God might be up to among the people in this time and place. What adaptive challenges do recognize emerging in the data. might the Spirit be inviting them into? From this contextual work, articulate a theologically informed understanding of how you imagine the Spirit is leading in this context. What is, for example, the Spirit up to in these contextual interactions? What is being challenged? What opportunities are being presented?

Section III: In 3-4 pages (750-1,000 words) explore the data theologically, naming what you hear as possible futures the Spirit is calling the Christian community into, and with whom. For instance, what postures and practices is the Spirit forming among them? Argue what you think makes it a particularly Spirit-led practice or posture. You might want to theologically frame Ammerman's 7 habits here.

You will include your ethnographic notes as an appendix at the end of your paper.

By March 25 each student will present a rough draft of their first section of the paper. This will include having completed the activity, captured it as ethnographic data, and beginning to offer some initial readings of your discoveries. This will be shared in your Lab group for this week, and each person will present their paper, and receive feedback from their partners.

By April 22 each student will present a rough draft of the second section of the paper. The process will follow similarly as the first section. See above for details.

Final Papers will be due Sunday, May 10th Each lab group will engage in a scheduled zoom call to share your learnings, and enter a learning conversation with your colleagues. Each person will receive a half hour consideration for their paper with a 5-minute introduction, and the remaining 25 minutes of conversational interaction from the group partners. (we will explore what this process will involve further in class)

Accommodation Policy

It is Seminary policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disability conditions that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students are responsible for informing their instructor of any documented disability by the end of the first week of class or upon subsequent diagnosis. Documentation on disability conditions is to be kept on file with the Dean of Students office.

Pastoral Practices

- Practice of Complex Analysis
- Practice of Immersion in Context
- Practice of Evangelical Listening and Speaking the Faith to Others
- Practice of Curiosity

Course Dwelling Narrative: Luke 17:11-21 (text found in Castle Commons)

SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSION TOPICS, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

See Castle Commons for Further Details

Prolog Week 1: Course Introduction**Monday, Feb. 3-7****Topics:** Dwelling in the Word; Brief intro to ethnography**Week 2: Spirit-led Congregational Discernment****Mon. Feb. 10 & Wed. Feb. 12****Topics:** Dwelling; Context conversations; The “10,000 foot view”: why does this work matter? And how does it serve a model of congregational discernment; change cycle; brief intro to theories of change (adaptive, gap-theory, vector/dispositional theory)**Assignment/Labs:** Listening to the Congregation/Organization & Neighborhood Community**Week 3: Reading the Local Church****Mon. Feb. 17 & Wed. Feb. 19****Topics:** Reading the Local Church using Ethnography (protocols, interviews, data collection); “7 Habits” of Experimenting (Ammerman)**Reading:** Postures-Ammerman, p. 8-11 (come prepared to discuss these pages), & Chapter 3; Moschella, Introduction & Chapter 5.**Assignment/Lab:** Practicing Interviews**Week 4: Reading Neighborhood Communities****Mon. Feb. 24 & Wed. Feb. 26****Topics:** Ethnography Neighbors and Communities using Ethnography; defining boundaries; collecting data;**Readings:** Ammerman, Chapter 2;**Assignment/Lab:** Practicing Coding/interpreting data**Week 5: Ethnography as Pastoral Listening****Mon. March 2 & Wed. March 4****Topics:** Ethnography as Pastoral Listening;**Reading:** Moschella, Chapter 6;

Wednesday Lab: Journal Check-ins (meet with group, no need to meet in-class)

Week 6: NO CLASS - Reading and Research Week

March 9 & 11

Week 7: Narrating the Data

Mon. March 16 & Wed. March 18

Topics: Organizing data; Writing up the Story;

Reading: Moschella, Chapter 7 & 8

Wednesday Lab: Vision, Planning, Budgeting (Dr. Kris Stache)

Week 8: Interpreting with Spirit, part 1

Mon. March 23 & Wed. March 25

Topics: What is God up to? What does it mean and look like to interpret theologically through data?

Reading: Allen, Chapter 1 & 5 (e-book available on library website)

Wednesday Lab: First Section rough draft due (meet in groups to discuss, no class)

Week 9: Interpreting with Spirit, part 2

Mon. March 30 and Wed. April 1

Topics: Spirit-led Leadership

Reading: Allen, Chapter 6 & 8 (e-book available on library website)

Wednesday Lab:

Week 10: NO CLASS – Reading and Research Week

April 6 & April 8

Week 11: Leading Adaptively, part 1 April 13 (Easter-No Class; Fri. April 17) & Wed. April 15

Topics: Naming adaptive challenges; Leading adaptively in light of Ammerman's 7 habits; Complexity

Reading: Watch videos on Cynefin framework;

Assignment/Lab:

Week 12: Leading Adaptively, part 2

Mon. April 20 & Wed. April 22

Topics: Adaptive challenges, and how to name them; leading adaptively in light of Ammerman's 7 habits (p. 8-11); Change and Organizational direction/"aim"

Reading: Wheatley, Chapter 1 & 2; ("Myth of Progress" p. 38)

Assignment/Lab: Conversationally exploring adaptive challenges, Second section rough draft due

Week 13: Leading Adaptively, part 3

Mon. April 27 & Wed. April 29

Topics: Exploring bias and prejudice as fruitful ways forward for congregations; redefining what counts as "failure";

Readings:

Assignment/Lab:

Week 14: Integration - Bring it All Together

Mon. May 4 & Wed. May 6

Topics: Congregational discernment, theological engagement via ethnographic techniques; Discerning the Spirit's leading

Reading:

Assignment/Lab:

Week 15: Online Zoom Calls

Monday, May 15 Last Day of Spring Semester