

TPM/CED 645
Constructions of Youth & Youth Ministry
Spring Semester 2012
Virginia Theological Seminary

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

An exploration of adolescence and the identities of youth in everyday life - the church and wider culture - as a significant pastoral theological concern. Students will learn and engage methods of practical theology to study the changing understandings of youth across time; the formation of adolescent identities and youth culture today; the impact of consumer culture on young people and the church's ministries with them. How can the church respond authentically to their lives while honoring the importance of tradition? Students will explore models and resources for building and sustaining vibrant ministries with young people that are theologically and culturally appropriate for diverse congregational settings. The course will incorporate multi-media resources including recent documentary films focused on the complex world of adolescence and youth culture.

COURSE GOALS

1. To examine, at a beginning level, the socio-cultural constructions of "youth" and their implications for the church.
2. Exploring intersections between globalized consumer culture and church ministries with young people.
3. To equip students to identify and evaluate existing models of youth ministry toward articulating a vision of youth ministry in the church, and to construct a framework for that ministry in a chosen context.
4. Thinking locally/contextually and globally/contextually about Christian perspectives on youth in ways that both critique current youth ministry practices and work toward the construction of a practical theology for youth ministry.
5. To identify resources, theoretical and practical, to support vibrant youth ministry.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Answer the question, “What is youth ministry?” with clarity and confidence.
2. Critically examine contemporary constructions of adolescence and youth ministry.
3. Locate and assess the value of resources for ministry with young people in diverse ministry settings.
4. Articulate emerging practical theologies of youth ministry, demonstrated in the ability to write and present the final assignment.

GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

- Young people are fully human with gifts, created in the image of God.
- The body of Christ includes people of all ages. Without the contributions of youth, the church is incomplete.
- Youth are not merely receivers, but also doers of the Word.
- All participants in this graduate-level course are adults who are responsible for the quality of their own learning, have the freedom and responsibility to help shape the class dynamics and thus the learning of others.
- Language matters therefore how we talk about young people, God, and human communities is critical.
- Youth ministry must not be isolated from the other ministries and theologies of the church.
- Like other ministries, youth ministry must be contextually situated and shaped.
- Given the social constructions of youth, walking with them carries both privilege and responsibility.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Dean, Kenda Creasy (Ed.). (2010). *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Mahan, Brian J.; Warren, Michael; and White, David F. (2008). *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Response in a Consumer Culture*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Mercer, Joyce Ann. (2008). *Girltalk Godtalk: Why Faith Matters to Teenage Girls – and Their Parents*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Yaconelli, Mark. (2006). *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Recommended Text

White, David F. (2005). *Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and full participation in class. (20%) The course meets once per week for 2.75 hours. It is designed to emphasize experiential learning through participatory methods. As such, attendance at each session is crucial and expected. Missing class affects learning and therefore grades. To the extent possible, classes will be laboratories to model teaching and learning methods and specific activities that could be transferred effectively to direct work with young people. To participate fully, you must come prepared, **having completed the reading and any other assignments for a given session** prior to the start of class. Students will share in class leadership as assigned. Quality participation will be marked by genuine effort to engage in and benefit from the merging learning community – attentive listening, respectful dialogue, openness to new ideas, and an attitude of collaboration. If you have a documented learning disability requiring particular accommodations, please let the faculty know in the first week of the course.

Class Leadership (30% total)

- A. Each student will be asked to prepare, lead and debrief one class activity (10 minutes) appropriate for use in ministry with an identified group of young people. (10%)
- B. In pairs, plan and facilitate a 15 minutes class on a current event, issue or a sub-culture of youth, and its implications for ministry using a practical theological method that you explain. (20%)
 - a. Describe the situation in which “X” matters for youth and youth ministry
 - b. Engage in biblical and theological reflection

- c. What would ministry look like that took the situation and the above analysis of it seriously and tried to address this?

Neighborhood Mapping Exercise OR Interview with Young Person (20%)

Neighborhood Mapping – Choose a familiar starting point (e.g. field education congregation, home, grocery store). Walk approximately 5 blocks recording all spaces/places, institutions, organizations, or structures that young people would notice or engage for any reason. Identify each location on a map and create a legend to “explain” the locations you chose.

Interview with Young Person – Identify a young person (under 18) you do not know well. Obtain his/her permission to be interviewed for your class, promising confidentiality. (You will use a pseudonym in all reporting on the interview.) Arrange to meet in a safe, public space that will allow you to focus on and hear the conversation comfortably. Interview the young person for approximately 30 minutes, using questions designed in class. Submit a verbatim portion and 2-3 double-spaced page reflection on what you learned.

Final Paper (30%)

Critical Practical Theological Analysis of a Vision of Youth Ministry

Students will begin with a job description for a position with responsibility for youth ministry and respond to the following questions:

- What constructions of youth and youth ministry does your argument depend on?
- What constructions does it critique? (cite from course materials, readings, and research)
- What social-political context does your argument assume?
- What theological and Biblical understandings of young people and the church are assumed in your argument?
- Finally, would you take the job? Why or why not?

SCHEDULE OF OUR WORK TOGETHER:

DATE	FOCAL TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS	RESOURCES
January 30	Where are we? How did we get here? Constructing adolescence & youth ministry Where we stand	David White, Ch. 1, pp. 13-34. Cannister,, Ch. 4, pp. 77-90 in <i>Starting Right</i>	Film, Merchants of Cool
February 6	Locating Youth Culture in Consumer Culture	Turpin, <i>Branded</i> , Ch. 1 & 2, pp. 11-52. Mahan, Warren, & White, <i>Awakening Youth Discipleship</i> Ch. 1 & 2, pp. 1-37	Film segment, "Inside the Teenage Brain"
February 13	Gender, Race, Class-Identities	Mercer, <i>Girltalk, God Talk</i> (entire)	TBA
Feb 20	NO CLASS		
Feb 27	Identities II	Cole, Allan, <i>Solitude and God: A Lonely Boy's Allies</i> , pp.99-127 in <i>Losers ...</i> Parker, <i>Trouble Don't Last Always</i> , Ch.3, pp. 52-81. Due tonight: Mapping a context <i>or</i> interviewing a young person	
March 5	Vocation	Baker and Mercer, <i>Lives to Offer</i> , Ch. 8, pp.154-175	Film, "What Do You Believe?"
March 12	Spirituality	Yaconelli, <i>Contemplative Youth Ministry</i> (entire)	

March 19	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK		
March 26, Delayed start following Church Pension Fund	TBD		Movie
April 2	Worship &Technology	Dean, <i>OMG</i> Ch. 1& 2, pp. 1-40	
April 9	NO CLASS		
April 16	Recreation & Justice	Mahan et. Al., <i>Awakening Youth Discipleship</i> , Part II, pp. 39-74	
April 23	Public policy and youth: Jack Calhoun, Sr. Gov't Consultant	Dean, <i>OMG</i> Ch. 3-4, pp. 41-84	
April 30	Sex and Youth Ministry in the 21 st Century	Dean, <i>OMG</i> Ch. 5-6, pp. 85-136	
May 7	Musings on Youth Ministry	Mahan, et al. <i>Awakening Youth Discipleship</i> , Part 4, p. 107-126	
Friday May 4		Final papers due	

Grading Scale:

Final grades will be assigned based on total points earned.

- A 95-100%
Represents outstanding achievement relative to level necessary to meet course requirements.
- A- 90-94%
- B+ 85-89%

- B 80-84%
Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
- B- 75-79%
- C+ 70-74%
- C 65-69%
Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
- C- 60-64%
- D 50-59%
Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
- F 49% or below
Represents failing to demonstrate knowledge of course material and/or ability to meet course requirements.

Incompletes require a completed and signed contract with the faculty.