

PT 53: Youth, Church, Culture
Virginia Theological Seminary, Fall/1st Quarter 2006
Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer

Addison 109
Mondays/Wednesdays 8:55-10:25
1.5 credits

Dr. Mercer's office: 204 Sparrow
telephone 703-461-1720
Email jmercer@vts.edu

Course Description: This course explores adolescence and the identities of youth in the church and wider culture as a significant pastoral theological concern. This is not a “how to” course in youth ministry. We 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; and Christian practices of formation in relation to youth. We will also consider perspectives on the structure of youth ministry in congregational life that can enhance opportunities for youth to contribute to the life and liberation of the church. The course is organized in part around several recent documentary films focused on the complex “world of adolescence” and contemporary youth culture.

Required Texts:

Dean, Kenda Creasy (2004). *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Parker, Evelyn L. (2003). *Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope Among African American Adolescents*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.

Smith, Christian with Melinda L. Denton (2005). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. London and New York: Oxford Press.

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

Recommended:

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

Course goals include:

1. Surveying some of the current literature and research on youth, both from the specific area of youth ministry but also more broadly in youth and culture studies.
2. Exploring intersections between globalized consumer culture and church ministries with young people.
3. Thinking locally/contextually and globally/contextually about Christian perspectives on youth, church and liberation in ways that both critique current youth ministry practices and work toward construction of new ways of being church together with youth.
4. Situating youth ministry as an ecclesial practice and a contextual practical theology.
5. Assisting participants to develop a theological framework for youth ministry.

Learning Objectives-- Participants in this course will:

1. Learn what practical theology is, and gain a basic understanding of methods used by practical theologians, by engaging one such method in relation to youth issues. Achievement of this objective will be demonstrated through a student's participation (written contributions) in Blackboard discussion groups and in other forms of in-class participation;
2. Critically examine contemporary constructions of adolescence, as demonstrated in the ability to evaluate films and texts used in this course;
3. Gain survey-level knowledge of some of the current literature in the field of youth ministry, and be able to articulate a critical comparative perspective on these resources. This objective will be demonstrated through the quality of a student's contributions to the online and in-class discussion, as well as in the final brief paper;
4. Articulate their emerging practical theologies of youth ministry, demonstrated in the ability to write such a perspective in the final brief paper.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and full participation in class: This course meets twice weekly and involves all persons working collaboratively to learn and teach. As such, attendance at each session is crucial and expected. Missing class sessions affects learnings and therefore grades. To participate fully, you must come prepared, **having completed the reading** prior to the start of class and any other written assignments for that week such as Blackboard discussion postings, by their deadline. If you have a documented learning disability requiring particular accommodations, please discuss this with the professor in the first week of the course. (20% of final grade)

2. "Blackboard" Participation: This is a "web enhanced" course in which we will utilize the forum area of the online program Blackboard for small group discussions. Each participant in the course is assigned to a small group for these online discussions, which involve posting a contribution to the discussion two times/week. These need not be lengthy—expectation is 250-500 words each time (about ½ to 1 single spaced page)—but they must be substantive. The **deadline for the week's first postings is 9:00 pm Tuesdays; Second postings must be done by 5:00 Fridays.** Participants will be assigned to particular roles in these small groups. More details will be provided in class. (40% of final grade)

3. Final short paper: Each course participant will complete a 5-page final paper articulating the outlines of her/his emerging theology of youth ministry. This paper should address key themes of the course and must be *written in relation to its texts and films*. In other words, this is not a casual "reflect on your personal opinion" blog. It is an academic paper, the purpose of which is to demonstrate your ability to critically engage/integrate themes and resources from the course toward your articulation of a theological perspective of your own. **Due by 5pm Wednesday, Oct. 25, in the Blackboard Drop Box for this course.** (40 % of final grade)

Schedule of Work

Wednesday, September 6	Introduction to the course and each other	After class: a one-page self introduction in terms of the one or two most formative/significant experiences of your own adolescence, to be posted on the course's web site (on Blackboard). Comment on how your social/cultural location shaped your adolescence. Due by Friday 9/8 at 9 pm
Monday 9/11 Wednesday 9/13	"Merchants of Cool" What is a youth? Youth Ministry?	Dean, pp. xi-116
Monday September 18 Wednesday, September 20	"Inside the Teenage Brain" Developmental Perspectives	Dean, pp. 117-257
Monday, September 25 Wednesday, September 27	"What Do You Believe?" Religious lives of youth in North America	Smith, pp. 3-117
Monday, October 2 Wednesday, October 4	"Country Boys" Socio-economic class and youth	Smith, pp. 118-192; 218-271
Monday, October 9 Wednesday, October 11	Youth and ecclesial practices "The Education of Shelby Knox"	White, entire (Recommended: Yaconelli)
Monday, October 16 Wednesday, October 18	"Girlhood" Gender and Race	Parker, entire