Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Course Profile

Course # and Title: RHTH/CC (CC/RHTH) 501, “World Religions and Christian Mission”
Instructors: Dirk Ficca and Mark Swanson
Semester/Year: Spring 2020

Meets on Wednesday evenings, 6:30 – 9:30 pm, in LSTC 205.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This course involves three site visits, two of which are led by the instructors and which will probably be scheduled for two Friday mornings/early afternoons early in the semester. (Watch this space or contact Dr. Swanson for details.)

ALSO: Want to get started on the reading for this course? Begin with Diana Eck, *Encountering God.*

Course Rationale and Description
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program Learning Competencies does it address?):

Twenty-first century Christian leaders will carry out their ministries in communities marked in various degrees by a plurality of religious belief. They will be called upon to lead their congregations (and other gatherings) in the development of respectful and community-building relationships with neighboring religious groups and institutions; to justify this kind of engagement from the fundamental sources of Christian faith; and to articulate and bear witness to Christian faith in contexts outside the church’s walls.

This course is designed to address these realities, through greater familiarity with and preparation for Christian life and ministry within “multi-religious contexts” (Learning Competency #5, “Cultural Context”), which involves an exploration and articulation of core theological and missiological commitments (Learning Competency #3, “History & Theology”). We anticipate that the course will also be an opportunity for growth in areas addressed by other Learning Competencies, e.g. personal and spiritual formation (as we learn to be good guests in the world); the use of scripture in inter-religious encounter; and contextualized practice of the arts of ministry (as in our case studies).

Course Learning Outcomes (Learners will be able to):
(What difference will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

(As a result of this course, participants will be able to …)

1. Articulate, in an elementary way (but reasonably accurate, respectful, and open to correction by adherents), the fundamental beliefs and practices of some religious traditions other than their own;

2. Articulate, with some degree of sophistication, a range of Christian theological positions that give permission and guidance for inter-religious engagement and definition to the task of Christian mission – and to be able to situate themselves within these possibilities;
3. Be good and respectful guests of religious communities other than their own – visiting, observing, engaging in conversation, learning, and reporting back to a peer group;
4. Reflect with theological acuity and pastoral sensitivity on issues that arise in North American settings as people of different religious traditions encounter one another in shared communities.

**Strategies for Learning):**
(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)

1. Reading, reflecting on, and conversing about carefully selected texts and common experiences.
2. Presentations from and conversation between the instructors – out of their different experiences and theological perspectives.
3. Three site visits, two of which are led by the instructors; the third site visit is the responsibility of each individual student, who will report on it to the class. *(Note that participation in the first two site visits is critically important; they will be scheduled – probably – on two Fridays, and will occupy the morning and early afternoon.)*
4. Reflection on and conversation about selected case studies (real situations concerning inter-religious encounter in North American settings).
5. Our reflections and conversations will be enabled by each student having prepared a sharply-focused reflection paper (normally two-page, apart from the site visit report and the case study paper). Students will be prepared to share these papers in class. Adequate time will be allotted for significant conversation about the day’s assignment.

**Assessment :**
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

1. BOTH instructors will read and offer feedback on every reflection paper, normally returning them the week after they have been received.
2. Guidance as to expectations for the reflection paper (with a grading rubric) will be provided at the beginning of the class.
3. Final grades will represent the consensus of the two instructors.
4. Time will be set aside during each class session for questions and feedback to the instructors. Both instructors are happy to hear from students; both can be reached by email, and Mark Swanson is readily available on campus.
5. The Course Evaluation will provide students an opportunity to evaluate the success of the class in achieving the Course Learning Outcomes articulated above.
Bibliography:

Among other readings, we will make use of the following texts which are all available in relatively inexpensive paperbacks or in Kindle editions. Most can be purchased very inexpensively from used book sellers (through Amazon or elsewhere).

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You may want to consult a more up-to-date textbook on the world’s religions than the classic but somewhat dated Smith and Novak volumes. One possibility is a standard textbook like John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching and Todd Lewis, World Religions Today (Oxford University Press). **Don’t buy the latest edition** (6th ed., 2017), which is very expensive. However, inexpensive used copies of the 4th edition (2011) or 5th edition (2014) are available from online booksellers. And copies will be on Reserve in the JKM Library.

A variety of other readings will be made available through the course website (and on reserve in the JKM library); the idea is to widen our reading without added cost to students.

Additional information:

Dirk Ficca is an ordained Presbyterian minister and expert in inter-religious relations, who presently serves as Executive Director of the Twin-Cities Social Cohesion Initiative and as a Senior Advisor to the Church of Sweden. During his tenure as Executive Director of the Council for a Parliament of the World Religions, parliament events were held in Chicago, Cape Town, Barcelona, and Melbourne.

Mark Swanson is an ordained Lutheran minister who has taught Christian-Muslim studies, interfaith relations, church history and world Christianity at LSTC since 2006. For 17 years he and his spouse, the Rev. Dr. Rosanne Swanson, were missionaries of the LCA→ELCA in Cairo, Egypt. (Dr. Rosanne has also served as a missionary professor in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Indonesia.)

Questions? Contact Dr. Mark Swanson at mswanson@lstc.edu.