Course Profile

Course # and Title: RHTH/CC 601: Exploring the Book of Urban Nature: Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science

Instructor: Lea F. Schweitz with discussion leaders and guest lecturers
Semester/Year: Fall 2016

Course Description:
Urbanization is one of the inescapable forms of life in, through, and under which contemporary life takes place. Population models report dramatic growth in the numbers and percentages of urban dwellers in the last half-century. By 2050, it is predicted that two-thirds of the world’s population will be located in urban centers. The urban context is a permanent aspect of our social imaginaries and an inevitable feature of our planning for futures that nurture living cities. And, yet, both Christian thought and the philosophy of nature have a conflicted relationship with the city.

In this course, we will explore the book of urban nature through an interdisciplinary, action/reflection pedagogy. We will draw on urban nature writing, natural history, studies in urban ecology, theology, and the philosophy of nature to reveal the realities of urban nature, and we will cultivate experiences in urban nature through case studies, spiritual practices and nature writing.

This interdisciplinary course aims to give learners the resources to reclaim the urban context for thinking theologically about nature in order to expand our vision of nature, of God’s creative activity, and of ourselves as created co-creators.

Course Rationale:
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

As a 600-level seminar in theological studies, the Advanced Seminar in Religion in Science supports LSTC’s advanced studies programs in theological studies; in addition, the Advanced Seminar is the cornerstone course for the Religion and Science concentration in LSTC’s Advanced Studies program. The Advanced Seminar meets LSTC’s curricular goals by providing learning opportunities for a student to develop and to demonstrate progress toward:
- Mastering a particular area of concern in the field of religion and science dialogue and its relationship to the discipline of theology (Th.M. Curriculum Outcome #1 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #2 and #5);
- Developing a research program and research methodology (Th.M. Curriculum Outcomes #2 and #3 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #1); and
- Engaging in scholarly discussion and presentation (Th.M. Curriculum Outcome #6 / Ph.D. Curriculum Outcome #4).

History of the Advanced Seminar:
Since 1965, an advanced seminar on religion in the context of the sciences has been offered for faculty, students, and professionals in the Chicago area. The seminar was founded by Ralph Wendell Burhoe
under the auspices of the Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science (CASIRAS) and Meadville/Lombard Theological School. In 1970, CASIRAS affiliated with the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS). In the 1970s, Philip Hefner, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), joined Burhoe in directing the seminar. In 1988, the Zygon Center for Religion and Science (ZCRS) was founded by LSTC and CASIRAS and began sponsoring the Advanced Seminar. From this tradition, the Advanced Seminar takes its shape as a multidisciplinary network of persons seeking to understand how the sciences and the religions engage each other and to interpret the fundamental issues that are posed in this engagement. The goal is to gain insight into the import of the sciences for the critical function of religion in its role as a cultural vehicle of ultimate values and concerns.

The Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science is designed as a research seminar for faculty, students, and other professionals. Course credit is available via registration through the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) or cross-registration through member schools of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS); the course number is T-672. For more information about ZCRS, please visit www.zygoncenter.org, email zcrs@lstc.edu, or call 773-256-0670.

Course Learning Outcomes:
(What difference will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)
Learners will show progress towards:
• Demonstrating scientific literacy, particularly in the natural sciences;
• Formulating research questions that integrate this knowledge with contemporary theological concerns;
• Analyzing and assessing theological proposals in light of current scientific understandings of nature; and
• Communicating research questions, analyses, assessments, and theological proposals in written and oral forms.

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

In order to deliver the outcomes listed above, we will:
• Dialogue with leading scholars addressing the agenda above; and
• Read, discuss, and research in areas related to the seminar themes.

Students will be required to:
• Attend and participate in all seminar meetings;
• Read all required readings;
• Present verbal and written responses to readings and lectures;
• Develop a research question, in consultation with the instructors;
• Develop and submit a research bibliography, in consultation with the instructors;
• Write a final seminar paper addressing the student’s research question and utilizing the student’s research bibliography. At the Master’s level, recommended length is 10-15 pages. M.Div. students are invited to apply the seminar topic to ministry themes and practices. At the Ph.D. level, recommended length is 20-25 pages.
Assessment:
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

The seminar paper will be the main determinant of the final grade. Students will also be graded on their responses to readings during the semester. Students are encouraged to consult with the instructors and lecturers throughout the semester. Final papers will be given grades and comments by the instructor.

Students will be invited to provide assessment through speaker evaluations and a final course evaluation. LSTC requires students to submit a final course evaluation on LSTCnet before his/her grade is released.

Course Readings:


Additional readings will be provided by the instructor and guest lecturers. It is expected that students will read additional materials to support his/her learning. The instructor welcomes questions about additional readings.

*Note: Course profiles provide only a preliminary snapshot of the course offered. It does not take the place of the course syllabus which will be provided by the course instructor.*