

DRAFT

Dynamic Youth Ministry

EDFT-8462, 3 Units

Starr King School for the Ministry / Graduate Theological Union

Spring 2017 (Online)

Semester Instructor: Megan Dowdell, M.A.
Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society
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Course Developer: Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward
Visiting Assistant Professor of Transformative Leadership
(on leave during some of the spring semester)

Office Hours: Students may request a 15-minute appointment to discuss course concepts and assignments, using this link: <https://calendly.com/megan-dowdell>

E-mail Communication: Questions and appointment requests by e-mail are welcomed. E-mails sent after 6pm Pacific or on the weekends may not receive an immediate response. The instructor does not accept text messages from students, except when experiencing technical difficulties in a live session. Subject lines of e-mail messages should clearly indicate whether you have a question or request for appointment. Requests for extension must be submitted prior to the day of the assignment's deadline, and are up to the instructor's discretion. Please do not hesitate to contact fellow students for assistance as well.

Course Description

This lively and interactive on-line course grounds participants in the social, emotional, theological and programmatic aspects of youth ministry. Geared particularly toward Unitarian Universalists, but open to all backgrounds, this course seeks to embody a vision of youth ministry that is a vibrant, robust, and flexible part of every congregation and community. Topics of instruction include leadership and spiritual development, professional support for adults who work with youth, adolescent development, and intergenerational community-building. Students will be guided in developing a critical analysis of different models of youth ministry and programming. Recommended for all religious leaders, both new and old to youth ministry.

Inspired by the pedagogy of Starr King School for the Ministry, this course will:

- Invite students to bring their full, authentic selves to the learning community.
- Draw knowledge from both academic sources and lived personal experience.
- Embody an ongoing practice combining inquiry, study, action and reflection.
- Permeate the walls of the academy and build a global learning community.
- Center the unique learning goals and needs of each student.

- Further Starr King's commitment to countering oppressions, creating just and sustainable communities, and fostering multi-religious life and learning.

Educating to Counter Oppressions

The course developers share a vision in which counter-oppression efforts are infused in every part of youth ministry. This course will examine assumptions about age, leadership, and authority and employ a collaborative approach to shared ministry with youth. We will explore course topics using a critical analysis of multiple identities and oppressions, primarily race, ability, gender/gender expression, and sexual orientation. In reading and discussing the first-hand accounts of youth, we will draw from a diverse pool of voices and experiences. Students will be encouraged to examine their own social location as it affects their ministry with youth.

Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- Trace the history of other faith-based youth ministries and movements
- Critically evaluate resources for youth and multigenerational ministry
- Explore the psychosocial, emotional, and sexual development of adolescents
- Draw on diverse perspectives and case studies for insight and inspiration
- Reflect on emotional, spiritual, and practical aspects of youth ministry
- Provide and receive peer/collegial support for youth ministry

Learning Outcomes

Through this course, students will:

- Understand core concepts of youth ministry
- Identify their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities re: youth ministry
- Gain practical strategies and tools to address common challenges
- Articulate their personal theology for and approach to youth ministry
- Research, create, and present learning resources on topics of personal interest
- Engage in ongoing, immersion learning via a self-designed praxis (action/reflection) project

Course Policies

This course relies on the thoughtful and consistent engagement of each participant. All are expected to participate actively and promptly in discussions, activities, reading and written assignments. Students are leaders and co-creators of this graduate-level learning experience, generating conversation and learning materials for each other, and proactively building a culture of peer support. In the case of missing or late assignments or inconsistent participation, students must notify the instructors as soon as possible, and work out a plan for completion.

Course Assignments

Each week,

- Review any written or recorded announcements and instructions for the week.
- Complete reading, viewing, interactive activities, and other posted assignments.
- Post (written, or via video) in an online discussion.
- Comment on at least two postings by peers.
- Engage in praxis (action/reflection component).

During the first weeks,

- Begin praxis experience.
- Begin planning student-led presentation.
- Draft a preliminary personal statement paper on faith-rooted organizing.

At the mid-semester point,

- Submit an update on your praxis project.
- Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

During the final weeks,

- Summarize key lessons from your praxis experience.
- Lead presentation, and complete self-evaluation of your planning and delivery.
- Engage classmates' presentations through discussion and/or other activities
- Submit a revised personal statement paper on faith-rooted organizing.
- Complete self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course.

Once during the course,

- Provide leadership in facilitating an engaging discussion in the week's forum.
- Consultation with instructor re: personal learning goals and interests.

Detailed instructions will be available in supplementary documents for the following:

Praxis Project

Starr King is committed to community-based, immersion learning to complement classroom/online engagement. Further, learning – particularly about youth ministry – thrives in a praxis engagement model, cycling between action and reflection, enabling us to draw from our firsthand experiences in ministry with youth. As such, students are expected to develop and engage in individualized youth ministry praxis. This might include serving as a congregational youth advisor or mentor, participating in an in-person youth ministry training or conference, fulfilling volunteer requests for denominational youth

ministry staff, soliciting feedback from a community about their youth ministry needs, etc. The instructor will provide support and consultation to assist students in developing their praxis component; at the same time, the instructor defers to the wisdom and authority of congregational / community leaders in deciding appropriate roles for students to fill.

Presentation

Students are responsible for a multimedia presentation that brings course topics of interest to them to life for their peers/colleagues.

Paper

Students will develop a personal statement paper on their unique philosophy / theology of youth ministry.

Grading and Evaluation

Regular, active class participation constitutes most of the grading rubric. Also required are three additional items of equal weight: the praxis project, presentation, and personal statement paper. Components are designed to enrich the online experience, and equip students with hands-on experiences, theological reflection, and collaborative ethos to build and sustain youth ministries.

Your final grade +/- or evaluation will be determined by the following components:

Class Participation - 40%

Praxis Project - 20%

Presentation - 20%

Paper - 20%

Required Texts

“Youth Ministry Advising: A Complete Guide”

by Unitarian Universalist Association Office of Youth Ministries

ISBN: 9781558966826, current cost at UUA Bookstore: \$15.00

Choosing to serve as a youth advisor is one of many ways that adults can demonstrate their commitment to youth. Serving in this capacity, however, is more than just making sure things run smoothly. Advisors contribute to faith- and spirit-centered, multigenerational, multicultural, congregationally rooted ministry to and with youth. Youth Ministry Advising: A Complete Guide covers broad-ranging topics including ways to recruit and support youth advisors, the nuts and bolts of youth group management, the role of youth in advisors creating a safe space, leadership training, and programming and project ideas.

“Sustainable Youth Ministry”

by Mark DeVries

ISBN-10: 0830833617, **ISBN-13:** 978-0830833610, current cost on Amazon: \$12.62

You're looking for a youth pastor. Again. What goes wrong? Why do youth ministries crumble? And what is the cost to students, parents, volunteers and church staff? Is a sustainable youth ministry possible, even after a youth pastor leaves? Youth ministry expert Mark DeVries knows the answer is yes, because he helps build sustainable youth ministries through his coaching service called Youth Ministry Architects. So take heart: No matter what state the youth ministry at your church is in--in need of a leader and volunteers, full of battles and stress, large or small in number--it can be built to survive and to last for the long haul. Based on his own experience and on his many conversations and interviews with churches in crisis, DeVries pinpoints problems that cause division and burnout and dispels strongly held myths. He then provides the practical tools and structures pastors and church leaders need to lay a strong foundation for your ministry so that it isn't built on a person or the latest, greatest student ministry trend.

In addition to these texts, the course will incorporate other materials (readings, videos, online resources, etc.) generated or suggested by students and guest contributors, as well as by the instructor.

Course Topics

This course will explore topics including (but not limited to):

- Why Youth Ministry?
- Foundations of Youth Programming
- Theology and Philosophy of Youth Ministry
- Adolescent Development
- Leadership Development
- Spiritual Development
- Group Dynamics
- Collegiality, Polity, and Professional Concerns
- Faith In Action
- Identity, Privilege, and Oppression
- Bridging the Lifespan

Course Schedule

Weeks One to Three:

- Welcome and Introduction
- Getting Oriented to the Course, and Each Other
- Exploring Key Course Concepts

Weeks Four to Ten:

- Engaging Course Textbooks and Diverse Learning Resources
- Reflecting on Personal Journeys in Youth Ministry

Weeks Eleven to Fourteen:

- Student Presentations
- Closing & Celebration

About the Instructor

Megan Dowdell is the Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society at Starr King School for the Ministry, where she has been teaching on-campus and remotely for the past seven years. She holds a M.A. and Certificate in Women's Studies in Religion from the Graduate Theological Union and is a doctoral candidate in Sociology through the University of California San Francisco. Her current scholarship on the spiritual needs of people coping with chronic health conditions across religious traditions was awarded the UUA's Joseph Gittler Religion and Ethics Grant. Her heart is captivated by teaching and working with students pursuing religious vocations that seek wholeness and liberation. She lives in Southern California.