Sexual Ethics
(draft syllabus 11/1/18)

Sexuality is sacred. This course examines the role of sexual health for faith communities and their leaders. Students will engage key theological, ethical and public health perspectives on themes in sexual ethics, including: sexual freedom and responsibility, pleasure and desire, boundaries and consequences, heteropatriarchy and resistance, responding to violence and misconduct, abortion care, reproductive technologies, and prophetic witness for sexual justice. The course provides students pursuing ministry and leadership within a specific tradition the opportunity to demonstrate their competency in professional clergy sexual ethics and promoting sexually healthy congregations. Particular emphasis is paid to queer and womanist/feminist voices on sexuality and faith. Evaluation is based on participation and discussion leadership, as well as case study analysis.

It is open to both high- and low-residence students who have consistent access to technology requirements. Students should have taken the ECO Seminar, passed another course related to systemic oppression, or be willing to take a pre-course module. Prior coursework in ethics is useful, but not required.

Relates to SKSM Threshold 5 and fulfills required course content for MFC Competency 2.

Course website: moodle.gtu.edu

Discussion and course assignments begin online asynchronously. Live seminar meets on eight Mondays, 2:10-5:00pm (Pacific) on Zoom: https://zoom.us/my/megandowdell

I. Faculty Details
Instructor: Megan Dowdell, MA, PhD(c), Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society
E-mail: mdowdell@sksm.edu
Office Hours: Each student may request a 20-minute appointment (on Zoom or by phone) to discuss the course, using the following link: https://calendly.com/megan-dowdell

E-mail Communication Policy: Questions by e-mail are welcomed. E-mails sent after 6pm or on the weekend may not receive an immediate response. The instructor does not accept text messages from students. Subject lines of e-mail messages should clearly indicate whether you have a question or request for appointment. Please do not hesitate to contact fellow students for assistance.

Megan Dowdell (GTU MA ’09, WSR ’11) has been an instructor at Starr King School for the Ministry since 2009, and a faculty advisor since 2014. She is a Ph.D. candidate in medical sociology at the University of California San Francisco. After experiencing a call to ministry through seminary teaching, she became a UU minister and is currently the affiliated community minister with Throop UU Church in Pasadena, California. She also participates in the spiritual care research community. She is the co-author of one book, Who’s in Charge Here? The
Complex Relationship between Ministry and Authority, a report of the UUA Commission on Appraisal. Her current research explores the spiritual experiences of people coping with chronic health conditions.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

At the close of the course and successful completion of all course requirements, students will be able to:

1. Articulate theological and ethical perspectives on human sexuality;
2. Understand the origins, theories, and frameworks of multiple disciplines and religious traditions on sexual ethics;
3. Apply ethical principles to real-life congregational, community, and global issues about sexuality, sexual health, and sexual justice;
4. Act upon a plan to develop as a sexually health religious professional;
5. Integrate an imagination of sexually health religious communities into their ministries and communities they serve.

III. Sources of Learning

This course conceives of the field of sexual ethics by entering three doorways: (1) professional clergy and congregation-centered ethics; (2) multi-racial feminist/womanist ethics; and (3) critical theory. The sources for learning include a diverse set of perspectives from North American and global scholars from these bodies of knowledge. The required books will be significantly supplemented with electronic readings to focus each unit and include diverse voices. Students pursuing fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association will be able to demonstrated required graduate level coursework and reading in sexual ethics.

a. Required Books:

Available at Amazon.com and other retailers:


**Required books (continued):**

One of the following sets (select age range), available for purchase from UUA but *check your local UU and UCC congregations about borrowing copies*:

**Set 1 - Grades 4-6:**


and


**Set 2 - Grades 7-9:**


and


**Set 3 - Young Adult:**

Michael J Tino, Laura Anne Stuart and Sarah Gibb Millspaugh. *Our Whole Lives, Young Adult.* UUA (ISBN: 9781558965324) $40.00

and


Recommended, but not required for purchase:


b. **Additional Required Resources:** The instructor will supplement the required course books by assigning methodological, substantive, and theoretical contributions to the field of sexual ethics, including but not limited to articles, blogs, films, and clips available on the internet.

Students will be required to watch at least one film during the course of the term. The official list of titles and available sources will be subject to theater or home-viewing availability and will be announced as soon as possible. Proposed titles include:

- Moonlight (2016) - Availability TBA
- Transparent (2014-2016) Available on Amazon TV for a fee, season 1, 2, or 3
- Spotlight (2015) - Available on Netflix
- Pose (2018) – TV show, Season 1, on FX
d. Codes, Covenants, and Policies: Prior to the intensive, students are expected to obtain and read the codes of conduct, guidelines, behavioral covenants, competencies, and policies related to sexual behavior within their relevant institutional and credentialing bodies. They should assemble documents relevant to both members (or clients) and professionals. Examples: Unitarian Universalists pursing ministerial fellowship would want to look at current Ministerial Fellowship Committee competencies, and UU Ministers Association policies, as well as congregational codes of conduct or covenants. An individual pursuing hospital chaplaincy would want to look at hospital policies about behavior among staff and with patients, as well as guidelines put forth by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education.

e. Embodied Knowledge: The last (or in some ways, the first!) source of learning is the personal, lifelong experience of having/being a body in relationship with other bodies. Embodied experience is a form of expertise in itself and ought not to be discounted. As students are confronted with multiple forms of knowledge and a variety of views on important issues related to health and illness, personal histories (our own and through narratives and literature) can offer pause and help one to think critically in dialogue with scholarly, professional, and sacred sources. Students are expected to approach texts and resources with the goals of interpretation, analysis, and response, while engaging embodied experience as a valuable component of learning; however, personal sharing (anecdotes, stories, and raw opinions) is no substitute for serious study and engagement. Everyone will be reminded, gently and often, to bring it back to the text.

Note: Areas of health ethics address experiences of pain, trauma, loss and violence. These experiences live in personal, family, and collective histories as well as religious communities and traditions. Processes of grief, healing, and recovery are not linear and can provoke a wide range of responses (or non-responses) and needs. This course values honesty, compassion, and community, but it does not gather for a therapeutic purpose. All students, regardless of personal history, are encouraged to seek out external sources of support, comfort, and restoration in preparation for this course, according to their personal needs.

IV. Course Expectations

A. Attendance: Each student is expected to participate in the Moodle learning community each week, as the content and assignments are cumulative. Thus, it is not possible to make up a full missed week of the course. Attendance comprises fulfilling the course requirements, as well as demonstrated dedication to building a strong learning community and developing one’s own knowledge and practice as a spiritual caregiver. Plan to write, speak and share often. If you are sick or have to miss class, please contact at least one other student (cc-ing the instructor) before you get behind. For instance, if you start to come down with the flu on Sunday and you haven’t completed the reading or activity due Thursday, send a brief message on Sunday to schedule a call with a fellow student to catch up within the week, cc-ing the instructor. If you miss a full unit, it is your responsibility to review what has been missed and stay up-to-date with the material.
Missing one full week in the first half of the semester will put a student at a disadvantage; if you miss two (2) units, I suggest you withdraw from the course. Repeated lateness to the seminar, turning in assignments or delayed engagement on Moodle will negatively impact your evaluation in the course.

B. **Reading and Note-taking:** Each student is expected to read all required reading in full, conduct necessary literature searches, and take good notes. Please see the PDF handout on the course website about “good note-taking for ethics” for the instructor’s suggestions on how to be a successful note-taker. Good notes will help you analyze, evaluate, and apply what you have read and discussed. This course will engage these issues with the goal of comprehension, intellectual depth, and professional/spiritual discernment in a dialogue among scholars and leaders.

C. **Technology Requirements:** *Do not attempt to take or complete this course using a tablet or smartphone.* Students are required to use a computer and consistent internet connection each week of this course. Inability to access a computer or good internet will not be a sufficient excuse for delay or absence from the course. Test your equipment and connection often. In addition to Moodle and Zoom, this course takes advantage of web-based applications, such as Google Drive (sharing documents, slides, spreadsheets and PDFs).

D. **Peer-to-Peer Dialogue:** Peer-to-peer dialogue is important for accomplishing the learning outcomes of the course. Students will have a case study partner and a small group. They are expected to meet voice-to-voice with case study partners and small groups to complete activities on a weekly basis. Students are expected to comply with the school’s Statement on Academic Integrity, all other GTU and SKSM policies, and observe the commitment to educating to counter oppressions that is integral to an SKSM education.

E. **Counter-Oppressions in the Course Community:** In addition to providing a valuable foundation in sexual ethics for graduate students preparing for ministry and religious leadership, this seminar seeks to advance the values expressed in the statement on Educating to Counter Oppressions (ECO) that is central to Starr King School for the Ministry’s educational design. Students should familiarize themselves with these priorities and reflect on them as they critically engage sources of learning and the learning community developed through the course.

Gender binaries, gender/sexual oppression, racism and other intersecting forms of oppression affect each of us. We don't leave them behind as we engage new information or join a new cohort of students. Please take time to review three links below, prior to beginning the course.

1. **#HatchKids Discuss Microaggressions (a <2min minute video)**
2. **Understanding Non-Binary People: How to Be Respectful and Supportive** (2-page article)
3. **Interrupting Microaggressions** (2-page handout - geared toward college students, but tactics still relevant)
There are concrete ways that students can practice solidarity with people who experience different forms of oppression. For me, the journey to practicing solidarity in new groups or settings has deepened my spiritual experiences and my friendships. I hope it can be a part of your practice as a student in this course and you experience the joy and the gifts, too!

I'll use myself as an example of how solidarity and response can come up: As a queer/lesbian cis-gender woman (meaning my gender identity matches the sex I was assigned at birth), conversations about LGBTQ equality and inclusion in faith communities feel really personal as well as political. My hope is that in discussions about these topics that my voice, and the voices of other LGBTQ people, will be listened to. But I also can't speak for other LGBTQ people, or even other cis-gender lesbians! In group situations, I hope that I can count on someone who seeks to be an ally (or a co-conspirator) to shift the discussion or speak up if I, or another LGBTQ person were asked to speak for "all LGBTQ people." I'd also feel respected/supported if people were curious what I thought as an individual and wanted to check-in with me about how a comment or discussion felt. I'm also aware that I won't understand fully how the same dialogue might feel for a transgender/non-binary person or a queer person of color -- opportunities for me to practice solidarity are also plentiful.

V. Course Assignments

1. **Discussion Leadership:** Beginning on Week 3, one or two students will be assigned as discussion leaders for particular units (and in some cases, specific readings). Instructions will be given during Week 1.

2. **Case Analysis Leadership:** Each student will be required to examine cases that corresponds to the concepts and readings covered on that day. Specific instructions will be offered, and cases will be distributed on Moodle.

3. **Spiritual Centering and Ritual:** The issues covered in this course touch upon issues of identity, trauma, violence, betrayals of trust, and other painful or sensitive experiences. Caring for the spirit and the body is important to the learning community. Each student (or pairs, depending on the size of the class) will be asked to lead a brief spiritual practice or “moment” (no more than 10 minutes, approximately) at the beginning or close of the live session. Bring musical instruments, sacred objects or other resources from your own practice or tradition. Creativity is welcomed. Sensitivity to the unit topics is imperative, but the centering moments need not apply to the topic directly. Evaluation is based on completion of this leadership – not on the craft of the ritual.

4. **Final Project:** Developing and shaping a moral argument is a key activity in ethics. This course includes multiple opportunities to practice constructing moral arguments through in-class dialogue and case study analysis. For the final project, students will a choice of a take-home exam or a moral argument paper (both due the last week of the term).
VI. Schedule of Live Seminars

Live seminars bridge and integrate the content delivered via Moodle and discussions in small groups. Each live Monday seminar begins at 2:10pm (Pacific) and ends at 5:00pm (Pacific). There will be a 5-minute body break and a 15-minute additional break during each seminar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Seminar</th>
<th>Week’s Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, February 4 – first</td>
<td>No Live Seminar – students self-schedule initial meeting with case study</td>
<td>Introduction to Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day of term</td>
<td>partner via phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, February 11</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Religion and Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, February 18 -</td>
<td>No Live Seminar – students self-schedule meeting with case study partner</td>
<td>Characteristics of a Sexually Healthy Religious Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/Administrative</td>
<td>during week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holiday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, February 25</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Characteristics of a Sexually Healthy Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 4</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Professional Sexual Ethics – Behavior and (Mis)Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 11</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Professional Sexual Ethics – Accountability and Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Note Daylight Savings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 18</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Sexuality Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 25 – Reading</td>
<td>No Live Seminar</td>
<td>Break/Catch-Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 1</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Inclusion and Support of GLBTQIA People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 8</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 15</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Trauma, After-Pastors and Advocates (How to Be an Accomplice in Sexual Justice-Making)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 22</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Sexuality and Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 29</td>
<td>Live Seminar</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, May 6</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Gratitude and Celebration!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>