

Fall 2019  
RAFT-8100

**Writing for Religious Leaders**  
(8/15/2019)

Whether working for justice, serving communities, or guiding organizations, religious leaders should be able to write well and often for a variety of audiences. Theological school is a perfect place for thinking about how we put our ideas and interpretations into words. Writing as religious leaders requires thoughtful articulation of our own ideas as well as the ability to clearly explain multiple perspectives on a variety of critical issues. This is an online course geared toward students who wish to improve their critical thinking skills and writing habits for graduate-level academic work and religious leadership. *It is recommended for students early in their degree program, but open to all.* Students will engage texts from a range of substantive topics and explore various writing assignments, which are common in their education at the GTU. Each week includes reading activities to build comprehension and reconstruction skills, synchronous writing “chats,” peer-editing sessions, and student-led themed discussions. Students will be familiarized with the GTU library resources early in the semester and use of electronic library resources will be a consistent component of assignments. Upon registering and in preparation for the start of the term, students will be asked to read and write a brief essay on an assigned topic.

Prerequisites: None, Relates to Threshold 3. Online, asynchronous with synchronous online chat meetings.

### **I. Faculty Details**

Instructor: Rev. Megan Dowdell, [mdowdell@sksm.edu](mailto:mdowdell@sksm.edu)

Office Hours: You may request a 20-minute appointment to discuss course assignments using the following link: [www.calendly.com/megan-dowdell](http://www.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 as well.

### **II. Student Learning Outcomes**

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

1. Summarize the thesis and major points of an article or chapter and put one author’s perspective in its proper historical-social context.
2. Critically evaluate an author’s perspective/argument in dialogue with one’s own experience and prior knowledge.
3. Understand oneself positively as a writer and create tailored habits for writing across the theological school curriculum.

4. Plan, organize and develop an argument on an important issue in ministry and religious leadership.
5. Revise one's own writing for academic papers or for a general audience.

### III. Course Expectations

- A. **Attendance:** Each student is expected to participate in the Moodle learning community each week, as the content and assignments are cumulative. Weekly online chat sessions are required. 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 writer. Plan to write and share often. If you are sick or have to miss something in the course, 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. Realize that not everything can be made up after the week has closed. Missing one full week in the first half of the semester will put a student at a disadvantage; if you miss three (3) weeks, I suggest you withdraw from the course. Repeated lateness, 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 and discuss the assigned texts and cases that are indicated in each unit of the course schedule or by the instructor. Please see the PDF handout on the course website about "good note-taking" for the instructor's suggestions on how to be a successful reader and note-taker. Good notes will help you analyze, evaluate, and write about what you read.

Please purchase the following text:

Cathy Birkenstein, Russel Durst, and Gerald Graff. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing (Fourth Edition)*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-0393631678. Available on Amazon.com as an e-textbook, \$12.47 or new paperback for \$21.00

- C. **Writing:** Writers write. You will write at least 25 minutes every day, taking 2 days off per week. There are three kinds of writing that students will do:
1. "Morning Pages" – short free-writes written (you guessed it) in the morning
  2. "Challenge Sessions" – brief goal-oriented writing sessions (may write on any course assignment or vocational writing project as long as you are *writing continuously* – not research, note-taking or reading time)
  3. "Peer-editing Sessions" - afternoon sessions reading/commenting on writing
- Every other Monday morning*, each student will turn in a log of their writing, which will include process and reflective notes about the writing process, positive self-statements, challenges and accomplishments.

D. **Assignments:** Each student is required to complete all reading and writing assignments according to the guidelines provided. Unless otherwise stated, all written assignments must be in 12-point font, double-spaced, include 1” margins, and adhere to assigned page limits. All references should use Turabian/Chicago citation format and include a bibliography. Grammar, spelling, clarity, and organization count. Reading and writing these assignments takes time. Below is a list of the cumulative major writing assignments:

1. *Argument Reconstruction (1 paragraph) – due 9/13*
2. *Literature Review of 3 book chapters or journal articles – due 10/18*
3. *Draft Newsletter Article or Letter to the Editor (1 page) – due 11/8*
4. *Paper draft – due 11/22*
5. *Final paper – due 12/3*

E. **Final Paper:** Students will write a 3-page argument in response to a question they develop through a literature review. Students will exchange drafts with one other student in order to provide and receive feedback on their writing. Students will then revise their paper using one of the methods taught in the course. With special permission, students may substitute this assignment for drafting six pages of writing for a vocational purpose (not for another course and not a sermon). Must be a new piece, written synchronously with this course.

F. **Technology Requirements:** *Do not attempt to take or complete this course using a tablet or smartphone.* Students are required to use a computer and have 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, this course takes advantage of web-based applications, such as Google Drive (sharing documents, slides, spreadsheets and PDFs)

**IV. 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.

[#HatchKids Discuss Microaggressions \(a <2min minute video\)](#)

[Understanding Non-Binary People: How to Be Respectful and Supportive](#) (2-page article)

[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. **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**: Taking words from others' work *and* taking ideas from others' work are both considered plagiarism and will be reported. 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.