

Spring 2020 - RAFT-8100
Writing for Religious Leaders
(draft syllabus – 1/30/2020)

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 Visser, mvisser@sksm.edu

Office Hours: You may request a 20-minute appointment to discuss course assignments using the following link: 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.

Rev. Megan Visser (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. She also serves as the minister of UUs of Santa Clarita Valley and affiliated community minister with Throop UU Church in Pasadena. 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 religious/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. Understand oneself positively as a writer and create tailored habits for writing across the theological school curriculum.

2. Summarize the thesis and major points of an article or chapter and put one author's perspective in its proper historical-social context.
3. Critically evaluate an author's perspective/argument in dialogue with one's own experience and prior knowledge.
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

1. **Attendance**: Each student is expected to participate weekly. Weekly online chat sessions are required. If you are sick or fall behind, please send the instructor an e-mail right away. If you miss a unit, it is your responsibility to review what has been missed and stay up-to-date with the material. You won't be able to go back to a previous week's discussion and make it up. Each week builds on the previous week; missing more than 1 week will put a student at a significant disadvantage. If you miss three (3) weeks, I suggest you withdraw from the course. Repeated lateness to the discussions will negatively impact your evaluation in the course.
2. **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 2 texts:

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.

Paul J. Silvia. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* APA Lifetools, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-1433829734. Available on Amazon.com for \$12.99 in paperback.

3. **Writing**: Writers write. You will write at least 25 minutes every day, taking 2 days off per week. 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.
4. **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.
 - a. ***"Writing self" memo***
 - b. ***Argument Reconstruction***

- c. *Congregational/Organizational Writing Item*
- d. *Writing Log and Process Reflection*