

RS-8300
3.0 units
Spring 2020

**EVIDENCE-BASED SPIRITUAL CARE:
FROM THE “BEDSIDE TO THE LAB BENCH”**
(Draft syllabus 1-30-2020)

From the “Bedside to the Lab Bench.” Is ministry an art or a science? How do we explain our goals and outcomes as spiritual caregivers? What happens when our duties to serve human need face the challenges of the biomedical system? What do emerging technologies mean for how we understand oppression and the care of communities?

Scientific literature recognizes that religion/spirituality is an integral dimension of well-being and makes a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. However, the measurement of religion/spirituality continues to invite public and scientific debate and meanwhile, scientific advancements raise questions about theology and justice. This course provides a foundation in the growing fields of spiritual care research and the biopolitics of science meeting religion. Students will learn to understand the evidence, develop the experiments and investigate the ethical and social implications of their ministry and caring practice. The course includes a significant “laboratory” component, in which students take their spiritual caregiving from the bedside to the lab bench to: test new interventions in spiritual care; create measurement tools to understand their practice of ministry and leadership; and respond to the effects of new scientific technologies on marginalized communities.

Prerequisites: A pastoral care/counseling course or prior CPE preferred. Online, asynchronous, with 2-3 synchronous meetings. Low residency. Relates to Threshold 5, MFC Competencies 2 and 7.

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-visser

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. Read, understand and evaluate research articles on spiritual care, chaplaincy and health equity.
2. Describe evidence-based spiritual care, including its goals, benefits and challenges, as well as identify gaps in knowledge.
3. Analyze the ethical, social and policy implications of clinical and spiritual care, centering the experiences of people of color, women and other marginalized groups
4. Measure and assess their own ministerial practice and success as a spiritual caregiver
5. Discuss spiritual care interventions and opportunities for change in practice with others.

III. Sources for Learning

We enter the field of spiritual care research and biopolitics through multiple doorways: (1) broad theoretical frameworks about the relationships between spiritual care and research and between biomedicine and systems of oppression; (2) recent research studies and professional networks related to chaplaincy and spiritual care research; (3) narrative and lived experience of spiritual care-giving and receiving care; and (4) hands-on investigation of research methods, interventions and outcomes.

Students are expected to conduct an electronic literature review, using the GTU electronic and print holdings and journal subscriptions. A GTU research librarian will lead a tutorial in the first week of the course in using database search engines and citation software.

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 spiritual care 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.

Required Books for Purchase:

George Fitchett and Kelsey White, editors. *Evidence-Based Health Care Chaplaincy: a reader* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018) **THE READER**

Strongly recommended for those entering vocations in chaplaincy or spiritual research:

Wendy **Cadge**. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) **CADGE**

Ewan Kelly and John Swinton, editors. *Chaplaincy and the Soul of Health and Social Care*. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019). **KELLY/SWINTON**
https://www.amazon.com/dp/1785922246/ref=rdr_ext_tmb

George Fitchett and Steve Nolan, editors. *Spiritual Care in Practice: Case Studies in Health Care Chaplaincy* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015). **FITCHETT/NOLAN**

George Fitchett. *Case Studies in Spiritual Care* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018).
CASE STUDIES

George Fitchett. *Assessing Spiritual Needs: A Guide for Caregivers*. (Academic Renewal Press, 2002) **ASSESSMENT GUIDE**

IV. Course Expectations

The course is designed as an advanced, interdisciplinary seminar and learning laboratory.

- 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 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 come down with the flu on Sunday and you haven't completed the reading or lab exercises 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 serious disadvantage; if you miss two (2) units, I suggest you withdraw from the course. Repeated lateness on assignments 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 website about "good note-taking" 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 internet will not be a sufficient excuse for delay or absence from the course. Students will need active GTU library privileges and should check their access to GTU electronic materials *prior* to the start of the course. In addition to Moodle, this course takes advantage of web-based applications, especially VoiceThread. Other applications include Google Drive (sharing documents, slides, spreadsheets and PDFs), and Zotero. In order to meet as a small group for completing some assignments, students will need to use a video platform, such as Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts.
- D. **Peer-to-Peer Dialogue:** Peer-to-peer dialogue is important for accomplishing the learning outcomes of the course. Students will have a research lab partner and a small group. They are expected to meet voice-to-voice with their lab partner to complete laboratory 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:** Gender binaries, gender/sexual oppression, racism and other 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 the resources in the top section of the Moodle page.

V. Course Assignments

- A. **Group Quiz:** In Week 3, students will take an online group quiz on basic research terms, methods and validity. Students can retake it up to three times to achieve full credit.
- B. **Research Article Critique (Voicethread):** In week 6, students will critique a research article using the skills developed during weeks 2 to 5 through a Voicethread presentation.
- C. **Final Project:** Students will complete a literature review and constructive paper outlining a possible change in their practice of spiritual care. Between Reading Week and Week 13, research questions, annotated bibliography, outline and final paper will be turned in. A presentation will be offered using VoiceThread in the final week of the semester.