

VDS CONCENTRATIONS

Black Religion and Culture Studies (BRCS)

This concentration offers opportunity for study and research in the religions of the African diaspora, their spiritual, intellectual, moral, and cultural contributions towards transforming the world through institutions, social movements, and cultural politics of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Black Religion is an umbrella term for historically understanding the Black Church and other African derived religions in the Americas from their development during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the present and explores their creative, sacred powers of survival, resistance, and flourishing. Drawing on a wide range of resources and black biblical hermeneutics, African American religious history, Black philosophy and theology, African American religious studies, womanist ethics, sociology, and psychology, and cultural studies, the concentration is methodologically interdisciplinary.

Learning Goals

- Historical understanding about the development of Black Religion and culture formations from African roots and beginnings in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the present.
- Explore creative and transformative cultural practices and institutions that empower the spiritual and moral universes of Black religion and culture.
- Critique social forces of oppression and transformative sources of liberation through interdisciplinary analysis.

Current Steering Committee: Herbert Marbury and Stacy Floyd-Thomas (Co-Conveners), Victor Anderson, Michael Eric Dyson, Forrest Harris, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Lisa Thompson, and Phillis Sheppard

Required Courses

None

Praxis Fulfillment

One of the designated courses:

DIV 5236 Mobilizing for Justice: Advocacy Among Children and Youth

DIV 6573 African American Biblical Interpretation

DIV 6924 Preaching in the African American Tradition

DIV 7240 The Sociology of Religion

DIV 7145 African American Social Ethics

OR in consultation with Field Education faculty, a related placement and completion of a course in Supervised Ministry and/or Field Education.

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(Other courses not listed here may qualify with the permission of instructor and Co-Conveners)

Chaplaincy

Chaplaincy is a particular type of ministry focusing on holistic, integrative, embodied, emotional and spiritual care in a variety of contexts beyond the local congregation. The Chaplaincy Concentration provides students theoretical and practical knowledge to prepare for vocations in variety of contexts (healthcare, campus, social justice, street ministries, prison, military, corporate) and with diverse populations.

LEARNING GOALS:

- Reflect theologically and pastorally on the practice of chaplaincy
- Cultivate competence in theory and facility in the practice of pastoral counseling with attention to diversity and differences, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation.
- Develop facility in practicing ritual and prayer in interpersonal, communal, and public contexts appropriate to diverse settings and needs
- Reflect critically on institutional and societal cultures and systems in order to engage issues of justice and fairness in ways that integrate the pastoral and prophetic into holistic practice.

COMBINED COURSE/PRAXIS CREDIT REQUIREMENTS:

To move toward professional work in this vocation, supervised learning in the field is essential:

- **For MDIV Students:** In addition to the mandatory two-semester, 6-credit Field Education course (DIV 7900, Supervised Ministry and Seminar), an additional 3-credit Field Education course is required for this concentration (either DIV 7902, 7903, or 7904). That additional Field Education course counts as one of the student's four Chaplaincy-designated courses (12 credits, plus 6 credits for DIV 7900).
- **For MTS Students:** A total of 15 credit hours are required: three Chaplaincy-designated courses (9 credits, total) and two Field Education courses (6 credits, total). Those six praxis credits may be earned *either* through the two-semester DIV 7900 (Supervised Ministry and Seminar) *or* in some combination of DIV 7902 (Special Project in Field Education), DIV 7903 (Independent Study and Practicum in Field Education), and DIV 7904 (Clinical Pastoral Education).

REQUIRED COURSES:

Minimum one course in Pastoral Care. Steering Committee: Phillis Sheppard (Convener), Bruce Morrill, Yara Gonzalez-Justiniano, Arelis Benitez, Herbert Marbury, Jaco Hamman.

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Global Christianities and Interreligious Encounter (GCIE)

True and transformative knowledge of Christianity cannot exist without the study of other religions, their influence upon Christianity and its portrayals of these religious movements. “Global Christianities and Interreligious Encounters” engages the inevitably intercultural and interreligious nature of the various versions of Christianity from its very first days, whether Second Temple Judaism or religions of Rome in the first century, CE.; whether Islam from its birth or Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions as mercenaries, merchants and missionaries encountered them in the medieval and early modern periods; and whether various new religious movements in modernity. GCIE offers a range of courses and perspectives that are designed to introduce VDS students to the variety of encounters between various religious traditions and Christianity, and the mutual gaze that has influenced both sides. The *telos* of GCIE is to help the larger VDS community – students, alumni, and friends – to become better equipped to understand the complexities and nuances of the historical contingencies of their version and vision of Christianity vis-à-vis other versions of Christianity of the past as well as other religions, both past and present.

Learning Goals

- Students will understand how religions emerge out of contact with one another.
- Students will recognize their traditions as contingent, thus open to interpretation, with an awareness of accompanying historical harms and benefits of their tradition. Further, they will value difference and become aware of the dynamics of Christian privilege, with a concomitant commitment towards transformative solidarity not guilt.
- Students will develop the capacity for deep listening and civil discourse across religious difference, thereby becoming more adroit in assessing religious traditions, building constructive alliances, and cultivating respect interreligiously.

Current Steering Committee

Dave Michelson (Convenor), Annalisa Azzoni, Jimmy Byrd, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Jim Hudnut-Buemler, Graham Reside, Choon-Leong Seow, Melissa Snarr.

Required Courses

None

Additional Requirements

None

Praxis Options

Strongly encourage a field education placement. Courses designated in YES that emphasize the theory- praxis connection may also satisfy this requirement.

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Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies (MANES)

The cultures of the Mediterranean and Near East have exerted a formative influence on identity and practice in a number of religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students in this concentration are invited to learn a variety of disciplinary approaches to the study of religion as part of the cultures of the Mediterranean and Near East. Although there are no chronological limits to the focus of this concentration, the course offerings focus primarily on ancient and medieval cultures and languages. The subjects are studied through a variety of sources including textual, linguistic, material, geographic, and visual evidence. The courses offer a variety of approaches drawn from the disciplines of history, philology, visual arts, literary analysis, gender analysis, biblical studies, post-colonial studies, and the social sciences. Students are particularly encouraged to diachronically examine the reception and intersection of cultural and social forms and institutions.

Learning Goals

1. Students will become familiar with the cultural and social history the Mediterranean and Near East as a context for the development of religious traditions.
2. Students will become familiar with textual, philological, and material approaches to the study of the religions of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean and Near East.
3. Students will gain facility in the teaching and research practices use to study the cultures of the Mediterranean and Near East.

Current Steering Committee

David Michelson (Convener), Annalisa Azzoni, Choon-Leong Seow

Required Courses

None

Additional Requirements

None

Praxis Options

This could be satisfied by archeological work (Maymester courses such as Vanderbilt expeditions at Caesarea Maritima), field education as an undergraduate teaching assistant (at Vanderbilt or another local university), working as a faculty research assistant (for example on grant funded research in the digital humanities), or immersion language courses in the Mediterranean or Middle East.

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Pastoral and Prophetic Congregational Leadership (PPCL: MDiv Only)

This concentration is designed for individuals intending upon careers in congregational ministry. It provides an opportunity to delve more deeply into the literature, problems, practices of ministry. Students in particular denominational traditions may be able to fulfill some of their ordination requirements in this concentration, but all students are challenged to think deeply about the intersectional dimensions of life in congregational community in twenty-first century North America.

Students take designated courses from the school's offerings in three areas—Perspectives on Contemporary Ministry, Leadership, and a contextual requirement in the area of Field Education or Clinical Pastoral Education. **No course applied to the concentration may also be applied to the requirement in Ministerial Arts (i.e. no double counting).**

Learning Goals

- Students will develop perspectives on contemporary ministry such that graduates will proceed into the further practice of ministry as thoughtful and engaged leaders.
- Students will attain skills in the practice of ministry applicable to the practice of congregational leadership.
- Students will engage in an additional unit of congregationally based field education in order to grow under supervision in the capacity for leadership and self-awareness of their own gifts.

Current Steering Committee

Jim Hudnut-Beumler (Convener), James Byrd, Stephanie Budwey, Jaco Hamman, Forrest Harris, Eunjoo Kim, Bruce Morrill, Lisa Thompson

Praxis Options: An appropriate placement for DIV 7900.

Required Courses:

Perspectives on Contemporary Ministry (3 or 6 hours)

Courses in this grouping offer perspectives especially applicable to the understanding of practice of congregational ministry. These include the history of religious bodies and biblical interpretation used in congregations, the theology of particular traditions, the theory of approaches to ministry, pastoral lives, and worship.

Leadership in Contemporary Ministry (3 or 6 hours)

Courses in this grouping offer both a grounding in their subject matter and leadership skills and development opportunities for pastoral leaders in the sources themselves.

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Co-Curricular Offerings:

In collaboration with faculty and staff colleagues, we offer workshops throughout the academic year in such areas as:

- Reading Scripture in public worship;
- Leading effective meetings;
- How to read budgets and exercise financial management;
- Managing staff, evaluating personnel, hiring, firing;
- Protecting the vulnerable—safe congregational practices;
- Entering and reading congregational culture;
- The vocation of the pastor: Finding mentors and building a colleague group.

Senior Project Emphasis

Students choosing this concentration are encouraged to pursue Senior Project topics related to some aspect of congregational leadership.

Prison and Carceral Studies (PCS)

This concentration provides VDS students with the opportunity to take up issues of incarceration from a theological perspective. Students will explore biblical, theological and historical documents as well as sociological data to deepen understanding of the current reality of punishment in the United States. We will explore what religious traditions have to contribute to critiquing the injustices of our justice system. Students will engage prisoners and formerly incarcerated citizens through our Riverbend Program as well as appropriate field education opportunities. We will pay particular attention to issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in the application of punishment in the United States and beyond, taking up the relationship of discipline and punishment in society. And we will develop theological and ethical reflection in relationship to these issues. What, for example, is the relationship of punishment and mercy? How are reconciliation and justice possible? The concentration draws on a broad range of disciplines and combines learning from those whose lives have been most affected by incarceration – the incarcerated and their communities-- as well as scholars whose research and teaching focus on the development and analysis of the prison industrial complex.

Learning Goals

- To develop an understanding of the realities of mass incarceration in the US.
- To explore the causes and consequences of prison, paying particular attention to issues of race, class, gender and sexuality.
- To mine religious/theological traditions for resources for disrupting the prison industrial complex, and the cradle to prison pipeline.

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Current Steering Committee

Graham Reside (Convener), Ellen Armour, Bruce Morrill, Herbert Marbury, Stacey Floyd Thomas

Required Courses

None

Additional Requirements

None

Praxis Options

DIV 5250 Models and Practices of Justice

DIV 5213 Restorative Practices

OR in consultation with Field Education faculty, a related placement and completion of a course in Supervised Ministry and/or Field Education.

Religion, Arts and Culture (RAC)

This concentration serves the student with interests in the mutually formative relationship of religion and the arts. Areas of inquiry include theological aesthetics, the role of art in fulfilling the societal mission of congregations and communities, the role of religion in literature, art's generative role in personal devotion, spiritual practice, and congregational life and identity. Practical courses in writing (creative, non-fiction, and song) are offered regularly and are an important component in the curriculum.

Learning Goals

- Student will demonstrate creative imagination in at least one of two streams of activity:
A) The translation of theological concepts into images, sounds, movements, novels, plays, or poetry. B) In scholarship, preaching, worship design, and other modes of expressive theological reflection.
- Student will put their engagement with the arts into conversation with the broader components of her or his theological education.
- Student will build a greater recognition of the interconnections between religion and the arts and be able to articulate points of affinity between the two.

Current Steering Committee

Stephanie Budwey (Co-Convener), Victor Judge (Co-Convener), Juan Floyd-Thomas, Yara Gonzalez-Justiniano

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Required Courses

Writing Creatively About Religion (Judge)

Additional Requirements

None.

Praxis Options

1. By working with the Field Education faculty to identify a learning context.
2. By fulfilling the praxis requirement in one of the following courses:
Writing Creatively about Religion (Judge), Images of Mary in Christian Thought and Practice (Budwey), Singing Theology and Justice in Christian Traditions [formerly Survey of Christian Congregational Song] (Budwey), Introduction to Christian Worship (Budwey)
3. By fulfilling the praxis requirement in another course with permission by the instructor and the co-conveners of the concentration.

Religion and Economic Justice (REJ)

Economic realities and faith traditions are closely related. Economic realities shape religious experiences, images, and practices at their core, even though this is often overlooked. Likewise, religion influences economics, providing both support and critique. The concentration on religion and economic justice is designed to investigate these interrelations and to address both the problems and the potential emerging at the intersection of religion and economics. Aspects include growing inequality as well as alternatives such as participatory economies and economic democracy, keeping in mind the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, ecology, and class.

Learning Goals

- Understand and investigate how economics, theology, and religion shape and influence each other.
- Engage economic thought and practice in relation to the history of Christian and other faith traditions in terms of similarities and differences.
- Analyze situations of economic injustice and develop viable alternatives informed by faith traditions in the context of the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

Current Steering Committee

Stacey Floyd-Thomas (Co-Convener), Joerg Rieger (Co-Convener), Juan Floyd-Thomas, Fernando Segovia, Melissa Snarr

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Required Courses

None

Additional Requirements

None

Praxis Options

Students are encouraged to pursue a field education internship. The Wendland-Cook Program in Religion and Justice at VDS offers and sponsors field education placements related to matters of economic justice. Students may also satisfy this requirement with a designated theory-praxis course.

Religion, Gender, and Sexuality (RGS)

This concentration allows students to explore the complex intellectual, historical, and practical interactions between religion, gender, and sexuality.

Learning Goals

To prepare students with the intellectual and practical tools to work effectively on these issues with communities of faith.

Steering Committee

Ellen Armour (Convener), Stephanie Budwey, Yara González-Justiniano, Phillis Sheppard, Annalisa Azzoni.

Required Courses

None. We will designate each semester specific courses that will count toward the concentration. Students may, under special circumstances and with the instructor's and Convener's permission, petition to count one course toward the Concentration that is not so designated in YES. The student will have to show how they will focus their graded work on religion, gender, and sexuality.

Praxis Options

For MDiv students, field ed. For MTS students, field ed is one option, but other options could include other kinds of practice (an art exhibit or musical performance based on religion, gender, sexuality, a curated archive of historical or contemporary resources, etc.) that are integrated in to one of the designated courses. These must be approved both by the Concentration Convener and the course professor.

Spirituality and Social Activism (SSA)

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The Spirituality and Social Activism concentration gives students interdisciplinary knowledge for integrating spirituality with vocations of social activism. Students will be exposed to the historical and contemporary contexts in which spirituality and activism have helped generate movements for justice in the academy, religious communities, and society.

Learning Goals

- Reflect ethically, biblically, and pastorally on the practice of activism in light of spirituality
- Understanding the practice of spirituality as an integral aspect for sustained commitment to social activism
- Developing capacity in creating public spaces for the integration of spirituality in activism

Current Steering Committee

Phillis Sheppard (Convener), Arelis Benitez, Herbert Marbury, Forrest Harris, Lisa Thompson

Required Courses:

One of the following:

- DIV 5224: Liberation and Spirituality (Harris)
- DIV 7080: Spirituality and Social Activism (Sheppard)
- DIV 6574 Bible and Black Political Theology (Marbury)
- DIV 7084 Nonviolence in Theory and Practice

Reading courses comprised of 3 or more students can count toward the concentration, with permission of the Concentration Convener.

Additional Requirements

None

Praxis Options

Students may:

- Choose an additional Field Education option.
- Develop VDS specific Forums on Spirituality and Social Activism as part of the assignment/work of a course. Prior approval by the Convener and professor required.
- Work with a professor to construct a reading course whereby their final assignment is a public activism project that includes a spirituality component.

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