Religion and Public Health
Spring Semester, 2009
GMS MA722 A1

Faculty: Lance D. Laird, Th.D.
Office: 801 Albany St., Suite 319
Office Hours: Mon. 11-12 or by appointment
Phone: 617-414-3660
Email: lance.laird@bmc.org

This course will explore multiple dimensions of the relationship between religion and health in the context of public health projects. We will critically examine research literature on “religion, spirituality, and health” to understand the problems of definition and the various proposed conceptual links between these fields of human experience. We will explore the historical development of medicine and public health in the context of religious communities and missionary outreach. Students will consider examples of faith-based public health organizations and current research on “religious health assets,” both locally and internationally. We will consider the role of public health efforts in proselytizing for particular religious, political, economic, and scientific values.

Course Materials: The following required book is available through the bookstore for purchase. All other readings will be made available electronically through CourseInfo.


### COURSE SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 1: Introduction to the Course</th>
<th>January 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Introduce course; Discuss personal attitudes and experience with religion and healing; Introduce the danger and promise of “religion” in public health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Begin personal reflection essay (in-class exercise)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 2: Religion, Spirituality and Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon., Jan. 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY* |

*WED. ONLY*

| Goals                             | Begin review of current research on religion, spirituality, and medicine; Discuss models of religion, science, and efficacy involved in these studies. |


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 3: Jan 26 &amp; 28</th>
<th>Religion, Spirituality, and Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Goals | Discuss critiques and revisions of RSH research;  
Introduce medical and religious pluralism. |


| Assignment | Survey faith-based health organization websites of interest |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 4: Feb 2 &amp; 4</th>
<th>Christian missions and healing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Goals | Introduce history of Christian medical missions;  
Discuss paradigm shifts. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Choose faith-based health organization; submit brief, one-page prospectus on Wed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 5: Feb 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Christian missions and healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>1. Explore changes in Christian medical missions; 2. Introduce case study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Background research for faith-based organization study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| WEEK 6: Feb 17 & 18* | Global health and “mission”  
*NOTE: TU/WED |
<p>| Goals                | Examine case study of Christian organization in international health; Begin discussion of how “secular” public health intersects with religious... |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Required Readings** | M) Case study materials on World Vision (TBA)  
M) Review website for World Vision: World Vision  
[http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/ways-we-help-health](http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/ways-we-help-health)  
W) Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* |
| **Assignment** | Draft interview protocol; review with instructor |
| **WEEK 7: Feb 23 & 25** | Introducing public health |
| **Goals** | Discuss historical development of public health field  
Identify major concerns of public health work |
| **Assignment** | Arrange interviews |
| **WEEK 8: March 2 & 4** | Religion, discrimination, and health |
| **Goals** | Introduce discrimination as a health issue;  
Discuss effects of racism and Islamophobia. |
Recommended Readings |  
--- |  
Townes, ch. 4  
Surgeon General’s Reports on Health Disparities:  
http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/index.html  
Assignment | Note reflections, develop critical questions at mid-point of course  
BUMC SPRING RECESS | NO CLASS March 7-15  
WEEK 9: March 16 & 18 | Religious Health Assets  
Goals | Introduce African Religious Health Assets Programme;  
Discuss assets-based development;  
Explore “religious health assets” model  
W) ARHAP, Appreciating Assets, chs. 3-4 (Case Studies of Zambia and Lesotho), pp. 62-122.  
Assignment | Begin conducting interviews  
WEEK 10: March 23 & 25 | Faith-based public health organizations  
Goals | Continue discussion of ARHAP
### Required Readings


### Assignment

**Conduct interviews**

### WEEK 11: Mar 30 & Apr 1

**Faith-based public health organizations**

**Goals**

Begin examining faith-based public health projects in the US; 
Discuss the challenges and opportunities, in light of the ARHAP model

### Required Readings


### Recommended Readings


### Assignment

**Conduct interviews**

### WEEK 12: April 6 & 8

**Faith-based public health organizations:**
### Goals

Examine church and organizational responses to HIV/AIDS in African-American contexts.

### Required Readings

- **M)** Townes, chs. 6 & 7, pp. 121-167
- **W)** Balm in Gilead website: [http://www.balmingilead.org/home.asp](http://www.balmingilead.org/home.asp)

### Assignment

Report summary interviews in class

### WEEK 13: April 13 & 15

**Islam and public health efforts**

**Goals**

Examine debates over the use of religion in public health initiatives; Discuss role of faith-based clinics for religious minority communities.

### Required Readings

- **W)** Muslim clinic Websites

### Recommended Readings


### Assignment

Write research paper

### WEEK 14: April 22 & 23*

**Case study and Conclusions**

**Goals**

Examine case study of Thai Buddhist response to HIV/AIDS; Evaluate the intersection of religion, medicine, and public health.

### Required Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Prepare presentation and draft paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 15: April 27 &amp; 29</td>
<td>Presentations and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Present student research for discussion; Review and integrate course material; Evaluate learning through reflection on the course and personal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>M) Student presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W) Discuss personal reflection essays; evaluate the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Personal reflection essay due Wed. in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAM WEEK:</td>
<td>FINAL PAPERS DUE by 5 PM on WED., MAY 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Requirements

The format of the course will consist of discussion, commentaries, and occasional lectures. Students will participate in leading a critical discussion of the required readings for each class session. Guests or the instructor will lecture or provide formal commentaries on student \textit{précis's} for a portion of each class period, as appropriate.

1) \textbf{Attendance and Prepared Participation: up to 20 grade points.}

The class will be conducted in a small-group discussion format. Your presence, prepared participation, and engagement in these discussions are essential to your own learning and to that of the group as a whole. Therefore, a fifth of the grade will be divided between these two components.

2) \textbf{Discussion Leading: up to 10 grade points}

Students will facilitate the discussion of required (and recommended) readings during up to four class periods, in consultation with the instructor. Discussion facilitators will draw on their own readings of the materials and on the \textit{précis} sent to them by their classmates.

3) \textbf{Short assignments: up to 40 grade points.}

\textit{Eight short writing assignments (five points each)}

Each student will be expected to write a brief \textit{précis}—a summary of critical thoughts that arise during their reading—about several or all of the required readings for eight of the fourteen weeks in which there are assigned texts. Please note that case study/website material does not apply. These assignments are not to exceed 600 words, and must be emailed to the instructor and to the discussion leader by \textit{5:00 pm the day before class}. These \textit{précis} will be used to organize the discussion for that week’s class.

Each of these assignments will count for up to five points of the student’s grade. Late assignments will be docked a point for each hour they are late. Assignments submitted after the date due will not be accepted. Please plan ahead, so that you have an opportunity to complete the required number of submissions. There will be no make-up assignments.

The student is free to choose the class sessions for which s/he will not turn in a \textit{précis}.

4) \textbf{Case Study Paper (up to 30 grade points)}

The case study project provides students with an opportunity to explore the links between religion, spirituality, and public health initiatives in their own area of interest by conducting research and exploratory interviews with members of a faith-based health organization. Each student will research web-based, print, and visual media associated with a faith-based organization (either local or with easy access for telephone/email/Skype interviewing). Students will design an interview protocol and conduct interviews with at least two staff persons (present or former) with field experience in the organization. We will utilize the model of appreciative inquiry as we attempt to discern the intersections of “religion, spirituality, and healing” in the organization, its current and past challenges and opportunities, and to assess the “value added” to the health services by the faith-based nature of the organization. The course schedule provides a schedule of “assignments” that require you to develop the project in stages, each of which we will discuss in class.

Students will integrate an analysis of the interview data, background research, and the course material in a creative \textit{presentation} of their findings, which will take place on \textbf{Monday, April 27}. 
Each student will submit a critical essay based on their research, incorporating peer and faculty feedback on the presentation. The essay should demonstrate the integration of key concepts, approaches, and comparative material from the course. Papers should be no less than 5,250 words (ca. 15 pages) and no more than 8,750 words (ca. 25 pages), not including references. The final paper is due on Wednesday, May 6 at 5 pm. Please submit an electronic copy to the Dropbox on Courseinfo; email a second copy directly to the instructor, and retain a hard copy for your records.

5) Media Watch journal (recommended)
Each student is requested to monitor selected media outlets for current news stories related to the topic of religion and public health. Students may post articles, commentary and links to the stories on the Courseinfo discussion board each week. Each student should also read and comment on at least one other student’s post during the week. This is an opportunity to improve participation, practice critical reading, and integration. Participation in this aspect of the course will not only make it more enjoyable and practical for us all, but it may prove helpful in borderline grading decisions.

6) Personal reflection essay on religion and healing (ungraded)
Students are required to write a brief 500-1000 word personal reflection (ca. 2-4 pages) on the course material and its impact on their own sense of how religion and spirituality influence their understanding of illness, healing, and health care. These should be submitted to the instructor by the final class period in Week 15. Though ungraded, they provide an opportunity to demonstrate engagement and participation in the course, and integration of the material for oneself.