

I. Course Description

Through an immersive experience on the campus of MTSO students are invited to reflect on the relation of theology, ecology and their engagement with theological education. Students are encouraged to explore and construct new relationships with food, land, and community. This course serves as the foundational course for all masters degrees, introducing students to MTSO's core values of justice, sustainability, and generativity.

II. Course Modality

Hyflex synchronous – Students attend a one week intensive with class sessions in person or online. There will be reading prior to the first class meeting and exercises to complete after the one week intensive. Students who attend fully online will have online work that replaces site visits that in-person students will complete during the intensive week. Additional online lessons or activities will allow online and in-person students to meet and complete online group work. Students are expected to complete course readings prior to class meeting. Assignment due dates are below with the the final paper to be submitted on October 20, 2024.

The intensive will meet from 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 (all times EDT) pm Monday through Friday during the intensive week. The instructor will be present in the classroom.

III. Course Objectives

At the end of this course, learners should be able to:

1. articulate a foundational understanding of the practices of intersectional ecological theology.
2. understand the sustainable commitments within the MTSO mission
3. engage basic ecological theological concepts as foundations for resilient communities

IV. Contribution to MTSO's Educational Mission and Degree Outcomes

This course offers an early introduction to the MTSO mission and vision. It is a required course for all entering students in all master's degrees.

Specific Degree Outcomes

MDiv – Exercise leadership through contextually grounded practices of worship, theological reflection, and missional and prophetic witness that promote personal wholeness, faithful and hospitable community, and sustainable justice.

MAPT – The MAPT recognizes the imperative of social justice and equips students to engage with pressing contemporary issues. Graduates will be able to critically analyze and respond to issues at the intersection of the church, academia, and civil society.

MASJ – Develop a theoretical and practical framework of social justice informed by interreligious theologies, moral systems, and sacred texts that is capable of guiding activism, advocacy, and/or community organizing.

MTS – Engage in creative and critical reflection on the contemporary world from the perspective of a theological discipline.

Connections the course has to other MTSO courses

The course will introduce the work of several MTSO faculty as they reflect on the mission of the institution and their understanding of their discipline within the curriculum

V. Textbooks

Required Texts (*none*)

Selected readings will be posted on Populi prior to class, including chapters or essays from the following texts and writers. Including

Carter, Christopher. *The Spirit of Soul Food: Race, Faith, and Food Justice*. University of Illinois Press, 2021.

Clingerman, Forrest. "The Intimate Distance of Herons: Theological Travels through Nature, Place, and Migration" *Ethic, Place, and Environment: A Journal of Philosophy and Geography*. 11:3,313-325 To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/13668790802559718

Harris, Melanie. *EcoWomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*. Orbis Books, 2017.

Heinrichs, Steve, ed. *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*. Herald Press, 2013.

Readings selected from this book

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2015.

Kimmerer readings are from articles related to above book.

VI. Course Requirements and Assessment of Student Learning

1. All readings will be posted on Populi and must be completed prior to the class session they are assigned.
2. Baseline Reflective Exercise completed and turned in on day assigned (25 points, course objective 2)
3. All students are to visit a farmer's (or community) market either prior to or within two weeks after the intensive week. Students will provide a short description (150-300 words) to a Populi discussion section on local markets. (25 points, course objective 1)
4. Online Students – An additional assignment for individuals who take the course fully online as an alternative to the on-site work of in-person students. Online students should explore the ecological challenges in their local region. This could include elements of the food system under stress and possible solutions. Healthy responses might include small urban and rural farms/gardens, farmer's markets, regional plans for sustainability, organizations that support resilient communities through food sovereignty, and other elements discovered by students in their regions. IN addition, students might discover particular local/regional challenges in water, air, climate, and other local public health issues related to the environment. Please be open to what serves as a foundation for an eco-theological engagement with your particular region.

Students are asked to research sustainable initiatives in their region. The core question is where do you discover communities building ecologically resilient responses to regional (and possibly global) ecological challenges The purpose is to discover a diversity of people and places working for land renewal, land justice, air quality, water quality, rights of nature, climate chaos, and ecological renewal/resilience.

Project findings will be posted on Populi in a discussion named "local challenges to thriving for all". Project findings for the Wednesday afternoon section for remote students will be posted on Populi in a discussion named "local responses for resilience and health". Additional explanation will be posted on Populi and offered in the first class meeting. The online work offers an opportunity for students to discover local sustainable and generative initiatives. This online work is due to be posted by Sunday,

August 31, 2025. Please post all that you find interesting. 3 challenges/initiatives for each discussion is the minimum requirement.

In-person students earn these points by engaging the on-site exercises for this course on Monday and Wednesday. However, everyone should feel free to participate in this online discussion.

(50 points, course objective 1)

5. Final Paper – All Students: The final paper for this course is a reflective academic essay completed in two steps. A draft of your paper should be turned in to Populi by Friday, September 12. We will do our best to return your paper with comments by Sunday, September 28. (50 points)

Your final paper (2400 – 3000 words, double spaced) is due on Sunday, October 26. Final papers must be turned in through Populi. (100 points, course objectives 1 and 3).

350 total points are available for the course, a passing grade requires successful submission of all required assignments (above) and earning at least 225 points. Failure to submit a required assignment may result in failure of the course.

VII. Course Schedule and Format

This schedule provides the general timing of topics, readings, and assignment due dates. The online learning agenda found on Populi is always the most current and may vary from the schedule in this syllabus. This course includes outside site visits and service. These times and days may change in response to weather and the availability of our hosts.

Monday 8/18 (9 am to 4 pm)

Morning – Introduction to syllabus, course schedule, and each other
Baseline Reflective Exercise

Afternoon – MTSO farm tour and discussion of sustainable farm practices
(online students excused after in class presentation by steward and guests) ~ 3 pm

Online students will research local/regional ecological challenges

Tuesday 8/19 (9 am to 4 pm)

Morning – Wrestling with sacred texts
Clingerman article
Research tools for Master’s Students – Librarian Dr. Elonda Clay

Afternoon – Faculty Guest presentation (Dean Bridgeman) followed by discussion - 1 pm
Dean Bridgeman – 1 pm
Dr. Schellenberg – 2:45 pm

Wednesday 8/20 (9 am to 4 pm)

Morning - Carter reading and Harris reading
Dr. Carter 10:00 am - Zoom

Afternoon – Meet Tim Bachelor (Land Steward) and team, riparian presentation by Dr. Jay Dorsey (OSU)
Online Students research sustainability projects engaging water, air, forest, desert, prairie, land, soil, heat, fire and other resilience projects in their local/regional contexts

(online students excused after in class presentation by steward and guests)

Online students will research local/regional ecological resilience organizations and responses

Thursday 8/21 (9 am to 4 pm)

Morning – Woodley and Myers essays from *Buffalo Shout*

Ecological hermeneutics (Indigenous, Watershed, Laudato Si)

Afternoon – Dr. Stroud and Dr. Baek - 1:15 pm

Dr. Numrich - 3 pm

Friday 8/22 (9 am to 4 pm)

Morning – Kimmerer readings

Possible guest time along with discussion of indigenous voices

Afternoon – Final Discussion and defining the final project

VIII. MTSO Standard Syllabus Statements

Carefully review these policies and refer to the MTSO Academic Catalog / Student Handbook for additional details.

All students in every degree program are expected to become familiar with MTSO policies as listed in the most current MTSO Academic Catalog and Student Handbook, connected here. The policies listed below are highlighted here because of their importance to our academic lives together.

https://www.mtso.edu/site/assets/files/2103/academic_catalog_2023-24.pdf

Class Attendance

Regular attendance is expected in all classes. Students attending online are required to show their faces the entire class time in order to be considered present. You are expected to attend class as you would in a face-to-face classroom (not driving, cooking, folding clothes, etc.). During asynchronous class time, faculty will monitor time used in posting and responding to colleagues to track your participation.

An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will fail a course if they are absent for 25% of the class sessions (including online meetings).

Electronic Devices

As an institution dedicated to the advancement of learning, MTSO is firmly committed to a philosophy of mutual respect. When use of electronic devices violates that respect instructors have the right to impose appropriate grading penalties. In many courses, electronic devices are integral to learning, especially for students attending online. However, the use of such devices should be restricted to course-related purposes. General browsing of the Internet or engaging in email or social networks during class time is inappropriate. Unless there is an emergency requiring immediate attention, phone calls should be returned during classroom breaks (even if you're at home) in an area that is not disruptive to others.

Title IX/504 ADA Statement

MTSO is committed to providing a workplace and educational environment that are free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. To ensure compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, and to affirm its commitment to promoting the goals of fairness and equity, MTSO has developed internal policies and procedures that provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process for those

involved in an allegation of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected class status, and for allegations of retaliation. More information about the University's policy and grievance processes can be found at <https://www.mtso.edu/about-mtso/notice-nondiscrimination/>. Reports of misconduct can be made to the Title IX/504/ADA Coordinator, Kathy Dickson, kdickson@mtso.edu.

ADA/Disability Services

MTSO supports all students by encouraging self-advocacy and empowering students to help themselves, while providing a safe environment in which to do so. We commit to an inclusive learning environment and will support reasonable, documented requests for accommodations and learning adaptations. To request a reasonable accommodation, contact the Director of Student Services, Bhoke Kirigiti, at bkirigiti@mtso.edu.

Documenting written work at MTSO

Written work submitted for courses at MTSO must conform to the Note-Bibliography style in the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) (18th edition). All sources used in completing an assignment must be properly cited. This includes AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly. For guidance on formatting citations and a helpful discussion of how to avoid academic misconduct, see the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) website at <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/index.html>. Students who commit academic misconduct will be subject to penalties up to and including expulsion from the Institution.

Plagiarism is not merely a disciplinary matter. Avoiding plagiarism ensures that all voices are identified in written and oral work. Faculty want to hear the student's voice and also need to distinguish it from other voices the student incorporates into a paper or presentation. All other voices, including those generated by artificial intelligence, must be properly credited whether the student is replicating exact phrasing or paraphrasing in the student's own words.

Technology Requirements

If you do not already have one, you are required to obtain a personal library card in your local library system and to create your own accounts for free digital media services like [Libby](#), [Kanopy](#), and [Hoopla](#) in order to access various free resources that may be assigned for your coursework.