

PT 615 – Prophetic Hope and Creative Practice

Spring 2025, Tuesdays 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm EST

with weekly asynchronous work online

Dr. Tim Van Meter, G 246 (office)

740.362.3437 - tvanmeter@mtso.edu

I. Course Description

Contemporary human cultures rely on systems that exploit our earth and diminish its capacity to sustain life. Many people find it increasingly difficult to articulate hope or maintain a vision for a future in which all creatures can thrive on our abundant earth. This course engages the creative work of poets, artists, musicians, and filmmakers as spiritual practices supporting communities in the midst of ecological, economic, political, and cultural challenges. Students will explore theology and the arts as sources for articulating hope, constructing resilient communities, and renewing heart and spirit.

II. Course Objectives

As a result of successfully completing this course students should be able to:

- . 1) articulate a practical theology for hope and creative action
- . 2) explore creative practices for teaching hope in the midst of ecological, economic, and political challenges
- . 3) envision a teaching event or ongoing creative practice embodying hope

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

This course fulfills the spirituality requirement for the M.Div. It is also a course supporting the Ecology and Justice specialization for M.Div. and MAPT degrees.

Specific Degree Outcomes – MDiv & MASJ

- 1) Develop a contextual theology toward hope
- 2) Engage with artists, poets, writers and practices for sustaining vocation
- 3) Recognize the importance of theology, beauty, and spirituality for building and sustaining community

Aspects of the MTSO mission and/or MTSO's general theological curriculum

This course supports MTSO's commitment to sustainable justice for people, communities, fellow creatures, and world.

IV. Textbooks

Required Texts

Brueggemann, Walter. *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.

Rukeyser, Muriel. *The Life of Poetry*. Paris Press, 1996.

Smith, Luther. *Hope Is Here!: Spiritual Practices for Pursuing Justice and Beloved Community*. Westminster John Knox, 2023.

Texts for final project (Choose 1)

Brown, William P. *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature*. Eerdmann's, 2014.

Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower & Parable of the Talents*. Latest editions Grand Central publishing, 2023.

Chambers, Becky. *A Psalm for the Wild Built & A Prayer for the Crown Shy* (Monk and Robot two book series). Tor Books, 2021, 2022.

Powers, Richard. *The Overstory*. W.W. Norton, 2019.

OR

Powers, Richard. *Playground: A Novel*. W. W. Norton, 2024.

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Optional Texts (Poets, Artists, etc. partial list in document on Populi)

V. Course Requirements and Assessment of Student Learning

This course will be built by all participants over the course of the semester. Each person will need to identify a poet and an artist for each section of the course (Lament, Reality, Hope). You might choose a single poet and artist for the entire course or change as we change our four-week focus. The instructor's expectation is that you will read poetry and look at art as an element of your daily spiritual practices for the entire semester. The best way to engage the poets and artists is to read a poem or short passage of a longer work every day and spend a significant time with a single artistic piece. I strongly suggest that each person take some time to reflect, write, and pray or meditate to discover what insights arise through the piece or poem. Take this course as an opportunity to slow your pace for a time each day and learn with a poet and artist to shift your way of seeing the world.

Building this course will require putting forward our best collaborative work. It also requires offering each other a significant amount of grace while maintaining our commitment to engaged learning. We will be using Populi and Zoom as our primary tools.

- 1) Online Reflective Posts on Found Artifacts (6 key pieces)** Each person will be responsible for posting ecological art, short film, poem, essays discovered in their reading and reflections during the semester. One poem and one art piece for each section (lament, reality, hope). Include a short written reflection on your post to spark responses from your classmates.

These postings are different than what you will present in your final reflection for the course.

Please post poem or artistic piece by Friday at 5 pm in the Populi discussion area for Reflective Posts.

In addition to posting a link to art, poetry, film, etc. you are expected to respond to others' postings in the discussion section with a comment of at least 50 words.

On the weeks you are not posting a central piece for reflection you will respond to 2-3 posts by others with comments of at least 50 words in each comment.

Comments on posts by others are to be completed by Tuesdays at 4 pm each week

- 2) Presentations for each section (Lament, Reality, Hope)** (30% of final grade)

In the syllabus you will see concluding presentations for each section (Lament, Reality, Hope)

These are to be cumulative reflections on the central theme for that section of the syllabus. You will need to find contributions (poetry, art piece, short film, etc.) expressing the theme for that presentation (Lament, Reality, Hope).

Be ready to read, show or otherwise present on the designated day. Please be prepared in case you are called on to present on the designated class meeting. These presentations will be strictly timed with a 5 minute limit.

Everyone is required to present in class, the presentations will be recorded for my evaluation, they may be posted to Populi for this course for class members to view.

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3) Final Paper or Project: - (Due May 13 [seniors] or May 30 [all others in course]) (30% of final grade)

Your final paper or project is to construct a theological/philosophical/aesthetic (optional frames, not all required) foundation for resilience and/or hope. Please choose a theologian, philosopher, or novelist who works with ecological and/or justice ideas within their work. These thinkers can be Christian, Buddhist, Humanist, agnostic, atheist but must take seriously the work of resilience and justice within their ideas. If you choose a thinker that only peripherally engages ecology, you will need to bring ecological justice into the discussion with other sources. Place this theorist in conversation with the artists, poets, etc. you worked with and resonated within this course. Develop a 12-15 page paper (2400-3000 words) constructive vision for offering hope or a renewed vision of resilience. (easy right?)

An alternative project would be to develop your theological paper from which you construct a retreat or curriculum that explores these themes. This retreat or curriculum must demonstrate the rigor of the paper detailed above.

Another alternate final project is to offer your own art as an element of the final. This will require all the work detailed in the first paragraph plus creating art which illustrates your theological/philosophical construction of hope. Any project requiring moving earth or construction worthy of Goldsworthy, Calder, Walker, Lin, Hull, etc. may be presented in a series of sketches.

4) Discussion and Class Participation will be a central part of this course. Students are expected to attend each synchronous session having completed all of the assigned reading and ready to interact in an informed and helpful manner. Students are expected to complete all work in a timely fashion as detailed in this syllabus (15% of final grade).

VI. Course Schedule and Format

Course Schedule of Synchronous Meetings

1/28 – Introduction and Overview

2/4 – Lament and the Practice of Truth

2/11 – Learning Lament as Resistance to Optimism

(Complete Brueggemann)

2/18 – Resting in Grief

2/25 – Lament and Grief – Poetry, Essays, Reflections (Presentations)

3/4 – Seeing and Holding Reality against Artifices of Illusion

3/11 – Remembering Beauty

(Complete Rukeyser reading)

3/18 – Spring Break

3/28 – Constructing Vision for the Possible

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4/1 -Seeking Prophetic Vision – Poetry, Essays, Reflections (Reality Presentations)

4/8 - Hope in an Optimistic Age

(Complete Smith)

4/15 - Holy Week

4/22 - Visions toward Resilience

4/29 - Resilience, Hope, Joy – Dispositions for New Realities?

(additional book finished from Optional List)

5/6 - Constructing Creative Hope/Resilience – Poetry, Essays, Reflections (Presentations)

5/13 - (Hope/Resilience videos due & graduating senior final projects due)

Asynchronous online work

Tools used for asynchronous learning in this course include Zoom and Populi. You should check Populi no later than Wednesday morning for the following week's work.

Each week's asynchronous materials will be posted in the Lessons section on Populi. Primary asynchronous work will consist of viewing lectures, documentaries or other visual media, listening to podcasts, reading short articles, poetry, etc. My hope is that our asynchronous learning can enrich our knowledge about the topics shaping this course.

There is no journal requirement for this course. However, I strongly encourage each student to have a place for written reflections. You may want a notebook set aside for the course or you may use a journal app for your preferred device.

Final papers and/or projects are to be turned in through the assignments area on Populi. Word docs are the preferred written media. Links to other types of media should be indicated in the comments section under the final assignment.

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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_2024-25_web.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. It is permissible to use such tools to identify and correct grammatical errors; however, students must indicate in a citation how these tools were used and retain a version of the document that contains the student's original, uncorrected writing. Instructors may ask students to submit this uncorrected document together with the final version.

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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.