RS-672: TACKLING THE ISSUE: RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MAINLINE DENOMINATIONAL CONGREGATIONS

Adair Lummis, instructor

Course Description and Objectives

“Why are there so few teens and young adults active in this congregation? What can we do?” This is a very familiar plaint in many Mainline Protestant congregations, but it is increasingly being heard in congregations of other denominations and faiths in the United States and across the world.

Nearly monthly empirical studies, position papers, articles and books are published on how young people’s religious commitments are maintained, altered or discarded as they move from childhood into adulthood. On this research front, there are study findings, insights, and advice, but no definitive answers.

In this graduate level course the reading assigned is intended to give students an overview of recognized scholars’ and youth ministers/practitioners’ theories, findings and suggestions. Additionally the instructor’s lectures will summarize the major findings of very recent empirical studies on religion and young people. Students are NOT expected to read those articles that include many tables of numbers, but some of these recent articles (along with all other reading) will be available for download from the Blackboard course site under a category called “New Empirical Studies.” Such as:


The instructor hopes that over the semester students will learn to take a concept or general finding from a study done on young people of another race/ethnicity, or from another country, or in another faith community than theirs, and make comparisons to youth and religion in their own faith community here. In illustration, a university Muslim team published an article in which they first summarize empirical studies and theories on how parents influence their teenagers’ faith commitments in predominantly Christian families in the United States, before presenting these authors’ new findings on Muslim parents and young people in Malaysia (see week 4). Reciprocally, insights from the study of Malaysian Muslim youth may suggest additional areas of importance for those studying Christian, Jewish or Muslim youth and religion in the USA.

The first half of the course is more theoretical, and the second half is more focused on applying concepts and findings to youth and young adults’ faith commitments. Each weekly lecture will be followed by discussion questions posed by the instructor. The discussion questions generally ask how applicable the weekly reading material has been for the students’ own experience and what they would add, critique, or question. Students’ weekly responses can provide a basis for developing a proposal for and completing their final essay.
Course Requirements

Weekly: Complete the assigned reading; answer one of the questions posed by the instructor with each lecture, and comment on at least one of the answers written by another student. **40% of final grade**

Mid-term proposal for final essay: 500-1000 words on your proposed subject and approach on a final paper for this course. **20% of final grade**

Final essay: About 1500 or more words (15 pages double-spaced) on what you see or propose for the future of young people’s involvement in your congregation, teenage or young adult group, denomination, or other faith community -- AND WHY (using your scholarly reflections, assigned readings, interviews, insights, and hopes.) **40% of final grade**

Course Starts Tuesday, January 20, 2015

Weekly reading will usually include a lecture of several pages and assigned reading. The reading in forthcoming weeks is primarily to gain understanding of themes and trends (not historical or statistical details)

WEEK 1: Introduction to Religious Views and Participation of Young People

1. Reading: Only the on-line lecture introduction
2. Students: Introduce themselves to the class, and give some information about their backgrounds, and what their particular interests are in this course or for careers.

COURSE SECTION I: THEORIES ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND RELIGION

WEEK 2: From Silent to Millennial and Further: Generational Effects on Beliefs


WEEK 3: Religious Involvement of the Boomer, X, Y and Tinkerer “Generations”


* Weekly participation on the discussion course site is expected. **Missing more than two weekly discussion sessions is likely to lower your final grade by 10%**


### WEEK 4: Parental Behavior and Young People’s Religious Involvement


Lecture will summarize the following recent articles and others. “*New Empirical Studies*” listed here and elsewhere are not required reading.

**New Empirical Studies**


### WEEK 5: Importance of the Teenage Years in Faith Formation


**Other Empirical Studies**

WEEK 6: Importance of the College Years in Faith Stability and Change


Empirical Studies

WEEK 7: Seeking a Spiritual Identity and a Faith Community

3. Mike Hayes, Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20’s and 30’s (New York, Paulist Press, 2007), Chapter 1, “Identifying Young Adults: Would you know a young adult if you fell over one in the aisle?” pp. 3-24.

WEEK 8: Catch up reading week, and proposal

There will be more information about the final essay. No other reading or web posting is required. Instead, students should ensure that their 500+ word proposal for their final essay is emailed to the instructor by the end of the week or very soon thereafter.
COURSE SECTION II: THE PRAXIS OF MINISTRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WEEK 9: Young Adults and Congregational Participation

WEEK 10: Being a Youth Minister is Risky Business
1. Mark DeVries, Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why most youth ministry doesn’t last and what your church can do about it. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2008.)
   • Chapter 8, “Aligning the Heart: The Emotionally Healthy Youth Worker”, pp.107-123.

WEEK 11: Finding a Youth Minister
Mark DeVries, op cit. (2008)
2. Chapter 7 “Searching Right: A Primer for Youth Ministry Search Teams”, pp. 90-106,
3. Chapter 10 “Architecting the Constellation: From Camp Counselor to Sustainable Leader”, pp. 140-158

WEEK 12: Congregational Case Studies and Ideas for Effective Young Adult Programs
1. Mike Hayes, Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s. (New York: Paulist Press 2007),
   • Chapter 7; “Doing Ministry: Fifteen Initial Steps in Starting a Young Adult Ministry”.
   • Chapter 8: “Resources for Building a Young Adult Ministry”, pp. 157-201.
2. Perry Chang, “Engaging Young Adults: Best Practices for Congregations..”

There will be a selection of congregations that have or are trying to have youth and young adult programs for students to choose one to read and comment on.

WEEK 13: Pulling Together as an Age-Diverse Congregation

WEEK 14: Spring Reading Week: (No Seminary classes)

WEEK 15: Summary Lecture and Final Essay No reading or web posting required of students. Final Essay is due on or before May 22, or at least by May 29.