Course Description

Can They Hear Us Now: Spirituality, New Media & the Religiously Unaffiliated
July 13-17, 2015

Elizabeth Drescher, PhD

Description:

What would Jesus tweet, post on Facebook, or pin on Pinterest? Digital social media have had a rapid and profound impact on practices of everyday living, including religion and spirituality. This course explores the influence of increasingly digitally-integrated life practices on the religious and spiritual lives of ordinary people. We will pay particular attention to how new media practices may shape the spiritualities of the growing population of “Nones”—people who answer “none” when asked with what religion they are affiliated. We will explore theologically-grounded digitally-integrated ministry approaches that enrich connections within and beyond church and other religious communities.

Texts:

Elizabeth Drescher, Tweet If You ♥ Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation (Morehouse, 2011).

Please read the above texts in advance if possible. Additional readings will be provided by the instructor before the course begins or links are provided in the course schedule below.

Requirements:

Active Participation | This is a course designed for adult learners, which assumes that everyone in the class brings experience and insight to class discussions as well as a learning ethic expressed by thoughtful reading of assigned texts, thorough and timely completion of class assignments, and respectful engagement with other learners in class discussions. It should go without saying that none of this can happen if every student is not on time and fully present for every session. [30 points]

Small Group Case Study Presentations | In the first session of class, students will form small groups (probably 3-4 depending on class size) that will be responsible for presenting original research on the lived, digitally-integrated spiritual lives of the affiliated and unaffiliated today. Student groups will identify an affiliated or
unaffiliated cohort group (these will be discussed in the first class) to research in terms of demographic profile, spiritual profile, and digitally-integrated sites of practices. On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of the course, groups will have 20 minutes to present findings and facilitated discussion. Additional guidelines will be provided in the first class. [35 points]

Final Critical Reflection Paper | Each student will complete a 2000-2500 word final critical reflection paper on engaging the spiritualities of the affiliated or unaffiliated in a digitally-integrated religious landscape. Papers should be informed by class readings and discussions as well as by one additional academic article on the topic. Additional guidelines will be provided in the first class. Papers will be due in the final class session. [35 points]

Course Schedule:

Monday, July 13 | Introduction: Feral Christians, the Free-Range Faithful, and the Rise of Liminal Religion in America

Reading:
- Elizabeth Drescher, *Tweet…*, 1-22

Discussion Questions: What role do various forms of media have in the development of the growing population of Nones? How do you see Nones drawing on media resources to support their extra-institutional spiritual lives? What role do various forms of media have in the spiritual lives of the religiously affiliated?

Tuesday, July 14 | Exploring Digitally-Integrated Spiritual and Religious Culture and Life

Reading:
- Elizabeth Drescher, *Tweet…*, 25-53

Discussion Questions: Are there areas of religion that are not prone to mediation? Are there things that are essentially or authentically “religious”? How does the mediation of religion change over time? What are the intersections of media and religion that interest you the most? How do you see spiritual life as your ministry travels through these intersections?

Wednesday, July 15 | Travels through the Digitally-Integrated Landscape

Reading:
- Drescher, *Tweet…*, 57-73
- Watch Coke’s 2014 Super Bowl Ad [available at http://tinyurl.com/SuperBowlCokeAd] and google some of the reactions to the advertisement.
Discussion Questions: What constitutes the distinctiveness of religion in America? How is this distinctiveness related to the historical roots of American religion? How is this distinctiveness expressed in digitally-integrated practice? In this religious context, how does media shape religious viewpoints and practices? Why was Coke’s 2014 Super Bowl ad so controversial in religious terms? How can these features of the American religious landscape be approached through digitally-integrated ministries?

**Small Group Presentations**

**Thursday, July 16** | Digitally-Integrated Practice with Somes and Nones

Reading:
- Drescher, *Tweet…*, 74-92; 108-119

**Small Group Presentations**

**Friday, July 17** | Digitally-Integrated Ministry in the Liminal Religious Landscape

Reading:
- Drescher, *Tweet…*, 95-107; 123-153

**Small Group Presentations**

**Critical Reflection Papers Due**