

Field Education I: Reflection for Public Ministry

Rebekah Sims
Department of English, Purdue University

Course Description

This course accompanies students' initial field placement in a congregation or nonprofit setting. The focus of this course is developing the reflective skills required for building a robust public theology that is lived out in an authentic ministry setting. Emphasis is placed on transferring *into* the course knowledge, skills, and identities from other vocational settings as well as adaptive, flexible transformation of these *and* newly gained skills from the field context into a developing integrative, public theology.

Theological reflection facilitates transfer among formation contexts. Via integration of these contexts, it connects individual development, development of corporate theology, application of theological education in a field education setting, and application of field education experiences to the theological education (seminary) setting.

We will focus on three methods of theological reflection, exploring these methods in class as ways to understand our work in field settings as theological work. We will also discuss their applications to the parish or other contextual education field sites, as part of doing theology and nurturing discipleship in community.

Theology Reflection Methods Explored (see Graham et al., 2018):

1. Theology in Action: Praxis
2. Correlation/Correlative Reflection
3. Corporate Theological Reflection

Course Format - Residential Version

This course meets once per week for two hours. Course time will involve some lecture, but will emphasize small group work and whole-class discussion. Before the semester begins, students are expected to read two books (see "Pre-Semester Preparatory Reading"); during the semester, there will be two more books as well as a variety of chapters and articles. Follow-up to class discussion may involve discussion board posts from time to time.

Course Outcomes

1. Operationalize knowledge of scripture, tradition, and reason to build a public theology of Christian life, through integrating field education site work, seminary formation, and previous education/vocational work
2. Engage *adaptive transfer* of skills & knowledges across seminary, field site, and previous life contexts to build a reflective ministerial identity
3. Engage in ongoing development of intercultural competence, with attention to IC in field education settings

Field Education Expectations:

8-10 hours per week over several days. Please see standard seminary expectations documentation.

Pre-Semester Preparatory Reading

**The reading is to be completed before the first class meeting.*

Steinke, P. L. (2006). *Healthy congregations: A systems approach* (2nd ed.). Alban Institute.

Tyler Scott, K. (2010). *Transforming leadership*. Church Pub., Inc.

Semester Reading -- Full Books

Kujawa-Holbrook, S. A. (2002). *A house of prayer for all peoples: Congregations building multiracial community*. Alban Institute.

Nieman, J. R. (2008). *Knowing the context: Frames, tools, and signs for preaching*. Fortress Press.

Semester Reading -- Chapters & Articles

Bonhoeffer, D. (1954). *Life together* (J. W. Doberstein, Trans.). Harper & Row.

Chapter 1: "Community"

Chapter 4: "Ministry"

Chapter 5: "Confession and Communion"

Cozart, S. C. (2010). When the spirit shows up: An autoethnography of spiritual reconciliation with the academy. *Educational Studies*, 46(2), 250–269.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131941003614929>

Horton, K. (1995). An autoethnography. In *Sucking at the breast of God: Women and the rhetoric of faith* [Dissertation] (pp. 2-14). University of Oregon.

Graham, E. L., Walton, H., Ward, F., & Stuerzenhofecker, K. (2018). *Theological reflection: Methods* (2nd ed.). SCM Press.

Chapter 4: "Writing the Body of Christ: Corporate Theological Reflection"

Chapter 5: "Speaking of God in Public: Correlation"

Chapter 6: "Theology-in-Action: Praxis"

Walton, H. (2014). Approaching autoethnography. In *Writing methods in theological reflection* (pp. 3–9). SCM Press.

Wigg-Stevenson, N. (2017). You Don't Look Like a Baptist Minister: An Autoethnographic Retrieval of 'Women's Experience' as an Analytic Category for Feminist Theology. *Feminist Theology*, 25(2), 182–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735016673261>

Assignments (Listed in Chronological Order)

Field Education Learning Covenant -- This is the standard agreement between a seminary student and the field site mentors about contextual education goals and responsibilities.

Brief Spiritual Autobiography -- A 4-5 page narrative writing that documents your religious identity, spiritual formation, and what key experiences led to your vocational aspirations. Many dioceses have their aspirants/postulants write a brief spiritual autobiography; if you have already done so, you may use that document. This document will form the basis for your autoethnography.

Systems Analysis: Field Education Context -- In 4-5 pages, you will complete a systems theory analysis of your contextual education site to understand the congregational dynamics and your place in the system.

Autoethnography -- An autoethnography connects the writer's personal experiences to wider cultural and social movements. This kind of writing is not an autobiography nor a narrative of your life's events. Rather, an autoethnography allows thoughtful inquiry into who we are and how we come to be a certain way. It lets us examine how the social structures, groups, and institutions that create culture shape our lives and our positions in the world. The purpose of this assignment is for you to reflect on how particular groups or social institutions have shaped who you are and your public theology.

Short Reflective Papers -- Students will complete three short reflective papers (~800 words) on specific field site experiences, applying one of the chosen theological reflection models to a site experience.

Field Education Contextual Project -- in partnership with the field site mentor, students will complete a field education project related to their individual learning goals. For example, for a preaching learning goal, the student might submit the texts and recordings of several sermons. It is important that this project involves work done authentically within your contextual education site; it should not be created for this class specifically. You and your field site mentor will determine the focus of the project.

Final Portfolio -- The final portfolio is an assessment of your entire development trajectory over the course of the semester. This cumulative project includes a reflection on your leadership development as well as revisions of the systems analysis, autoethnography, your field education contextual project. The portfolio also includes the end-of-semester field placement assessments from supervisor & lay committee.

Grading

Grading is on a total-points scale. Please see the chart below for point distribution by assignment.

Assignment	Point Value
Field Education Learning Covenant	10 (Seminary Requirement)
Participation: In-Class & Short Follow-Up Assignments	100
Brief Spiritual Autobiography	100
Systems Analysis of Field Education Context	100
Three Short Reflective Papers	90 (30 points each)
Autoethnography	150
Field Education Contextual Project	150
Final Portfolio	300

Point Distribution for Semester Grades:

A+ 990-1000 points	B+ 870-899	C+ 770-799	D 600-699
A 930-989 points	B 830-869	C 730-769	F 599 and below
A- 900-929 points	B- 800-829	C- 700-729	

Keep in mind that “A” level work involves more than simply meeting the assignment requirements. Rather, “A” work demonstrates **mastery** of the skills and concepts involved in the assignments. “B” level work demonstrates that you have a strong understanding of the skills and concepts and have met all of the assignment requirements. “C” level work indicates that you have met the requirements of the assignment and are working towards understanding the course concepts. “D” and “F” work means that you may have attempted the assignment, but that you struggled with major sections of the assignment.