SYLLABUS

YM/EM/EV 591 Theology & Principles of Dynamic Youth Ministry
Gordon-Conwell’s CUME, Fall, 2011
Tuesday Evenings: 6:30-9:45pm

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Course Focus

Youth ministry courses strive to balance passion for youth with the professional skills needed for acting as evangelist, pastor, teacher, social worker, event planner and more. It draws on sound biblical and theological principles as well as lessons from the social sciences and personal experience. Youth ministry begs a lifetime of learning and a willingness to reflect on the dynamic process of praxis, theory, and praxis. Class discussions will take note of the nature of adolescence, adolescent development, and today’s youth culture. Reference to past and current models of youth ministry will be noted—especially from student questions.

We begin this course with your life and youth ministry experience, then turn to available cultural research, understand this in the light of biblical principles, from which we attempt to help you construct your own theology, philosophy and model of youth ministry. Finally, in view of all this, we turn the spotlight on how you are seeing your present and future youth ministries.

Here is a general outline of our progression through this course:

Introductions. Who are we whom God has brought together for this project?
Brief history of adolescence, youth cultures, and youth ministry
General idea of human and adolescent development
The Ten Stages as a guideline for youth ministry
The Four Basic Questions as reflecting the spirit of youth ministry and suggesting a style
Special Issues in Youth Ministry (to be determined by you and your classmates)
Models of Youth Ministry (again according to questions and suggestions)

This course assumes your experience in youth ministry—not that someone new to this cannot profit from it. Here, at the graduate level, we will deal with the spirit and philosophy of youth ministry more than techniques and programs. The latter are important, but we’ll be more concerned with you as a total person—more with how you "come off" to young people—than what you know about youth work. But we also want you to have a strong biblical, theological, and social science understanding to support creative youth ministry in any context.

The most important things about adolescents will be learned from young people themselves—they are the "experts" on themselves and the youth culture around them. The rapidity of their personal change, and cultural changes, further justifies the nature and style of this course. You need to take our questions and suggestions to young folks themselves.
this semester. You must meet some of them to complete our assignments and the course's intent. Your skill as a listener/learner will serve you well in ministry.

Different than most seminary courses, our approach will be more general, interactive, practical, and subjective. Attempting to cover broad ranges of information and ideas, this course could be critiqued as superficial or a "tease" if it doesn't coax you into deeper, continued study, research and further training. Though not a requirement, the course works best if you are currently involved in youth ministry or at least around young people. This course is a seminar—drawing on the resources of an entire class who have actually been adolescents themselves and who have worked with youth in different ways. If YM591 is for you, ask and expect help from fellow students and your instructor. A personal time with him can help you integrate and personalize some things that might not otherwise come together for you. Studying people is holy business; it is dangerous without help from our divine Teacher.

Course Goals
Expected outcomes from this course include the following:

1. excitement about meeting and relating to young people as evidenced in class discussions and in journal
2. understanding how the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology and theology apply to youth ministry judged from discussions/journal
3. appreciation for the need of research in any kind of ministry and added skills for topical and especially community research in youth ministry as seen in discussions and in final paper
4. ability to apply understanding of various ages and stages of development to youth ministry evidenced in class discussions and final paper
5. understanding of how youth ministries may be developed and an ability to evaluate youth programs seen from discussions and final paper
6. memorization and understanding of Ten Stages and Four Basic Questions measured by pop quiz, discussions and final paper
7. increased skills in relating, listening, and communicating to young people measured by pop quiz, discussions and journal.

Required Texts
(Suggested order of reading. Read very critically. I question some of the ideas in the first two books and want you to critique. Go on to add another 300pp. or so of reading.)

**Recommended Reading**

Borgman, Dean (1997) *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 234pp. (ISBN: ISBN 1-56563-247-8) This has been the basic text for this course. It’s a little dated but still relevant. A good extra read with theological challenges. You might read, Ch. 11 first, then Ch. 5, and the Preface through Ch. 4. Then, pick and choose what you think most helpful.

Borgman, Dean (2003) *Hear My Story: Understanding the Cries of Troubled Youth*, Hendrickson, 415p. (ISBN 1-56563-489-6) Used as the text for “Ministering to Troubled Youth” and “Counseling the Adolescent,” this book is for all who care especially for youth at high risk and want to deal with the theology of intervention, suffering, violence, healing and reconciliation. It deals specifically with many forms of childhood and youthful violence to others, self-injury and suicide to self. The chapters on healthy/unhealthy growth and development as well as the chapter on sexuality go beyond similar discussions in *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough*.


David Elkind (1984, 1998) *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*. Addison Wesley, 265pp. Please read this, if you haven’t, for a new and deeper understanding of teenagers. This is truly a classic, and a text students have highly appreciated since its first edition in the mid-eighties. Above all, understand the “patchwork self”: its causes, definition, and the stress it creates.

Doug Fields (2002) *Your First Two Years of Youth Ministry*, Zondervan, 290pp. If you are just getting started in youth ministry or have become rather discouraged, this is for you. This text will give you what mine won’t—more “nuts and bolts” and getting started. Along with Ginny Olson’s *Youth Ministry Management Tools*, you will have a good tool kit for ministry.


**Course Assignments**

1. Reading. You are asked to write up Critical Reviews of Palfrey&Gasser and DeVries. A third paper will discuss ideas you’ve found in further reading. (40% of grade)

2. There will be at least two announced Quizzes on your reading and basic lecture material. (15% of grade)
3. Class Participation: Your prompt attendance for each session and your active, focused (without digital distraction) attention, questions and contribution are critically important for this class to work well. 

(15% of grade)

3. Personal Journal: 

(30% of grade)

Ch. 1 Discuss your childhood and teenage years emphasizing the major influences in your life and any most serious wounds you received. Conclude with a few paragraphs about how God is growing you these days.

Ch. 2 What are you struggling with in this class and life in general these days? How are you dialoguing or arguing with authors you’re reading. What a couple of positive highlights from our class for you so far?

Ch. 3 How do you evaluate this class negatively and positively? What is the most important thing you take from this class and how do you plan to apply this or these lessons in ministry?

Additional Bibliography

David Chow (2005) The Perfect Program and other fairy tales: Confessions of a well-intentioned youth worker, Colorado Springs, CO: Think of NavPress, 130pp. If you are discouraged, or turned of by Sustainable Youth Ministry, please rush into this book. You should find this very personal and refreshing—challenging your spiritual priorities.


Mizuko Ito, et al. (2010) Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out, MIT Press, 419pp. Researchers probe behind the stereotypes of digital youth and point to the broader structural conditions under which young people are growing up.

Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan (2009) iBrain: *Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, Harper Paperbacks, 256pp. Vorgan, a leading neuroscientist explains his belief that evolutionary transformation of the human brain has taken place in one generation. Identifying problems and challenges this poses, the authors come up with positive strategies for preserving our humanity.