Syllabus (preliminary)

I. Course Objectives - This course will provide an Introduction to Theological Studies for the Master of Arts in Religion (MAR), Master of Divinity (MDiv) and the Master of Arts in Urban Ministry (MAUM) as offered at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Hispanic Initiatives Program. Class participants will be exposed to methodologies and techniques necessary to do research, write academic papers of graduate level quality and to think theologically. This will be accomplished through:

A. Improving Organizing and Thinking Skills (Seminary goals: MDiv., 3-4, 6)
   1. Improving note-taking abilities
   2. Developing organizing and outlining abilities for writing and ministry
   3. Improving reasoning and critical thinking skills for writing
   4. Acquiring a Christian worldview

B. Discovering and applying practical research methods and sources
   (Degree goals: MDiv., 2, 4, 6-7; MAUM 1-3, 5-6)
   1. Learning how to find useful sources of information
   2. Applying research methods to understand the community and its context
   3. Applying research methods to understand the church and holistic ministry

C. Developing the ability to use libraries and information sources effectively
   (Degree goals: MDiv., 2,4,6-7; MAUM 1-3,5-6)
   1. Becoming familiar with local library resources
   2. Understanding library classification systems; use of card catalogs and on-line catalogs
   3. Understanding computer-based information sources
   4. Becoming aware of useful general and theological reference tools

D. Improving basic writing skills (Degree goals: MDiv., 3,4,6-8; MAUM, 5-6)
   1. Correctly citing sources in footnotes and bibliographies
   2. Developing paragraphs effectively and with unity and coherence
   3. Writing sentences with improved style and clarity
   4. Sharpening present grammatical usage

II. Required Textbooks


III. **Course Requirements**

A. **Attendance Policy & Class Participation (20%)** – attendance at all class sessions is critical to the learning process. Students have a half-day (1/2) unexcused absence without penalty. Lateness to either half of the class session’s count as 1/4 absence. Class participation enhances the learning process by making space for the diverse voices of knowledge and experiences of the students to become shared wisdom of the community.

B. **Reading Log (20%)** – students are responsible for the readings indicated in the syllabus. Failure to read the material will affect the student’s comprehension of the lectures and capacity to participate during class sessions. The attached reading log must be submitted with the final paper. Please note that class lectures do not summarize or review the readings due. Rather, they assume that the reading has been done and build on it.

*Students should read at least the following before May 20:*
- *How to Think Theologically*
- Chapters s. 1,4,7,8,14,15,17,18 of the Vyhmeister book
- Chpts. 1, 3 of the Bradford book

C. **Research Paper (60%)** - Students will write a 10-15 page research paper. The paper is to include:

1. **Thesis Statement** - state the issue and what you will do with it in the paper (e.g., compare and contrast, take a position, etc.)

2. **Biblical and Theological Analysis** - parallels, contrasts, etc., from the Scriptures that may speak to the issue. Basic exegetical considerations (including historical, linguistic, theological analysis using key word studies, commentaries, etc.), must be incorporated.

3. **Historical Analysis** - what is the history of the issue? What are the historical factors that have contributed to the issue becoming what it is today in the community? Has the Church (local and global) historically dealt with the issue? If so, how? Has the Church been effective in its dealing with the issue? What models are/are not useful for today?
4. **Social analysis** - This involves doing qualitative and quantitative research. What does the issue look like today? Compare the issue at the state and/or national levels. How are various demographic groups being impacted by this issue? What is a contemporary understanding(s) of the issue both, in the local context, and in US society at large. How is the issue perceived in the community? What are the various ways in which folks in the community attempt to address or deal with the issue?

5. **Annotated Bibliography** - a minimum of ten (10) sources. At least five (5) of these should be non-reference texts on the issue. While there is no minimal amount required, attention should be paid to the use of primary sources. On-line, open-source reference tools are not to be included in the bibliography.

**NOTE**: The student may want to submit a research paper which he/she is writing for another course at the seminary. However, the paper the student turns in for this class **must** conform to the guidelines stipulated in this course.

### D. Grading scale and Plagiarism

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**Violations of Academic Integrity**

The seminary considers all breaches of personal and academic integrity to be serious offenses. As such, the seminary has zero tolerance for such behaviors.

**Cheating** involves, but is not limited to, the use of unauthorized sources of information during an examination. **Duplication of course requirements** involves the submission of the same (or substantially same) work for credit in two or more courses without the knowledge and consent of the instructor. *(See Duplication of Course Requirements)*

**Plagiarism** involves the use of another person’s distinctive ideas or words, whether published or unpublished, and representing them as one’s own instead of giving proper credit to the source.

**Overview of Class Sessions:**

- Syllabus review
- What is research?
- Biblical Basis for Theological Research
- How to Think Theologically
  - Researching and Writing as a Holistic Being
  - Researching and Writing in the Context of One’s Calling
The Theological Researcher as Writer:
  The Writer as a Social Product and as an Individual
  The Writer as Interpreter
  The Writer and the Prophetic Imagination

Varieties of Research Papers

Selecting a Research Topic
Developing a Preliminary, “Working” Thesis Statement
Gathering Sources for Research
  Evaluating sources and their Authority

Notetaking Methods and Techniques

Creating an Outline
Writing with Clarity
Revising and Improving the Paper

Referencing Formats
  Footnotes, endnotes, parenthetical referencing
  Bibliography, works cited

Researching, Analyzing and Contextualizing Issues
Researching, and Analyzing the Community

Biblical Research Tools
  Understanding the Text and the Context
  Doing a Word Study
  Applying Theological Research to Contemporary Issues

Biblical Research Tools
  Commentaries
  Bible dictionaries
  Concordances