

**Elmhurst College**  
**THL 331 Christian Ethics and Human Sexuality**

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Elmhurst College  
Private liberal arts college

Class: THL 331 Christian Ethics and Human Sexuality  
27 students / 2003 / 3 hours per week / lecture

Pedagogical Reflection: This class is particularly interesting because it includes guest speakers in relationship to service learning projects. In addition, students are required to submit a final paper focused on a particular area of interest. I have found this combination of requirements is successful working with undergraduates.

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Course Meeting Times: Monday, Wednesday, Friday  
8:00 a.m. - 9:05 a.m.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course is a critical study of biblical perspectives, theological positions, ethical reasoning, church traditions, faith commitments, and empirical data that address questions of sexuality and the family. It examines key ethical variables such as human nature, God, the church, love, justice and empowerment in such major issues of sexuality as eroticism, marriage, partnering, divorce, contraception, reproduction, sexual identity, sexual harassment, health care, and public policy.

**GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS**

THL 331 *Christian Ethics and Human Sexuality* satisfies Elmhurst College's General Education Requirements for the Judeo-Christian Heritage and Religious Faith category when taken for a letter grade. It can also be used to fulfill the requirements of a theology major or minor, or as an elective. The following are the General Education objectives and methods of implementation for this course.

**Objective One:** Understanding significant aspects of the Judeo-Christian belief through the examination of classical primary texts and/or artifacts. THL 331 *Christian Ethics and Human Sexuality* will use the student's choice of an English translation of the Christian Bible as a classical, primary text, from which are drawn central theological insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition as they related to issues of sexual morality in American today.

**Objective Two:** Understanding the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage in the formation of western civilization and values. Monogamy, the nuclear family, covenantal marriage, and popularized versions of Christian love are some of the practices that have arisen under the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage and which now shape other aspects of human sexuality in American – appropriately and perhaps inappropriately. Through class textbooks, the Christian Bible, case studies, discussions, and videos, this course will investigate the theological and faith assumptions behind the sexual teachings of Christians and how these values are expressed and suppressed in modernity in such contemporary realities as romantic love, teenage pregnancies, marriage, divorce, single parent families, gay and lesbian parenting, homosexuality, reproductive technologies and abortion.

**Objective Three:** Helping students to hold in creative balance the personal importance of their own religious convictions with a respect for the spirituality of others. It is especially crucial in this class that students hold and examine their own convictions with integrity, just as they respect the spirituality of their student-neighbors in their own struggles. Such a balance is vital in class discussions on such potentially divisive issues as abortion and choice; sex education in public schools inclusive of homosexuality; reproductive technologies; and eroticism. During the course students will choose some issue of sexual morality, develop a case study for the issue, weigh the inherent values, reach a conclusion, and present their findings for classroom review, discussion, analysis and evaluation. In the process of wrestling with one's own convictions, students typically become more conscious of their own vulnerability, as well as more sensitive to the spiritual and moral struggles of others –even those who come to vastly different conclusions. The professor and students, therefore, will emphatically eschew any judgmental attitudes to convert or indoctrinate fellow travelers.

**Objective Four:** Exploring of the relationship between religious faith and secular convictions. This is a course in Christian ethics that draws on theological sources, assumptions, experiences, literature, and communities that are particular to religion, generally, and to Christianity, specifically. As an ethics course, this class will also draw on scientific evidence from both the natural and social sciences. Class activities and assignments address the common questions of humanity about sexuality thus repeatedly raising issues about both religious and secular convictions as well as scientific and humanistic concerns. This course investigates questions such as: Are patriarchy and sexism inherent in Christianity or a projection of cultural mores onto the church? What is the biblical view of homosexuality and is this the same as the Christian view of homosexuality? Is there just one truth, “the” truth, on issues of human sexuality? Are there really Christian grounds for celibacy, abstinence, and monogamy – and what about for a similar, secular sexual ethics? The class's explorations of the relationship between religious faith and secular convictions will be both deeply personally and intellectually demanding.

## **GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF OBJECTIVES**

Students will be evaluated through critical discussions, written outlines of assigned articles, oral presentations, and a final paper. Students also make first-hand reports (oral and written) in response to Service Learning Projects. End-of-semester, departmentally approved, student evaluations of the course will be tailored to assess how well course and general education objectives are met.

## **ACROSS THE CURRICULUM INITIATIVES**

*Oral communications* will be emphasized in the small, seminar-style class structure that requires that all members of the class participate in critical discussions where ideas are articulated, criticized, defended, evaluated, revised, and the student's sphere of knowledge expanded beyond their own limits.

*Writing* is linked with reading and oral communication as the primary tools to develop and elicit *critical thinking*. This course will use WAC techniques such as brief regular writing assignments to guide and develop critical thinking and class discussions.

*Critical thinking* without compassion misses or destroys much of what is genuinely human. Human beings must learn how to think empathetically about those who are unlike themselves, even hostile to themselves. The development of *humane values*, among this course's highest priorities, is facilitated through videos, class discussions, and readings of diverse persons.

This course equips students to enter and leads them into the modern cacophony of human religious diversity. It fosters *life-long learning* by allaying many of the fears human beings have of that which is unknown or different. By encouraging both a critical and empathetic understanding of others, this course finds common ground on which students can go forward together though with significantly different life experiences and faith commitments. Further, this course teaches that spiritual awareness is never fully achieved but a process of life-long nurture and study. In short, this course not only enables students to pursue a life of learning, it is a prime example.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The following are course objectives for the student beyond the General Education requirements.

1. Expand student ability to think more emphatically, especially about other person's religious beliefs and sexual morality.
2. Critical analysis of contemporary issues within the intersections of Christian ethics and human sexuality; family, marriage, abortion, divorce, sex education, etc.
3. Deepened recognition of the dignity and value of other person's religions.
4. Deepened critical awareness of and appreciation for one's own cultural, religious and sexual identity.
5. Explicit reflection on the meaning of life.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Jordan, Mark D., *The Ethics of Sex: New Dimensions to Religious Ethics*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

Nelson, James B. and Sandra P. Longfellow, eds. *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1994.

*Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV preferred - but not required)

## RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Sands, Kathleen M., *God Forbid: Religion and Sex in American Public Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Brock, Rita Nakashima and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996.

Maguire, Daniel C., *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation and Attendance	CR/NC
Theology of Sexuality / Reflection	100
Outlines (12 @ 25)	300
Service Learning Project / Participation	150
Service Learning Reflection Paper	50
Class Presentation / Panel	100
Final Paper	<u>300</u>
	1,000

<b>Grading Scale:</b>	90-100%	900-1000 points = A
	80-89%	800-899 points = B
	70-79%	700-799 points = C
	60-69%	600-699 points = D

Students who choose to take this class pass / fail must meet with the instructor within the first two weeks of class. To achieve a grade of 'pass' a student must receive an average grade of 'B'

or 80-89% in completion of all course requirements. In addition, students who take this class pass / fail are not eligible for extra credit points.

Students who attend class regularly are eligible to complete assignments for extra credit. Extra credit will be given for the following

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|--|-----------|
| Attend the Vagina Monologues and write a 2-3 page reflection paper:  | 50 points |
| Attend movie night at EC and write a 2-3 page reflection paper:<br>(sponsored by SAFE -staff and faculty for equality) | 25 points |

### **COURSE GRADING:**

Attendance: Roll is called every class session. Punctual attendance is required. Tardy arrivals are rude interruptions of your classmates and professor that detract from everyone's learning. Please be in class, on time. Videos, lectures and class discussions are essential to student learning. Absences can do nothing but diminish learning and lessen appreciation for the course. Corresponding to this, any absences or tardy arrivals can have a deleterious effect on one's final grade.

All assignments must be submitted on the date due. Failure to submit an assignment will result in a penalty of one grade lower for each day the assignment is submitted late. Thus, a grade of 'A' will be lowered to a 'B' if turned in one day late, etc.

As regular attendance is important to individual and community learning, any student that is absent from class in excess of *five* times during the semester is *not* eligible to submit extra credit assignments.

I expect you to act with integrity throughout the course. If, however, it comes to my attention that a student is not, the sanctions of the Elmhurst College's Code of Academic Honesty will be evoked. These can range from a failing grade for the assignment in which the dishonesty occurs to a failing grade for the course. Students may refer to the Elmhurst College Student Handbook for examples of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, penalties for dishonesty, more information on the Code, and their rights to due process under the Code.

Miscellaneous: Please turn off beepers and cell phones during class sessions. If you *must* make or receive a phone call please do so outside the classroom. Food is not allowed in the classroom at any time.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

Elmhurst College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability, which may have some impact on your work in this course, please contact Ms. Maureen Connolly, Learning Center, Frick Center, 630-617-3753.

Another resource available to all students is The Writing Center at Elmhurst College (<http://www.elmhurst.edu/~write> or e-mail [write@elmhurst.edu](mailto:write@elmhurst.edu) . The Writing Center offers one-on-one tutorials to help students at all levels to improve their writing. A peer tutor can help

you to draft, revise, or edit a paper for any course. The Writing Center is located in the Frick Center, Room 229 (x5689).

**ASSIGNMENTS / DUE DATES:**

**\* Additional reading assignments will be given throughout the course.**

Week One: February 3, 5, 7 Introduction to Course

Introduction to Course and Requirements  
Introduction to Service Learning Projects

**READ:** Syllabus

Week Two: February 10, 12, 14 Basic Issues within The Ethics of Sex

**READ:** Jordan, Prologue and Chapter 1, pp. 1-19  
Nelson and Longfellow, Introduction, pp. 3-8

**DUE February 14:** Outline One, Jordan

Week Three: February 17, 19, 21 Hermeneutics / The Search for Truth

**READ:** Nelson and Longfellow, Article 1, pp. 9-18  
Nelson and Longfellow, Article 2, pp. 19-27  
Jordan, Chapter Two, pp. 20-46

**DUE February 21:** Outline Two, Jordan

Week Four: February 24, 26, 28 Spirituality / Sexuality / Eroticism

**READ:** Nelson and Longfellow, Article 3, pp. 28-53  
Nelson and Longfellow, Introduction to part 2, Article 5, pp. 71-79

**DUE February 26** Theology of Sexuality

**February 28:** Outline Three, Lorde (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Five: March 3, 5, 7 Spirituality / Sexuality / Eroticism (cont.)

**READ:** Nelson and Longfellow, Article 8, pp. 91-104  
Nelson and Longfellow, Article 9, pp. 105-110  
Jordan, Chapter 3, pp. 47-75.

**DUE March 7:** Outline Four, Timmerman, (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Six: March 10, 12, 14                      Women's Experience

**READ:**            Nelson and Longfellow, Article 10, pp. 120-130  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 11, pp. 131-148  
                 Brock and Thistlethwaite, Chapters 3 and 5, ON RESERVE; LIBRARY!

**DUE March 14:** Outline Five, Brock and Thistlethwaite, Chapter 5

Week Seven: March 17, 19, 21

**NO CLASS! COMPENSETORY TIME FOR SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS**

March 24-28 **SPRING BREAK! NO CLASS!**

Week Eight: March 31, April 2, 4    Men's Experience

**READ:**            Nelson and Longfellow, Article 14, pp. 183-194  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 15, pp. 195-215

**DUE April 4:** Outline Six, Culbertson, (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Nine: April 7, 9, 11                      Singleness, Marriage, Divorce, and Celibacy

**READ:**            Nelson and Longfellow, Article 19, pp. 256-261  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 20, pp. 262-263  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 21, pp. 264-276  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 22, pp. 277-281

**DUE April 11:** Outline Seven, Lebacqz (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Ten: April 14, 16, 18                      Sexual Violence / Pornography

**READ:**            Nelson and Longfellow, Article 28, pp. 326-334  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 29, pp. 335-344  
                 Nelson and Longfellow, Article 30, pp. 345-356

**DUE April 18:** Outline Eight, Fortune (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Eleven: April 21, 23, 25      Heterosexism /  
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Concerns

**READ:** Nelson and Longfellow, Introduction, pp. 357-360  
Nelson and Longfellow, Article 31, pp. 361-373  
Nelson and Longfellow, Article 33, pp. 387-396  
Additional Reading(s)

**DUE April 25:** Outline Nine, Ruether (from Nelson and Longfellow)

Week Twelve: April 28, 30, May 2      Abortion

**READ:** Handout(s)

**DUE April 28:** Service Learning Reflection Paper

**May 2:** Outline Ten, Handout

Week Thirteen: May 5, 7, 9      Reproductive Technologies

**READ:** Handout(s)

**DUE May 9:** Outline Eleven, Handout

**May 9:** Last day to submit extra credit

Week Fourteen: May 12, 14, 16      A New Christian Ethic of Sexuality

Course Evaluation

**READ:** Jordan, Chapter Seven and Epilogue, pp. 155-175.

**DUE May 16:** Outline Twelve, Jordan



Finals Week: May 19, 21, 23

**Final Paper Due at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, May 19.**

Final paper must be submitted in person.

Late papers will not be accepted.

**End of Course ... CONGRATULATIONS!**