

Center for Chaplaincy Studies offers classes through trans-institutional partnership model

By ZACHARY MOON

One new trend in theological education is the increasing number of students interested in chaplaincy ministries. The Center for Chaplaincy Studies (CCS) began meeting the growing demands for robust chaplaincy studies resources by offering courses this fall term for affiliated schools from broad geographies and diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

While chaplains engage clinical pastoral education, much of their key learning and formation happens in the seminary classroom. Historically, many seminaries have focused on congregational leadership, but the seismic shifts in faith community dynamics, multiple religious belonging, and spiritual-but-not-religious identities demand a more realistic look at theological education itself—who are we serving and for what work are our students preparing? Increasingly, the answers to these questions relate to chaplaincy.

Merely suggesting a shift to address these emerging needs sets off tremors. Budgets and faculty are already stretched, academic programs and course offerings may not suit chaplaincy preparation, and professional networking infrastructures may not be in place. While a number of schools have sought to meet these demands at a local level, a new partnership model is galvanizing to meet these needs through trans-institutional cooperation that provides student access to faculty expertise, course offerings, and professional networking that complement and strengthen their theological education beyond what is available at their home institutions. Such models already exist in the theological education landscape—the



Hispanic Summer Program and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference being among the best known.

Inspired by these successful models of trans-institutional partnership, CCS pressure-tested the scope and scale of the work in consultation with rabbinical schools, Muslim and Buddhist chaplain programs, and Catholic and Protestant seminaries, and now offers a variety of chaplaincy classes. CCS has also engaged important stakeholders like the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Transforming Chaplaincy, the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, and a diversity of religious communities and organizations to align the education and formational goals of preparing effective and sustainable chaplains. It is working in the gaps to make connections among organizations to resource students' educational and professional needs.

Chaplaincy studies is well suited to this form of trans-institutional partnership. At many of our schools, we might have a few students interested in specific types of chaplaincy like prison ministry, hospice chaplaincy, campus ministry, or military chaplaincy. With only a few students pursuing such fields, offering advanced elective courses in these areas typically exceeds most institutions' capabilities. Through cooperation, however, students

from multiple schools are brought together, creating critical masses where none previously existed.

What students find in a CCS classroom is very unique—an instructor with deep expertise in the particular context of chaplaincy or topic area and a learning community rich with interreligious and multicultural dialogue partners. Because chaplaincy ministries operate within pluralistic contexts, bringing students together with different backgrounds, values, and belief systems is the best possible educative pathway.

Spiritual Care and LGBTQ Experiences, one of the courses CCS is offering this fall, is taught by Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders. LGBTQ folks inhabit every chaplaincy context and, in different contexts, must navigate different institutional challenges to provide effective care.

“This course helps to resource students to know and understand the many and varied situations that call for care in the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, and to develop the skills to practice care in those situations,” said Sanders. “It also helps students become attentive enough to the lives and experiences of LGBTQIA+ people to begin learning from queer and trans people in ways that shape the practice of spiritual care more broadly.”

“This course provided essential language and perspective to broaden my awareness and skills as a religious leader,” said one student in Sanders’ class. Another student learned “to become a more collaborative partner with LGBTQIA+ care seekers, cultivating rituals and

meaning-making practices that honor their lives and lived experiences.”

CCS also offers *Intercultural Spiritual Care*—a master’s level course designed to meet the needs of those who may practice the same religion but in very different ways, depending on the region in the world from which they come. According to the CCS course catalog, “... students will learn how to identify their own cultural conditioning, the value of and practices around cultural humility, and how to appreciate difference to effectuate spiritual care that is culturally sensitive.”

Often, the spiritual and emotional demands can weigh heavily on chaplains who serve others in extreme times of need. *Sustaining Practices for Ministry* is another master’s level course CCS offers that focuses on self-care practices and on “nurturing an organizational culture that positively contributes to healthy, professional, and sustainable ministry in the long-term.”

Initial affiliate partners participating in chaplaincy courses through CCS have included schools and programs of various sizes. Schools with developed programs looking to do more for their students and schools just launching their programs are finding the courses and other resources valuable in strengthening their local efforts.

If you are interested in learning more about this work, please visit the [Center for Chaplaincy Studies website](#) or email us at admin@chaplaincystudies.org



Zachary Moon serves as Professor of Theology and Psychology at Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, and he coordinates partnership development for the Center for Chaplaincy Studies.