344-01 The Challenge of Peace

John Snegocki
Course Description
This course will explore “the challenge of peace” in our contemporary world. The concept of "peace" will be viewed holistically, encompassing social justice and ecological sustainability as well as the absence of violent conflict. The interconnections of inner peace, interpersonal peace, and societal peace will be highlighted. Specific topics that will be covered in the course include analysis of current global conflicts and their historical backgrounds, religious perspectives on peacemaking and violence, the history and theory of nonviolent action as a source of social change, ecological issues, connections between current forms of economic globalization and social conflict, and others. We will also explore the possible role of spirituality, such as meditation and mindfulness practices, in the building of peace. The issues that we examine will be based in part on feedback from the class and the topics chosen for student papers and oral presentations.

Peace Studies, Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS), Latin American Studies
In addition to being the required seminar for Peace Studies minors (the minor consists of this course plus four electives), this class also fulfills the Ethics/Religion and Society 4th course elective requirement and fulfills a requirement for the Latin American Studies minor if your final project is related to Latin America.

Student Learning Outcomes
This course seeks to foster many of the desired learning outcomes of the core curriculum. A few of these include:
- becoming skilled in oral and written communication
- exploring fundamental questions of the human condition
- fostering critical thought, particularly in relation to issues of religious faith and social justice
- engaging constructively with issues of peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability
- becoming responsible global citizens

Required Texts
3) Thich Nhat Hanh, Essential Writings (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001)
4) Shane Claiborne, The Irresistible Revolution (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)
Recommended Text
This text is not required, but is available for purchase in the bookstore if you are interested: Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler, and Brett Johnson, *The Better World Handbook: Small Changes that Make a Big Difference* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2007)

Electronic readings on Canvas
There will also be numerous required readings placed on the Canvas page for this course at https://canvas.xavier.edu

Course Requirements
Attendance, careful reading of the texts, and active participation in the classroom are the fundamental course requirements, forming the basis for all others. Final grades will be determined as follows:

1. **Class participation (10%)**
   Class participation includes attendance, contribution to discussion, occasional quizzes and short writing assignments in preparation for class, and participation in various in-class activities.
   Excessive absences (4 or more) will result in a lowering of one’s grade. For each absence beginning with the 4th the maximum participation grade that one can get (out of a total of 10) will be lowered by 1 1/2 points. Eight or more absences (except in case of serious illness, etc.) may result in a failing grade for the course.

2. **Two exams (20% each) plus a shorter final exam (10%)**
   The exams will consist primarily of essay and short answer questions. A study guide will be provided for each exam.

3. **Final Project and Oral Presentation (15%)**
   You are expected to do a final project for the course. Normally this will consist of individual research papers of a minimum of eight (8) pages on a topic related to the themes of the class. Other types of projects, however, are both possible and encouraged. These could include projects that involve active community engagement, group projects, the creation of artistic works, etc., related to the themes of the class. If you have an idea that you would like to propose for a final project, feel free to speak with me about it.
   You will also be asked to consider doing a short oral presentation (15 minutes or so) on the topic of your project. Those who choose not to do an oral presentation are expected to write a slightly longer paper (minimum 10-11 pages). We will discuss these options further in class. A partial list of possible topics will be distributed in the first couple weeks of the semester. Your paper (or alternative final project) will be due at our final meeting during exam week (they will not be due at the time of your oral presentation, if any).

4. **Reflection essays/journal (15%)**
   Over the course of the semester each student is expected to write a series of at least five brief reflections (each 1½ pages or greater in length) in dialogue with the course material. While I will occasionally assign specific topics (probably twice in the semester), you will otherwise be free to write on any course-related topic that most interests you. You may, for example, reflect upon things learned, relate the course material to other coursework or experiences, express agreement or disagreement with the material (giving reasons), or note questions that the material raises for you. These reflections will be evaluated not on the basis of agreement with any particular position but rather according to the degree of active, thoughtful engagement with the
course material that they demonstrate. You should **be sure to make reference to specifics from the readings or other class material in your reflections**. These reflections can be either handwritten or typed. I will collect a reflection early in the course to give you feedback then collect them again around mid-term and at the end of the semester. The due dates will be given well in advance.

You may also be asked occasionally to participate in on-line discussion boards related to specific course topics.

**5. Songs for a Better World (5%)**

You are asked to put together a collection of at least 3 songs (more if you wish) that address issues that you think are crucial for the creation of a better world. You can either provide me with YouTube links for the songs or copy the songs to a CD or other storage device to hand in. The songs should be accompanied by a brief reflection (at least 1½ pages) on why you chose these songs, how they relate to the themes/material of the course, etc. This can be handed in at any time after the first few weeks of the semester.

**6. Out-of-class experiences (5%)**

You are asked to attend/watch **two (2) out-of-class lectures or videos** and write a brief **reflection paper (at least 1½-2 pages) on each**. These papers should include both a brief summary of the video/lecture and your reaction to it. Information concerning possible events to attend will be announced throughout the semester. A list of suggested videos that can be borrowed from the XU library or, in some cases, directly from me, as well as a listing of some possible on-line videos, will be posted on Canvas. These essays on out-of-class experiences can be turned in at any time during the semester.

There may also be some out-of-class experience options that require a larger time commitment (e.g. attending a meditation retreat, etc.) that would count for both of your required experiences. I will let you know what experiences meet this criterion when I announce them.

**Grading Scale** (as determined by Theology Department grading guidelines)

A = 94-100, A- = 92-93, B+ = 90-91, B = 87-89, B- = 84-86, C+ = 82-83, C = 79-81, C- = 76-78, D+ = 74-75 D = 71-73, D- = 68-70, F=67 or below

Papers, essays, etc. will be graded on the following basis:

A = exceptional. You not only complete the assignment well but do so in a way that demonstrates a significantly above average degree of thoughtfulness, effort, and clarity.

B = good. You complete the assignment well, without any major weaknesses.

C = fair. You complete the assignment adequately, though some significant weaknesses exist.

D = poor. You fail to adequately complete some major aspects of the assignment.

F = you fail to complete the assignment at all or do so in a way that does not demonstrate that you have read or seriously thought about the relevant course material.

Additional details concerning grading can be found on the Theology Department website at [http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm)

**Technology Policy**

Unless you have a documented need, the use of laptop computers, tablets, phones or other electronic devices is not permitted during class. Exceptions can be made if there is a need to look up something online as part of a class discussion, if permission is requested/given prior to use.
CALENDAR, COURSE TOPICS

The topics that we cover in the course will be influenced by your feedback at the start of the course and your choices of topics for papers/oral presentations. Readings/topics for upcoming classes will be distributed by email and will be posted on Canvas. Dates for exams and due dates for assignments will be announced well in advance both in class and by email.

The final meeting of this class (during exam week) will be Thursday, December 18, from 10:30-12:20

The topics that we will be exploring during the first half or so of the course include:

- What is peace? What are obstacles to peace? What are some of the primary challenges/crises that our world currently faces? What are some of your hopes/fears concerning the future?
- Case study: Guatemala
- Broader issues in Latin America and globally
- Thich Nhat Hanh
- Introduction to meditation and mindfulness practices
- Gandhi
- Martin Luther King, Jr., especially the last few years of King’s life
- Case studies: nonviolent action to overthrow repressive regimes
- Case studies: Middle East