



McMaster Divinity College

Practice Led Research Methods MS 5YR5 Fall 2023

Dr. Lee Beach beachl@mcmaster.ca
Office # 237

Class Begins with an online gathering Sept. 11 at 7:30 – 9:00 pm EST. While this course is an asynchronous course we will meet synchronously as a class via Zoom on Monday October 2, Monday, October 30 and Monday, November 6 (all at 7:30 – 9:30 pm ET).

Instructor Biography

Dr. Lee Beach is the Associate Professor of Christian Ministry, the Garbutt F. Smith Chair in Ministry Formation and the Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. He teaches courses on the church in culture, pastoral ministry and Christian spirituality. Prior to coming to MDC Lee pastored for over 20 years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada serving churches in Peterborough, Cobourg and Scarborough, Ontario. He currently participates in Ancaster Village Church in Ancaster, Ontario where he lives with his family. He is the author of the book, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* (IVP) and co-author (With Dr. Franklin Pyles) of the book *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Four-Fold Gospel Today* (Wipf and Stock).

Course Description

Practice Led Research (PLR) is at the heart of the Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) degree, This course will introduce the practice led method by addressing the theoretical, conceptual and practical skills needed to engage in graduate level practice led research. The course will explore the theoretical foundations of PLR, examine a range of practice led research methodologies, provide an orientation to foundational graduate level research skills and ultimately aid students in the initial development of their dissertation topic.

As an online course we will be using a course shell provided by McMaster University's "Avenue to Learn" (A2L) as well as Zoom for online meetings. Information about accessing and using these sites will be provided prior to the beginning of the course and as needed. If you have questions about the technological aspects of the course or have any problems with the technology, please contact the instructor. I will do my best to help and if I am not able to answer your questions, I will work with our IT support team to get an answer for you as soon as possible.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate a basic overview of the practice - led research method.
- 2.. Upon completion of this course students will have a basic understanding of a number of different practice focused research methods that can be used in practice – led research.
3. Upon completion of this course students will have an introductory understanding of how to develop a DPT dissertation proposal.

Being

1. Upon completion of this course students will have begun to develop their identity as researching practitioners.
2. Upon completion of this course students will gain a greater appreciation of the integration between their ministry practice, their academic research and their personal formation.

Doing

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify data that they need for the dissertation project and some possible approaches they can use to get that data.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to analyze and assess their practice in order to determine the direction and nature of their research.

Working together as a learning community

A core value of our class is that it is a "learning community," designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We

should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and formed through our mutual learning experience.

As a responsible member of our learning community, you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level, therefore it is expected that each student will be fully engaged in the online aspect of the course and will make every effort to be in attendance for the synchronous sessions. Specific expectations for online interaction can be found in the “assignments” and “course schedule” sections of this syllabus (below). Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an attachment to an email to the professor. Assignments should be sent in on or before the due date specified in this syllabus. All assignments handed in after the due date may be subject to a penalty of 3% for each day (including weekends) that they are late.

Instructor’s role and availability

As professor it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I come to position myself as a fellow learner in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience, and questions for us to reflect on together. Further, it is my responsibility to give good evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class in our discussions and through written work so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

I will do my best to answer any email enquiries within 24 hours during weekdays (Mon.-Fri). I do not generally answer emails Saturdays or Sunday. If an email is sent later in the afternoon on a Friday it will probably not be answered until Sunday evening or Monday morning. I will do my very best to grade assignments within three weeks of submission.

I am available to meet with you online or in person. If you would like to meet together in person or via zoom, please feel free to email me and make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

Required Reading

Resources on Practice – Led Research (see bibliography in Appendix 1 at the end of this syllabus for the specific list of resources)

“Practice-led Theology or Thinking Theology through Practice.” Neil Ferguson (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame Australia, 2014). online:

<http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/99>

Invitation to Research in Practical Theology. Zoë Bennett, et.al. London: Routledge, 2018.

Suggested Reading

The Craft of Research (Fourth Edition). Wayne Booth, et. al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Assignments

1. Practice Led- Research Description Paper

Foundational to the Doctor of Practical Theology Degree is the discipline of practice led research (PLR). As a core course in the DPT this class will help students develop an initial understanding of this unique approach to research. Students will write an introductory understanding of practice led research that covers the philosophy behind and the unique features of this approach to research. The paper should offer a definition of PLR, a brief history of PLR's development, demonstrate an acquaintance with some of the literature on the subject by noting how various sources contribute to the field, and provide an overview of some of the key features that are part of a practice led research project.

The paper will be due Friday Oct. 6, 2023. This paper should be approximately 3000 words and will constitute 20% of the overall course grade.

2. Research Methodology paper

Practice Led research is a method for doing research that is rooted in the practice of the researcher. However, in most cases other research methodologies are also needed in order to accrue the data necessary to successfully complete a dissertation project. This paper invites the student to choose a research method that is commonly used to acquire data. Many of these methods will be briefly presented in the content of the course, they include; Phenomenology, Ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative, as well as others. The student will choose one of these methods (or another one agreed upon in consultation with the professor) and write an introductory study of the method. The paper should include an overview of the philosophy and history of the method, key practitioners, various possible approaches and best practices in utilizing the method. Ideally the method chosen will be one that potentially suits your overall research project in your DPT program.

This paper should be approximately 3000 words and is due Oct. 27, 2023. It will constitute 20% of the total course grade.

3. Class Presentation: My Practice, My Research

Students will present to the class an overview of their research interest particularly as it pertains to their practice of ministry. The presentation should address the following questions; What is the practice you are researching? What are the problems you want to address regarding that practice? What are the key questions you are asking? What assumptions do you bring to this research? What approach do you currently anticipate taking in your research (i.e. how will you gather data and analyze that data)? What questions remain for you in terms of doing this research? The presentation should leave at least a few minutes at the end for Q+A from the class.

Class presentations will take place in small groups, online Monday Nov. 6, 7:30-9:30 EST. A group list and presentation schedule will be drafted and distributed well in advance of the presentation date. Your presentation should be 20 minutes in length (including the Q+A time) and will constitute 10% of the course grade. Grades will be based on clarity of the presentation, thoughtfulness, creativity and sticking to the allotted time.

4. Developing a Dissertation Proposal

Students will develop a dissertation proposal according to the MDC Dissertation Project Proposal Application Guidelines: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/DPT-Dissertation-Project-Proposal-Application-rev.-15-11-2019.pdf>

(Please note that the material on p. 2 of the application does not need to be included in your paper) This is NOT to be considered your actual dissertation proposal, this assignment is designed to introduce you to the process of proposal development and also to help you hone your topic, your approach to the topic and to identify key resources for your topic. The assignment will invite you to think closely about your ongoing research and will lay a foundation for how you can maximize future course work to develop areas that still need further consideration. The paper should reflect some initial interaction with some of the key literature in your field of study.

The paper will also form the basis for a *written* class presentation as it will be posted in an online forum and the class will interact with the paper by posting responses, constructive critiques and questions. You will be expected to interact with the comments for one week after the paper is posted. A presentation schedule (between the weeks of Nov. 13 and Dec.4) will be constructed and distributed during the first or second week of the course. This schedule will include the due date for your paper.

The paper should be 5-6000 words in length and will constitute 40% of the course grade. Papers are due on the date they are to be posted to the class discussion forum according to the schedule that will be finalized before the end of the second week of class.

Papers will be presented to a small group of classmates. Depending on the size of the class paper presentations will begin the week of Nov. 13 and will continue weekly ending no later than the week of Dec. 4th.

5. Participation

As a doctoral level course, it is expected that students will make engagement with peers a high priority in their learning. As an online/hybrid class this kind of commitment to participation is absolutely essential to the ethos and overall quality of the course. Thus, students will be graded on their participation based on the quality and frequency of their online participation. For each online discussion students are expected to offer one response to the discussion prompt provided by the instructor and at least two responses to classmate's posts.

Class participation will constitute 10% of the course grade. Grades will be determined using the following rubric.

A-LEVEL PARTICIPATION (9-10 Points)

- The participant integrated evidence from the reading, lecture, or past experience in supporting their argument.
- The participant consistently posted insightful comments and questions that prompted on topic discussion.
- The participant consistently helped clarify or synthesize other class members' ideas. If disagreeing with other class members' ideas, the participant stated his or her disagreement or objections clearly, yet politely.

B-LEVEL PARTICIPATION (8 Points)

- The participant was notably lacking in one or two of the items listed for A-level participation.
- The participant consistently had to be prompted or coaxed to participate.
- The participant usually, but not always, expressed herself or himself clearly.

C-LEVEL PARTICIPATION (7 Points)

- The participant was consistently lacking in two or more of the items listed for A-level participation.
- The participant was extremely reluctant to participate, even when prompted.
- The participant rarely expressed himself or herself clearly.

D-LEVEL PARTICIPATION (6 Points)

- The participant frequently attempted (success is irrelevant) to draw the discussion off-topic, even if the participant's participation otherwise conforms to a higher level on the rubric

F-LEVEL PARTICIPATION (0-5 Points)

- The participant was rude or abusive to other course participants.
- The participant consistently failed or refused to participate at all, even when specifically prompted or questioned, even if the participant's participation otherwise conforms to a higher level on the rubric.

Course Outline and Expectations

Course Introduction: Zoom class meeting (online), Sept. 11th 7:30 pm ET

**please plan to attend this gathering via. the online platform.*

- Meeting content will include: Course overview, introductions, student questions and a brief lecture: Practical Theology and Practice as Research.
- Student Responsibilities: Please review the course syllabus before this meeting and come prepared to offer a brief (1-2 minute) introduction of yourself (occupation, professional background, personal/family situation, your hopes for the course), and bring any questions you have about the course.

Section One: Introducing Practice - Led Research

- Weeks of Sept. 18, 25, and Oct. 2 there will be online Presentations on various introductory aspects of PLR. These presentations will be posted on our A2L site for your review at a time that is convenient for you. On Oct, 2 we will meet together for an online lecture and discussion at 7:30 – 9:00 pm ET.
- Student Responsibilities: Review the weekly online lectures and the other material provided. Also, begin engaging with the list of articles provided in the syllabus (and also found on the content menu of our class site on Avenue to Learn) and the course text *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*. During the week of Sept.25 participate in the on- line discussion forum that will be created on our A2L site. Please post your response to the discussion prompts provided by the instructor by Thursday of this week (Sept. 28th). Respond to at least two posts by your classmates no later than Sunday of this week (Oct. 1st). Join the class gathering online on Oct. 2 (7:30 pm EST). Work on your paper on PLR and submit the paper to the instructor as an email attachment by Oct. 6, 2023.

Week of Oct. 9 – 13, Reading week, no class content.

Section Two: The Craft of Research in Practical Theology

Weeks of Oct. 16 & 23- Online Presentations. See our A2L site for lectures on the craft of research and strategies for developing your Dissertation project.

Student Responsibilities: Review the weekly online lectures and any other material provided. Prepare your second paper on a specific research method and submit it to the instructor via email attachment on or before Oct. 27, 2023.

Section Three: Online Class Gatherings Oct. 30 and Nov. 6, 7:30-9:30 EST.

The class gathering on Oct. 30 will have a unit focus on research ethics and an introduction on preparing an application to the McMaster research ethics board (MREB) in order to get clearance for human based research (as many of you will choose to use this approach as part of your methodology). We will also hear from a panel of former DPT students who will share insights from their experience in the program.

On Nov. 6, we will engage in class presentations (see assignment #3). These presentations will take place in small groups. Details and a schedule will be provided for these presentations several weeks before the date of this class gathering.

Student Responsibilities: Attend the online class gathering on Oct. 30th. Prepare your class presentation for the assignment on “My Practice, My Research” and be prepared to present your work to your group on Nov. 6 according to the presentation schedule that will be developed in the preceding week.

Section Four: Class Paper Presentations

Beginning the week of Nov. 13th students will present, in written form, their final paper to the class (or a small group of the class, depending on class size). This presentation is done by submitting your paper to the instructor as an email attachment. The instructor will distribute your paper to your discussion group and a discussion board to be provided on our A2L site where group members can post their response to the paper (see instructions in the assignments section of this syllabus) The presentation schedule will be determined the second week of class. One paper will be posted each week and the class/group will interact with it for the balance of the week.

-Student Responsibilities: Prepare your paper and submit it to the instructor on the date it is due according to the schedule. Timely posting is important so that your peers have time to read your paper and offer a response. Each week students are expected to read each paper and offer at least one response to each paper presented by 8:00 pm EST on the Friday of that week. Responses should be thoughtful, engaged and specific in terms of their interaction with each paper. The responses will constitute a significant portion of the participation grade. Paper presenters should respond to comments throughout the week as is appropriate.

Additional notes:

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Appendix One: Practice-Led Research Resources

*Students are not expected to read each entry completely but to engage with them so as to enhance their understanding of PLR and employ these resources in the course paper on PLR.

1. Gray, Carole. "From the Ground Up: Encountering Theory in the Process of Practice led Doctoral Research," *In Theory? Encounters with Theory in Practice-based PhD Research in Art and Design*, AHRC Postgraduate Conference, De Montfort University & Loughborough Universities, UK. 26 June 2007. online:
<http://carolegray.net/Papers%20PDFs/Fromthegroundup.pdf>
2. Gray, Carole. "Inquiry Through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies", in P Korvenmaa (ed). *No Guru, No Method?, Conference Proceedings*, Research Institute, University of Art and Design, online:
<http://carolegray.net/Papers%20PDFs/ngnm.pdf>
3. McNamara, Andrew. "Six Rules for Practice-led Research," *Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 14 (Special Is): 1–15. online:
<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue14/McNamara.pdf>
4. Candy, Linda. "Practice Based Research: A Guide," *CCS Report* (Sydney: Creativity & Cognition Studios, University of Technology, November, 2006).
<http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf>
5. Carol Costley & Nicola Pizzolato. "Transdisciplinary qualities in practice doctorates"
[Costley and Pizzolato article.pdf](#)

Recommended Books

6. Smith, Hazel, and Roger Dean, *Practice–Led Research, Research–Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. (Book, not online)
7. Nelson, Robin. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, London: Palgrave, 2013.

Further Resources

Cameron, Helen, Bhatti, Deborah, Duce, Catherine, et. al. *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. London: SCM, 2010.

Graham, Elaine, Walton, Heather, Ward, Frances. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM, 2005.

Miller-McLemore (editor). *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Schoen, Donald. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Milton Park, UK: Routledge. 1983.

Swinton, John and Mowat, Harriet. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (second edition). Norwich: SCM, 2016.