



McMaster Divinity College

Practice Led Research Methods MS P51130 Fall 2024

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Class Begins Sept. 9 at 4:00 – 6:50 pm EST. The final week of class is the week of Dec. 9. The class will work together in small groups asynchronously (online) for the final three weeks of the course. Reading week is the week of Oct. 14, there is no class on that day.

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.

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 be able to describe the fundamentals 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 know how to develop a DPT dissertation proposal.

Being

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate the relationship between their work as a practitioner and their work as a researcher.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate the relationship 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 identify the ministry practice they are studying 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 weekly class gatherings.

Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order in a word or pdf format through the online A2L class site (more detail on this will be provided on the first day of class). 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 Sundays. If an email is sent later in the afternoon on a Friday it will probably not be answered until Monday. 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: A Model for Faith Based Research. Neil Ferguson. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2024.

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. This paper is designed to help students achieve the first "knowing" learning goal and help them to clarify the goal of clearly identifying the ministry practice that they are planning to study ("Doing" goal number two).

The paper will be due Oct. 7, 2024. 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 is designed to help students achieve the second "knowing" learning goal and first "doing" learning goal.

This paper should be approximately 3000 words and is due Oct. 28, 2024. 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. This assignment is designed to help students work toward achieving several of the learning goals articulated above (esp. "Being" #1&2 and "Doing" #1&2).

Depending on the size of the class presentations will take place Nov. 4 & 11. A presentation schedule will be drafted and distributed by the second week of class. Your presentation should be 10-12 minutes in length, followed by 5 minutes for Q+A. Going over the allotted presentation time will adversely affect your grade on this assignment. This assignment 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 on our A2L class site, and a small group of class members will interact with the paper by posting responses, constructive critiques and questions on the discussion site. 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. 18 and Dec.2), that includes the makeup of the small groups, will be constructed and distributed during the first or second week of the course. This schedule will include the due date for your paper. This assignment is designed to help students achieve the third “knowing” goal and the first “doing” goal.

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 the schedule that will be finalized before the end of the second week of class.

Papers will be presented (in written form) to a small group of classmates. Depending on the size of the class 1-2 paper presentations will be offered each week beginning the week of Nov. 18 and will continue weekly ending no later than the week of Dec. 9th.

5. Participation

As a doctoral level course it is expected that students will make engagement with peers a high priority in their learning. Thus, students will be graded on their participation based on the quality and frequency of their participation in classroom discussions, student presentations and responses to your peers papers during the online paper discuss discussions.

Class participation will constitute 10% of the course grade.

Course Outline and Expectations

Course Introduction: Sept. 9th 4:00 pm ET

- Meeting content will include: Course overview, introductions, review of the syllabus, 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 (not required), your hopes for the course), and bring any questions you have about the course.

Section One: Introducing Practice - Led Research

- Weeks of Sept. 16, 23, 30 and Oct. 7 we will focus on Practice led Research as a distinct research methodology. We will consider various introductory aspects of PLR in particular and graduate level research in general. We will think about practice as a key piece of doing research in Practical Theology and the importance of research in the discipline of Practical Theology. We will also spend part of some classes discussing a number of the required readings for the course.

- Student Responsibilities:

In preparation for our Sept. 16 class please read, Candy, Linda. "Practice Based Research: A Guide," **and** Gray, Carole. "From the Ground Up: Encountering Theory in the Process of Practice led Doctoral Research,"

In preparation for our Sept. 23 class please read, Gray, Carole. "Inquiry Through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies," **and** McNamara, Andrew. "Six Rules for Practice-led Research," **also**, Carol Costley & Nicola Pizzolato. "Transdisciplinary qualities in practice doctorates"

In preparation for our Oct. 30 class please read, *Practice-led Theology: A Model for Faith Based Research*. Neil Ferguson.

- Work on and submit your paper on Practice Led Research to the instructor by Oct. 7, 2024.

****Week of Oct. 14, Reading week, no class.**

Section Two: The Craft of Research in Practical Theology

Weeks of Oct. 21 & 28- We will focus these weeks on the craft of research, key disciplines to consider and master as a researching professional and strategies for developing your Dissertation project.

Student Responsibilities: In preparation for class on Oct. 21 read the course text *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*. Prepare your second paper on a specific research method and submit it to the instructor on or before Oct. 28, 2024.

Section Three: Class Presentations

Nov. 4 and 11 we will engage in class presentation on the topic “My Practice, My Research.” A presentation schedule will be developed and distributed to the class early in the semester.

Student Responsibilities: Come to class ready to engage with your classmates presentations. Prepare your own presentation and be ready to present it at the time allotted to you on the presentation schedule.

Section Four: Class Paper Presentations

Beginning the week of Nov. 18th students will present, in written form, their final paper to a small group of the class (a schedule and group list will be developed and distributed early in the semester). 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 will 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 (or if necessary two) paper(s) will be posted each week to each group and the 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 11:00 pm EST on the Thursday 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 up until Friday of that week at 11:00 pm EST.

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.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

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: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), 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.

Appendix Two: 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.