

# TH3323: Restorative Justice Theory and Practice Syllabus

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Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
Online September 9 – December 2, 2024

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Virtual Office Hours: By Appointment

## *Course Description*

“Restorative justice is an approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (Zehr 2015: 48).

This course studies restorative justice (RJ) and evaluates its distinctive approach to achieving peace with justice. Students will read foundational and contemporary writings in restorative justice in order to: (1) identify the promise and problems of RJ for ministry and/or therapy; (2) assess the continuities and discontinuities between restorative justice and retributive justice; and (3) hear concerns about the practice of restorative justice voiced by restorative justice practitioners of color.

The course, therefore, has four main thematic emphases that are developed in the course modules. In the first module, the course examines the idea of restorative justice and how it is conceptualized. This section consists of an overview of restorative justice theory and process, including core principles, values, and goals. Students will learn how the meaning of restorative justice has developed from its early days as a Western criminal justice reform effort, to its emphasis on restorative practices in the following decades of global expansion and social scientific analysis, to the current implementation of restorative systems. Further, students will learn how the idea of restorative justice has been linked to a variety of practices that share some theoretical commitments to group process and community participation.

In the second module, the course examines critical issues in the practice of restorative justice. For example, is the right procedure more important than good outcomes in this approach to peacebuilding and to putting things right? Does restorative justice affect social justice? Are patterns of racial disparity replicated by restorative practices? Students will learn how restorative practices are evaluated by social scientists and assess how restorative practices function alongside retributive practices. Students will also investigate the reasons why restorative justice theorists and practitioners disagree about what restorative justice means, how it should be practiced, and how it should be evaluated.

In the third module, students will read the testimony of restorative justice practitioners of color. These practitioners illuminate the dangers of restorative justice for those European-descended restorative justice practitioners who work with justice theory but without a racial or social justice consciousness. For example, if the Restorative Justice Movement is unconcerned about the malignant effects of settler colonialism on restorative justice, and convenes on land stolen from Indigenous and First Nations people, then what type of justice is being restored and to whom?

The fourth and final course module considers restorative systems and a model for a Restorative City. The purpose of this reading is for students to think creatively and descriptively about how they might implement specific restorative practices and systems to address needs in their particular communities and, more than this, how restorative systems might work together to develop restorative cities. To be effective, restorative justice must be contextualized.

### ***Student learning outcomes (SLOs)***

- **SLO 5:** Students will demonstrate a beginning ability to read and interpret a variety of cultures.
- **SLO 8:** Students will demonstrate an ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.

### ***Course objectives:***

- 1) Articulate an understanding of restorative justice theory and identify its promise for ministry and/or therapy (**SLO 5**).
- 2) Assess the relevance and efficacy of restorative practices for ministry and/or therapy (**SLO 5**).
- 3) Demonstrate critical awareness of the role of culture in restorative justice (**SLO 5**).
- 4) Demonstrate knowledge of the interlocking commitments of Christian faith and restorative justice (**SLO 8**).
- 5) Demonstrate an ability to initiate and sustain peer dialogue with critical issues central to understanding the complexity of restorative justice.

### ***Course Requirements***

#### **I. Weekly “A WOW and A WONDER” Personal Reflections (due Sundays)**

Respond to the reading for the week by answering two questions:

1. What **WOWED** you about this reading? (A new concept, way of thinking, connection to your own life, etc.) Be specific about why this Wowed you.
2. What do you **WONDER** about this reading? Did something confuse you, annoy you, repel you? Let me know what about this reading you want to explore further.

Your response should show that you have processed the reading and are able to articulate at a graduate level the concepts that resonate with you and that you want to explore more fully.

## II. Small Group Module Assignments

At the end of each module, you will work with your small group to complete a module assignment.

- **Module 1 Assignment: Understanding Restorative Justice** (due September 29)

For this assignment, you will work with your small group to identify key terms in Restorative Justice. More specifically, I want you to discuss your answers with your group. You may “*divvy up*” the terms, but your group should reflect on each term. For example, I do not want a textbook definition of “encounter.” Rather, I want you to identify what it means in conversation or chat with your group. You may use textbooks, but when you close the book, what does the term mean to you and what does it mean to your group. You might invite a scribe to submit on behalf of the group, or you might each submit two identification terms that you have discussed with the group.

- **Module 2 Assignment: Contesting Restorative Justice** (due October 27)

For this assignment, you will submit an essay of approximately 2250 words, or 5 pages, single-spaced, in which you reflect on one of the issues, or cluster of issues, you select from Part Three, “Contesting Restorative Justice,” found in *Restorative Justice Critical Issues*. You should take and defend a position on the issue you select that reflects:

- Your careful reading of the text and understanding of multiple positions on the issue; and
- How your small group helped you to sharpen your understanding of the issue.

- **Module 3 Assignment: Colorizing Restorative Justice** (due November 17)

For this assignment, you and your small group will submit a PowerPoint Presentation on “The First Harm.” Refer to chapter 18 in *Colorizing Restorative Justice*, “Undoing the First Harm: Settlers in Restorative Justice,” by Edward Valandra. In your presentation you should address:

- What Valandra means by the “First Harm,” and
- Why he thinks that the mandate to undo harm caused by wrongdoing should be a fundamental restorative justice principle.
- Does your group think that circles can provide a container strong enough to undo the First Harm?

- **Module 4 Assignment: Prospects for Developing Restorative Cities** (due December 15)

For this assignment, each student should submit a 5 to 7-minute video in which you answer the following question, “*What are the prospects for developing restorative cities in the United States or in another country in which you have lived?*” Your videos should:

- Highlight your understanding of restorative justice cities
- Reference critical issues that might complicate the development of restorative cities
- Make explicit reference to how your small group helped you to sharpen your argument

***Required Texts:***

Daniel Van Ness and Karen Strong. *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015. (978-1-4557-3139-8)

Eugene McLaughlin, Ross Fergusson, Gordon Hughes and Louise Westmarland, editors. *Restorative Justice Critical Issues*. London: Sage Publications, reprinted 2004. (978-0-7619-4209-2)

Edward C Valandra, editor. *Colorizing Restorative Justice: Voicing Our Realities*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Living Justice Press, 2020. (978-1-937141-23-3)

***Class Schedule and Assigned Readings:***

**Module 1:** *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*

**Week 1 (9/9 – 9/13):**                      **Conceptualizing Restorative Justice (RJ)**

- Read Van Ness and Strong, chapters 1-3
- Submit “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 9/15

**Week 2 (9/16 – 9/20):**                      **Institutionalizing Restorative Justice**

- Read Van Ness and Strong, chapters 4-7
- Submit “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 9/22

**Week 3 (9/23 – 9/27):**                      **The Challenges Facing Restorative Justice**

- Read Van Ness and Strong, chapters 8-10

- Submit your module 1 small group assignment on 9/29
- Submit “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 9/29

\* Note: Chapters in the Sixth Edition parallel the Fifth Edition but contain some differences. Your small group might reflect on these differences. \*

### **Module 2:** *Restorative Justice Critical Issues*

#### **Week 4 (9/30 – 10/4):**      **Conceptualizing Restorative Justice**

- Read McLaughlin et al., chapters 1-5
- Submit “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 10/6

#### **Week 5 (10/7 – 10/11):**      **Institutionalizing Restorative Justice**

- Read McLaughlin et al., chapters 6-12
- Submit “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 10/13

#### **Week 6 (10/14 – 10/18):**      **RESEARCH AND STUDY BREAK**

#### **Week 7 (10/21 – 10/25):**      **Contesting Restorative Justice**

- Read McLaughlin et al., chapters 13 – 17
- Submit your Module 2 small group assignment on 10/27
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 10/27

### **Module 3:** *Colorizing Restorative Justice*

#### **Week 8 (10/28 – 11/1):**      **RJ/RP Challenges and Obligations**

- Read Valandra chapters 1, 3, 4 & 6
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 11/3

**Week 9 (11/4 – 11/8): RJ/RP Experiences and Lessons**

- Read Valandra chapters 9, 12, 14, & 17
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 11/10

**Week 10 (11/11 – 11/15): A Call to Settlers in RJ**

- Read Valandra, chapter 18
- Submit Module 3 small group assignment on 11/17
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 11/17

**Module 4: *From Restorative Practices to Restorative Justice Cities*****Week 11 (11/18 – 11/22): Restorative Cultures**

- Read Daniel Van Ness, “Restorative Justice as World View”  
<https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/restorativeapproaches/DanielWVanNess.pdf>
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 11/24

**Week 12 (11/25 – 11/27): Restorative Systems**

- Read Daniel Van Ness, “Creating Restorative Systems”  
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:1a20f906-474f-4b0f-a1ea-8cbef4768a7e>
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 12/1

**Week 13 (12/2 – 12/6): Restorative Justice City**

- Read the introduction and select a Restorative Justice City to read about in: <https://peaceofthecircle.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/DIGITAL-%E2%80%93-EFRJ-Travel-Guide-%E2%80%93-FINAL-VERSION-201123.pdf>
- Submit your “A WOW and A WONDER” reflection on 12/8
- Submit Module 4 small group assignment on 12/15 by 11:00 PM EST

*LPTS Policies***1. Use of Inclusive Language:**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible’s images for God. See for further assistance, [http://www.lpts.edu/Academic\\_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp](http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp).

**2. Academic Honesty:**

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another’s language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

**3. Special Accommodations:**

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center, Beth Herrinton-Hodge

([bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu](mailto:bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu)), during the first two weeks of a semester and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

#### **4. Citation Policy**

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

#### **5. Attendance Policy**

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class sessions or participate in online classes regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, or participation in an online course, either prior to the absence or within 24 hours of the absence.