CAS/GRS New Course Proposal Form
This form is to be used when proposing a new CAS or GRS course.

This form should be submitted to Senior Academic Administrator Peter Law (617-353-7243) as a PDF file to pgl@bu.edu. For further information or assistance, contact Associate Dean Susan Jackson (617-353-2410; sjackson@bu.edu) about CAS courses or Associate Dean Jeffrey Hughes (617-353-2690; hughes@bu.edu) about GRS courses.

DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM: Religion

COURSE NUMBER: RN294

COURSE TITLE: Christian Ethics and Moral Controversies

INSTRUCTOR(S): David Decosimo

TO BE FIRST OFFERED: Sem./Year: Spring 2017

SHORT TITLE: The “short title” appears in the course inventory, on the Link University Class Schedule, and on student transcripts and must be 15 characters maximum including spaces. It should be as clear as possible.

X I A N E T H I C & M R L S

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is the description that appears in the CAS and/or GRS Bulletin and The Link. It is the first guide that students have as to what the course is about. The description can contain no more than 40 words. How have Christians thought about sexuality, democracy, environmentalism, race, and war? An introduction to competing ways diverse Christians have addressed controversial ethical questions, and how they have reasoned and debated these matters among themselves and with secular thinkers and critics.

PREREQUISITES: Indicate “None” or list all elements of the prerequisites, clearly indicating “AND” or “OR” where appropriate. Here are three examples: “Junior standing or CAS ZN300 or consent of instructor”; “CAS ZN108 and CAS ZN203 and CAS PQ206; or consent of instructor”; “For SED students only.”

1. State the prerequisites: none

2. Explain the need for these prerequisites:

CREDITS: (check one)
☐ Half course: 2 credits ☐ Variable: Please describe.
X Full course: 4 credits  □ Other: Please describe. Provide a rationale for this number of credits, bearing in mind that for a CAS or GRS course to carry 4 credits, 1) it must normally be scheduled to meet at least 150 minutes/week, AND 2) combined instruction and assignments, as detailed in the attached course syllabus, must anticipate at least 12 total hours/week of student effort to achieve course objectives.

DIVISIONAL STUDIES CREDIT: Is this course intended to fulfill Divisional Studies requirements?

□ No.  X Yes. If yes, please indicate which division _____HU_______________ and explain why the course should qualify for Divisional Studies credit. Refer to criteria listed here and specify whether this course is intended for “short” or “expanded” divisional list.

HOW FREQUENTLY WILL THE COURSE BE OFFERED?

□ Every semester  □ Once a year, fall  □ Once a year, spring  X Every other year  □ Other: Explain:

NEED FOR THE COURSE: Explain the need for the course and its intended impact. How will it strengthen your overall curriculum? Will it be required or fulfill a requirement for degrees/majors/minors offered by your department/program or for degrees in other departments/school/colleges? Which students are most likely to be served by this course? How will it contribute to program learning outcomes for those students? If you see the course as being of “possible” or “likely” interest to students in another departments/program, please consult directly with colleagues in that unit. (You must attach appropriate cognate comments using cognate comment form if this course is intended to serve students in specific other programs. See FURTHER INFORMATION below about cognate comment.)
ENROLLMENT: How many undergraduate and/or graduate students do you expect to enroll in the initial offering of this course?

CROSS-LISTING: Is this course to be cross-listed or taught with another course? If so, specify. Chairs/directors of all cross-listing units must co-sign this proposal on the signature line below.

OVERLAP:

1. Are there courses in the UIS Course Inventory (CC00) with the same number and/or title as this course? 
   x No. 
   □ Yes. If yes, any active course(s) with the same number or title as the proposed course will be phased out upon approval of this proposal.
   NOTE: A course number cannot be reused if a different course by that number has been offered in the past five years.

2. Relationship to other courses in your program or others: Is there any significant overlap between this course and others offered by your department/program or by others? (You must attach appropriate cognate comments using cognate comment form if this course might be perceived as overlapping with courses in another department/program. See FURTHER INFORMATION below.)

   N/A

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT: What, if any, are the new or special facilities or equipment needs of the course (e.g., laboratory, library, instructional technology, consumables)? Are currently available facilities, equipment, and other resources adequate for the proposed course? (NOTE: Approval of proposed course does not imply commitment to new resources to support the course on the part of CAS.)

   N/A

STAFFING: How will the staffing of this course, in terms of faculty and, where relevant, teaching fellows, affect staffing support for other courses? For example, are there other courses that will not be taught as often as now? Is the staffing of this course the result of recent or expected expansion of faculty? (NOTE: Approval of proposed course does not imply commitment to new resources to support the course on the part of CAS.)
BUDGET AND COST: What, if any, are the other new budgetary needs or implications related to the start-up or continued offering of this course? If start-up or continuation of the course will entail costs not already discussed, identify them and how you expect to cover them. (NOTE: Approval of proposed course does not imply commitment to new resources to support the course on the part of CAS.)

N/A

EXTERNAL PROGRAMS: If this course is being offered at an external program/campus, please provide a brief description of that program and attach a CV for the proposed instructor.

FURTHER INFORMATION THAT MUST BE ATTACHED IN ORDER FOR THIS PROPOSAL TO BE CONSIDERED:

• A complete week-by-week SYLLABUS with student learning objectives, readings, and assignments that reflects the specifications of the course described in this proposal; that is, appropriate level, credits, etc. (See guidelines on “Writing a Syllabus” on the Center for Excellence & Innovation in Teaching website.) Be sure that syllabus includes your expectations for academic honesty, with URL for pertinent undergraduate or GRS academic conduct code(s).

• Cognate comment from chairs or directors of relevant departments and/or programs. Use the form here under “Curriculum Review & Modification.” You can consult with Susan Jackson (CAS) or Jeffrey Hughes (GRS) to determine which departments or programs inside and outside of CAS would be appropriate.

DEPARTMENT CONTACT NAME AND POSITION: Stephen Prothero

DEPARTMENT CONTACT EMAIL AND PHONE: PROTHERO@BU.EDU, 3-4426

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL: __________________________________________ 9/29/16
Department Chair

__________________________________________________________
Other Department Chair(s) (for cross-listed courses) Date
DEAN’S OFFICE CURRICULUM ADMINISTRATOR USE ONLY

CAS/GRS CURRICULUM COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

☐ Approved  Date: ________________
☐ Tabled    Date: ________________
☐ Not Approved  Date: ________________

Divisional Studies Credit:

☐ Endorsed
  ☐ HU  ☐ MCS  ☐ NS  ☐ SS
☐ Not endorsed

______________________________________________________________
Curriculum Committee Chair Signature and Date

Comments:

PROVISIONAL APPROVAL REQUESTED for Semester/Year ________________

______________________________________________________________
Dean of Arts & Sciences Signature and Date

Comments:

CAS FACULTY: Faculty Meeting Date: ________________  ☐ Approved  ☐ Not Approved

______________________________________________________________
Curriculum Administrator Signature and Date

Comments:
**Course Description:** What does Christianity have to do with politics, war, and money? How have Christians thought and argued with one another and non-Christians about homosexuality, torture, and racism? This course introduces students to diverse, complex, and often competing ways in which modern and contemporary Christians have imagined what it means to order lives and communities rightly given their religious beliefs, practices, institutions. It does so by focusing on competing Christian perspectives on a number of important and controversial ethical issues – from euthanasia, drones, and abortion to capitalism, the environment, and #BlackLivesMatter. Engaging diverse figures, such as Dorothy Day, Reinhold Niebuhr, MLK, James Cone, Pope Francis, and many others, it attends as much to the distinctive modes and methods of ethical reflection that various Christians employ as to the particular conclusions they draw. And it consistently puts these approaches and conclusions in conversation with non-Christian ethicists and philosophers, along with critics from both within Christian communities and without. Throughout, it affords students the chance to better understand the ways in which many of the most contested and fraught debates in contemporary Western societies continue to be framed by and implicate various Christian assumptions and values.

**Learning Outcomes:**
This course makes a set of promises to you. Provided you participate in the course and its work to the best of your ability, by its end you will be able to:

- understand a number of influential perspectives and debates in Christian ethics and between Christian ethics and ‘secular’ traditions, especially as concerned with virtue theory, natural law, realism, and feminist and liberationist perspectives, and the relations among those approaches and their substantive conclusions
- think, write, and speak more carefully, precisely, and thoughtfully about deeply controversial matters of contemporary human concern, such as sexuality, war, race, the beginning and end of life, and the relation of religion to politics, and understand perspectives on these matters which may be deeply different from your own
- better comprehend and analyze philosophically demanding texts and better make and recognize philosophical distinctions related to ethics, politics, and religion
- better understand the diverse and often dialectical relationships among Christian doctrines, practices, and concrete ethical stances, their relation to “secular” approaches, and the way these and their interchange inform broader debates and conversations in contemporary Western societies

In addition, you will read and demonstrate your understanding of primary texts in Christian and philosophical ethics and demonstrate your analytical and expressive skills in a variety of written forms and in thoughtful discussion.

**Course Requirements and Grading Distribution:**

- Careful reading of the required materials for each class, Blackboard postings (explained below), and regular, thoughtful participation in discussion and debates ................................................................. 25%
- Class Presentation.................................................................................................................. 10%
- Midterm Exam ....................................................................................................................... 15%
- Final Exam ............................................................................................................................. 20%
- Final Paper prospectus ........................................................................................................ 5%
- Final Paper (six-eight pages) .............................................................................................. 25%

**Required Texts** (available for purchase at BU bookstore):
Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*
Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peacable Kingdom*
Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. J. Washington, *I Have a Dream*

**All other readings are available on Blackboard**
You are responsible for bringing all readings to class. Access to readings via phone is neither permitted nor sufficient.
Blackboard Postings

- There are two varieties of posting – (1) postings prior to Friday class discussions (due Thursday by 5 PM) and (2) required postings noted on the syllabus (due by 5 PM the day before class).
- Late postings receive no credit.
- No posting is required on the day of your presentation.
- The default grade for a post is a “check” but excellent posts will receive a “check plus” and especially poor posts will receive a “check minus.”

Unless otherwise directed, posts should be 4-5 sentences long, roughly a short paragraph. Unless otherwise directed, there are three options for your posts: (1) Identify and explain a particularly important passage or point from the assigned reading, explaining what it means and why it is important; (2) Identify a specific question related to a particular passage or point that you think is important and ask the question in a way that could be generative of discussion (so, for example, don’t pose the question as a “yes/no” question); (3) Identify a particular passage or point that you find confusing or difficult to understand and explain what in particular about it confuses you. If you have an idea for a different sort of posting, please let me know.

Core Values

The course policies detailed below extend beyond the purely “academic” to a variety of other dimensions integral to a robust, genuinely communal learning experience.

**Integrity** In this and every course, you are bound by BU’s Academic Conduct Code (http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/). Suspected violations will be referred to the Academic Conduct Code committee. Insofar as it is compatible with the Conduct Code, the standard penalty for an violation in my course is failure of the course, regardless of the student’s grades on other assignments and activities. What does it mean to violate the Conduct Code? For full explanation consult the website, but the following are all examples of violating the code: cheating, stealing, forgery, plagiarism, and duplicate submission. Ignorance of or failure to understand the Conduct Code is not an acceptable defense for violating it. “Plagiarism,” explains a former colleague, is “any unacknowledged use of another’s words or ideas. This definition applies to non-print media, including the Internet, as well as to books, magazines, journals, newspapers, or other print media.” Lack of an intention to deceive is not an excuse for committing acts of plagiarism. For further explanation see “Citing Sources; Avoiding Plagiarism” (A Writer’s Reference, Diana Hacker). If you have any questions, please consult me.

**Responsibility:** While I want to help you flourish, ultimately you are responsible for your education. This means that you are responsible for completing assigned readings, preparing thoughtfully for class, and turning in assignments on time.

Failure to turn an assignment in on time results in deduction of 1 letter grades for the first 24-hour period beginning from the missed deadline; work received during the second 24-hour period will result in deduction of two letter grades; work during the third 24 hour period will receive a 50 at the best; work submitted after that will not be accepted. You are responsible for ensuring your document correctly uploads onto Blackboard. Problems with technology are no excuse for late work.

You must bring print copies of assigned reading to class. The first failure to bring an assigned reading to class will lower your participation grade; the second and subsequent failures to do so will count as absences. You are responsible for obtaining notes from a classmate for missed classes.

**Respect:** Learning – especially learning about religion, ethics, and politics – involves disagreement, often disagreement about the most important things. Conversations may touch on matters of profound personal significance. You are always free to disagree with one another or me and to challenge an idea. It is easy for such discussion to grow heated, but take care that in all matters you treat one another with respect. Never attack or mock those with whom you disagree. In your comments, take care not to presume that everyone holds the same religious or ethical commitments that you do. Often, I will articulate and defend a position with which I strongly disagree, giving it the most vigorous, persuasive, and attractive presentation that I can. Do not assume that I am personally endorsing such positions. Do not assume that someone personally
subscribes to some view simply because s/he is arguing for it. Do not assume that your fellow students ascribe to any religious or non-religious viewpoint.

Unless otherwise instructed, we will carry on a single conversation. Listen to what your classmates have to say and avoid engaging in side conversations.

**Presence:** You are permitted three absences. Take care with how you use these days – if you spend them sleeping in or out of town and then need to miss class because you are sick or have to travel home for an emergency, your absence will not be excused. Each absence beyond three reduces your course grade by one letter grade (e.g. B+ to C+), and you will not have the opportunity to make up any missed work. Arriving more than ten minutes late counts as an absence. Frequent tardiness will also lower your grade. Students who wish to attain the highest marks for participation should avoid missing class unless they are prevented from doing so by illness or another emergency. Attending a class without participating earns a “D” for participation for that meeting. If you would like to use one of your absences by coming to class unprepared you may do so (and will be better off than missing the class altogether) but need to notify me.

Because of their power to distract, laptops, I-Pads, and other electronic devices are not permitted in class without a letter from the Disability Services stating that such a device is necessary as an accommodation. Cell phones and media devices should be turned off or put in silent (not vibrate) mode and stored. If your device interrupts class, you will be considered tardy for that class. If it happens again, you will be considered absent and receive a zero for that day’s participation and any written work (quizzes, postings, etc.) associated with that class period. Texting or using a device during class will result in your counting as absent and being asked to leave.

**Miscellanea**

- You are welcome to enjoy a beverage in class but please refrain from eating.
- Please do not leave the classroom during our meeting time unless it is necessary, in which case please do so as quietly and unobtrusively as possible.
- Please don’t leave bags, purses, headphones, etc. on your desk

**Student athletes** need to provide their travel and game schedule ahead of time indicating clearly which class meeting(s) will be missed in order to be excused from class, though not from the work associated with that class. Outside of their required athletic events, student athletes should avoid missing class if at all possible.

**Disability Services:** Boston University provides reasonable accommodations to eligible individuals with disabilities in conformance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Requests for disability accommodations must be made in a timely fashion to Disability Services, 19 Deerfield Street, Boston, MA 02215; 617-353-3658 (Voice/TTY). Students seeking accommodations must submit appropriate medical documentation and comply with the policies and procedures of Disability Services.

**Grades:** For a comprehensive statement on my approach to grades and grading see the document “Grades and Papers” in Blackboard. See also “Grades and Course Credits” (http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/grades-and-course-credits/). Please note that the course’s success requires your regular, constructive participation. You will be called on to participate frequently, above all in our regular Friday discussions. Generally speaking, grades for class participation depend on the **quality** rather than the **quantity** of your contribution. One of the most important forms of contribution is the posing of questions that lead us deeper into the text or issue at hand. Often these questions ask us to help you understand what is going on in the text or the discussion itself: they are in the service of **understanding**. Excellent participation, then, is not necessarily a matter of mastery of the day’s material but of depth and carefulness of engagement with it, willingness to seek assistance from me and one another, and clarity of expression in doing so.

**Troubles and Woes:** Emergencies and serious challenges of all sorts may arise. There are many resources at BU to support you in the face of such difficulties. Please know that in the face of such challenges, I will be happy to work with you to find a way forward.
Please note: This syllabus, including the assignment dates and length, may be changed if doing so will further the learning aims of the class.

Course Schedule

I. Introduction

1/20 What Is Christian Ethics?
Jean Vanier video; Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, brief excerpt; Maggie Barnkitse, Rwandan genocide survivor, “Life Wins” video

Robin Lovin, “The Origin of Ethics”; Delores S. Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness, preface and Introduction; Glen Stassen and David Gushee, “Authority and Scripture”

Recommended: Alasdair MacIntyre, “Religion and Morality” and Ellen Davis, “Critical Traditioning”

1/25 Some Types of Christian Ethics

1/27 Class Discussion

II. Means, Ends, and Sacred Value: Torture, War, Euthanasia, and Abortion

Torture: Do bad means ever justify good ends? Are some prohibitions inviolable?

1/30 Torture & Dirty Hands


2/1 Enhanced Interrogation?
Hitchens waterboarding video; Marc Thiessen, Courting Disaster, selections; Jean Porter, “Torture and the Christian Conscience”; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, “Committee Study of the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program: Findings and Conclusion,” selections

Recommended: Thiessen interview with Jon Stewart

2/3 Class Debate

War and Peace: Can Christians (or anyone) justly kill? Can killing show love? What does responsibility require?

2/6 Just War
Matt. 5:38-48, 8:5-13, and 22; Rom. 13:1-7; G.E.M. Anscombe, “The Justice of the Present War Examined”; Aquinas II.II 40.1

Recommended: Anscombe, “War and Murder”; Augustine, Contra Faustum, XXII.73-79 and City of God XIX.6; John Calvin, Institutes, IV.20

2/8 Just War, contd.
Anscombe, entd.; Paul Ramsey, “Justice in War”
2/10 Class Debate: Was the Iraq War Just?

2/13 Niebuhr, “Christian Realism,” and Supreme Emergencies
Reinhold Niebuhr, “Augustine and Christian Realism”, Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, “Supreme Emergency”; one article of your choosing on the Obama – Niebuhr connection (e.g. David Brooks, Time, The Diplomat)

Recommended: John Diggins, “Why Niebuhr Now?”

2/15 Drones and Assassination
Jane Meyer, “The Predator War”; Barmen Declaration; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Is Assassination Ethical” - video

2/17 Class Discussion: The Case of Euthanasia


2/21 Christian Ethics as Story REQUIRED POSTING BU MONDAY
Hauerwas, *PK*, xv-xviii & Chapter 1

2/22 Making God’s Story Their Own
Hauerwas, *PK*, 116-130, 58-63, 72-91, 35-top of 40 (I recommend this order)

2/24 Class Discussion – Pacifism and Eschatology
Hauerwas, *PK*, 94-95, 24-29, Chapter 6, & 149-151

Recommended: H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Grace of Doing Nothing”

*Abortion: Are embryos people? Is their destruction murder?*

2/2 Abortion and Feminism
Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion”; Sydney Callahan, “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Prolife Feminism”


3/1 Agape and Abortion

Recommended: Gene Outka, “The Ethics of Love and the Problem of Abortion”

3/3 Midterm Exam
III. Life in Between: Politics, Justice, and God

Does Christianity belong in politics? Does separation of church and state rule that out? Does Christianity itself rule that out?

3/13 Political Liberalism, Religious Reasons, and Public Reason
Richard Rorty, “Religion as a Conversation Stopper”; Charles Larmore, “Public Reason”

Recommended: Barack Obama, “Call to Renewal”

3/15 Democracy and Religious Reasons

3/17 Class Discussion

3/20 The King Legacy
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” “A Time to Break Silence,” “Black Power Defined,” “Where Do We Go from Here?,” “I See the Promised Land,”; Cornel West, “Dr. King Weeps from His Grave”

Recommended: Barack Obama, Philadelphia Speech on Race; Stanley Hauerwas, “Remembering Martin Luther King Remembering”; Cornel West, “Subversive Joy and Revolutionary Patience in Black Christianity”

3/22 Catholic Social Teaching
Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”; Rerum Novarum; Laudato si (selections on economics)

Recommended: John Donovan, “Pope Leo XIII and a Century of Catholic Social Teaching”; Charles Curran, Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present, “Theological Methodology” and “The Political Order”

3/24 Class Discussion – Radicalism and Dorothy Day

3/27 Alinsky, Organizing, and the Common Good REQUIRED POSTING
Jeffrey Stout, Blessed Are the Organized, Preface and Chapters 1-3

3/29 Domination and Liberty REQUIRED POSTING
Jeffrey Stout, Blessed Are the Organized, Chapter 5 and 18

4/1 Class Debate – The Financial Crisis: Occupy or Organize?

4/3 Practices of Solidarity
Stout, Blessed Are the Organized, Chapters 13, 16 and 17

IV. Liberating Bodies: Race and Feminism

Is God colorblind? Is Christianity a “white” religion?

4/5 God of the Oppressed
James Cone, “Black Theology and Black Liberation” and “‘Nobody Knows De Trouble I See’”
4/7 Class Discussion: From Ferguson Forward

4/10 America’s Religion?

4/12 Imagining Otherwise

4/14 Class Discussion - Christian Ethics, Intersectionality, and Black Lives Matter
Is God a sexist? Are Christian churches sexist?

4/19 Feminism, Womanism, Agape

4/21 Domination, Sexism, Hierarchy

V. Desire and Its Limits: Sex & Nature

Homosexuality: Does God care what people do in bed? Why? Is sex sacred?

4/24 “Loving the Sinner”?


**Final Paper prospectus due on Blackboard before midnight 4/25**

4/26 Grafted In


4/28 Class Discussion

Environment: Is the world at our disposal? Does Christianity conduce to nature’s destruction?

5/1 An Unsustainable Existence?
Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation”; Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis”


5/3 A Way Forward?
Pope Francis, Laudato si (selections); Charles Camosy, “Intellectual Strangers No More: Peter Singer and Roman Catholicism on Ecological Concern”
**Final Paper due on Blackboard by 5 pm 5/5**
Final Exam on Date Posted on Registrar’s Website