Mission Statement:
Our mission is to serve as a leading center of Christian thought and action providing an excellent education from a biblical perspective and global context in pivotal professions to equip Christian leaders to change the world.

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & THE ARTS

REGENT UNIVERSITY

COM 632
MEDIA AND THE CHURCH
FALL, 2011

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: J.D. Keeler
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All students are required to read and have a thorough understanding of the syllabus. Any questions or concerns should be addressed to the instructor.
**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In recent years, rapid proliferation, development, application and creative uses of both traditional and newer media and communication technologies have impacted society in what many believe are unprecedented ways. Their influence on individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and professions has been dramatic and exciting and at the same time problematic and even alarming.

Traditional religions, religious institutions and religious cultures have experienced many of these technological changes and related cultural trends. The Internet and many other related digital technologies in what is now a truly “converged,” global media environment also have stimulated the growth of new forms of religious organizations and activities. Some scholars and other observers have claimed that religious beliefs and practices are themselves being dramatically changed through the influence of these technological developments and uses.

The Church (i.e. “body of Christ” or all Christian believers), as well as Christian denominations, local churches, missionary and other types of Christian organizations, are being inspired and strengthened and yet challenged and threatened by these pervasive, technology-induced changes. As with the advent of new communication technologies and related cultural changes in the past, Christians are being encouraged to embrace them. At the same time they are being warned about their dangers.

This course examines trends and issues affecting the current “digital church,” both the Church as a whole and the local church and other types of Christian organizations, with an eye toward the future. It will provide an opportunity to explore new, creative opportunities for Christian ministry and more effective communication that these digital media or technologies and their applications present. At the same time, it will provide a greater understanding of the challenges and even perils digital media or technologies, their uses and applications bring to the current and future missions of the Church worldwide and Christian organizations The course will blend theological, philosophical and theoretical perspectives with very practical considerations in fulfilling this overall purpose.

**COURSE OUTCOMES**

A number of basic course objectives should be achieved as we strive to fulfill the stated purposes above. Once the course is completed you should:

1. Have a much greater understanding of how current digital media or communication technologies, their uses and applications and related trends and issues are influencing the individual Christian, Christian community, Christian organizations, and cultures generally.
2. Be familiar with and be able to further examine various practical ways local churches and other Christian organizations are using current and emerging digital media and communication technologies or may be able to use them in the future.

3. Be more creative and effective in using digital media and communication technologies to meet the communication and arts needs of particular Christian organizations or ministries that you are interested in or with which you are or will be associated.

4. Have become more able to conduct scholarly research that focuses on meaningful, digital media and church questions or issues you or other scholars may want to pursue.

5. Have a greater global perspective and understanding of the Church and Christian organizations and the influences and opportunities today’s digital media and communication technologies provide in this regard.

INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

This course by its very nature challenges us to view each topic from the standpoint of the Christian faith and biblical truth and to apply this specifically to digital media and communication technology trends, issues and opportunities related to the Church and Christian organizations currently and in the future. All readings and assignments are designed to achieve this purpose in various ways and draw from various points of view relevant to this overall goal.

As we undertake this important task, please recognize that students taking this course may represent many different Christian denominations, traditions and experiences. They and their beliefs should be consistently respected. On the other hand, the challenge of examining all that we undertake in this course through the lens of our Christian faith is based on the assumption that there is wholehearted agreement regarding the fundamental tenets of Christian doctrine.

COURSE FORMAT

The course is open to doctoral and master’s degree students, both those in online and on campus degree tracks. It is a “hybrid” course in that it is being taught online, but with some additional on-campus meetings for those in the Virginia Beach area that are able to attend them.

Each week of the semester I will introduce topics, readings and assignments scheduled for the particular week, primarily using the “announcements” feature at our Blackboard course site and/or e-mail. You will find some readings and other materials related to weekly topics at the “course resources” site within our Blackboard course site. Many but
not all of our interactions in the course will be at the “discussion board” at this course site.

As a graduate course extensively offered in an online format, your active participation in the course through readings, assignments and related online discussion is critical to its overall success. Normally I will post discussion questions and/or brief exercises at the beginning of each week at the Blackboard course site “discussion board.” These usually are tied to the topics scheduled for that week and/or particular readings or other course materials or assignments.

I usually provide about ten to fourteen days for the class as a whole to respond to specific questions or exercises and for everyone to respond to what others in the class have posted regarding any particular questions or exercises. Normally, new questions or exercises are placed at the discussion board site each week. In effect, you normally will be responding to these new questions or exercises before the discussion period (ten to fourteen days) related to the previous week’s questions or exercises has been completed. This overlapping system, although a little hard to get used to at first, seems to help pace the course and provide more flexibility for individuals to manage their time.

*It is best not to view the discussion deadline in each instance as merely a “due date” for responding, but instead view it as a time frame within which meaningful interactions among the class as a whole take place.*

I will read all postings and respond to many but not all of them. If I do not respond to something you post at any particular time, it is not indicative of its relative pertinence or quality.

Of course you also are welcome to interact with me apart from the discussion board by e-mail, phone or in person regarding any course-related or other need.

**ON CAMPUS SESSIONS**

On a number of occasions throughout the semester those that are in the Virginia Beach area may have the opportunity to meet on campus for special sessions related to the course. These may involve further discussion of particular subjects, assignments or individual or class projects or perhaps guest speakers. Some of these may be made available electronically for students unable to attend because of distance or other conflicts. A schedule of these particular meeting times will be provided at a later date, although a Tuesday night time slot (6 p.m-9 p.m., in room 104 in the Communication and Arts Building) generally has been have reserved for this purpose.

**READINGS**

Texts suitable for graduate level study that deal directly with the subject of “digital media and the church” are difficult to find, are too narrow in focus or tend to be dated, given the
stated overall purposes of this course. Scholarly journal articles and more often, meaningful professional and popular literature that relate to various subject areas we will be concerned with in the course exist to some extent or are emerging.

There are not texts to purchase for this course.

Instead, various book chapters, articles, visual and other materials will be assigned throughout the semester, usually tied in some way to particular Blackboard discussion board exercises that will be posted. These currently are not listed in this course syllabus but will be provided at a later time and placed in the “course resources” element of our Blackboard course site. In other instances, they will be “linked” with a particular exercise or set of discussion questions at the time they are posted.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to responding to weekly discussion questions or exercises and related assigned readings or other materials mentioned above, the following varied assignments should be interesting, enjoyable and greatly enhance your understanding of how current and emerging digital media and communication technologies and their uses are influencing the Church and Christian organizations and how they may use these tools to fulfill their missions.

1. Media in the Local Church Proposal—The primary goal of this assignment is creatively and practically to offer specific ways in which current digital media or communication technologies could be used in the local church setting.

Develop a brief, but well thought out, precise proposal (probably around five pages or so) for one or a combination of any of the following—a new or improved Internet website; a new or better strategy for using mobile/portable communication devices/media; an innovative way to use a blog(s); a creative way to use an online social network of some type; or a new or better strategy for incorporating digital media or the arts into worship services at an existing (or perhaps hypothetical) local church.

Your proposal should clearly describe the general purposes for the communication/artistic vehicle(s) or changes regarding this you have in mind, the particular communication and/or artistic objectives it would help fulfill, what specific media, communication technologies or tools might be used, and what unique features or design and aesthetic qualities it may have. Also, discuss why what you have proposed would truly address the local church and its ministries’ communication objectives and in what ways it would be an improvement over the organization’s existing uses of media or communication technologies or be an improvement over what other local churches typically are doing in these respects.

Once you have completed this proposal please post it at our Blackboard course site in a discussion board “forum” that will be created for this purpose. In addition, please send
me an electronic copy of your proposal by e-mail. The proposal should be submitted on or before **October 4**th.

2. *Media and the Church Book Proposal*—The goal of this assignment is to help you integrate some of your thinking about the future of digital media, communication technologies and the arts relative to the Church.

Develop another brief proposal (several pages or so) for a book on any topic that deals in some way with digital media and the church. Your book could focus on the Church as a whole, a particular element or culture within it, particular issues, or specific types of organizations/ministries or even a particular organization and those that it is attempting to reach. The book should be aimed primarily at the Christian community, a particular part of it or those occupying particular roles within it. It could be academic, professional/trade or popular in orientation. It might be aimed at any particular educational or age level.

The book could be intended to be in printed or in some electronic form or have elements of both.

Envision this as a proposal that might be submitted to a publisher or be self-published. It should contain a statement of the purpose of the book, a general description of its structure and content, what is basically contained in each of its chapters or other elements of it and why, and the style of writing, images, graphics, etc. that will be used. It also should *clearly and in some detail define* the specific types of readers or consumers to whom it is aimed or the potential market for the book, especially in light of similar works that already may exist. Be clear as to why this book will meet the needs of these potential consumers, possible ways it can be effectively promoted and distributed and why it is likely to “sell” in the current marketplace, cultural climate and media environment. (The above points or elements can be ordered in any way you see fit).

It is quite possible this brief proposal may help you get a more detailed book project (or something similar in another form) off the ground at a later time. So “think big,” beyond this course, and have fun with it.

This particular project should be submitted on or before **December 1**st. As in the case of the other assignments, a Blackboard course site “forum” will be set up in which you can place your finished proposal. Please submit a copy to me by e-mail as well.

3. *Research Project/Paper*—The very broad subject of “digital media and the church” offers a great many possibilities for scholarly research dealing with particular topics, themes, questions and issues. Select a research topic within this context that interests you greatly, search relevant literature, and develop a scholarly paper (12-20 pages) that addresses a theme, issue and/or specific research questions that scholars and/or practitioners would be interested in and provides them with new insights.
Your study could rely primarily on secondary sources or it could also involve data collecting, using any particular research methodology. Ideally it should attempt to provide a new contribution to research/thinking in your chosen area of study.

You can use either APA or MLA style as you organize your paper and cite sources or materials.

*The most important thing is to select a subject that you will find meaningful and enjoyable. I’ll be glad to help you as you select your research topic and pursue your study. You also are welcome to team up with someone else in this class on this particular project if your interests are similar.*

The paper should be submitted on or before **November 1st** as an e-mail attachment. A “forum” at our Blackboard course site will be created where you can place the paper for others in the class to read.

**GRADING**

There are no exams in this course. Course grades will be determined on the following approximate basis:

*Discussion/Exercises*—30% (discussion exercises are graded on a “pass/fail” basis that later will be explained in more detail; quality, quantity, timeliness of initial responses to particular discussion board assignments and responses to the responses of others in the class are general criteria that are used)

*Media and the Local Church Proposal*—20%

*Media and the Church Book Proposal*—20%

*Research Project/Paper*—30%

**INCOMPLETE GRADES**

It is Regent University policy that incomplete grades are to be given only for legitimate reasons such as severe illnesses or emergencies or other significant reasons acceptable to the professor and not because of neglect on the student’s part. If you should have any difficulties of this sort, please let me know as soon as possible rather than waiting until the end of the course to do so.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

As should be expected, particularly at a Christian university, students should adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. This includes avoidance of plagiarism,
defined as the uses of written and oral words of another person, including another student, without the expressed acknowledgement of the speaker or writer’s indebtedness to that person. This also applies to the use of papers or other materials previously submitted for grading purposes to instructors of other classes, either at Regent University or other institutions. Any violation of this policy normally will result in failure of the course.

**STUDENT FEEDBACK**

At or near the end of the course you will receive an opportunity to evaluate course content and instruction. You can access the online evaluation system at: [http://eval.regent.edu/regentsurvey/students.cfm](http://eval.regent.edu/regentsurvey/students.cfm). If you have questions about the online evaluation please contact evaluation@regent.edu.

**INTERACTION WITH INSTRUCTOR**

You also are invited and encouraged to interact with me regarding the course at any time during the semester. If you have questions or suggestions about the course or about particular subjects, assignments or have any other needs, I am glad to interact with and pray for/with you.

I think you will enjoy this course and I want to help make it a meaningful learning experience for you. I am very excited about the possibilities it offers, because it is so directly tied to our Christian faith and the needs and future of the Christian community and our efforts to communicate with others about our faith. I view it as a great opportunity for God to provide us with many new insights and creative ideas that may help fulfill His purposes for each of us, Christian organizations and the Church as a whole in our highly mediated, increasingly global age!

My scheduled office hours are Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), but I will be glad to arrange either a phone or in person meeting with you at another convenient time. I also am glad to respond through e-mail as quickly as possible, although because of the volume of mail I receive and many tasks and responsibilities I am involved in, there may be some delay in doing so. The important point is that I welcome serving you and getting to know you better.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of August 22nd

Topic: Introduction
Assignment: Discussion board exercise.

Week of August 29th

Topic: Key Digital Media and the Church Trends and Issues Today
Assignment: Discussion board exercise; readings to be assigned.

Week of September 5th

Topics: Digital Media, the Church and the Altering of Self, Family and Community; Digital Media Roles in Altering Religious Beliefs and Practices.

Assignments: Discussion board exercises; readings to be assigned; individual project ideas developed.

Week of September 12th

Topic: Toward a Biblical Model or Perspective of Digital Media and the Church.
Assignment: Discussion board exercise; readings to be assigned.

Week of September 19th

Topic: Digital Church Metaphors.
Assignment: Discussion board exercise; reading to be assigned.

Week of September 26th

Topic: Digital Media and the Local Church: Worship Trends, Issues and Opportunities.
**Assignment:** Discussion board exercise; readings to be assigned.

**Week of October 3rd**

**Topic:** Proposed Innovations for Using Digital Media and Communication Technologies in the Local Church.

**Assignment:** Digital Media and Local Church Assignment Due **October 4th.**

**Week of October 10th**

**Topic:** The Literate Digital Media Church.

**Assignment:** Discussion board exercise; readings to be assigned.

**Week of October 17th**

Modular week; no new assignments.

**Week of October 24th**

**Topic:** Digital Media, the Church and Prayer;

**Assignment:** Discussion board exercise; reading to be assigned.

**Week of October 31st**

**Topic:** Scholarly Research Opportunities and the Church

**Assignment:** Research Project/Paper due **November 1st.**

**Week of November 7th**

**Topic:** Media, the Church and New Opportunities for Worldwide Missions, Evangelism and Outreach.

**Assignment:** Discussion board exercise; readings to be assigned.

**Week of November 14th**

**Topic:** Digital Media and the Church: Two Scenarios for the Future.

**Assignment:** Discussion board exercise.
Week of November 23rd (Thanksgiving Week)
No new assignments.

Week of November 28th
Topic: Addressing Digital Media and the Church Needs
Assignment: Book Proposal Project due December 1st.

Week of December 5th
Topic: Book proposal critiques.
Assignment: Discussion board exercise.
UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Please review the following links for important information on University policies:

- Academic Calendar/Registrar Information
- Bookstore
- Honor/Plagiarism Policy
- Regent Library
- Student Services (includes links to student handbook, disability services, University calendar, University Writing Center, etc.)
- Technical Support – University Helpdesk
- www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/student_life/disabilities.cfm

Disability Statement—the student is responsible for contacting the assistant director of Student Services at 752-353-4486 to request accommodations, provide necessary documentation, and make arrangement with each instructor. The website above is designed to help our disabled students learn of their rights and responsibilities with regard to disability services. The site also has resources for faculty to become better informed of their responsibilities toward the disabled students and their classes.