

**PRELIMINARY
SYLLABUS v.1
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**Institute for Ministry
Loyola University New Orleans**

The Emergent Universe: Our Sacred Story LIM G814-Y1G0E

Summer 2026

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Important! The sessions in this course run Monday through Sunday. Each week begins Monday at noon and concludes the following Sunday at 6 PM. You will be notified by email when your course is available (normally the week before class begins). Please check your *Loyola email* account for instructions. ***Please reply*** to the instructor’s email upon reception.

Course Description

The human community has composed and inherited numerous accounts of how the world in which we find ourselves began and took form and shape in its early and continuous development over a vast period of time. The earliest accounts of Creation were “pre-scientific” and speculative, imaginative, intuitive, mythic accounts of the origin and sequential emergence of the created world. In the wake of scientific empirical investigations of our world, we have learned a new version of the creation story, representing a complementary perspective that deepens and challenges some of our earlier interpretations of our origin and evolution. Thomas Berry, whose wisdom informs our study, proposed that we need to integrate these stories into a new meta-narrative. He summed up the importance and relevance of the course for our time in the following analogy, “We need to honor the way the mother knows the baby AND the way the doctor knows the baby.” This analogy frames the goal of the course.

As we humans struggle to understand the challenge we currently confront in our current critical global experience, through the merger of creation stories, we discern an expression/experience of a continuing process called “evolution” (or “living transformed”), mediated by a Creator who doesn’t make or fashion life, but rather “**creates a world that creates itself.**” A process that inspires faith and confidence in the persistent evolution (“trans-formation”) of matter and mind that constitutes the story and endurance of the universe. Indeed, a process through which we and all Creation are being carried forward through time and space.

Our study will begin with a scientific description of the major developments of the universe and consider how our faith tradition expresses these developments in its unique language of faith/spirituality/theology/ritual. Noting how one story complements the other, how the latter

lends a depth of meaning and significance to the former. Seeking to repair the fragmentation of knowledge rather than its unification. In short, we will draft a single story out of the seemingly disparate stories that are part of our oral and written narratives. Throughout we will seek to discern and illumine the implications for faith and human responsibility.

An educational context consideration: The course is an attempt to respond to the question: How might education overcome the chasm it sets up between the humanities and the sciences, “teaching” that students must choose between them – scientists aren’t offered “poetry” and “liberal studies” majors don’t understand the sacramentality of the Elements??

Course Goal

Participants will appreciate the scientific discovery of the origin and evolution of the universe and its theological meaning and significance as the integral comprehensive “new” story—the “meta-narrative” in which all our wisdom traditions are woven together in one comprehensive expression of “salvation history.” And its implications for the future of humans and all Creation.

Key Learning Outcomes

Through participation in the course, participants will acquire the ability to:

- distinguish and appreciate the complementarity of the pre-scientific/mythic (biblical-theological) and scientific-empirical story of Creation.
- perceive these distinctions and complementarities in analogous ways, (e.g., yin and yang, scholarship and intuition, the mother knows the baby and the doctor knows the baby).
- appreciate and articulate an understanding of evolution in theological language and experience as a manifestation of the Divine, creation, revelation, salvation, blessing, grace, sacrament, vocation.
- propose extensions and/or revisions of traditional theological interpretations and emphases such as grace, creation, community, faith, redemption, salvation history, and morality in light of this new story of the universe.
- appreciate and articulate the formation and significance of Earth as a unique chapter of the sacred story.
- discern the unique role and responsibility of the human within the earth community in the 21st century.
- find meaningful and helpful ways of sharing the fruits of your learning with others in personal, ministerial, educational, and social contexts.
- bear witness to our sense of accountability to and responsibility for the well-being of the community of all beings and the viability of the life process itself and in ritual celebration.

Required Readings

Please order the required text as soon as possible from the bookstore of your choice.

Swimme, Brian, and Thomas Berry. *The Universe Story*. Harper, 1994. ISBN-13: 978-006-250-8355

A creative synthesis of humanities and scientific evolution and wisdom –a unique text that offers an account of evolution from its cosmological origin and unfolding that includes the human story of evolving cultures and understandings between the covers of a single text, in a comprehensive story.

We will **also** be consulting online and scanned texts that offer relevant information and insights regarding the evolutionary development of the natural world in all its forms and expressions, including the evolution of human understanding of this complex and awe-inspiring process. (No trees sacrificed or added monetary expense is required).

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, et al., eds. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. 3rd ed., University of Minnesota Press, 2017. ISBN-13: 978-1-5179-02377 This text is available in Canvas as an [ebook](#) through Loyola's Monroe Library.

Required Video Found in Canvas under Course Resources

Journey of the Universe. 2012. (Video streamed in Canvas).

Additional videos are also included in the course. They, too, are included in their respective sessions, offering you access to these resources for your own “shared praxis.”

Sequence of Topics/Calendar of Assignments

Please bear in mind that the course not only honors the process of evolution but seeks to be responsive to it. Thus our planned sequence may be adjusted to relevant “current events.” Think of it as a “flight plan” that pilots file, recognizing that conditions may (and usually do) change and affect its need for revision.

See the next page for a weekly calendar.

Session	Topic	Assignments
Week 1 May 26–31	Beginnings and Introductions (Memorial Day Holiday, 5/25)	Introduce self; complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions
Week 2 June 1–7	Introducing the Subject of our Course	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions; attend optional synchronous class meeting
Week 3 June 8–14	“...the Universe fired forth out of the void...”	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions
Week 4 June 15–21	“...unfurling, expanding, and fluctuating waves of energy constellating in galactic formations...” (June 19, Juneteenth holiday)	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions; attend optional synchronous class meeting
Week 5 June 22–28	“...within and through which hydrogen and helium generate primal stars...”	Complete readings, audios, videos; attend small group meeting (required)
Week 6 June 29–July 5	“...which, in turn, bring forth new generations, out of which our sun is born...” (Independence Day holiday. July 3)	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions
Week 7 July 6–12	“...which brought forth countless forms of life...”	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions; attend optional synchronous class meeting
Week 8 July 13–19	“... and, in time, life that enabled the universe to reflect on itself in a special mode of conscious self-awareness ...”	Complete readings, audios, videos
Week 9 July 20–26	... as our particular summer work draws to a close, we are drawn forward to new challenges and opportunities ...	Complete readings, audios, videos, discussion questions; attend optional synchronous class meeting; submit creative assignment
Week 10 July 27–31	Final Project and Course Evaluation	Final assignment due 7/26; attend optional synchronous class meeting

Wednesday, August 5: due date for posting final grades

Week One Assignments

- 1) Read overview in Canvas
- 2) Participate in a Discussion on Canvas by introducing yourself and greeting your learning companions. Helpful introductions include pertinent information about yourself, your life/ministerial context(s), and what draws you to the course.
- 3) Post a "Beginnings Reflection"

4) Complete the Availability Survey

Evaluation and Grading: Overall Comprehensive Assessment Criteria

Participants will be evaluated on the extent to which they engaged in the assigned activities that include:

- faithful and active participation in the course as reflected in thoughtful, well-composed responses to questions posted on Discussion Board.
- appreciative and respectful responses to at least 3 participants' postings each session.
- your own creation of a Cosmic Walk ritual for implementation in your practice of religious education/ministry.

Each student's final grade will include the following parts:

		Percentage of Grade	
		Graduate	CEU
1	Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings	55%	95%
2	Creative Assignment	5%	5%
3	Final Project	40%	—

1. Discussion Board Evaluation Criteria (55% of graduate students' course grade; 100% of CEU students' course grade)

The modules of this course include assignments for reading, video segments, and discussion questions. These are provided in the weekly modules in our Canvas course. In addition to reading all the materials assigned and watching assigned videos, all students will also be expected to participate in the class discussions online.

You will also be asked to participate in two virtual small group sessions that you will initiate and assess. That is included as part of this participation grading.

Each week you will be able to earn 4 points for each Discussion Board question.

For each weekly discussion, your participation includes your original post in response to the assigned question(s), as well as the comments you are asked to make on your colleagues' posts. There are specific directions posted about these requirements each week in Canvas. Postings should address the question(s) for the session, respect the word limit posted for each week's question(s) and demonstrate some interaction with course materials for that session.

In addition to addressing the question(s) for each week, you are also asked each week to comment on the postings of your colleagues in this course. This comment should also be substantive: "I agree" or "I like what you posted" is not a substantive comment. Please articulate what about their posting is compelling to you, and why you consider their comment relevant, challenging, important, etc. There is no word limit requirement to comment posts.

Asking Questions: One of the most effective tools of a good online discussion is the question. Communication in the online medium can be easily misinterpreted; conversely, it can be challenging to effectively convey tone and nuance in an online discussion. This can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and frustration in the learning group.

When in doubt about the meaning of a posting, a good strategy is to pose a question about it, and to avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions. Even if the meaning seems straightforward, it is good practice to ask follow-up questions and/or questions for clarification. My hope for our discussions is that we will rely on the question as a standard tool for effective communication.

Discussion Leaders: Rather than planning for a discussion leader each week to help initiate the flow of our conversation, I am asking that each student take a turn in post first each week. Basically, he or she would essentially begin the conversation around the given question(s) for the week by posting their response to the session question by Wednesday at 8pm Central of each week. Others will then be able to respond to this initial posting and engage in a thread. All subsequent postings in the conversation, both for the Discussion Leader and the rest of the class will be due the following Sunday evening at midnight Central. Each week's session will follow this general format.

Directions for Weekly Posting in Discussions

Please note: All times are Central Time.

For each Discussion assignment, students are required to make three (3) posts: a major post of 200-400 words in which they respond to the question posted, and two (2) minor posts of no more than 150-200 words each in which they respond to two (2) of the major posts made by their fellow students. In weeks where there are two discussion board questions, students are required to make one major post and two minor posts for each question (totaling 2 major, 4 minor posts). Our weekly sessions will run from Monday to Sunday.

Beginning Each Monday

- Read the overview for the week's work and begin individual work for the week. Questions that arise about the material may be addressed to the professor in the Question Board or via email.
- Contributions to Discussions should reflect critical engagement with both the required readings as well as any other assigned material and should demonstrate itself as such. Remember to site the sources.

By Wednesday, 11:59pm CT.

- I would like to see the first major post to the weekly discussions question by Wednesday for a person leading the discussion and Thursday or Friday for everyone else (between 200-400 words). Please do not wait until the last day to post your responses. Posting in a timely manner will allow for a considerate exchange between

you and your peers.

By Sunday, 11:59pm CT.

- All students respond to two other member's posts in 150-200 words by Sunday night (Minor posts).
- All members should have a total of three discussion posts by Sunday night (one Major, two Minor) for each discussion board question.

Contents of Discussion Post

To earn full credit, you should do the following things:

- post and respond by the deadline;
- adhere to word length requirements;
- refrain from inappropriate posts (words/tones that diminish the character and community of the course) Practice using "I-statements," avoid generalizations by qualifying your words;
- provide content of substance based on the course material—that is, not comments such as “I agree wholeheartedly,” but rather content that offers an original and informed contribution to the discussion, either as an opening or as a response, and reference course material;
- integrate (reference/cite) what you have read, how you understand the material, your experience, the remarks of your colleagues, and the course material;
- posting fully addresses the weekly questions and stimulates substantial follow-up postings;
- write in accessible prose—that is, not necessarily formal academic prose, but prose that is as clear and correct as you can make it, citing material not your own, and avoiding “text-speak” (using complete sentences rather than abbreviations and emoji to make your point, for example).

2. Creative Assignment? (5% of graduate students' course grade; 5% of CEU students' course grade)

This assignment asks you to interpret and present your key learning from the course so far in a creative and intuitive way. Full details can be found in the Week 2 module in Canvas.

3. Final Course Project (40% of graduate students' course grade; optional for CEU students)

The balance of your grade will be determined by your completion of the final project. Full details can be found in the Week 4 module in Canvas.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82.9	D+	67-69.9
A-	90-92.9	C+	77-79.9	D	60-66.9
B+	87-89.9	C	73-76.9	F	0-59.9
B	83-86.9	C-	70-72.9		

Overall Grading Scale

Please note that the LIM grading scale uses B as the standard for graduate-quality work. A and B+ indicate graduate work done with distinction, with B- and below signifying levels below graduate standards.

Letter Grade	Quality Points	Characteristics of Student Work
A	4.0	Work done with distinction. An outstanding use of all four evaluation criteria as a catalyst for critical reflection.
A-	3.7	Work done with distinction, with a few minor corrections needed.
B+	3.3	Work of very good quality. The assignment is addressed in an exceptional manner with a good balance of personal insight and academic documentation.
B	3.0	The standard for the master's degree. The assignment is adequately addressed in a clear and concise manner with appropriate documentation. If subsequent work meets this standard of quality, the degree will be awarded.
B-	2.7	The work is slightly below the standard for master's level work. The assignment is addressed, but a number of corrections is needed to address the assignment in a clear and concise manner. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C+	2.3	Substandard graduate work. Evaluation criteria are not adequately met in the assignment. Moderate improvement is needed. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C	2	Less than graduate-level work. Evaluation criteria are not met. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C-	1.7	Below average, grade does not count towards graduation.
D+	1.3	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
D	1	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
F	0	Assignment not addressed at all, incomplete assignment, or not submitted on time.

Course Policies

Incomplete Grade Policy

Students are subject to the university policy regarding incomplete grades with the following additions to university policy. Grades of Incomplete are given at the instructor's discretion. Students must complete LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources, Policies, Forms, & Services section of their Canvas course. Students should first inquire of their instructor whether or not they are eligible for an incomplete; this must occur with sufficient time to complete the process explained here. To be eligible, students may not have

received an Incomplete in the previous semester, must have completed at least 75% of the course work to date, and must have at least a C or above in the course. After the instructor makes an initial assessment of eligibility, including checking with the LIM Office to ensure there was no Incomplete in the previous semester and finds the student eligible, by the due date of the course's final assignment, a student must complete and obtain all signatures for LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources section of their Canvas course and submit it to their instructor, who will forward a copy to the LIM Director. LIM graduate students may not receive Incompletes in LIM courses in consecutive semesters.

Attendance and Participation

Students are subject to the university policy regarding attendance found online in the Bulletin. Students in online courses communicate their presence by active participation in weekly discussions. Each course's instructor sets requirements for how many times students must post on the Discussion Board in Canvas. Failing to post during the first week of class may result in removal from the course. If you foresee that you will be unable to post in a given week, please contact the instructor ahead of time. Extensions for posting are given at the instructor's discretion and for a valid reason may be granted if arranged ahead of time. In extraordinary circumstances, students may arrange with their instructor to post up to two weeks after a deadline, though this may entail a grade reduction. Posts and other assignments submitted more than two weeks late may be subject to a grade of zero. If students do not post in a given week, they are considered absent. Absence for more than one week without contacting the instructor may result in removal from and failure of the course.

University Policies

Please read Part 2 of the syllabus (located in Canvas) for university policies on plagiarism, use of AI, accessible education, and more.