



Birmingham Theological Seminary

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Birmingham, Alabama 35243
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Developing an Apologetic Ministry

Semester: Spring 2026 **Course:** DM4535 Developing an Apologetic Ministry

Day/Time: **Room:** Teleconference instruction via Zoom
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/9538207228>

Mondays, 4–6 PM (PT)/6–8 PM (CT)/7–9 PM (ET)
January 26, February 2, 9, 16, March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6, 13
Spring break: February 23

Professor: Krista Bontrager, D.Min. **Credits:** 3

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Please text first.

Course Description: In this course, students work with the supervising professor and outside mentors to develop and study strategic ministry deployment of apologetics in the marketplace. Whether directly from the church, in the business community, with youth ministry, in an academic context, or in different socio-economic and possibly ethnic contexts, students will be challenged to develop a usable strategic plan for ministry deployment. Attention will be paid to foundational positions, biblical approach, avenues of contextualization, and [to](#) leadership initiatives and reproduction in assessing final projects.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- **Develop** the ability to assess real-world apologetic ministries with theological, methodological, contextual, and leadership criteria—then extract transferable principles (positive and negative) for the student's own three-year plan.
- **Conduct** advanced cultural exegesis of one distinct ministry context (e.g., urban/secular professional, Gen Z digital native, post-Christian academic, multi-ethnic immigrant, affluent suburban, or global-south persecuted church), identifying its dominant

worldview(s) beliefs, intellectual and existential objections to Christianity, and the most strategic apologetics entry points.

- **Reflect** theologically, personally, and pastorally on the character virtues of apologetic ministry (humility, courage, empathy, intellectual hospitality, resilience in the face of hostility) and propose sustainable spiritual practices that foster long-term faithfulness in this calling.
- **Design** a practical, contextualized, biblically grounded, and reproducible three-year apologetic ministry plan for the student's own cultural and ecclesial setting that intentionally equips others and advances the church's public witness about the truth claims of historic Christianity.

Required Texts

- *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, Paul Hiebert (334 pp.)
- *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, Os Guinness (240 pp.)
- Students will choose one specialized text related to his or ministry interest. Choose a text that will help equip you to better understand your mission field. The professor will provide approval.

Here are a few examples to help you get started:

- Deconstruction/Exvangelical: *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Alisa Childers & Tim Barnett
- Next Gen: *So the Next Generation Will Know*, Sean McDowell
- Digital Native/Gen Z: Analog Church, Jay Y. Kim
- Poverty context: *Church in Hard Places: How the Local Church Brings Life to the Poor and Needy*, Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley
- African American context: *African American Guide to the Bible*, HC Felder
- Multiethnic ministry: *Walking in Unity*, Krista Bontrager and Monique Duson

Course Requirements and Assessments

- **Attendance:** 20%
Attendance will be taken during each Zoom session.
- **Reading Report:** 10%
Students will self-report, per the reading schedule below, on the percentage completed. See instructions detailed [below](#).
- **Apologetics Ministry Case Study:** 20%
Students will choose one established apologetics ministry (local, national, or international) that has been operating for at least five years and that works in a context reasonably analogous to the one you believe God is calling you to and

evaluate its effectiveness. See detailed instructions [below](#).

- **Cultural Exegesis Project: 20%**

Students will use Hiebert's analytical framework in *Transforming Worldviews* to conduct a focused worldview analysis of one specific community or subculture they believe God is calling them to reach with apologetic ministry. See detailed instructions [below](#).

- **Personal Apologetic Ministry Plan: 30%**

Students will write a 12-14 pp. paper on a topic of interest integrating the course content with the student's personal ministry context. See detailed instructions [below](#).

BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. All papers are to be #12 font Times New Roman and Double-Spaced. Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Please see the BTS Turabian Style Guide for more information on turning in papers and assignments.

The BTS Turabian Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Writing Center webpage: <https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

BTS Plagiarism/Generative AI Policy

In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

Course Schedule

January 26	Course overview and introduction
February 2	<i>Fool's Talk</i> , chapters 1–4 (Come prepared to discuss.) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student selected text: Send the title, along with a one paragraph description about why you have selected this textbook and how it will help you in ministry. Email this information to the professor before the start of class.
February 9	<i>Fool's Talk</i> , chapters 5–8 (Come prepared to discuss.)
February 16	Apologetics Ministry Case Study: UNITED, Jennifer Beitel (local ministry) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>Fool's Talk</i>, chapters 9–11 (Come prepared to discuss.)● Reading report for Guiness text due before the start of class. What percentage of the book did you read analytically? See instructions detailed below. Email this information to the professor before the start of class.
[Spring break; no class February 23]	
March 2	Apologetics Ministry Case Study: MAVEN, Brett & Erin Kunkle (national ministry) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Students will have an opportunity to ask questions about their Apologetics Ministry Case Study.
March 9	TBD
March 16	Apologetics Ministry Case Study due before the start of class. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be prepared to provide a five to ten minute oral summary about your case study in class. No slides are needed.
March 23	TBD <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Students will have an opportunity to ask questions about their personal apologetics ministry plan.
March 30	Cultural Exegesis Project due before the start of class. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reading report for Heibert text due before the start of class. What percentage of the book did you read analytically? See instructions detailed below. Send your report via email to the professor.

April 6

TBD

April 13

before the start of class.

Personal Apologetics Ministry Plan due

- Reading report for student selected text due before the start of class. What percentage of the book did you read analytically? See instructions detailed [below](#). Send your report via email to the professor.
- Be prepared to provide a five to ten minute oral summary about your ministry plan. No slides are needed.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to 4 hours (2 class sessions) of instruction without penalty. Attendance will be taken during each Zoom class session.

Class Policies and Procedures

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note-taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- Late assignments will incur a -3 point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.

Video Conference Policies and Procedures

- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.
- Students are expected to keep their video on so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in a decrease in attendance points and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

Instructions for the Reading Reports

All assigned reading should be done *analytically* (see definition of this term in [Appendix 1](#) below). Students should interact with the textbook content thoughtfully. This might also include steps such as underlining key ideas, making notes in the front of the book to summarize key ideas, recording questions in the margins that arise as a result of the content, etc.

Students will report what percentage of the textbooks that they have analytically read to the professor. Students will be expected to be conversant on each book's key ideas in order to engage in thoughtful analysis of their content during the class sessions.

Instructions for the Apologetics Ministry Case Study

Overview: Students will choose one established apologetics ministry (local, national, or international) that has been operating for at least five years and that works in a context reasonably analogous to the one you believe God is calling you to and evaluate its effectiveness.

Your paper should include the following sections:

1. Descriptive Overview (10%)

- History, leadership, funding model, size/scope, primary activities, and stated mission/vision.
- Include at least two first-hand data points (attend an event, interview a leader/staff/volunteer, or analyze 3–4 hours of their primary content).

2. Contextual and Worldview Analysis (10%)

Describe the primary audience this ministry is trying to reach and how well the ministry's leaders appear to understand that audience's worldview (cite evidence). Use Hiebert's analytical framework, if relevant.

3. Methodological Analysis (10%)

Identify the dominant apologetic methodology (e.g., evidential, presuppositional) and evaluate its appropriateness for the context.

4. Effectiveness Evaluation (50%)

Include the following criteria (include specific evidence for each; no vague impressions):

- Biblical and theological fidelity: Orthodoxy, handling of Scripture, balance of truth and grace (possible data sources: public teaching, statement of faith, controversies)
- Contextual appropriateness: Degree of genuine inculcation vs. imposition (possible data sources: language, examples, format, audience feedback)
- Disciple-Making Fruit: Evidence of genuine conversions and/or maturing defenders of the faith (possible data sources: testimonies, follow-up data, leader training)
- Leadership Multiplication: Are new leaders being raised and deployed? (possible data sources: Staff growth, training programs, partnerships)
- Sustainability: Financial model, volunteer burnout rate, adaptability over time (possible data sources: financial reports, longevity, crisis response)
- Public Witness & Cultural Impact: Measurable influence on broader plausibility structures (media, academia, legislation, etc.) (possible data sources: Citations, invitations, cultural references)

5. Personal Application (20%)

- State the three most important lessons (positive or negative) you are taking from this ministry into your own three-year plan.

- State the two biggest mistakes or weaknesses you will intentionally avoid, and how.

Grading Matrix

- Primary research and fairness of portrayal – 15%
- Sophistication of methodological & worldview analysis – 30%
- Rigor and evidence in the six-criterion evaluation (#4 above) – 30%
- Concrete, specific personal application to student's own plan (#5 above) – 15%
- Turabian documentation and scholarly tone – 10%

Follow the BTS Writing Guidelines.

- Ensure your writing is scholarly, formal, and avoids personal bias or emotional appeals.
- Make sure that your paper documents all sources and follows the guidelines according to the BTS style guide.

Length: Students will present their findings in a tightly worded essay (~2000 to 2500 words), as well as be prepared to summarize their project in a 5 to 10-minute~~10 minute~~ oral presentation to the class.

Instructions for the Cultural Exegesis Project

Worldview Analysis of a Specific People Group or Subculture

Purpose

Using Paul G. Hiebert's analytical framework in *Transforming Worldviews* (especially chapters 1–4, 7–11), students will conduct a focused worldview analysis of one specific community or subculture they believe God is calling them to reach with apologetic ministry. This is not a generic “culture report”; it is a disciplined exercise in cognitive, affective, and evaluative understanding that uncovers the deep-level assumptions shaping how this group perceives reality, truth, morality, suffering, time, community, authority, and the supernatural.

Target Community

Choose one concrete, reachable community that you feel called to reach (examples: urban tech professionals under 40, first- and second-generation South-Asian immigrants, Gen Z public university students, affluent empty-nest suburbanites, ex-vangelical “deconstruction” online communities, blue-collar tradespeople in a specific industry, etc.).

Research Methods

Students should conduct their own primary research as the foundation for their report. Here are some ideas:

- Required: Conduct a minimum of 3 first-person interviews or focused life-story conversations with members of your target community.
- Conduct one or two interviews with Christian leaders who already minister to your target community.
- Create your own observation notes.
- Provide analysis of the group’s own media and artifacts
- Relevant insights from your self-selected textbook.

Required Sections

1. Introduction and Rationale

- Describe the specific community/subculture and explain why you believe this is your primary apologetic mission field.
- Summarize your research methods. (See above for ideas.)

2. Summary of Culture

- Behaviors, customs, symbols, and institutions you can observe.
- Explicit beliefs, values, and felt needs that members openly articulate.

3. Deep-Level Worldview Analysis (This should be the heart of the paper.)

- Summarize the worldview in one clear paragraph (the “story they live by”).

- Apply Hiebert's key worldview questions and categories for your chosen people group (see chart below). Analyze and illustrate with primary data.
- Summarize the three or four most dominant worldview themes you discovered.
- Explicitly identify: a) Points of tension or contradiction with biblical revelation, b) Points of contact or redemptive analogies (Hiebert's "critical contextualization" step).

Hiebert Category	Specific Questions to Answer
What is really real? (ch. 3–4)	Ontology of the supernatural, self, time, space; sources of knowledge and truth
What is good, beautiful, and valuable? (ch. 7)	Felt needs, shame/honor or guilt/innocence orientation; locus of evil
How do we decide what we ought to do? (ch. 8)	Moral reasoning, authority structures, individualism vs. collectivism
Time orientation	Understanding of history, progress, fate, planning
Plausibility structures & bounded vs. centered sets (ch. 9–10)	What makes something believable or unbelievable?
Key symbols, myths, and rituals that hold the worldview together	Master narratives (e.g., therapeutic, scientism, critical theory, karma, etc.)

4. Apologetic Implications

- Summarize common intellectual or existential objections to Christianity that arise from this worldview.
- State strategic apologetic entry points.
- State likely blind spots or resistance points you will face.
- Briefly indicate how this analysis is already shaping the kind of apologetic ministry you will propose in your final three-year plan.

Optional Appendices (not counted in word limit)

- Interview guide or protocol you used
- Table summarizing the interview data (pseudonyms, age, key quotes illustrating worldview elements)

- Sample field notes from participant observation
- Key artifacts analyzed (screenshots of social-media posts, song lyrics, memes, etc.)

Grading Matrix

- Depth and accuracy of worldview analysis using Hiebert's categories – 40%
- Quality of research – 20%
- Clarity in identifying points of contact and tension with the gospel – 20%
- Clarity and cohesiveness of writing – 10%
- Turabian documentation and scholarly tone – 10%

Follow the BTS Writing Guidelines.

- Ensure your writing is scholarly, formal, and avoids personal bias or emotional appeals.
- Make sure that your paper documents all sources and follows the guidelines according to the BTS style guide.

Length: Students will present their findings in a tightly worded essay (~2000 to 2500 words). Be prepared to summarize their project in a 5 to 10 minute oral presentation to the class.

Apologetic Worldview Interview Guide (Sample Questions Built on Hiebert's Framework)

Plan for 60–90 minutes

Interviews can be in-person or on Zoom

You may use pseudonyms in your paper.

Adapt these questions to your own context. Or create your own.

Opening (build rapport)

1. Tell me a little about your life story in this city/neighborhood/job. What are you most proud of?
2. When you think about your community here (e.g., tech workers, immigrants, students), what are the best parts? The hardest parts?

Questions re: What is really real/ true?

1. When you have a big decision to make, how do you figure out what is true or real?
2. Do you think there is anything “spiritual” or beyond the physical world? Why or why not?
3. Has science answered most of life’s big questions, or are there still mysteries?

Questions re: What is good / valuable / shameful?

1. What makes you feel most alive or gives your life meaning right now?
2. What do people in your circle admire most in a person? What do they look down on?
3. When you feel guilt or shame, what is it usually about?

Moral Questions

1. How do you decide right from wrong when values clash?
2. Who or what has the right to tell someone how to live?

Questions re: Suffering & Evil

1. When bad things happen (personal or global), how do you make sense of it?
2. What do you think the world most needs right now to be better?

Christianity-Specific Probes (asked gently, near the end)

1. Have you ever had any contact with Christianity or church? What was that experience like?
2. When Christians say “Jesus is the only way” or “the Bible is God’s Word,” what goes through your mind?
3. If Christianity were actually true, what would be the hardest part for you to accept?

Optional

1. If you could ask God one question—and He had to answer—what would it be?
2. Is there anything I should have asked but didn't?

Thank you.

Instructions for the Personal Apologetics Ministry Plan

Overview: Students will develop a three-year plan for their ministry. As part of this plan you will identify their special ministry focus—the personal mission field in your own community where God is calling you to serve. This plan will utilize your passion, spiritual gifts, strengths, experience and life of discipleship to reach those in your sphere of influence. The plan must demonstrate how the ministry distinctly advances the church’s public witness to the truth claims of historic Christianity in a skeptical or hostile environment. Personal fulfillment is welcome, but subordinate to the apologetic task. Use the research you did for the Contextual Exegesis paper to help inform your ministry plan.

Your ministry plan should include the following information:

- Summary overview of your ministry and its objectives. (2-3 paragraphs)
- Who is the primary target group you will be attempting to reach?
- What motivates you to work with this group?
- What relevant personal life experience, ministry experience and/or education do you have that will help you reach this particular group?
- How will this ministry plan utilize your passions, spiritual gifts, and strengths?
- The ministry’s mission, vision and values.
- The ministry’s statement of faith.
- Core Scriptures that will guide your ministry.
- What are the next seven steps you need to do to get started on this ministry effort?
- What resources will you need to be successful?
- What are the five biggest challenges you expect to face in launching and executing your ministry? What are your plans to overcome these challenges?
- State your critical year-one, year-two and year-three goals? Include at least two quantitative and two qualitative metrics for each year. At least one metric per year ought to measure public defensibility of the faith (e.g., number of public lectures/debates, published articles, recorded podcasts, trained lay apologists who can articulate and defend the resurrection, etc.).
- How will you raise up and deploy at least three new leaders by the end of year three who can help to sustain or expand the ministry. Include training curriculum outline, mentoring structure, and doctrinal accountability safeguards.
- How will you measure the success of your ministry during this period? Be specific.
- How will you build structures for personal spiritual growth and external feedback, as well as mentoring?
- What accountability structures will you build into your ministry, especially for yourself?

Grading Matrix

- Strategic coherence, realism, and measurability (steps, goals, resources, challenges) – 10%
- Leadership multiplication and reproducibility (detailed plan for raising + deploying new leaders) – 10%
- Personal calling, gifting, and external accountability (mentor/pastor feedback) – 10%
- Integration of contextual exegesis research and audience understanding – 10%
- Quality and clarity of writing – 50%
- Writing, Turabian/APA documentation, and scholarly tone – 10%

Follow the BTS Writing Guidelines.

- Ensure your writing is scholarly, formal, and avoids personal bias or emotional appeals.
- Make sure that your paper documents all sources and follows the guidelines according to the BTS style guide.

Length: 12-14 pp. paper (between 3,500 to 4,500 words, including bibliography if needed)

Appendix 1

In his modern classic, *How to Read a Book*, Mortimer Adler outlines several kinds of reading, each suited to different types of texts and purposes. Here's a summary of the key types:

1. **Elementary Reading:** This is the most basic form of reading, which focuses on learning to decode words and sentences. It is the kind of reading most people learn in childhood.
2. **Inspectional Reading:** This type of reading involves a quick, superficial examination of a book to get a sense of its content and structure. It's about gathering the "gist" of a book by skimming or reading the introduction, conclusion, and headings. Inspectional reading is helpful when you need to evaluate whether a book is worth a deeper read.
3. **Analytical Reading:** This is a deeper, more focused form of reading where the reader actively engages with the text to understand it fully. It involves asking questions about the material, identifying the author's main arguments, and evaluating the logic and evidence. Analytical reading is often necessary for complex or challenging texts and involves critical thinking.
4. **Syntopical Reading:** The most advanced form of reading, syntopical reading involves reading multiple books on the same topic and comparing them to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. The reader synthesizes different perspectives and ideas across texts, analyzing them in relation to one another. This type of reading is especially useful for research or when studying a broad subject across different authors and viewpoints.

Each of these types of reading is suited to different goals, and Adler emphasizes that effective reading requires the right approach for the material at hand.

BTS Outcomes Evaluation

Please rank each outcome on a scale of 1-5

- 1: this outcome is not covered in this class**
- 2: this outcome is only touched on in this class**
- 3: this outcome is discussed in conjunction with class material**
- 4: this outcome lightly assessed as part of course assessment (one assignment)**
- 5: this outcome is fully integrated into the assessment of this course (multiple assignments)**

1. **Scripture**: Students will effectively articulate the truth of Scripture and Scripture as truth, engaged with learning biblical knowledge and reformed principles of the supremacy of Scripture as God's word.
2. **Reformed Theology**: Students will be able to engage and reproduce the primary and essential elements of Reformed Theology.
3. **Local Church**: Students will be engaged in applied ministry projects in the local church
4. **Wisdom**: Students will grow in character; increasing in their demonstration of wisdom and its fruits.
5. **Discipleship**: Students will be able to understand and articulate the nature and importance of discipleship—both ordinary (means of grace) and extraordinary (biblical counseling).
6. **Communication**: Students will grow in the efficacy of their communication (articulation, teaching/speaking, and preaching—respective to various departments) both in content knowledge and rhetorical strategies.
7. **Worldview**: Students will demonstrate a growing ability to apply God's word to all spheres of life, evidenced through class discussion and other assigned assessments.
8. **Leadership**: Students will grow in their understanding of godly leadership and ability to lead others in service of the local church.

Outcome	Rank	Rationale (one sentence)
Scripture	4	Biblical foundations, Scriptural fidelity, and theological evaluation are consistently required across the Case Study, Cultural Exegesis, and Ministry Plan assignments.
Reformed Theology	3	Reformed theological categories are discussed and applied within apologetic method, ministry fidelity, and worldview evaluation but are not the primary focus of assessments.
Local Church	3	The course requires contextualized ministry planning and analysis that assumes a local-church setting, though no direct local-church project is required.
Wisdom	4	Reflection on character virtues (humility, courage, empathy, hospitality, resilience) is explicitly required in course objectives and inform final ministry planning.
Discipleship	3	Students evaluate disciple-making fruit in apologetics ministries and must plan for leadership reproduction in their own ministry context.

Communication	5	Students must orally present summaries, write multiple major papers, and demonstrate persuasive clarity across written and oral apologetic communication.
Worldview	5	Worldview analysis (Hiebert) forms a major graded project and is central to every assignment, especially contextual exegesis and apologetic method.
Leadership	5	Students must assess leadership models in existing ministries and produce a three-year leadership-multiplication strategy in their final ministry plan.