

Hartford International University --- Summer 2026
CH-730 Resilience for Spiritual Leaders
Final Syllabus (as of 4/30/26)

Instructor:

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Affiliated Faculty

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Bio: Rev. Tracy Mehr-Muska, DMin, serves as the Assistant Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and University Chaplain at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT. She is an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC). Earlier in her career, she served as Minister for Mid and Later Life at Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, CT, and as the Coordinator of Pastoral Care at Care Dimensions (formerly Hospice of the North Shore) in Massachusetts, where she served both hospice patients and pediatric palliative care patients. During her training, did her residency program at an acute care trauma hospital and completed internships as a chaplain in a prison, psychiatric hospital, trauma hospital, and non-profit advocacy agency. Before entering Princeton Theological Seminary to pursue her call to ministry, she served as a marine scientist in the private sector and as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Coast Guard, working closely with the several military chaplains. She received her Doctor of Ministry degree from Hartford International University and published *Weathering the Storm: Simple Strategies for Being Peaceful and Prepared* (Wipf and Stock, 2019) based on her research on resilience. Her passion for learning about and teaching resilience has been inspired by the strong and spirited people she has served and worked alongside while in the military and while doing the work of ministry in the parish and in specialized settings.

Course Meeting Times:

Class meets **online asynchronously** from May 25 through May 29, 2026.

Class meets **in person** from June 8 through June 12, 2025, from 9:00am – 4:00pm.*

*Thursday class will end at lunchtime.

Course Description and Goals:

This course is designed for people of all spiritual/religious backgrounds who are providing spiritual and emotional support to others, leading faith communities, serving as chaplains, working on justice issues, or seeking additional self-care practices. This course about resilience teaches the participants about the characteristics of resilience, invites the participants to engage in reflective self-assessment, and provides the participants with tools and resources to enable them to develop strategies to help the people they serve in their contexts build resilience. The course includes lectures, individual reflection, independent reading, written reflection, resilience-building workshop exercises, and small-group discussion. It is only through learning to cultivate our own resilience that we can mindfully extend that invitation to others through our programs, teaching/preaching, conversations, and role modeling. *3 credits*.

Completion of this course will enable the student to:

- Articulate and understand the characteristics of resilience and evaluate some of the related scholarship.
- Articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual/religious identity and identify the ways in which resilience is relevant to their ministry contexts or community organizations.
- Identify barriers to resilience.

- Engage in the practice of “resilience building” by assessing their own resilience, identifying areas of strength and areas in need of growth, and employing practices that can help build their own resilience.
- Develop a research-based plan to engage their faith communities or organizations in the practice of resilience-building using these strategies.

Through this course, students should be able to achieve the following Learning Outcomes for Hartford International University’s programs:

- To demonstrate foundational and critical knowledge of one’s own religion [as it relates to resilience]
- To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views
- To demonstrate knowledge of the practices of one’s own religious tradition and the capacity to appreciate the practices of other religious traditions
- To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity.
- To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist
- To develop the intellectual, interpersonal, and professional skills needed to provide chaplaincy care in complex, pluralistic environments
- To gain an understanding of the role of the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as they relate to resilience

This course fulfills the following curricular requirements:

- MAIRS - Ministerial Studies: Arts of Ministry
- MAIRS - Interreligious Studies Elective
- MAIRS - Islamic Studies Elective
- MAC - Islamic Studies Pathway Elective
- MAC - Chaplaincy Elective
- MAP – Elective

The syllabus and course conversations aspire to do the following:¹

- Show mutual appreciation and respect for others – modeling the privilege to learn from and partner with each other.
- Engage in cross-disciplinary content and teaching
- Pay attention to the whole personhood of another – history, race, religion, knowledge, gender, and rank
- Demonstrate how to disagree respectfully and well
- Embody mutuality – learning to construct ideas and skills and experiences together

Assessment:

All aspects of this course are scheduled to be completed by June 12, 2026. Grades will be based on completion of assignments, attendance, meaningful participation in class discussion, and completion of written assignments as detailed below.

Hartford International University takes plagiarism very seriously. The policy says this, “Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where

¹ Based on Hartford Values for Collaborative Teaching and Learning.

the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.”

- Here is information about plagiarism: <https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/student-affairs/academics/academic-policies>.
- For proper acknowledgements and citations, a useful resource is Kate L. Turabian’s, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (6th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- AI Usage: The purpose of this course is to encourage thoughtful self-reflection and the ability to articulate one’s worldview, insights, and experience. By producing and presenting your own original work, you will develop the ability to independently understand and reflect on complex topics and organize and articulate your own unique views. For this reason, the use of any AI tools (such as ChatGPT, DeepSeek, or similar platforms) is not permitted on this course. This includes using AI tools for content generation, creativity, or text editing. If AI-generated material is detected, it will be addressed as a potential academic integrity concern in accordance with institutional policies. Grammarly may be used to check or correct grammar and spelling.

The requirements are as follows:

Attendance & Class Participation [40%]

Presence and participation during the course meetings and participation online via the Canvas are essential components of this course. *Because this class meets only five times face-to-face*, missing class may result in an automatic lowering of your final grade, unless an adequate manner of making up the time and covering the material is negotiated with the instructor.

Reflections [20%]

During the asynchronous portion, there will be an assignment each day, which is generally a written reflection of approximately 250 words (6 total).

Class Presentation [10%]

Each student will be asked to do some research on a resilience topic based on the student’s context, area of interest, or personal spiritual/religious tradition. The student will be asked to offer a 5-minute presentation on the material to the class and facilitate discussion related to the material on Thursday of our in-person week.

Project [20%]

Choose **one** of the following:

- Outline a program that you can implement in your context related to helping people build their resilience. Be sure to include the following:
 - Detail the audience.
 - Describe your rationale for this proposed project by citing at least four sources (books or journal articles).
 - Outline the program content.
 - Propose how you might introduce the program to stakeholders.
 - Consider and propose how you intend to assess the success of the program.
- Create (and/or develop a detailed outline for) an instructional resource and/or sermon/khutbah about resilience that incorporates theology and Holy Writ from your spiritual/religious tradition. Describe your audience and cite reliable sources such as books or journal articles.
- Other: If you have another idea for a project (group or individual), see instructor for approval.

Resilience Timeline [10%]

During the in-person class time, students will prepare and present a resilience timeline identifying your movement on a resilience continuum. Highlight 3-4 pivotal or formative moments that challenged/tested your resilience (mistakes, achievements, losses, transitions, disappointments, rejections, etc.). What made you move back? What helped you move forward? This could be presented visually (like a timeline), artistically, or in words.

Please consult with the instructor if you are in a doctoral program, as you may be required to complete an additional assignment.²

Email Policy:

The instructor will use the official Hartford International University student email addresses for all course communications. Please check your *hartsem.edu* email account regularly.

Required Reading:

Mehr-Muska, Tracy. *Weathering the Storm: Simple Strategies for Being Peaceful and Prepared*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019. ISBN 1532652372. [The university and library and instructor have copies of *Weathering the Storm* that can be borrowed.]
Southwick, Steven, and Dennis Charney. *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. ISBN 1108441661. [First edition is also fine.]

Recommended Reading/Viewing:

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York: Macmillan, 1961.
Bridges, William. *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2004.
Brown, Brené, host. "Dr. Vivek Murthy and Brené on Loneliness and Connection." Unlocking Us (podcast). April 21, 2020.
Brown, Brené. *Rising Strong*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. ISBN 0812999339.
Brown, Brené. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010.
Burke, Tarana and Brené Brown, eds. *You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience*. New York: Random House, 2021.
Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler. *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverhead, 1998).
Duckworth, Angela. "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance." Filmed April 2013. TED video, 6:02.
Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016. ISBN 1501111116.
Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon, 2006. ISBN 0807014273.
Goggins, David. *Can't Hurt Me: Master Your Mind and Defy the Odds*. Austin: Lioncrest Publishing, 2018.
Grenville-Cleave, Bridget. *Positive Psychology: A Practical Guide*. New York: MJF, 2012.
Hagerty, Barbara Bradley. *Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife*. New York: Riverhead, 2016.

² Per the guidelines provided by the university: "It is expected that doctoral students should have additional requirements students in the Master's program. Normally, this would be: 2 additional texts with short written reviews, a longer final paper, or other writing assignment—normally applied to their ministry context . . . additional texts to be integrated into other assigned, such as critical book reviews, short papers, or a final paper – ideally focused on their research topic."

- Hanson, Rick. *Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*. New York: Harmony, 2020.
- Hone, Lucy. "3 Secrets of Resilient People." Filmed August 2019. TEDxChristchurch video, 15:57.
- James, Lebron. "Train Your Mind – Vol 1." Calm (podcast).
- Khedr, Mahmoud. "How Toxic Positivity Leads to More Suffering." Filmed November 22, 2019. TEDxMenloCollege video, 13:55.
- Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Schocken, 1981.
- Kyodo Williams, Angel. *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*. New York: Penguin, 2002.
- Mehr-Muska, Tracy. *Weathering the Storm: Simple Strategies for Being Peaceful and Prepared*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019.
- Nelson, Shasta. "Frientimacy: The Three Requirements of All Healthy Friendships." Filmed November 2017. TEDxLaSierraUniversity video, 16:24.
- Nhat Hahn, Thich. *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting through the Storm*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012.
- Nhat Hahn, Thich. *Touching Peace*. Berkley, CA: Parallax, 2009.
- Nouwen, Henry. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Image, 1979.
- Reivich, Karen and Andrew Shatte. *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. Albuquerque: Harmony, 2003.
- Sandberg, Sheryl, and Adam Grant. *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*. New York: Knopf, 2017.
- Seligman, Martin. "Can Happiness Be Taught?" *Daedalus* 133, no. 2 (Spring 2004) 80-87.
- Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. New York: Vintage, 2006. ISBN 1400078393.
- Southwick, Steven, and Dennis Charney. *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Stone Zander, Rosamund, and Benjamin Zander. *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*. New York: Penguin, 2002.
- Swain, Storm. *Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero: A Pastoral Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011.
- Talks at Google*. "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance with Angela Duckworth." May 6, 2016. Video, 51:59.