Instructor  |  Brian D. Birch
Office Location  |  Tanner Humanities Center, TBA
Office Hours  |  T/TH 5:00-6:00 p.m. (or by appointment)
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Course Description
This course explores the development and contemporary landscape of Mormon intellectual engagement. It examines key episodes in Latter-day Saint history that shaped the development of policies, practices, and movements related to the study of Mormonism. The course also addresses distinctive features of the tradition that have served to regulate and constrain forms of academic activity within the ranks of the LDS Church. Finally, the course will situate Mormon ideas and practices relative to perennial questions related to reason, faith, science, and revelation.

Key Themes
• The dynamics of faith and reason in Mormon thought
• Science, religion, and Mormon cosmology
• Revelation and authoritative discourse
• The role of theology and apologetics
• The mainstreaming of Mormon Studies

Course Requirements & Grading
• Students are required to complete the assigned readings and actively participate in class discussion.
• Students are required to complete a midterm and final examination consisting of essay questions taken from the readings, lectures, and class discussion.
• Students are required to submit a term paper of 3000-3500 words. All paper topics must be selected in consultation with the instructor. A précis and preliminary list of sources is required for submission by October 20th.
• Each student is required to prepare a 10-12 minute classroom presentation on their paper topic.
• Students are expected to post on the Canvas discussion board at least once per week (200-250 words) related to the topic currently under discussion.
1. Introduction
   • Introduction to content and scope of the course
   • Overview of the Mormon tradition

2. The Nineteenth Century Context: Perspicuity, Common Sense, & Revelation
   Topics
   • Backdrop: The place of theology in American Christianity
   • Scottish Common Sense thought
   • The Mormon appeal to revelation
   • The thought of Parley & Orson Pratt
   Readings
   • E. Brooks Holifield, “Restoration” and “Evidential Christianity” from Theology in America (Yale University Press, 2005)
   • Parley Pratt, excerpts from Key to the Science of Theology (Deseret Book Co., 1978, reprint of 1855 edition)
   • Orson Pratt, “Man is the Offspring of God…” in The Essential Orson Pratt (Signature Books, 1991)
   • Catherine Brekus, “Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency” Journal of Mormon History 27:2 (Spring, 2011)
   • Richard T. Hughes, “Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century” (Journal of Mormon History 19:1, Spring, 1993)
   • Leigh Eric Schmidt, “Mormons, Freethinkers, and the Limits of Toleration” in From the Outside Looking In: Essays on Mormon History, Theology, and Culture (Oxford University Press, 2015)

3. The Early Twentieth Century: Roberts, Smith, Talmage, and Widtsoe
   Topics
   • Backdrop: The Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy
   • James Talmage and the stabilization of Mormon theology
   • Joseph Fielding Smith and question of anti-intellectualism
   • The speculative theology of John Widtsoe
   • B.H. Roberts and the regulation of authoritative discourse
   Readings
   • Joseph Fielding Smith, “Conflict Between Science and Religion” (1&2) and “Fundamental Doctrines of the Church” in Man: His Origin and Destiny (Deseret Book Co., 1954).
• Matthew Bowman, “James Talmage, B.H. Roberts, and Confessional History in a Secular Age” in Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy (Oxford University Press, 2014)
• Molly Worthen, “Errand from the Wilderness” from Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism (Oxford University Press, 2014)
• Richard Sherlock, “‘We Can See No Advantage of a Continuation of the Discussion’: The Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair” (Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 13:3, Fall, 1980)

4. From the “Chicago Experiment” to the “Charted Course”

Topics
• Joseph Merrill and the Chicago Divinity School pipeline
• J. Reuben Clark and the retrenchment of LDS education
• Joseph Fielding Smith vs. Heber Snell on biblical studies

Readings
• J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994, revised and reprinted version of the 1938 edition)

5. Institutional Contexts: Brigham Young University, University of Utah, and Stanford

Topics
• The Chamberlain brothers and the BYU purge
• Hugh Nibley and the origins of contemporary Mormon apologetics
• Lowell Bennion, Sterling McMurrin and the liberal voice in Mormonism
• The origins of Dialogue and Sunstone

Readings
• Claudia Bushman, “The Intellectual Activities of Recent Years” in Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern American (Praeger, 2006)
• Brian Birch, “The ‘Old Orthodoxy’: Sterling McMurrin and the Development of Mormon Thought” in Faith, Reason, Conscience, and Conflict: The Paths of Lowell Bennion, Sterling McMurrin, and Obert Tanner (University of Utah Press, forthcoming)
6. “New Mormon” vs. “Faithful” Histories

Topics
- Backdrop: Methodological and epistemological issues in historical scholarship
- The rise and fall of Leonard Arrington as LDS Church Historian
- The politics of the New Mormon History

Readings
- Richard Bushman, “Faithful History” in Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays (Columbia University Press, 2007)
- Edwin Gaustad, “History and Theology: The Mormon Connection” in Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History (Signature Books, 1992)
- David Bohn, “Unfounded Claims, Impossible Expectations: A Critique of the New Mormon History” in Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History (Signature Books, 1992)

7. Revelation, Authoritative Discourse, and Boundary Maintenance

Topics
- Backdrop: Authoritative discourse in religious communities
- The “September Six” episode
- Revelation theology and its implications for Mormon Studies
- The dynamics of LDS Seminaries and Institutes
- The role of the “Gospel Topics” essays in contemporary LDS discourse
Readings

• Dallin Oaks, “Alternate Voices” (Ensign, May, 1989)
• Margaret Toscano, “Is There a Place for Heavenly Mother in Mormon Theology: An Investigation into Discourses of Power” in Discourses on Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities (Greg Kofford Books, 2007)
• Armand Mauss, “Mormon Fundamentalism: The Institutional Matrix” from The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation (University of Illinios Press, 1994)
• Grant Underwood, “Revelation, Text, and Revision: Insight from the Book of Commandments and Revelations” BYU Studies 48:3 (2009)
• Brian Birch, “‘What power shall stay the heavens?’ Continuing Revelation and Doctrinal Authority Among the Latter-day Saints” in The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts (Maxwell Institute for Latter-day Saint Scholarship, forthcoming)
• David Holland, “Revelation and the Open Canon in Mormonism” in The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism (Oxford University Press, 2015)

8. Reason, Faith, and Theology

Topics

• Backdrop: Faith and reason in philosophy of religion
• Systematic vs. narrative theologies
• The discourse of Mormon atheology
• Fideism and the domestication of reason

Readings

• James Faulconer, “Why a Mormon Won’t Drink Coffee But May Have a Coke: The Atheological Character of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology 2:2, Fall, 2006)
• Sterling McMurrin, Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology (University of Utah Press, 1959)
• Terryl L. Givens & Fiona Givens, from The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith (Deseret Book Company, 2014)
• Dallin Oaks, “Reason and Revelation” from The Lord’s Way (Deseret Book Co., 1991)
• Stephen Davis, “Philosophical Theology for Mormons: Some Suggestions from an Outsider” Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology 3: 1&2 (Spring & Fall, 2007)
9. Mormon Studies and Apologetics

Topics
• Backdrop: Apologetic discourse the Christian theological tradition
• Mormon apologetics and the secular academy
• The institutionalization of Mormon Studies
• The Joseph Smith Papers Project

Readings
• Spencer Fluhman, “Friendship: An Editor’s Introduction” (Mormon Studies Review, vol. 1, 2014)
• LDS Newsroom Commentaries, “‘Mormon Studies’ and the Value of Education” and “A Mormon Worldview” (2007 & 2008)
• Julie Smith, “Apologetics” (Paper presented at the Faith, Reason, the Critical Study of Mormon Apologetics panel, November 6th, 2015)
• Ralph Hancock, “Keeping Faith in Provo: Warning of the Dangers of Secularism for Brigham Young University” (First Things, March, 2014)
• Daniel Peterson, “The Role of Apologetics in Mormon Studies” (Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture 2, 2012)

10. Contemporary Applications

Topics
• Selected areas of contemporary study

Readings
• Patrick Mason, “Faith and Trust in a Secular Age” from Planted: Belief and Faith in an Age of Doubt (Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015)