

# Religion and Popular Culture, Rel 3101

## Sample Syllabus

**Dr. Julie Ingersoll**  
**Office Hours: 10: 2223 M/W 3-4:30 and by appointment**

**620-1330**  
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### Course Description

If modern society is, indeed, becoming more secular, what does this mean for the continuing influence of religion? Institutional religion seems to be less and less significant in the lives of individuals, yet the "religiousness" of those individuals persists. This course will explore the presence of themes and functions traditionally associated with religion as they are found in less clearly "religious" aspects of culture. This focus will raise questions about the definition of religion and point to the power dynamics implicit in the act of defining.

### Required Readings

*Religion and Wine*, Robert Fuller  
*Redneck Liberation*, David Fillingim  
*The Joy of Sports*, Michael Novak  
*Roadside Religion*, Timothy Beal

### Suggested Readings (for projects, can be ordered through inter-library loan)

*Religion and Film*,  
*Judgment and Grace in Dixie*, Charles Reagan Wilson  
*Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, Stephen J. Fjellman  
*Consumer Rites*, Leigh Eric Schmidt  
*Material Christianity*, Colleen McDannell  
*Lived Religion in America*, David Hall  
*American Sacred Space*, David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal

### Course Requirements

It is imperative that you come to class and that you come prepared to participate in our discussion of the course materials. Your grade will depend on it. When I say that you should "be prepared" for each class, I mean that you should have completed the assignments for the day and that you should have spent some time reflecting on these assignments and their significance for the issues we are discussing. Meaningful participation requires that you engage constructively with the ideas presented in the readings, by me, and by your fellow students.

Students will write four -page (double spaced) analytical reviews of each book. Reviews should engage the thesis of the book, evaluate the data presented, and place the work in the context of related studies. Personalized reflections on the books are not really what I'm looking for here. Its is not so important whether you liked the book (or didn't), or whether you found it hard (or easy) these comments tell me more about you than the book; stay focused on analyzing the book, its content and the effectiveness of its argument. The strongest reviews (i.e. those that earn an A) will go beyond our class discussions of the book in some way. Students should look at scholarly journals for examples of appropriate book reviews. I will use these reviews in lieu of tests to assess your familiarity with the material.

Students will demonstrate their mastery of this approach to the study of religion by exploring an aspect of popular culture as religion, writing six-page term papers, and presenting their findings to the class. In previous classes students have written successful papers on such topics as sports, beauty pageants, patriotism, and celebrities.

Finally, with the compressed schedule of a summer course it is important that you stay on top of the material: falling behind can be costly with no time to make up the work. Keep up and we'll all get through this together: Do your readings on time and stay on schedule for your research paper.

### Grading

Each book review will be worth 20% of the final course grade, I will drop the lowest of your grades though you must complete all reviews in order to qualify for the grade-drop; The term paper will be worth 20%

\*\*I reserve the right to adjust course grades up or down for participation in class discussions and presentations.

## Course Guidelines

**I do not accept work by email. There are very good reasons for this that I won't elaborate here but please don't attempt to do this.** I also rarely accept excuses for late work. If you encounter an absolutely unavoidable problem in meeting a deadline for an assignment, see me as early as possible; do not assume that you will be permitted to make up missed work. The earlier I know about a problem the less it looks like poor planning and the more sympathetic I am likely to be. Computer problems and the like are inevitable and you should plan for them. Should extensions/make-ups be granted grades will be reduced.

In accordance with the editorial policy and practice with the majority of publications in our field, I require that students in my classes make use of gender inclusive language. The terms "man," "mankind," and so forth, and the pronoun "he" are not considered generic. This applies to references to human beings only; references to deity (and, of course, all material attributed to others) should be true to the usage of those about whom you write.

Plagiarism (the using of another's ideas and/or words without proper citation) is a serious offense and it occurs, perhaps most often, inadvertently. Be careful to keep track of your sources while doing research because even inadvertent plagiarism will result in a failing grade for that assignment.

Finally, ask for whatever help you need. I will make arrangements to meet with you before class, after class or at some other time convenient to you—even if that means having a phone consultation. Just ask.

## Course Outline

### Introduction to the course and to each other

In Class Discussion of syllabus, class input

Lectures: *What is Religion? Secularization and Ninam Smart's Dimensions of Religion*

In Class Reading and Discussion of Essays:

*The Academic Study of Religion*, Russell McCutcheon

*Body Ritual Among the Nacirema*, Horace Miner

*Sample book reviews*

Discussion of term papers and handout

*Guide to writing papers in the Academic Study of Religion*

### Let's Learn this Model of Studying Religion

Read Before Class: *From God in the Details* (Second Edition)

Introduction (1-14)

Chapter 1, Deliver me from Nowhere (20-40)

Chapter 5, Blood in the Barbecue (108-119)

Chapter 13, Thin Line Between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (258-270)

Chapter 16, The Happiest Place on Earth (307-321)

In Class Discussion of Readings

Media and Analysis

### More from *God in the Details*

Read Before Class: *From God in the Details* (Second Edition)

Chapter 3, Fire in the Sky (62-79)

Chapter 9, Is God Still in the Box? (179-197)

Chapter 12, Homer the Heretic (237-254)

In Class Discussion of Readings, discussion of writing assignment

Your scholarly review of *God in the Details* is due no later than **5:00 PM on Thursday 9/19**. Pay attention to the interplay between the categories: Religion in Popular Culture, Popular Culture in Religion and Popular culture as Religion Please upload your word document to blackboard.

## **Religion and Wine**

Read Before Class: Religion and Wine  
In Class Discussion of Reading

Field Trip: Wine Warehouse 655 Atlantic Bl. in Atlantic Beach 6:30 PM

**Cost to participate \$5**, you must have ID to verify that you are over 21. If you are under 21 or if you prefer for whatever reason you may observe only, in which case you do not need to pay the fee but you should still attend.

Your Review of *Religion and Wine* is due no later than **5:00 PM on Thursday 10/3**. Pay attention to the interplay between the categories: Religion in Popular Culture, Popular Culture in Religion and Popular culture as Religion

## **Magical Thinking and American Religion**

Read Before Class: *Bright-Sided* (Chapters 1-4)  
In Class Discussion of Reading

## **Magical Thinking and American Religion**

Read Before Class: *Bright-Sided* (Chapters 5-8)  
In Class Discussion of Reading

Your Review of *Bright-Sided* is due no later than **5:00 PM on Thursday 10/17**. Pay attention to the interplay between the categories: Religion in Popular Culture, Popular Culture in Religion and Popular culture as Religion

## **Religion, the Old South and Neo-confederacy**

Read Before Class: PDF on Blackboard

## **Country Music as/and Religion**

Read Before Class: Redneck Liberation  
In Class Discussion of Reading and listening!

Field Trip: The Ritz Theater and Museum, 829 North Davis St. Downtown Jax 6:30 PM

**Music as Religion? Religion as Music?: Communal identities & conflicts** with guest Professor Brandi Denison

Your Review of *Redneck Liberation* is due

**Movie Night** TBA, guest Professor Paul Carelli

**TV Night/ Project Presentations**

**TV Night/ Project Presentations**