

Religion as Culture, REL 3102

Sample Syllabus

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****This syllabus is subject to change**

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Course Description

This course will introduce students to one of the two primary approaches to Religious Studies: the Social Scientific Study of Religion as Culture (the other, complementary, approach being History of Religions/Comparative Religions.) Our focus in this course is on religions as cultural systems. We will examine the work of classical theorists (such as Durkheim and Weber), current theoretical developments (secularization and social formation), and some key methodological issues in quantitative and qualitative research. In each section we will draw on case studies to illustrate religious diversity and to refine/apply our understandings of theory and method.

Required Books and Readings

Selections from *Sociology of Religion: a Reader*, Susanne Monahan *et al*, eds., Prentice Hall, 2001 Relevant files available in PDF, Blackboard Course Documents

Students must also purchase these two books:

Personal Knowledge and Beyond, (PKB) James Spickard *et al*, eds., New York University Press, 2002
Contemporary American Religion, (CAR) Becker and Eisland, eds. Alta Mira 1997

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.

At the end of each class period for which reading groups are assigned to lead discussion, each student in the group will hand in a one-page double spaced summary/analysis of the essay for which he or she is responsible for leading discussion. This writing assignment is intended as an indicator of preparation for leading discussion. Students should begin with a brief summary of the essay including an outline of the argument made. Students may then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the essay, explore the questions posed in the text or in some other way respond to their essay. Since this writing assignment is intended to indicate preparation for participation, they cannot be handed in unless you are present for the entire class period.

The central goal for this class is for students to explore theoretical models used in understanding and interpreting aspects of religious communities and to demonstrate the critical thinking skills necessary to employ those models by writing their culminating project based in field research in a religious community of their choosing. The writing project (with references to scholarly literature and field research) spans the entire semester and will be submitted as a portfolio at the end of the term. The portfolio is to include your proposal with my comments, and any subsequent revisions, your collected field notes, the draft of your 6-8 page paper you bring to the peer review session and the comments from your peer reviewers and then the final draft of the paper, clearly labeled as such. Your combined paper grade will be based on assessment of all of these components and your presentation of your work to the class.

Grading

There will be four tests (they will not be "cumulative") and each will count for 20% for students' final grades. Students research project portfolios will count for an additional 20%. Grades will be adjusted up or down based on students' participation as evidenced, in part, by the compiled responses to daily readings, participation in workshops and presence at student presentations.

Course Guidelines

I 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 it the less it looks like poor planning and the more sympathetic I am likely to be. However, computer problems and the like are inevitable and you should plan for them. Should extensions/make-ups be granted grades on those assignments would be significantly 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. In serious cases of plagiarism I reserve the right to assign a failing grade for the course.

Finally, please take advantage of my office hours to get whatever help you need. You are not, however, limited to my office hours. Feel free to come by my office at other times as well; if I am there, you are welcome. **If you cannot meet me at the times I have set aside, I will make arrangements to meet with you.** Just ask.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS:

Introduction to the course and to each other, read and discuss McCutcheon, organize reading groups and discuss research project portfolios.

PART ONE: Overview of Classic Definitions and Theories in the Study of Religion as Culture

What is religion, actually? How is it related to Culture? What are some the classic examples of scholars' efforts to answer these questions?

DISCUSSION TOPIC: What is Religion? PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Introduction and Introduction to Part I; all students are to read the entire assignment and be prepared to discuss the Introduction to the book and the "Introduction to the Classical Definitions" by Chang. Think through the questions posed at the end of the selection.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Classical Definitions: PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Durkheim and Marx. Be prepared to summarize the reading and think through the strengths and weaknesses of these definitions.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Classical Definitions, cont. PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Geertz and Berger. Be prepared to summarize the reading and think through the strengths and weaknesses of these definitions.

RESEARCH WORKSHOP: identifying, sources, critical thinking and writing with theory

Come to class with a preliminary idea for a religious group you would like to study. You will be reading scholarly materials about this group and visiting services/events for field research so think about what interests you and what you have access to. You are also required to include some theoretical framework in your analysis. Examples of this will be provided when we begin reading our third book (but you might look ahead for ideas). Remember you are to study this group as a cultural system. Your focus should not be primarily on their beliefs, and your goal is not to assess their "correctness." Since this course fulfills a cultural diversity requirement you MAY NOT

study your own church. For next Thursday you should have a one page single spaced proposal that identifies a group, and at least three scholarly sources (give me full citations and a description of each) and a research plan. ****THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT SESSION. YOU MAY NOT MAKE IT UP AND YOUR FIELD WORK MUCH LESS EFFECTIVE WITHOUT IT.***

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Belief and Ritual Part 1 PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part II; all students are to read and be prepared to discuss "Introduction to Belief and Ritual" and "Salvation on Sand Mountain."

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Belief and Ritual, Part 2 cont. PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: All students are to read and be prepared to discuss the Bellah essay "Civil Religion in America" and the Turner essay "*Liminality and Communitas*." Reading Group ONE will lead discussion of the Bellah and group TWO will lead discussion of Turner. Students should each hand in a one-page discussion of the reading for their assigned group.

First Test

PART TWO: Ethnography of Religion in Practice

In this part of the course we will look at examples of ethnographic studies of a variety of religious communities that will serve as good models for your own projects. Please pay careful attention to the way in which the authors employ theoretical models to make an argument about the groups they study. Your ability to model this kind of analysis is an example of critical thinking and is the primary way in which your research projects will be evaluated. We will continue with our discussions of important themes in the study of religion and theories that may help you make arguments about the groups you are studying.

TOPIC: four ethnographic studies from *Contemporary American Religion*, All students should read the follow essays but members of reading groups should come prepared to lead discussion on the essay assigned to their group. See if you can describe exactly who is the data in the essay; what argument is being made; and what theory is being invoked.

Group One: Feher, Chapter 1

Group Two: Becker, Chapter 5

Group Three: Eisland, Chapter 8

Group Four: McMullen. Chapter 9

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Race, Ethnicity and Religion, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part IV; all students are to read and be prepared to discuss "Introduction to Race, Ethnicity and Religion" and the first four essays in this section. Group ONE will lead discussion of the Kurien essay, group TWO will lead discussion of the Roof essay, group THREE will lead the discussion of the Nelson essay and group FOUR will lead the discussion of the Zhou essay. Students should each hand in a one-page discussion of the reading for their assigned group

PAPER PROPOSALS DUE: proposals should be one-page single spaced. They should

- 1) identify the group you will study,
- 2) identify the aspect of the group you will explore,
- 3) identify a preliminary theory you will employ
- 4) Identify 2 relevant scholarly secondary sources and include annotated bibliographical citations (a FULL CITATION and a description for each).

****You must keep the copies returned to you as they are the first part of your portfolio which will be handed in and graded at the end of the term.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Social Class and Religion, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part VI; all students are to read and be prepared to discuss "Introduction to Social Class and Religion" and the Pope essay.

FOLLOWED BY WRITING WORKSHOP: *Asking Good Questions*

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Gender and Religion, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part V; all students are to read and be prepared to discuss "Introduction to Gender and Religion" and the four essays in this section. Group ONE will lead discussion of the Daly essay, group TWO will lead discussion of the Griffin essay, group THREE will lead discussion of the Wallace essay and group FOUR will lead discussion of the Pevey essay. Students should each hand in a one-page discussion of the reading for their assigned group.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Culture Wars: LGBT rights and Conservative Christianity

READ: Most recent three posts from Pew Research <http://www.pewforum.org/topics/gay-marriage-and-homosexuality/>

Second Test

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Secularization, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part VIII; all students are to read and be prepared to discuss "Introduction to the Secularization Debate" and the Berger essay Group ONE will lead discussion on the Wilson essay and group TWO will lead discussion on the Finke essay.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Organizations, Institutions, Authority, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part IX; All students should be prepared to discussion the "Introduction..." Group THREE will lead discussion on the Weber essay and group FOUR will lead discussion on the Finke and Starke essay.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Religion and Politics: Religious Exemptions and the Hobby Lobby Decision

READ: <http://religiondispatches.org/why-hobby-lobby-is-a-pandoras-box-ginsburg-v-alito/>
Plus additional essay TBA

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Social Movements, PDF in Blackboard Course Documents

READ: Part XIV; All students should be prepared to discussion the "Introduction..." and the selection from Martin Luther King.

TOPIC: four more ethnographic studies from *Contemporary American Religion*, *All students should read the follow essays but members of reading groups should come prepared to lead discussion on the essay assigned to their group. See if you can describe exactly who is the data in the essay; what argument is being made; and what theory is being invoked.*

READ: Gray and Thumma, Chapter 3

READ: Stocks, Chapter 4

READ: Wedam, Chapter 6

READ: Nelson, Chapter 7

Third Test

RESEARCH WORKSHOP: Incorporating Theory and Writing from Field Notes. We will work on your actual projects during this workshop. Please bring with you **TWO COPIES** of the material you have gathered which should, by this time, include some context drawn from scholarly sources and field notes from actual visits that include some quotes from interviews. I will be collecting one copy with which I will assess your progress ****THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT SESSION AND CANNOT BE MADE UP**

PART THREE: Reflexivity

While the Study of Religion will give you useful information about the world around you, it can also help you learn to see the world through the eyes of others. This skill is crucial to your becoming a good employee (employer) a good colleague and a good citizen. In the section of the course we will reflect on issues related to how we know what we think we know, how worldviews and socio-economic placement shapes what we think we know, and the limits of our knowledge.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: quantitative vs. qualitative methods

READ: Everyone should read "Introduction" to *Personal Knowledge and Beyond*. Be prepared to discuss the transformation of the Social Scientific Study of Religion as explored in the reading. Groups ONE through FOUR should read and be prepared to discuss Chapters One through Four respectively. As you read each essay reflect upon your own fieldwork

DISCUSSION TOPIC: issues in field research as you read each essay reflect upon your own fieldwork

READ: Groups One through Four should read and be prepared to discuss Chapters Five (Tweed), Six (Coleman), Eight (Landres) and Eleven (Birckhead) respectively.

Last Test

FINAL WORKSHOP: Peer Review Session. To benefit from this session you should have, what you consider to be, a FINAL version of your paper (not a rough draft). Please bring a copy for me (I will evaluate how well prepared you are for this session) as well as two copies to be edited by your classmates.

*** THIS IS AN IMPORTANT SESSION AND THERE IS NO WAY TO MAKE IT UP**

Working Session: use this time to make progress on your research papers. Please be sure that your paper meets these requirements:

- 1) 6-8 page minimum; these are to be full pages in normal sized type with normal margins. Do not attempt to fill the space with headings etc. Half a page does not constitute a full page.
- 2) Your paper is to be based in your field research
- 3) Your paper is to have an argument that uses a theoretical model to explain something (your ability to do this is evidence of the critical thinking skills that are central to this course.)
- 4) Your paper is to be submitted in a paper folder along with the other parts of the project submitted over the course of the term as a portfolio.

Students will briefly and informally share with their classmates the results of the research projects. Your attendance is required for both of these sessions and will be a consideration in your grade for your own paper/presentation. Term Papers Due on Presentation Day.

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