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## **SOC375: RELIGION AND AMERICAN CULTURE**

Spring 2019

TF 2:00-3:20 pm in SSB324

**Course Purpose and Description:** To rightly understand U.S. culture, one must understand the religions that influenced, and continue to influence, its citizens. Religion oriented the entire lives of early colonists, impacting the institutions they created, the interactions they had, and the cultural norms they established. Today, religion is no less influential in American culture; it shapes the personal realms of its citizens and touches every institution within it (e.g., school curricula, genetic research, foreign policy). Grasping some of the complex ways religion influences, and is influenced by, American cultural processes will be of value to any interested citizen, and especially to those who seek to better understand the dynamic interplay of religion and American culture in the making of American individuals.

Students successfully completing this course, then, will have achieved several important learning goals. First, they will appreciate commonalities across American religious groups, differences across these same groups, and the interrelationships of these groups with American culture and postmodern society. Second, they will gain an overview of how scholars make sense of religion in society, both over time and presently. Third, they will differentiate sociological from other perspectives on religion (e.g., psychological, theological, historical), and will be able to apply a sociological perspective to religion in contemporary society. To achieve these goals, this course will present students with various opportunities to observe and consider religion and American culture. Opportunities will include three field experiences, reading from a variety of texts, guest presentations, documentaries, and course discussions.

### **Learning Goals:**

*Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:*

- Use key concepts (e.g., meaning system, modernity, post-modernity, plausibility structure, discourse, cultural repertoire, formal organization, charisma, legitimation) to analyze American religion.
- Apply key concepts and theories to observation and analysis of formally organized, nascent, and amorphous religious groups.
- Converse analytically and civilly about religion, religious groups, and religious/normative/philosophical matters.
- Critique reductionist theories of religion, using empirical evidence and social construction theory.
- Critique functionalist theories of religion, using empirical evidence and critical theory.
- Articulate the complex web of relationships among American religion, power/politics, race/ethnicity, education, social stratification, and family life.
- Articulate important intersections between religion and family life, and between religion and the life course of contemporary U.S. residents.
- Distinguish significant and widely-subscribed U.S. religions -- in particular, Conservative Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism.

Or, to put it more formally, this course furthers core components of the college's, school's, and department's student learning outcomes – including written & oral communication, critical analysis and reasoning, intercultural competence, ethical reasoning and compassion, respect for diversity, sociological knowledge, and application of sociological knowledge.

### **Required Readings:**

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror and the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, 4th Edition*. Univ of California Press, 2017.

Roose, Kevin. *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University*. Grand Central Publishing, 2009.

Singleton, Andrew. *Religion, Culture, and Society: A Global Approach*. Sage, 2014.

Students must also read the following pdf articles (or view the following documentaries):

- Clydesdale, Tim & Kathleen Garces-Foley. Select chapters from *The Twentysomething Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Collings, Harry & Trevor Pinch. "Introduction," "Edible Knowledge," and "Conclusion." in *The Golem: What You Should Know about Science, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Ecklund, Elaine Howard. "The Real Religious Lives of Scientists" from *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Prothero, Stephen. Select chapters from *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World – and Why Their Differences Matter*. HarperOne, 2010.
- Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler*. Six Episode Film Documentary. Producer: Sally Thomas. Director: Bosie Vincent. Arlington, VA : Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2014.

The professor also reserves the right to revise readings throughout the course (and you have the right to suggest the same), based on the course of our class discussions, student interest, and current events.

### Course-specific Policies:

1. *Attendance and Participation*: Students demonstrate their commitment to learning by regularly attending class, by arriving *on time* and *staying for the full class period*, by restricting technology use to educational purposes only, by contributing usefully to class and Canvas discussions, by doing their part to create an atmosphere of respectful and serious learning, and by *reading the assigned material in advance of the class*. You will be expected to so express your commitment in this class, with a substantial portion of your final grade based on your class readiness & participation. You may also expect that I will start class promptly, end on time, answer your questions fully and respectfully, return your exams and papers in a timely manner, and be available to meet with you during my office hours.

2. *Papers and Examinations*: Students demonstrate their academic seriousness by submitting assignments on time, and by maintaining the highest standards of good writing. This includes (but is not limited to) spelling, grammar, style, documentation, and format. Dedicated students for whom this presents a challenge will avail themselves of the college's writing center. *Please note I often use strict word limits*: it is far harder to write a brief, focused paper than to write a long one – allow plenty of time for editing and rewriting. I have VERY high expectations about written work!

a. *All assignments should be turned in on time*. Late assignments are penalized as follows: 5% deduction for papers uploaded 3 minutes to 11 hours and 59 minutes late, 10% deduction for 12h:00m-23h:59m late, 20% deduction for 24h:00m-47h:59m late, 30% deduction for 48h:00m-71h:59m late, 40% deduction for 72h:00m-95h:59m late, 50% deduction for 96h:00m (4 days) or more late. I grant penalty waivers or reduced late penalties when justified by extenuating circumstances – for example, illness, injury, or family emergency. Best odds of receiving a waiver or penalty reduction go to those who notify me *in advance* (email or office hour visit are best), explain their situation, and request a specific number of additional hours needed.

b. Likewise, *examinations should be taken at the scheduled time*. Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips), or extenuating circumstances as specified above, may reschedule their examinations. No make-up exams will be given to students who notify me *after* the exam has taken place, unless they were incapacitated and unable to notify in advance (i.e., unconscious in a hospital). Make-up examination format is at my discretion (usually it is a 20-25 minute, one-on-one oral examination).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will be reported to the Academic Integrity Officer and I will press for the highest penalties possible. Don't be foolish--you don't want me as your adversary. I have respect for the student who accepts the consequences of poor preparation and turns in his/her *own* work. Do what is honorable and right.

3. *Grading Distribution*: Your course grade will be based on the following percentages:

Class Readiness & Participation	20%
Reading Notes	5%
Weekly Discussion Posts & Comments	20%
Field Experience Posts	10%
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Final Exam	<u>15%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grade distribution is the traditional 0 to 100 point scale: 93-100=A, 90-92=A-, 87-89=B+, 83-86=B, 80-82=B-, 77-79=C+, 73-76=C, 70-72=C-, 67-69=D+, 60-66=D, less than 60=F. And yes, I round up (e.g., 89.5 is an A-).

### Course Assignments:

1. **Reading Notes:** We will be reading various texts/articles this semester, and even viewing several documentaries on our own. It is imperative that you come prepared to discuss these in class. To facilitate this, you will submit to me at the start of each class a one-page, *handwritten*, single-sided sheet of reading notes. You will also upload an image of these notes to Canvas as a backup (and to give you access to these for exam preparation). Let me explain how reading notes will be processed:

The *reading notes* will be graded as submitted (complete) or missing (incomplete), and I save them until the exam. During the in-class component of the exams, *which are otherwise closed-book*, you will receive these reading notes back to assist you. So it is clearly in your interest to do the best job you can each week with your one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes. How you format/design these is entirely up to you – just make sure your name and the date of the class is written clearly on them, and that *you stick to one-side of one regular-size (8.5 x 11) sheet of paper* (only one page PER CLASS DAY, no matter how many different readings we may have).

IMPORTANT NOTE #1: These reading notes *must be* your individual work only; they are not to be the product of collaboration with any other students, and they are only to be about the reading assignment(s) for the day they are submitted.

IMPORTANT NOTE #2: I shall do everything I can to ensure the safekeeping of these notes; however, a page of notes may get separated from the rest and lost -- while this is unfortunate, I will not allow you to reschedule the exam if this occurs. What I will do is give everyone an opportunity, before the exam begins, to check that they have all their notes, and if any are missing, and let me know if any are missing so that I can call up the page from CANVAS to show you at that moment (*hence the importance of uploading an image of reading notes to CANVAS each class*).

IMPORTANT NOTE #3: You must submit and post your reading notes to CANVAS *before* class begins (whether present *or absent*, and whether class meets or is cancelled); if you do not, you will not receive credit for the reading notes.

2. **Weekly Discussion Posts & Comments:** You will each need to submit a weekly discussion post on the CANVAS website for this course. You will *post once each week* (except during skip weeks – see CANVAS), and you will also *comment twice each week* on a classmate's posts. A discussion post is an informal online forum in which individuals post thoughts, musings, reflections, opinions, and arguments – and invite others to comment on their posts. Your discussion posts will be visible to everyone else in the course, including your professor. Your posts should average 150-200 words, and your comments about others' posts should be at least 75 words. Of course, you need not agree with each other or with me, but you will be required to be civil and respectful.

NOTE: The blog is *not a site for proselytizing* (for or against religion, or any specific form of religion); such blogs will not receive course credit and will be deleted by the professor – this does not mean one cannot write about one's own beliefs or practices, or those of others, only that such **writing must be descriptive and analytical in nature, not normative/judgmental** (i.e., about what ought to be or ought NOT be).

OK, so what should you post about? You can post about texts/readings, videos, discussions in class, or my comments in class. You can be daring and post about stuff outside of class – e.g., a news article or op-ed; a movie; or an observation. What I'm looking for with this assignment is: evidence of your ability to engage thoughtfully with the class materials/issues, to think analytically and critically, to make integrative/synthesizing connections, *to demonstrate that you've read the assignments*, and to consider the implications of what you are learning. As for comments on others' posts, I will ask you to spread around your attention. No given student should receive more than 4 comments from you.

*Posts/comments more than one week overdue will not receive any credit.* And don't be surprised if your post or comment is on the screen in class for discussion – this is a good thing; I don't put up posts to shame them!

3. **Field Experiences & Reflection Posts:** It would be a crime to teach this class and never take advantage firsthand of the vivid examples of American religions that surround us. **Hence, we have three field trips.** *You must attend these field trips.* One trip will be to Sunday worship services at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, NJ, and last from approximately 10 am to 3 pm. The second trip will be to a Hindu Mandir in Robbinsville, NJ on a Saturday from 9am to 1:30pm. And the third trip will be self-arranged, to be completed after Spring Break. You are to observe a religious service that is different from the tradition(s) in which you were raised (e.g., raised Catholic – then any Protestant or Eastern Orthodox church, any other religious house of worship, or a gathering of atheists/freethinkers is open to you).

You will write a 600 word post of “*reflections and connections*” for each field trip. That is, a post in which you *reflect* upon what you observed/experienced – how the field experience helped you understand or see things in a new or more vivid way (if true) – and in which you *connect* your observations/experience with specific concepts

discussed in course readings. Again, about 600 words, and it must be posted by the date indicated. The best posts identify one or two key observations and then make insightful connections to the texts, key concepts, and possibly other course materials (a guest speaker, documentary). The worst posts present superficial reactions, write lists of general observations, and lack thoughtful, probing, and specific connections to course materials.

If you miss a field trip, or if you choose not to attend (because of paid work, family obligation, overslept, etc.) – the possibility of completing a make-up assignment is at my discretion. Should you miss for a legitimate reason, the make-up assignment will likely be an additional reading assignment and a 5-7 page analysis paper. If the reason is illegitimate, you’ll receive a zero on the affiliated discussion post and a 10% deduction on your class readiness/participation grade – given your inability to contribute to our discussion.

4. **Exams:** There will be three essay examinations. All three exams will include a take-home and an in-class component. Take-home examination questions will have a strict word limit (e.g., 300 words per question). You will receive the questions during class, and must submit your answers using CANVAS, by the date and time indicated. The in-class exams will be closed-book, except for the reading notes described above.

### **Mandatory College-wide Policies and Statements**

This course conforms to all campus-wide course and academic policies. You may view these policies using these links:

- Final Exam-Evaluation-Reading Days Policy:  
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9136>
- Absence and Attendance Policy:  
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134>
- Academic Integrity Policy:  
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=7642>
- Disability Support Services:  
<http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu>
- Americans with Disability Act Policy:  
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8082>

*E-mail and voice-mail:* I check e-mail each morning, and voice mail on days we have class only. Please don’t expect me to check my e-mail over the weekends, at night, or during breaks. I never check voice-mail from home. I usually reply within 2 business days to e-mail messages.

*Fourth hour equivalency statement:* Although this class meets for three hours each week, it is a 4-credit (1 unit) course that offers a depth of learning with additional learning tasks unfolding in the equivalent of a fourth hour. Students will engage in group or individual learning projects outside of class and/or additional learning experiences occurring multiple times during the semester on or off-campus, including community-engaged learning activities and/or campus-wide events.

**Course Schedule** (tentative; your professor reserves the right to adjust):

<b>Date:</b>	<b>What’s happening:</b>	<b>What’s due:</b>
Jan 29	Introduction to the Sociology of Religion, Opening discussion of a death-defying religion, and of “American exceptionalism”	
Feb 1	Establishing Civil Discussion: Sharing of religious/spiritual/secular autobiographies Religion & Young Adulthood	Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 1 Roose, pp 1-29
*2		<i>Week 1 Discussion Post due</i>
*3		<i>Week 1 Discussion Comments due</i>
5	Religion & Spirituality in Sociological Perspective	Singleton, Chapter 1 Roose, pp 30-65

8	Introduction to Christianity	Roose, pp 66-84 Prothero, "Christianity" Watch episode #1 "Lourdes" of Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler (streaming via TCNJ library)
*9		<i>Week 2 Discussion Post due</i>
*FEB 10	<b>*** field trip to Shiloh Baptist Church, 10:25am – approx. 2pm</b>	<i>Week 2 Discussion Comments due</i>
12	Field trip reflections & analysis	Roose, pp 85-164
*14		<i>Discussion post for field trip due</i>
15	Introduction to Hinduism	Prothero, "Hinduism" Watch episode #5 "Kumbh Mela" of Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler (streaming via TCNJ library)
*FEB 16	<b>*** field trip to BAPS Mandir, 9am-1:30pm**</b>	
19	Field trip reflections & analysis	Roose, pp 165-252
*21		<i>Discussion post for field trip due</i>
22	Introduction to Judaism	Prothero, "Judaism" Watch episode #3 "Jerusalem" of Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler (streaming via TCNJ library)
26	Introduction to American "Nones" and Atheism	Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 6 Prothero, "Brief Coda on Atheism"
*27		<i>Week 3 Discussion Post due</i>
*28		<i>Week 3 Discussion Comments due</i>
Mar 1	Religion, Science, and Epistemology	Collins & Pinch, excerpts from <i>The Golem</i> Ecklund, Ch 1 Roose, pp 253-316
5	Introduction to Islam	Prothero, "Islam" Watch episode #4 "Hajj" of Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler (streaming via TCNJ library) <i>Receive take home essay question</i>
8	<b>Exam 1</b>	Take home essay due to Canvas at start of class Reading notes will be returned for use during in-class exam
12	Theorizing Religion & Society: Classical Approaches	Singleton, Chapter 2

15	Theorizing Religion & Society: Twentieth Century Issues and Thinkers	Singleton, Chapter 3
*19,*22	***Spring Break ***	
26	Secularization, Religious Economies, & Globalization	Singleton, Chapter 4 <i>Start planning your individual worship service observation; be prepared to report on your experience in class, and submit discussion post no later than April 29</i>
29	Christianity's decline, or exception?	Singleton, Chapter 6-7
*30		<i>Week 4 Discussion Post due</i>
*31		<i>Week 4 Discussion Comments due</i>
Apr 2	Globalized religion	Singleton, Chapter 8-9
5	Islam's global trends; Lived religion	Singleton, Chapter 10-11
*6		<i>Week 5 Discussion Post due</i>
*7		<i>Week 5 Discussion Comments due</i>
9	Review & Catch-up	<i>**receive take home essay question**</i>
12	<b>Exam 2</b>	Take home essay due to Canvas at start of class Reading notes will be returned for use during in-class exam
16	<i>Sociology of Religion Applied: Religious Violence, Understanding American Twentysomethings</i>	Juergensmeyer, Ch 1 Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 2
19	Christian & Jewish extremists American Catholic twentysomethings	Juergensmeyer, Ch 2-3 Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 3
*20		<i>Week 6 Discussion Post due</i>
*21		<i>Week 6 Discussion Comments due</i>
23	Islam extremists American Protestant twentysomethings	Juergensmeyer, Ch 4 Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 4-5
26	Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist extremists	Juergensmeyer, Ch 5-6
*27		<i>Week 7 Discussion Post due</i>
*28		<i>Week 7 Discussion Comments due</i>
*29		<i>Last possible date to submit reflections &amp; connections for individual worship service observation</i>
30	Theater of Terror; Cosmic War	Juergensmeyer, Ch 7-8
May 3	Martyrs, Demons, Warriors	Juergensmeyer, Ch 9-10

*4		<i>Week 8 Discussion Post due</i>
*5		<i>Week 8 Discussion Comments due</i>
7	Curing Violence, Healing Politics Teens, Young Adults, & the Life Course The role of spirituality in social life	Juergensmeyer, Ch 11 Clydesdale & Garces-Foley, Ch 7
10	The future of religion ... <i>Take-home component of final exam questions distributed</i>	Singleton, Ch 12-13
*11		<i>Week 9 Discussion Post due</i>
*12		<i>Week 9 Discussion Comments due</i>
Exam Week	<b>See registrar's schedule for date and time of in-class component of Final Exam</b>	<b><i>Submit take-home essay component to CANVAS by time &amp; date posted</i></b>