

**Soc 265 Sociology of Religion**  
Fall 2006 (fulfills M3 requirement)  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:20 – 3:30; PPHAC 116

*Professor Daniel Jasper*  
PPHAC 316

*Office Hours: Tuesdays & Fridays 8:30-9:30; Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30-4:30; Other times by appointment*

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**Course Overview:** From the beginning of the sociological endeavor, the study of religion has been central to the understanding of modern societies. Early sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim made inquiries into religion the foundations of their larger research agendas. This course will continue in this tradition by surveying the interactions between religion and society while developing the sociological approach to the study of religion as a social institution. In particular, we will look at the ways in which religion is transformed by, and plays a role in the transformation of, a global society. Students will:

- develop a basic understanding of the world religions;
- learn how religion is shaped by and, in turn, shapes the larger social field in which it exists;
- become familiar with the dynamics of secularization, new religious movements, and other developments;
- develop an understanding of the ways in which religion interacts with other social institutions such as the state and economy, and culture;
- analyze the changing nature of religious pluralism in the United States and around the world.

**Course Requirements and Expectations:** It is expected that all students will have thoroughly and thoughtfully completed the weekly readings, and be prepared to discuss these, by our first meeting of each week. Students are expected to regularly contribute to in-class discussions with reactions and responses that deal directly with the issues and texts being considered. This participation will count for 20 % of the final grade. Reading the required texts and participating in class discussions is not a sufficient amount of work for this course. For students to do well in this course, they will need to read and think systematically about religion over the course of the semester. Towards this end, all students will keep a journal of their observations, thinking, and reflection about religion (these will be discussed the first week of class). Journals will account for 20% of the final grade.

One unit of this course will be devoted to the study of youth and religion. During this unit, the class will hold a ‘mini-conference’ on this subject. Each student will be responsible for making a conference presentation during this unit. An annotated bibliography of works consulted will be turned in by each student at the beginning of the mini-conference. The presentation and bibliography will account for 20% of the final grade.

There will be one essay, and a cumulative final exam.

## Grading:

Class Preparedness and Participation (Including quizzes and in-class assignments)	-- 20%
Journal	-- 20%
Mini-Conference Presentation and Annotated Bibliography	– 20 %
Analyzing Religion Essay	– 20 %
Final Exam	– 20 %

**Repressive Policies and other mechanisms of social control:** It is expected that all students conduct themselves as professional scholars in this course. This means that students will arrive for class on time, prepared to participate in the collective work of the course. Students will have all necessary materials with them—including the texts under discussion, and leave unnecessary distractions (such as cell phones) behind.

Students must abide by the conventions of scholarly work, most importantly, the conventions of citation. All students should read and be familiar with the college policy on Academic Honesty included in the student handbook. All written work must include full and proper citations. There are no exceptions, including ignorance. Cheating and plagiarism will result in failing this course.

Students who wish to submit their writing assignments through electronic mail may send it to my email address only as an attached Word document. Assignments submitted in this way must be received by 10:00pm the evening **before** the due date. No late journals will be accepted, other late assignments will be penalized 10 % per day.

## Required Text:

Aldridge, Alan. *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction*. (Polity, 2006) [Referred to as ‘Ald’ in the course outline.]

All other required texts are either available online, in the library, or will be distributed. Texts marked with an asterisk (\*) are available through one of the online databases accessible through the library. Unmarked texts in the schedule will be made available—details will be provided in class. Please bring a copy of all texts with you to class.

## Course Outline

Please note, the outline below is merely a guide. Changes are likely as the semester progresses.

### *Week 1* (August 28 & 30): **Course Introduction**

Ald. ch. 1

### *Week 2* (September 4 & 6) **Making Sociological Sense of Religion**

Ald. ch. 2

September 6: Bill Ayers Lecture “Free Minds, Free People: Teaching and Learning in a New Age”. 7:00 pm Prosser Auditorium.

### *Week 3* (September 11 & 13) **Religious Organizations**

Ald. ch. 3

\* Mahler, Jonathan. “The Soul of the New Exurb” *New York Times Magazine* March 27, 2005.

\* Stechschulte, Ben. "The Punk-Christian Son of a Preacher Man" NYT Magazine January 23, 2005

*Week 4* (September 18 & 20) Secularization – The Decline of Religion?  
Ald. ch. 4

**Analyzing Religion Topic Statement due September 20<sup>th</sup>.**

*Week 5* (September 25 & 27) Secularization – A Religion of Modernity?  
Ald. ch. 7

*Week 6* (October 2 & 4) New Economic Ethics of Religion  
\* Sanneh, Kelefa "Play and Grow Rich" *The New Yorker* 11 Oct. 2004.  
\* Shorto, Russell. "Faith at Work" *New York Times Magazine*. 31 Oct. 2004.  
**Analyzing Religion Essay due October 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

*Week 7* (October 11) **Religion and Gender, part 1**  
*Acting on Faith*

No Class October 9: Fall Break

**Mini-Conference Topic Statement and Preliminary Bibliography due October 11<sup>th</sup>.**

*Week 8* (October 16 & 18) **Religion and Gender, part 2**  
Hawkins, Billy "A Critical Reading of a Promise Keepers event: The interworkings of race, religion, and sport" *Sociology of Sport Online* Vol. 3, issue 1, 2000. <http://physed.otago.ac.nz/sosol/v3i1/v3i1a2.htm>  
\* Gallagher, Sally K. and Sabrina Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild?" *Sociology of Religion* 66:2.

*Week 9* (October 23 & 25) **The Return of Religion**  
Ald. chs. 5-6

*Week 10* (October 30 & November 1) **Religion and the State**  
Ald. ch. 8

*Week 11* (November 6 & 8) **Mini-Conference on Youth and Religion**  
**Annotated Bibliography due November 6<sup>th</sup>.**

*Week 12* (November 13 & 15) **Mini-Conference on Youth and Religion**

*Week 13* (November 20) **Thinking about Youth and Religion Today**  
Mini-Conference Wrap Up  
No Class November 22: Thanksgiving

*Week 14* (November 27 & 29) **Religion in The World Today**  
Ald. ch. 9

*Week 15* (December 4 & 6): **Course Conclusion**

**Final Exam during scheduled exam period.**

## **Analyzing Religion Essay**

The purpose of this essay is to identify and analyze some of the ways that religion is present and visible in our society and culture. Students will first identify a social-cultural text that involves religion. These texts may be symbolic texts, performative texts, or both. Students will then prepare an essay that thoroughly describes the text and provides a critical analysis of the text. In their analysis, students should clearly describe the representation that they are interpreting, and create a structured argument that analyzes the place—that is, the meaning and significance--of this representation in society. That is, they should interpret both the representation, and what it says about the world in which it is presented.

Examples of appropriate texts would include:

- A public nativity scene during the Christmas Holiday Season

- A popular culture text that contains specifically religious themes

- Consumer products that use religious symbolism to sell non-religious items

- Any religious service

If you choose the last of the above examples, select a religious program that you would not otherwise attend. That is, go as an outsider to a program that you know very little, if anything about.

Essays should be typed, double-spaced, and adhere to conventions of scholarly writing. Include page numbering. Rough length guidelines: 3000 words.

### **Due Dates**

- September 20<sup>th</sup>**: Topic Statement Due

- October 2<sup>nd</sup>**: Final Essay Due

## Mini Conference on Youth and Religion

In recent years, a good deal of sociological research on religion has focused on questions of youth and religion. As a class, we will organize an academic conference for ourselves to look systematically at this research. Each student will be responsible for presenting some of this research to the class.

Each student will select a topic of study, collect materials on this topic, and make a presentation to the class. Presentations should summarize the state of knowledge on the chosen topic, situate this within the larger sociological study of religion, and bring out the implications of this for our larger understanding of religion and society today.

Two on-line collections will help us to set the stage for this conference:

- 1.) The National Study of Youth and Religion <http://www.youthandreligion.org/>  
The 'Publications' and 'Resources' pages of this site will be particularly useful.
- 2.) The 'Essay Forum on the Religious Engagements of American Undergraduates', sponsored by the Social Science Research Council <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/>

Students will use these sources to pose a topic of study and to identify useful sources.

Students will prepare an annotated bibliography of the sources they consult and prepare a presentation on the topic that they will present to the class. These presentations should be analytic, not only informative. That is, students should have an interpretive analysis of the topic under review.

Due Dates:

**October 11<sup>th</sup>:** Topic Statement and Preliminary Bibliography

**November 6<sup>th</sup>:** Annotated Bibliography

**November 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>:** Student Presentations