

**Sociology of Religion**  
Rel/Soc 265; meets LinC M3 Requirement  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:35-3:45; PPHAC 335

*Professor Daniel Jasper*

*PPHAC 316*

*Office Hours: Posted on blackboard and by office door*

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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. This course is guided by two interlinked concerns: the relationship between state, society, and religion; and the interactions between different religious communities.

**Course Goals:** By the end of the course students will:

- be able to apply the sociological perspective to better understand religion.
- further develop their sociological imaginations, with particular reference to religion.
- improve their ability to construct and analyze academic arguments
- develop an understanding of the ways in which religion interacts with other social institutions such as the state, the economy, and culture.
- become familiar with the dynamics of secularization, new religious movements, and other developments.
- learn how religion is shaped by and, in turn, shapes the larger social field in which it exists.
- 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. 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.

It is expected that all students conduct themselves as professional scholars in this course. This means that students will arrive for class on time, having thoroughly and thoughtfully completed the assigned readings. Students will bring all of the necessary materials with them to class—including texts under discussion, questions and comments on these texts, and the energy to participate actively in the collective work of the course. Unnecessary distractions (such as cell phones) should not be brought to class.

**A note on reading:** For many of you, the readings for this course will be more complex and more difficult than you are used to reading. It has been my experience that this proves

incredibly frustrating for many students, especially at the beginning of the semester. I am happy to work with all students in order to help you find effective reading strategies. The most important thing, however, is that you must be willing to put in the time, concentration, and seriousness necessary with these texts. Again, this is especially true at the beginning of the term.

**A note on Academic Honesty:** All members of this course should read, re-read, and familiarize themselves 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.

**A note on Accommodations:** Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

**Assessment:** Student learning will be assessed through a variety of means during the course of the semester, including written work, class presentations, research projects, and active course participation. **Assignments, Journal Entries, and Quizzes** are designed to assess the thoroughness and depth of students regular engagement with course materials, and their ability to observe social life, conduct research, and develop scholarly arguments, including the ability to synthesize, analyze, and apply course material. **Essays and group projects** assess how well students can pose, research, and answer sociological questions about religion. **In-class activities and participation in discussions** assesses the degree to which students have actively contributed to the collective work of the class. Students will be evaluated on the quality as well as the quantity of their participation. It is within the instructor’s purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for an assignment or for the course

**Grading:**

Assignments and Quizzes	20% of final grade
Journal	10% of final grade
Participation (including in-class activities)	10% of final grade
3 Reflection Essays (10% each)	30% of final grade
Group Research Project and Presentation	15% of final grade
Final Essay (Take Home Exam)	15% of final grade
<b>Final Grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Final Grades**

	87-89.9 = B+	77-79.9 = C+	67-69.9 = D+
93-100 = A	83-86.9 = B	73-76.9 = C	63-66.9 = D
90-92.9 = A-	80-82.9 = B-	70-72.9 = C-	60-62.9 = D-
Below 60 points = F			

**Texts:** There are no assigned texts for purchase. All texts for this course will be available through internet resources, posted on Blackboard, or made available through Reeves Library. Students should have a folder where they keep all of the course readings, along with their notes on these reading, together.

The Blackboard **site** for this course will be the primary place where course readings and links will be posted. Announcements, assignment guidelines, and supplemental resources will also be posted to the site. Students are expected to check the site regularly. Students may self enroll in Blackboard for this course; the access code is ‘Soc265’.

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

*Week 1* (January 14th & 16th) An introduction to the course.

**Tuesday:** Closely read article distributed in class. You should also familiarize yourself with the course syllabus and the college policies on Academic Honesty included in the student handbook.

**Thursday:** In addition to the items listed above, be sure to closely read Meredith McGuire’s piece on “Observing Local Religious Groups” (available at <http://religionthesocialcontext.net/Guides/Observe.htm>)

*Week 2* (January 21st & 23rd) How do Sociologists understand Religion?

**Tuesday:** Closely read Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Introduction (available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>) and Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Book 1, ch. 1. Complete Response on Blackboard.

**Thursday:** closely read Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Book 2, ch. 7, Conclusion

*Week 3* (January 28th & 30th) The sociological approach to religion, continued.

**Tuesday:** closely read Clifford Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Culture*. Skim Talal Asad, “Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz” from *Man (NS)*.(Blackboard)

**Thursday:** closely read Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Part II (chapters 4 & 5) (available at: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/weber/cover.html>); also available at: <http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/jhamlin/1095/The%20Protestant%20Ethic%20and%20the%20Spirit%20of%20Capitalism.pdf>

*Week 4* (February 4th & 6th) Asking Sociological Questions about Religion

**Tuesday:** closely read, Linda Woodhead, “Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance” from *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, complete assignment on blackboard.

**Thursday:** closely read, Peter Kivisto, “Rethinking the Relationship between Ethnicity and Religion” from *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*.

**Essay 1 Due on Thursday, February 6<sup>th</sup>.**

*Week 5* (February 11th & 13th) Mapping Religion in the world and our communities.

**Tuesday:** Review Pew Report on Global Religious Landscape; complete exercise on BB.

**Thursday:** Local landscapes of religion.

*Week 6* (February 18th & 20th) Is there an American ‘Religion’?

**Tuesday:** closely read, Madsen, Richard “The Archipelago of Faith” *American Journal of Sociology* (March 2009) 114: 5, 1263-1301 and Jonathan Mahler, “The Soul of the New Exurb” *NY Times* March 27, 2005.

**Thursday:** closely read, Bellah, Robert. 1967. “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus*. 96 (Winter). Pp. 1-21; Frances Fitzgerald, “Come One, Come All” *The New Yorker* 12/3/2007, and Kelefa Sanneh, “Pray and Grow Rich” *The New Yorker* 10/11/2004.

*Week 7* (February 25th & 27th) Making Sense of Religious Diversity

**Tuesday:** closely read, Zain Abdullah “Sufis on Parade” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, June 2009, Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 199–237 (Online Access available through Reeves); John Leland “The Punk Christian Son of a Preacher Man” *NY Times* 1/23/2005; and Molly Worthen, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down” *NY Times* 1/11/2009.

**Tuesday, February 25th @ 7pm, Tim Wise will be speaking in Prosser Auditorium. Students are required to attend.**

**Thursday:** closely read, Nancy Ammerman “The Challenges of Pluralism: Locating Religion in a World of Diversity”. *Social Compass* 57 (2), 2010, 154-167. (Online Access available through Reeves); Watch *New Muslim Cool*.

*Week 8* (March 3rd, 4th & 6th)

No Classes for Spring Break

*Week 9* (March 11th & 13th) Religion and Popular Culture

**Tuesday:** Closely read Lawrence Jasud, “St. Elvis” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Spring 2009) and Daniel Shore, “WWJD? The Genealogy of a Syntactic Form” *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Autumn 2010).

**Thursday:** In class activity

**Essay 2 due**

*Week 10* (March 18th & 20th) How does religion relate to the state?

Secularism/Secularization part I

**Tuesday:** closely read: Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” and Kenneth W. Thompson, “Religion and Politics in the United States: An Overview” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, January 1986.

**Thursday:** closely read, Al Stepan, “Religion, Democracy and ‘The Twin Tolerations’” *Journal of Democracy* 11,4 October 2000 and Rajeev Bhargava “States, Religious Diversity, and the Crisis of Secularism” *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2010.

*Week 11* (March 25th & 27th) How does religion relate to the social?

Secularism/Secularization part II

**Tuesday**, closely read: Jose Casanova “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective” *The Hedgehog Review* Spring and Summer, 2006; Craig Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism” *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2010; and Charles Taylor “The Meaning of Secularism” *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2010.

**Thursday**: closely read, Eisenstadt, S.N. 2000. “Multiple Modernities.” *Daedalus*. Winter, 129(1): 1-29 and Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, Introduction.

*Week 12* (April 1st & 3rd) Is there a ‘secular’ religion?

Secularism/Secularization part III

**Tuesday**: closely read: Peter van der Veer, “Spirituality in Modern Society”. MMG Working Paper 09-10. Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen.

**Thursday**: Student Group Presentations on Religious Controversies

*Week 13* (April 8th & 10th) Student Group Presentations on Religious Controversies.

*Week 14* (April 15th & 17th) Thinking about Religion and Society Today

**Tuesday**: closely read David Smilde and Matthew May, “The Emerging Strong Program in the Sociology of Religion” SSRC Working Paper and Christian Smith, et. Al. “Twenty-Three Theses on the Status of Religion in American Sociology” A Mellon Working-Group Reflection.

**Thursday**: closely read Christian Smith. 2008. “Future Directions in the Sociology of Religion.” *Social Forces*, 86(4): 1561-1590.

*Week 15* (April 22nd & 24th) Putting it all together.

Scheduled final exam time: Friday May 2<sup>nd</sup> @ 1:30 pm. All final exams are due before this time.