RELIGION AND SOCIETY
SSP171/REL171

Spring 2006
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:45am-12:00pm
Maginnes 475

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course information available on Blackboard

This course offers an introduction to the sociology of religion. We will begin by discussing classical approaches to defining religion and studying its role in society. We will then answer three critical questions about religion. First, what do religious beliefs and practices look like in the United States? Second, how does religious change take place? Third, what effects does religion have? We will explore each of these questions at the level of society, at the level of organizations within society, and at the level of individuals.

Throughout the course the emphasis will be on emerging themes and current research in the study of religion. Doing so will bring us to consider the changing religious landscape of the United States, religious conversion, different kinds of religious practice and authority, secularization, and religion in the public arena. We will look at specific new research that examines things such as Jewish-Christian intermarriage, the religiosity of college students, the role of religion in shaping post-9/11 attitudes, conflict over homosexuality in Methodist churches, feminism in the Catholic church, and rituals within an African-American church.

Course Requirements

All students in the class are expected to complete all assigned readings, attend all class sessions, and actively participate in class discussions. In addition, students will be required to complete two fieldwork assignments, two in-class presentations, and a final exam.

fieldwork: You will have the opportunity to do two of your own fieldwork studies over the course of the semester. Prior students have found these assignments to be one of the most rewarding components of the class. The first requires that you interview 3–4 people about their religious beliefs and practices. The second requires that you attend a religious service outside of your own faith tradition. For each assignment you will write a 5-7 page paper analyzing what you learned through your fieldwork. Details about each project will be discussed in class. Due dates for these two assignments are March 3rd and April 28th. They must be turned in electronically via the ‘assignments’ section of the course website.
**presentations:** Everyone in the class, in teams of two, will be twice responsible for presenting and leading a discussion about a particular reading from the syllabus twice over the course of the semester. Presentations should summarize the main ideas in the reading, offer links between the reading and other ideas or issues we’ve discussed in class, and offer questions about the reading for the class to discuss. We will discuss further details of these presentations in class.

**final exam:** The final exam for the course will be open notes and consist of a combination of essays and short answer questions based on the class readings, lectures, and discussion.

Final grades will be determined as follows:
- 40% fieldwork assignments
- 30% final exam
- 15% class presentations
- 15% class attendance and participation

Course requirements are subject to change over the course of the semester. All such changes will be discussed in class, and students are responsible for meeting any new or modified requirements that are discussed.

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify me and/or Cheryl Ashcroft, Director of the Office of Academic Support Services (610-758-4152). Accommodations will be individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

An important note: Plagiarism and cheating are both forbidden by University policy (see your student Handbook). Every word in your fieldwork essays, class presentations, and exam must be your own unless contained in quotation marks and properly cited. This includes text taken from the web. Plagiarism or cheating will, at minimum, result in an F for the assignment and may, at my discretion, result in an F for the entire course. These are in addition to any sanctions imposed by the university. For more information on academic integrity, visit http://www.lehigh.edu/~indost/integrity.html. If you have additional questions or concerns about acceptable ways to use and cite outside material in your writing, please see me; I’m happy to help.

**Readings**

The following books have been ordered from the Lehigh University Bookstore (758-3374) and are also available at a discount from online retailers such as ecampus.com and amazon.com:

All other readings for the course are available online through the course website.
CLASS SCHEDULE

The course schedule and required readings are subject to change over the course of the semester. All changes will be announced in class, and students are responsible for taking note of any such changes and adjusting their reading and homework accordingly.

Defining Religion

01/17 Introduction to class

01/19 Classical Views of Religion: Comte, Marx, and Simmel


01/24 Classical Views of Religion: Durkheim

01/26 Classical Views of Religion: Weber


Religious Belief and Behavior

01/31 Societal Level: Overview of Religious Traditions in America


02/02- Societal Level: The American Congregation

02/09 Organizational Level: Culture and Change in Different Congregations

02/21 Individual Level: Believing, Belonging and Practice

02/28 Individual Level: The Church Attendance Debate

**Religious Change**

03/02 Societal Level: The Secularization Debate

[NOTE: First fieldwork assignment is due March 3]

[SPRING BREAK]

03/14 Societal Level: Rational Choice Explanations of Religious Change in America

03/21 Organizational Level: Change in Religious Groups


03/28- Individual Level: Religious Conversion


**Effects of Religion**

04/04 Societal Level: Religion and Historical Development
Review Weber readings from first week of class.


04/06 Societal Level: Religion in the Public Square


04/09 Organizational Level: Religion and Conservative Social Movements


04/11 Organizational Level: Religion and Progressive Social Movements

04/18 Individual Level: Faith-Based Social Services

04/20 Individual Level: The Many Impacts of Religion

**Religion and Society**

04/25- Religion in the United States Today

[NOTE: Second fieldwork assignment due April 28]