

SOCI 3334: Religion and Society

SOC 3334 Section 1
Sociology of Religion
Social Sciences Bldg 2021 (TR 5:00-6:15PM)
Fall (First Semester) 2016

Instructor: Dr. Brian Starks
Social Sciences Bldg 3002A
Phone: (470) 578-6710
Office Hours: TR 2:00-3:00 PM,
or by appointment
E-mail: bstarks3@kennesaw.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion is one of the most powerful forces of social cohesion, order, meaning, disruption, and change in human societies, both historically and today in the modern world. Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, the founding fathers of modern sociology, each devoted time to writing about religion and society. Sociology provides a particular disciplinary perspective and analytical tools and theories for describing, understanding, and explaining the nature and influence of religion. Today members of the American Sociological Association and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion continue to examine religious belief and practice. What do people believe? How do people talk about religion? How is religion organized? How does religious belief impact other aspects of social life? These are just some of the basic (and big!) questions we will examine in this class.

COURSE GOALS

This course is designed to:

1. *Cultivate in students an understanding of the distinctively sociological approach to studying religion.* There are many approaches to studying religion—historical, psychological, theological, anthropological, etc. Since in this class we take a distinctively sociological approach, a basic goal is to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the kinds of questions sociologists ask and the kind of explanations they offer when analyzing religion.
2. *Familiarize students with some of the major issues, problems, and findings in the sociology of religion* Students will have the opportunity to learn about both the classical theoretical tradition and the most interesting new work in the sociology of religion. Students will deepen their sociological knowledge of the linkages between religion and family life, gender, politics, and race.
3. *Introduce students to basic skills of field research.* Sociology is an empirical discipline that constructs theories and draws conclusions based on evidence that can be observed. Students in this class will go beyond merely reading about religion, to actually doing simple participant-observation through field trips at local religious groups, involving first-hand observation, analysis, and brief written reports. (Details below.)
4. *Improve cognitive & communication skills.* This course aims generally, through its exercises and requirements, to enhance students' abilities to read, analyze, discuss, and write skillfully.

To summarize in *performance-oriented* terms, students who have successfully completed this course ought to be able to: (1) know how to go about analyzing religious beliefs, experiences, practices, and organizations *sociologically* (as distinct from, say, theologically); (2) Distinguish among the major

classical and contemporary theoretical approaches employed by sociologists of religion in studying religion; (3) carry on an informed and informing conversation with others about the religious issues and problems we will study in this class; (4) have a basic idea about how to go about conducting field research on a religious group or institution; and (5) read, think, discuss, and write more skillfully than when they entered the course.

Readings for the Course:

The following required books have been ordered through the University and area bookstores:

Dillon, Michele (2003) *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* New York: Cambridge University Press ISBN: 0521000785

Smith, Christian (1998) *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. University of Chicago Press ISBN: 0226764192

Davis, Nancy J. and Robert V. Robinson. (2012) *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare*. Indiana University Press ISBN: 0253002389

Additional Supplemental Readings will be available online

OFFICE HOURS:

My office is in the Social Sciences Building in room 3002A. My office hours are on Tuesday and Thursday from 2:00 to 3:00 PM. If the listed hours are inconvenient, we can set up another time to meet. I am most easily reached by e-mail at bstarks3@kennesaw.edu.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT:

Every KSU student is responsible for upholding the provisions of the Student Code of Conduct, as published in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs, Section II of the Student Code of Conduct addresses the university's policy on academic honesty, including provisions regarding plagiarism and cheating, unauthorized access to University materials, misrepresentation/falsification of University records or academic work, malicious removal, retention, or destruction of library materials, malicious/intentional misuse of computer facilities and/or services, and misuse of student identification cards. Incidents of alleged academic misconduct will be handled through the established procedures of the University Judiciary Program, which includes either an "informal" resolution by a faculty member, resulting in a grade adjustment, or a formal hearing procedure, which may subject a student to the Code of Conduct's minimum one semester suspension requirement. **The full policy is published at the following link:** (<https://web.kennesaw.edu/scai/content/ksu-student-code-conduct>)

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:

Attendance will be taken for class. Every student is expected to participate in class. This means contributing to class discussions as well as active participation in class exercises, which will be held at announced and unannounced times throughout the course. Examples of in-class exercises include short writing assignments, small group discussions, and in-class projects. **You cannot get credit for class participation unless you are in class and are contributing.**

ENROLLMENT STATUS:

Students are solely responsible for managing their enrollment status in a class; nonattendance does not constitute a withdrawal. Please refer to the official KSU policy for potential reimbursement if you withdraw from classes.

CLASS CONDUCT:

As a sign of respect to me and to your fellow classmates, please get to class on time. Do your best to avoid walking in late, stepping out, or leaving early. Put away laptops and cell-phones when class begins – neither is allowed during class time. If you must have a cell phone to receive emergency calls about kids or other family members, keep it on vibrate. Please don't read newspapers, talk to your friends, sleep, or pass notes during class. Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to me and your classmates, but they also limit your ability to participate in class and understand the material. If you must enter late or leave early, please inform me before class begins and take the seat nearest an exit and enter or leave as quietly as possible. Repeated disruption of class may lead to penalties that reduce your final grade (see below). Class discussions of the issues we study can stimulate strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussions must be scholarly. **Failure to abide by these principles can result in academic penalties ranging from a lowered grade, to dismissal, to failing the course.**

Scholarly comments are:

Respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement; related to the class and course material; advance the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs; are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable behaviors are:

(a) Personal attacks. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or religious and political beliefs. (b) Interrupting your instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be called on by the discussion leader or myself to prevent this problem. (c) Using the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed as scholarly endeavors (see above). (d) Using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students, and being physically aggressive. (e) Ignoring your instructor's authority to protect the integrity of the classroom. Anyone who violates these guidelines will be asked to cease and desist and may be asked to leave the classroom and/or drop the course.

GRADES:

Grades will be based upon your percentage of the total number of points on exams, written work, and attendance. A= 90-100%; B= 89.99-80%; C= 79.99-70%; D= 69.99-60%; F= Below 60%.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Because each person in a class contributes to its ultimate success or failure, I expect everyone to attend our class meetings, read and think about the day's readings beforehand, work on in-class projects, and participate in the give and take of class discussion. Not meeting this expectation is grounds for a lowered grade.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Attendance and Participation in Class Discussion-10%

2) Reading Quizzes-12%

There will be short quizzes covering particular readings usually given at the beginning of class, to provide an incentive to complete readings fully and on time. Altogether, the quizzes are worth 12% of the final grade. Do not fall behind, but keep up with the assigned readings!

3) Field Report Assignments -18%

Students must choose two (2) unfamiliar religious groups or organizations to visit and observe on self-guided field trips during the semester, and write 2-page reports for each. Typically, this will involve attending religious services or gatherings and taking field notes. Students may not do religious tradition(s) within which they were raised or with which they are quite familiar. The two trips/reports are together worth 18% of the final course grade (9% each). Details on expectations, recommended procedures, and report requirements will be provided in a separate handout. Please use this as an opportunity to do something interesting and different.

4) Three Exams - 60%

Each exam is worth 20% of your final grade. There are three examinations: one during class on Thursday **Sep 13th**, one during class on Tuesday **Oct 18th**, and a final exam on Thursday **Dec 8th** at 6:00 – 8:00 pm. Please schedule any travel plans accordingly. Failure to be present for an exam will result in a grade of zero for that exam and this grade will be included in determining final grades. If you are unable to take an exam, you must call me with a valid excuse prior to the time of the exam.

COURSE OUTLINE:

This outline will give you an idea of how the course will unfold. Please complete the readings by class time on the day that they are listed in the syllabus. This will make information presented in class clearer and will give us as a class the chance to talk about and react to the readings in a more thoughtful way. (This is only a tentative outline and is subject to revision at any time during the semester)

Date Topic and Readings (Readings are to be completed by the class date)

[**WEB** = article accessible online via the course website]

Tuesday Aug 16 *Introduction to the Course*

What is Sociology? Why is studying religion from a sociological perspective important?

Thursday Aug 18 What is the Sociology of Religion?

Readings: Wuthnow, Robert. "Studying Religion, Making it Sociological" pp.16-30 in Dillon *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*

Tuesday Aug 23

How Do You Study Religion Sociologically?

Readings: Hout, Michael. "Demographic Methods for the Sociology of Religion" pp.79-84 in Dillon *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*; **WEB** Nelson, Timothy. 1996. "Sacrifice of Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African American Worship Service" *Sociology of Religion* 57(4):379-96

Be Prepared for a Quiz!

Thursday Aug 25

Emile Durkheim: Society as Sacred

Readings: Durkheim, Emile. "The Social as Sacred" pp.99-107 in Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*

Tuesday Aug 30

Emile Durkheim: Society as Sacred (Cont'd)

Readings: Durkheim, Emile. "The Social as Sacred" pp.107-120; 135-143 in Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*

Thursday Sep 1

Contemporary Application: Collective Effervescence

Readings: **WEB** Wilde, Melissa. "Collective Effervescence and the Holy Spirit: The Eventful First Session" pp.13-28

Tuesday Sep 6

Karl Marx: Religion as Alienation

Readings: Marx, Karl. "Religion as an Agent of Economic Oppression" pp.143-161 in Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*

Thursday Sep 8

Contemporary Application: Standpoint Epistemology in the Sociology of Religion

Readings: Neitz, Mary Jo. "Dis/Location: Engaging Feminist Inquiry in the Sociology of Religion" pp.276-293 in Dillon *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*

Tuesday Sep 13

FIRST EXAM

Thursday Sep 15

Max Weber: Religion as a Source of Social Action

Readings: Weber, Max. "Religion and Culture Interwoven" pp.237-255 in Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*

Tuesday Sep 20

Geertz, Clifford: Religion as a Cultural System

Readings: Geertz, Clifford "Religion as Worldview and Ethic" pp.341-372 in Pals *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*

- Thursday Sep 22 *Religious Imagination*
- Readings: **WEB**, Starks, “Distinctive Catholicism”
- Tuesday Sep 27 *Exploring Contemporary Debates Within the Sociology of Religion: Secularization Theory vs. Religious Economics Theory*
- Begin reading “American Evangelicalism”
- Optional Readings: Chaves, Mark. 1994. “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority” *Social Forces* 72(3):749-775
- Thursday Sep 29 *Religious Movements and Social Movement Theory: Understanding Religious Change*
- Continue reading “American Evangelicalism”
- Tuesday Oct 4 *New Institutionalism, Theories of Fields, and Charisma 2.0: Exploring Shifts in the Religious Field*
- Continue reading “American Evangelicalism”
- Assignment Due: First Field Report**
- Wednesday Oct 5 Last Day to Withdraw Without Academic Penalty
- Thursday Oct 6 *Subcultural Identity Theory*
- Finish reading “American Evangelicalism”
- Tuesday Oct 11 *Religion and Race*
- Readings: (selections from) Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. 2000. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* New York: Oxford University Press
- Thursday Oct 13 Religion and Race (cont’d)
- Tuesday Oct 18 **SECOND EXAM**
- Thursday Oct 20 *Religion and Family*
- Readings: Wilcox, W. Bradford and Nicholas Wolfinger. 2007. “Then Comes Marriage? Religion, Race, and Marriage in Urban America” *Social Science Research* 36:569-589

Tuesday Oct 25	<i>Congregations and Family</i>
	Readings: Edgell, Penny “In Rhetoric and Practice: Defining the Good Family in Local Congregations” pp.164-178 in Dillon <i>Handbook of the Sociology of Religion</i>
Thursday Oct 27	<i>Religion and Childrearing Values</i>
	Readings: Starks, Brian and Robert V. Robinson, “Moral Cosmology, Religion, and Adult Values for Children”
Tuesday Nov 1	<i>Religion and Social Justice</i>
	Readings: Wood, Richard. “Religion, Faith-Based Community Organizing and the Struggle for Justice” pp.385-399 in Dillon <i>Handbook of the Sociology of Religion</i>
Thursday Nov 3	<i>Debunking an “It’s Just Politics” Model: Introducing Moral Cosmology Theory</i>
	Begin Reading “Claiming Society for God”
Tuesday Nov 8	<i>Social Movement Theory--Revisited</i>
	Continue Reading “Claiming Society for God”
Thursday Nov 10	<i>Cross-National Research on Religious Movements</i>
	Continue Reading “Claiming Society for God”
Tuesday Nov 15	<i>Religious Institution Building</i>
	Continue Reading “Claiming Society for God” Assignment Due: Second (final) Field Report
Thursday Nov 17	Wrap-up “Claiming Society for God”
Nov 21-27	FALL BREAK, No Classes
Tuesday Nov 29	<i>Congregations and Generosity</i>
	Readings: Starks, Brian “Unleashing Catholic Generosity: Explaining the Catholic Giving Gap”
Thursday Dec 1	<i>LAST CLASS! Course Wrap-up and Review for Final</i>
Thursday Dec 8	<i>FINAL EXAM, 6:00–8:00 pm</i>

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to notify the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Verification from KSU Student Disability Services is required. All discussions will remain confidential. (http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/dsss/welcome.html)

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Students will be allowed to miss class due to observance of religious holidays but they are still responsible for all materials assigned outside and covered in class on the day(s) missed. Note: You must talk with your instructor in advance of missing a class for religious holiday observance reasons.

INCOMPLETE GRADES

Missing work is insufficient reason for a grade of Incomplete (I). An **I** will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor's discretion. Note that College of Humanities and Social Sciences guidelines require that students seeking an "I" must be passing the course.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY: This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.