

## SOC/REL 333: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

### Albright College – Reading, PA Tentative Syllabus for Spring 2010

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#### A Little About Your Instructor

I thought it might be nice to provide a small introduction to myself since we will be spending some time together. A certain amount of mystique is always good, so I won't tell you everything (besides, I'm sure that you wouldn't be interested anyway). For starters, I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon and Washington). I received my Bachelors degree in sociology from Oregon State University, my Masters degree from the University of South Florida, and my Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. I also spent two years as a visiting assistant professor at Ohio University before accepting a full time tenure track position here at Albright College in the fall of 2001. My major research interests in sociology include culture, religion, and popular culture. My master's thesis was a formulaic analysis of the lyrics and major themes of Conservative Christian speed/thrash metal music. My dissertation (the book that is written for the Ph.D.) incorporates interviews, participant observation, and secondary literature to analyze the production of contemporary evangelical Christian culture, especially popular culture, and how various tensions within the industry are recognized and mediated. My hobbies include snow skiing, playing softball, listening to music (everything from alternative to classical although I am getting into industrial techno), reading, computers, and playing the guitar (both electric and acoustic).

#### Course Description

"Sociology, what's that?" I have been asked this question numerous times as an undergraduate sociology major and a Ph.D. student. Most confuse sociology with social work (a field that is actually an offshoot of sociology) or some type of counseling. Although sociologists may participate in these activities, the field is much broader.

Sociology is the study of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. It investigates the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, their information, development, and interactions. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob, from crime to religion, from the divisions of race, gender, and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, from the sociology of work to the sociology of sport. In fact, few fields have such broad scope and relevance. This is nice because sociologists are largely free to conduct research in any area that interests them. It is a field that synthesizes from all of the other social sciences including psychology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, economics, and history. Furthermore, sociology has generated other disciplines including social work, criminal justice, and communication studies. All of these were, at one time, part of the field of sociology.

This course is designed to provide an opportunity for the student to develop a general sociological understanding and perspective with which to evaluate, interpret, and understand religion and religious institutions. This **IS NOT** a course in religious theology, nor will we be concerned with identifying the "truth" or "falsity" of religion in general or specific religions in particular. In short, we will confine ourselves to the scientific study of religion and not attempt to pass judgments about which religions are better or worse, true or false.

We will begin by looking at how religion has been traditionally defined and how it differs from magic. We will also discuss some of the world's major religious traditions, the role of belief, values, and symbols, how and why people decide to join a religion and what happens when they decide to leave, how religious organizations form and are maintained, the link between religion and social inequality (in regards to race and gender), whether religion is



diminishing in light of the advancement of science, and various contemporary expressions of religion (cults, civil religion, and fundamentalism). We will end by discussing the implications of the commodification of religion.

This is designed to be a “read and discuss” seminar. I expect you to come to class already having read the material and ready to discuss it intelligently.

### **Text and Other Readings**

Keith A. Roberts. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

Thomas E. Dowdy & Patrick H. McNamara, eds. *Religion: North American Style*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

### **Course Prerequisites**

None

### **Course Objectives**

1. To help students develop a “sociological imagination” to understand what religion is and how it functions in society.
2. To expose students to the sociological terms, concepts, and theories that are helpful in understanding religion and religious institutions.
3. To foster an understanding of how society shapes religion and vice versa.
4. To foster an understanding of the impact of various religious groups on others and ourselves.
5. To foster critical thinking skills.

### **Course Requirements**

Each student is responsible for completing all class assignments, exams, and readings. This means that if you are absent, you should check with me as soon as possible to make sure that you did not miss any assignment changes, etc. Each student is also responsible to attend each class period. The instructor reserves the right to move exams and assignments at his discretion. Missing an exam or assignment because it has been moved **IS NOT A VALID EXCUSE! IF YOU MISS AN EXAM OR ASSIGNMENT FOR THIS REASON YOU WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO MAKEUP THE WORK AND YOU WILL FAIL TO RECEIVE ANY POINTS!**

### **Quizzes**

Every Monday, beginning the third week, there will be a five question quiz covering the assigned reading for that week. I will drop your two lowest quiz scores at the end of the semester. **NO MAKEUP QUIZZES WILL BE OFFERED.** Quizzes will be administered the first few minutes of class so don't be late. Quizzes will be worth 5 points each.

### **Exams**

Each student will take three exams worth 50 points each. **NOTE: EACH EXAM IS CUMULATIVE WHICH MEANS THAT YOU WILL BE TESTED ON ALL MATERIAL COVERED UP TO THAT POINT.** ALSO NOTE: this includes the information on plagiarism which can be accessed by going to the class home page and clicking on the links: “A Note on Plagiarism #1” and “A Note on Plagiarism #2”. The exams will most probably consist of multiple choice and essay questions. **LATE EXAMS WORTH FULL CREDIT WILL NOT BE GIVEN** unless the student receives prior permission or an emergency warrants the situation. Late exams worth partial credit (a maximum of 30 points) **might** be given to students with unexcused absences (e.g. oversleeping). Students who miss an exam must contact the instructor **within 48 hours** of the exam in order to schedule a makeup. **Make up exams will more than likely be all essays in format.** You will need a pencil and pen for the exams.

### **Group Research Assignment**

An important part of your grade will be participating in a group project and writing up a 10-15 page (excluding the bibliography) research/synopsis paper on a religious movement. While many students do not like group projects (it's sometimes difficult to get together with other members, someone in the group slacks off and effects the work of the rest of the group, etc.) I feel that such projects are reflective of the actual challenges you will face when you go to work at your first "real job." In short, this assignment is not just a way to earn points, but to

learn valuable skills that can be put to use outside of the classroom. You will learn, for example, how to deal with conflict, how to work cooperatively to achieve goals, how to become a better communicator, and how to interact with others that may be different from you ethnically, socially, culturally, etc. Groups will consist of four members and will be formed by the instructor. No one is allowed to work independently on a research project. Furthermore, each group will be expected to turn in assignments designed to provide me information on your progress. Although you will not receive points for assignments; failure to turn in assignments will cost each group member 5 points off of their total score for each assignment that is not turned in. More details regarding the paper and the assignments should be downloaded from the class webpage. All groups need to submit an electronic copy in the form of an email attachment in Microsoft Word to turnitin.com (instructions for doing this will be given in class). The paper is due precisely on the date and time mentioned in the syllabus (unless otherwise noted by the professor). Late papers turned in after this time but by 11:59 p.m. that day will automatically receive 5 points off the total score. Papers turned in after 11:59 p.m. of the due date will continue to be penalized a total of 3 points every 24 hour period that the paper is late. Papers will not be accepted after 7 days from the due date. **NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE TO THESE RULES.** Papers are worth 40 points.

Group Presentation

Groups will be expected to put together a 15 minute presentation worth 20 points on their chosen group. You should feel free to use several types of media and techniques in your presentation (e.g. PowerPoint, costumes, plays, etc.). Be creative as well as informative.

Extra Credit Assignment

We are living in an age of computers and it is obvious that anyone who wishes to succeed in today's world needs to feel comfortable using them. Because of this, and because I may need to contact you at some point in the semester, I am providing you an opportunity to gain an easy 2 points. NOTE: This will be the only extra credit assignment given, so be forewarned! Begging and pleading at the end of the semester will do no good!!! Here's what you need to do: Email me using your own email account. In the "subject line" please type your first and last name and be sure to provide the following in the body of the message: (1) the class number (Soc. 333); (2) your name; (3) phone number; (4) email address; and (5) your major. You must complete this assignment within the first four weeks of the first day of the class. Late emails will not be credited. This assignment is worth 2 points.

The Fourth Hour of Rigor

“The rationale for the (unit) Course System at Albright was clearly articulated by Dean Lubot during the community discussions that took place during the spring and fall of 1988. On April 8, 1988, he published the report *Explanation of Course System Proposal*. His introductory justification for the curriculum changes rings as true today as it did a decade and a half ago: ‘Students would benefit from a reduced course load by being able to pursue a smaller number of courses in greater depth, and the expectation is that faculty would enrich and strengthen those courses so that they are more intellectually demanding. In a nutshell, the assumption is that enabling students and faculty to concentrate their efforts in fewer units will help promote an academic setting which stimulates learning in depth within an atmosphere of genuine intellectual inquiry.’” (Andrea Chapdelaine 2004).

To this end, all faculty have been asked to make the “fourth hour of rigor” evident in their courses and corresponding syllabi. What this means is that I’m supposed to assign you more work for this class than you would have if you took this course at another college or university under the credit system.

Methods of Evaluation

Grades will be determined by percentages in the following manner:

A+	97-100%	C+	77-79%	F	Under 60%
A	93-96%	C	73-76%		
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%		
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%		
B	83-86%	D	63-66%		
B-	80-82%	D-	60-62%		

You can calculate your current grade at any point in the semester by dividing the number of points you have earned by the total amount of points possible and referring to the scale above. Thus, if you achieved a “40” on the first exam and a “40” on the second exam, then you would calculate your current grade as follows:  $40 + 40 = 80$  divided by 100 (50 possible points for the first exam and 50 for the second exam) = .80 Using the scale above you can see that you are currently earning a “B-”.

### **Student Resources**

Some students require special needs from time to time or throughout their college career. Below are some important resources that you should take advantage of if you require assistance. I would encourage anyone who has special needs to drop by and see me (if you feel comfortable doing so) so that I can better understand your situation and work with you more effectively.

#### *Students With Special Needs*

Albright College ensures that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate in its programs and activities, in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and encourages students to request accommodations for which they qualify. Albright College does not offer a formal comprehensive program for disabled students but does offer services and accommodations for qualified students through the Academic Learning Center, which handles all requests for academic accommodations and makes referrals to other college units as needed. The ALC is committed to providing timely, individual assessment of student needs and promotes self-advocacy and intentional learning among all students, especially disabled students. The ALC is located in the Administration Building, phone 610-921-7662, email [academiclearningcenter@albright.edu](mailto:academiclearningcenter@albright.edu), TTY 610-921-7241.

#### *The Writing Center and Tutoring*

The Writing Center can help you with the writing you do for any of your classes. The center’s peer tutors will work with you at any stage of the writing process, from developing and organizing ideas to revising and editing drafts. Rather than editing your work for you, writing tutors will actively engage you in meaningful conversations about your writing and help you learn new strategies. The writing center is located in the Computing and Mathematics building. You can view the schedule and make an appointment through their online appointment system: <http://www.rich75.com/alb>. Appointments are recommended, but tutors will work with you on a drop-in basis as they are available. Please bring the writing assignment guidelines you received from your instructor as well as any related course materials. For more information, contact [writingcenter@alb.edu](mailto:writingcenter@alb.edu) or stop by the center.

### **Some Further Guidelines**

Here are a few guidelines that should be of help in this course:

First, if you have any questions, please ask. Chances are if you do not understand something, half the class does not either. I will not think you are stupid because you ask questions. On the contrary, if you knew all about sociology, you would not be here in the first place. Also, your questions tend to liven up the class and make it more interesting for all of us. If for some reason you do not feel like asking the question during class, stop me after class. If you do not have time after class, please make an appointment; we can find another time.

Second, I expect you to exercise proper manners while in class. This means that you should not talk during class to another student while I am addressing the class or another student is addressing the class. This means that you should arrive on time and not leave early. This means that you should not sleep in class, read the newspaper, listen to music, etc. **NOTE: THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO SUBTRACT POINTS FROM ANY STUDENT WHO REFUSES TO EXERCISE PROPER MANNERS IN CLASS. FURTHERMORE, POINTS MAY BE SUBTRACTED IN THE AMOUNT THAT THE INSTRUCTOR SEES FIT. IF MEMBERS OF THE CLASS LEAVE EARLY, THE INSTRUCTOR MAY, AT HIS DISCRETION, BEGIN ADMINISTERING POP QUIZZES TOWARD THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD.**

Third, I consider your class participation to be very important. Please feel free to ask questions offer suggestions and/or comments, etc. If you disagree with me, fine. Feel free to say so. I only ask that you provide a rational and/or evidence for your position. In other words, don't simply say, "I disagree with you because I just don't think you are correct," give me a reason why you disagree.

Fourth, I realize that many of you are going to be one or two points away from the next grade when I calculate your final grades. While some professors simply bump everyone up, I will not do this. Instead, I am giving you the opportunity to earn 2 extra credit points with the email extra credit assignment. These extra credit points will help you move up to the next level if you are a few points away. **DO NOT PLEAD AND BEG WITH ME AT THE END OF THE QUARTER TO MOVE YOU UP TO THE NEXT LEVEL AS YOUR PLEAS WILL BE IGNORED.** I think that I am already being more than fair by offering you a chance for extra credit.

Fifth, cheating of any kind is not allowed. Any student who appears to the instructor to be cheating will receive an automatic "F" for the entire course and s/he will be turned in to the appropriate academic authorities.

Sixth, each and every class is important. My lectures do not always follow the text. I may disagree with the text and may present material not found in the text. Lectures count more than text on exams. Therefore, **YOU SHOULD ATTEND EACH AND EVERY CLASS.**

Finally, I do not grade on a strict curve. This means you have more to gain by cooperating rather than competing with each other. I would like you to get to know the students in your discussion group really well. You should exchange addresses and telephone numbers with each other and try and form a study group. As a group you can help each other with the class material, particularly in studying for exams. You also can come into my office as a group and we can talk over things that are not clear.

### **Course Outline**

T= Textbook

R= Reader

\*= Articles located in the packet to photocopy

### **WEEK 1: Introduction and Expectations**

1.T Roberts, Chapters 1 & 2

2.R Durkheim in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 7-10

### **WEEK 2: The World's Religions**

1.\* Kurtz, Lester. 1995. "The World's Religions: A Sociological Tour." Pp. 21-50 in *Gods in the Global Village*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

### **WEEK 3: Major Historical Developments**

1.R Edward Shapiro in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 147-154

2.R Patrick McNamara in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 116-123

3.\* Johnstone, Ronald. 1997. "Major Historical Developments." Pp. 260-279 in *Religion in Society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

### **WEEK 4: Major Historical Developments, Continued**

1.R Edward Shapiro in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 147-154

2.R Patrick McNamara in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 116-123

3.\* Johnstone, Ronald. 1997. "Major Historical Developments." Pp. 260-279 in *Religion in Society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

**WEEK 5: The Functions of Religion and Religion in Conflict**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 3
- 2.\* Marx, Karl. [1844] 1964. "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." Pp. 41-42, 50-52, 56-58 in *On Religion*, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- 3.\* Juergensmeyer, Mark. 1993. "Why Religious Confrontations Are Violent." Pp. 153-70 in *The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts The Secular State*, Berkeley, CA: University Of California Press.

**WEEK 6: The Role of Beliefs, Rituals, and Symbols**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 4
- 2.R Clifford Geertz in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 11-19
- 3.R Peter Berger in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 20-21

**WEEK 7: Becoming and Remaining Faithful**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 5
- 2.\* Rochford, E B. Jr. 1982. "Recruitment Strategies, Ideology, and Organization in the Hare Krishna Movement." *Social Problems* 29(4):399-410.

**EXAM #1: Friday (Covers material up through week 6)**

**WEEK 8: SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

**WEEK 9: Becoming and Remaining Faithful, Continued**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 5
- 2.\* Rochford, E B. Jr. 1982. "Recruitment Strategies, Ideology, and Organization in the Hare Krishna Movement." *Social Problems* 29(4):399-410.

**WEEK 10: Formation and Maintenance of Religious Organizations**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 8
- 2.R Roger Finke & Rodney Stark in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 43-49
- 3.R Laurence Iannaccone in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 50-65
- 4.R William Bainbridge & Rodney Stark in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 86-103

**Easter Break: NO CLASS Friday**

**WEEK 11: Secularization**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapters 13 & 15
- 2.R Re-read Roger Finke & Rodney Stark in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 43-49
- 3.R Re-read Laurence Iannaccone in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 50-65
- 4.\* Chaves, Mark. 1994. "Secularization As Declining Religious Authority." *Social Forces* 72(3):749-74.

**Easter Break: NO CLASS Monday**

**WEEK 12: Religion and Social Inequality**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapters 10 & 12
- 2.R Rosemary Radford Ruether in Dowdy & McNamara, Pp. 170-179
- 3.\* Brown, Charles M. 1995. "Musical Responses to Oppression and Alienation: Blues, Spirituals, Secular Thrash, and Christian Thrash Metal Music." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. 8(3): 439-452

**EXAM #2: Friday (Covers material up through week 11)**

**WEEK 13: The Commodification of Religion**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 14
- 2.\* Balmer, Randall. 1993. "Bible Bazaar" in *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Group Papers Due: Friday @ 4pm**

**WEEK 14: The Commodification of Religion, Continued**

- 1.T Roberts, Chapter 14
- 2.\* Balmer, Randall. 1993. "Bible Bazaar" in *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Group PowerPoint Presentations Due: Friday @ 4pm**

**WEEK 15:**

No Reading: Student Presentations

**WEEK 16:**

No Reading: Student Presentations

**WEEK 17: Cumulative Exam #3**

**Student Information:**

Please answer the questions below and write your answers on the 3x5 note card provided by the instructor:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Major (spell out please)
4. Class standing (Freshman, Sophomore, etc.)
5. Where are you from?
6. Do you know anyone that has taken this course before? If so, who?
7. What other sociology courses have you taken?
8. Do you belong to a fraternity or sorority? If so, which one?
9. Are you involved in Albright sports? If so, which one(s)? (Don't include Intramural sports)
10. Do you work? Where? How many hours per week?
11. E-mail and phone number
12. Why did you take this class?