

SOCIOLOGY 129A. RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH
Brandeis University, Spring 2013

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Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 11:00-11:50am, Mandel Center for the Humanities G03

Course Description

This course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to the sociological study of religion in the United States. We ask what religion is, how it is present and influential in public and private life, and how and where people from different religious traditions interact in the contemporary United States. Specific attention is devoted to people's religious *practices*, religious *communities*, and the *identities* people develop through their religious traditions. Questions about religious pluralism, diversity, and multi-religious citizenship are central to the conversations we will have throughout the course.

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Provide substantive and functional definitions of religion and spirituality and explain how these approaches have been influenced by scholars in the past one hundred years.
- Analyze how religion and spirituality are present in American public life and how conflicts related to diversity and pluralism have been addressed in specific examples.
- Describe how religion and spirituality influence people over the life course and how that influence varies across people.
- Consider the place of humanists, atheists, and agnostics in the American religious context.
- Compare and contrast how religion and spirituality are addressed in secular institutions including on university campuses, in healthcare organizations, and in the military
- Present and defend your own approach to religious literacy.

Unlike courses in history or religious studies that often focus on one religious tradition, you will learn a little bit about several religious traditions in this course. If you are looking to better understand the history of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity or another religious tradition, this may not be the course for you. While we will certainly pay attention to history and religious teachings in this course, our focus as sociologists will be on the ways individuals live their religions in day-to-day life. Sometimes these experiences may seem to be in contrast to texts or religious leaders, an issue we will discuss throughout the course. Similarly, some of what we cover in this course may challenge what you know of your own or others' religious traditions. I ask you to be patient, to reserve judgment, and to remember the commitment Brandeis makes in its mission statement to be "a center of open inquiry and teaching."

This course is built around course readings, ongoing discussion, occasional films and guest speakers, and a series of written assignments that ask you to bring theoretical ideas into conversation with religion as it is lived by the people around you. You are also required to make field visits to two religious centers in the greater Boston area. I encourage you to visit centers and learn about religious traditions that are new to you and to see this class as an invitation and an important step in conversations about religion in all of our lives. This course counts towards the major in Sociology and Minor in Religious Studies. It is a Writing Intensive (wi) course and fulfills the School of Social Science Distribution Requirement (ss).



Course Readings

The following required books are available in the bookstore.

- Cadge, Wendy. 2013. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Frederick, Marla F. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gerber, Lynne. 2011. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press.

These books are also on reserve in the library. All other required course readings are available through Latte except for those listed with web addresses that can be located that way.

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for me and your fellow classmates. Your class attendance counts as 5 points towards your final grade. If you miss zero or one class, you will receive 5 points. If you miss 2 classes, you will receive 4 points. If you miss 3 classes, you will receive 3 points. If you miss 4 classes, you will receive 2 points. If you miss 5 classes, you will receive 1 point. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will receive 0 points. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance. For the health of all, absences may also be excused if you think you have the flu. If you are not feeling well, please take your temperature, follow campus flu guidelines, and email me to let me know you are ill. *Please make sure to sign the attendance sheet that will be passed around in class.* Signing in for someone else is a violation of University policies on academic integrity that I take very seriously.
2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for Monday of each week unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. To help you keep up with the reading, I will ask you to write five one page single-spaced "response papers" throughout the semester. I will give you the question for each response paper in the class meeting before it is due. These response papers are due on the dates noted in the syllabus and should demonstrate that you have completed the reading and are thinking about the issues we talked about in class and the topics the authors discussed. Margaret, Caty, and I will read and comment on your response papers and you will receive two points for each one you complete thoroughly (10 points total for the semester). Response papers cannot be made up if you are not in class when the question is announced or when the paper is due unless your absence is excused.
3. **Class Participation** is central to this class, and I ask that you participate fully in class, section, and the small group discussions we will sometimes have as a part of class. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, please participate by meeting with me during office hours, sending related articles to the class email list, etc. You are allowed to have computers and cell phones in class only if you are using them to take notes or look at readings. **Please sit in the front two rows of the classroom if you will be using a computer during class.** I will reduce your participation grade when I see you reading Facebook, surfing the web, sending text messages, etc. Class participation will count as ten points toward your final grade. Feel free to check with me about your participation grade at any point in the semester.

4. **Written Assignments:** The written assignments in this class include two short papers, two field reports (length will range), and a final short synthetic essay in response to a question I will distribute during the last week of class. Each field report is worth 10.5 points and each of the other three assignments is worth 18 points. I will distribute additional guidelines about each assignment well in advance of its due date. As a writing intensive class, we will spend some time talking about writing and you are welcome to turn in drafts of the two short papers for comments from Margaret, Caty, or me before the due date listed on the syllabus.
- The first paper assignment will be distributed on *February 11*, due on *February 28* (18 points).
 - The second paper assignment will be distributed on *March 4*, due on *March 21* (18 points).
 - The final essay will be distributed on *April 29*, due on *May 6*. This will serve as an open-book take home final exam (18 points).
 - You will write **two** field reports this semester based on your visits to two different religious organizations in the greater Boston area. These visits must be to organizations in two different religious traditions. You must visit traditions in religions that you neither grew up in nor currently practice. One of your two visits can be to a religious gathering on campus. Detailed guidelines for your visits, expectations for field reports, and samples of field reports are being distributed with this syllabus. Your first field report is due on *February 7* and the second on *April 11*. (10.5 points each = 21 points total).

I place a high premium on careful research and clear organization and writing. I will spend time in class talking about how to do each of these assignments and encourage you to use the Writing Center as you work on your papers. I expect you to properly cite and reference all sources you use in each assignment. We will discuss when and how to cite sources in detail when the first paper assignment is distributed. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to raise them. You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>).

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the days they are due. The final essay is due to my mailbox in the sociology department by 9am on May 6. Papers turned in to me after these deadlines are late. You will lose 2 points for each 24 hours after the due date the assignment is turned in (i.e. if you would have received 18 points but your paper is turned in within the first 24 hours after it is due, you will receive a 16, etc.).

5. **Final Grades** will be based on your class attendance (5 points), response papers (10 points), class participation (10 points), field report 1 (10.5 points), paper 1 (18 points), paper 2 (18 points), field report 2 (10.5 points), and final essay (18 points). Final grades will be calculated using the following point distribution:

98-100 A+	77-79 C+
94-97 A	74-76 C
90-93 A-	70-73 C-
87-89 B+	67-69 D+
84-86 B	64-66 D
80-83 B-	60-63 D-
	<60 F

There are numerous written assignments in this class so that you can improve over the course of the semester. If you are struggling or are not happy with how you are doing, please see me sooner rather than later so we can talk about it.

****All written assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class****

6. **University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
7. **University Policy on Academic Integrity:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>). I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences

Course Outline

I. Getting Started: Conceptualizing and Studying Religion and Spirituality

January 14, 16, 17. Introductions

Monday:

Introductions

Wednesday:

- Bender, Courtney. 2007. "Religion and Spirituality: History, Discourse, Measurement." Social Science Research Council Essay Forum on the Religious Engagement of American Undergraduates: <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Bender.pdf>

Thursday:

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 1 Religious Polarization and Pluralism in America)
- "'Nones' on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation." The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Executive Summary. Released October 9, 2012.

**Please bring to class one example of how this report was covered in the media and be prepared to share it with others

January 23, 24. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Scholars

Monday:

- No class, MLK Day

Wednesday:

- Durkheim, Emile. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The Free Press (c. 1 Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion)
- If you want to know more about Durkheim's approach to religion, read: O'Toole, Roger. 1984. *Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, p. 76-110. It is up on the Latte site but is *not* required reading for today.

Thursday:

- Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (c. 1 Religion and World Construction).

January 28, 30, 31. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Practitioners

Monday and Wednesday:

- Frederick, Marla. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (p. 1-130).

Thursday

- *First Discussion Section Meeting – response paper due*

II. The Context: Steps in the Development of American Religious Pluralism

February 4, 6, 7. Some Historical Context and the Question of Secularization

Monday:

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 2 Vignettes: the Old and the New, c. 3 Religiosity in America: The Historical Backdrop and c. 4 Religiosity in America: Shock and Two Aftershocks)

Wednesday:

- Please skim Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(5): p. 1044-1093.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Field Report 1 Due*

February 11, 13, 14. Religion in American Public Life – Including or Excluding?

Monday

- Bellah, Robert. 1970. *Belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world*. New York: Harper & Row. (c. 9 Civil Religion in America)

Please bring copies of the following to class:

- Washington, George. 1789. First Inaugural Address.
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html
- Obama, Barak. 2013. Inaugural Address.
- *Paper Assignment 1 Distributed*

Wednesday:

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 14 A House Divided? c. 15 America’s Grace: How a Tolerant Nation Bridges Its Religious Divides)
- Please skim Edgell, Penny, Joseph Gerteis and Douglas Hartmann. 2006. “Atheists as ‘Other:’ Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society.” *American Sociological Review* 72(2):211-234.

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting – response paper due*
- 2008. “Driven by Faith or Customer Service? Muslim Taxi Drivers at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport (A)” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

February 18-22, no class

III. Developing Religious and Spiritual Selves

February 25, 27, 28. Growing Up “Religious” or “Spiritual” or “Mixed” or “Nothing”

Monday:

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 5 Switching, Matching, and Mixing)
- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press. (c. 3 Conversion and Confusion, c. 4 Losing and Finding My Religion and c. 5 Unholier Than Thou: Saying Goodbye to God)

Wednesday:

- We will watch, “Soul Searching: A Movie About Teenagers and God.” A film based on Smith, Christian with Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Paper Assignment 1 Due*

March 4, 6, 7. Mixing and Matching: Two Case Studies

Monday: Bu-Jews

- “Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Eastern, New Age Beliefs Widespread.” Report, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. December 2009
- Cornille, Catherine. 2003. “Double Religious Belonging.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23:43-50.
- “Jews and American Buddhism” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*. February 27, 1998
- *Paper Assignment 2 Distributed*

Wednesday: Christian Yoga

- Miller, Elliot. 2008. “The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment. Part 3. Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response.” *Christian Research Journal*. 31(4).
- Guest speaker, Ame Wren, MA student, Brandeis Sociology and Yoga Teacher www.amewren.com

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting – response paper due*

March 11, 13, 14. Converting to Orthodoxy Judaism

Monday and Wednesday:

- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (c. 1-6)
- Monday: Guest Speaker, Jonathan Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting – response paper due*

March 18, 20, 21. Responding to the Body - Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America

Monday and Wednesday:

- Gerber, Lynne. 2011. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and Conclusion – read for the broad argument Gerber is making rather than the details). On Wednesday or Thursday we will skype with Lynne (who is a Brandeis alum) in class.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Paper Assignment 2 Due*

March 25 - April 2 no class

IV. Experiencing Religious Diversity in the Contemporary United States

April 3, 4: Creating Spaces...

Wednesday:

- Please skim Cadge, Wendy, Alice Friedman, Karla Johnson and Margaret Clendenen. 2012. "Sacred Space in a Secular Nation of Believers: A Working Paper."
- Guest speaker Karla Johnson, Johnson Roberts Associates

Thursday:

- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press. (c. 7 In Search of the Secular Soul, c. 8 Fact or Friction, Engage or Enrage)

April 8, 10, 11. Religion and Spirituality on College Campuses

Monday and Wednesday:

- We will divide up responsibility for reading the essays posted here: <http://religion.ssrc.org/reform/>
- Roose, Kevin. 2009. *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University*. Boston: Grand Central Publishing. (p. 1-84). See also: <http://www.kevinroose.com/>

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Field Report 2 Due*

April 15, 17, 18. Religion and Spirituality in the Military

Monday

- We will watch the film *Chaplains Under Fire*: http://www.chaplainsunderfire.com/Chaplains_Under_Fire/Home.html
- Otis, Pauletta. 2010. "An Overview of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence and Practice." *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 7(4): 3-15.
- Sweeney, Patrick, Jeffrey E. Rhodes and Bruce Boling. 2012. "Spiritual Fitness: A Key Component of Total Force Fitness." *Joint Force Quarterly* 66: 35-41.
- One additional article may be added here.

Wednesday

- Guest speaker: Larry Bazer, National Guard Chaplain

Thursday

- Meet in section

April 22, 24, 25. Religion and Spirituality in Healthcare

Monday and Wednesday:

- Cadge, Wendy. 2013. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Introduction, chapter 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9)
- Wednesday, Guest speakers Mary Martha Thiel and Beth Naditch, Hebrew Rehabilitation Center, Hebrew Senior Life.

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting – response paper due*

V. Concluding

April 29, May 1. Wrapping Up

Monday and Wednesday:

- Prothero, Stephen. 2007. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*. New York: HarperCollins. (Introduction and c. 5).
- Final Essay Distributed

Final Essay due to my mailbox or under my office door in Pearlman Hall by May 6th at 9am