

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Sociology 3093, CRN 15957
TR 2:30-3:45
MH 2.01.04
Fall, 2013

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OVERVIEW:

Since the classical sociological treatises of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, scholars have widely assumed that the vitality and social power of religion are being steadily eroded by the forces of modernity. However, contemporary developments in the United States and around the world call into question these time-honored notions of secularization. Indeed, many social scientists are now embracing a more dynamic, market-oriented perspective on individual and collective religious life, especially (but not exclusively) in the United States. This debate between classic secularization approaches and the more recent, market-focused paradigm has also reinvigorated the academic study of religion and spirituality, as well as closer attention to the far-reaching role of religious organizations, practices, and beliefs in American society.

In this course, we will examine the dominant theories of religion and look at the ways in which sociologists use multiple types of empirical data --quantitative and qualitative-- to study religion as a social institution. The first portion of the course will focus squarely on the debate between "old" and "new" paradigms in the sociology of religion. Among other specific topics, we will learn about patterns of religious affiliation, and the reasons for the growth and decline of particular religious groups and communities, as well as the varied factors that influence individual religious decision making. The second segment of the course will explore religious differentials in a number of important outcomes, ranging from pro-social behavior to health to family life, and other important areas of social life. In the third and final portion of the course, we will turn our attention to the important role that religion is playing in defining and responding to the AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa.

Taken together, these diverse aspects of the course should: (a) provide new information about the role of religion and spirituality in contemporary life; (b) help students to learn about basic theoretical tools with which social scientists study religion; and (c) acquaint students with the multiple methodological approaches utilized in the sociology of religion.

READINGS:

Three texts will be used in this course:

Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. University of California Press.

Stark, Rodney. 2012. *America's Blessings*. John Templeton Foundation Press.

Trinitapoli, Jenny, and Alexander Weinreb. 2012. *Religion and AIDS in Africa*. Oxford University Press.



COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grades will be based on the following components: two mid-term in-class exams and one (non-cumulative) final exam (30% of the total each), and class attendance and performance on in-class pop quizzes (10% of the total grade). Exam questions will consist primarily of identification items and short answer or short essay questions; blue books will be required. Students are expected to read all course materials in advance, and to come to class prepared to ask questions and discuss the issues covered in the readings. The grading scale for this course will be as follows:

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69%, F = less than 60

Additional details about the exams will be provided in class, well in advance of test dates. In general, however, the exams will consist of a combination of identification, true/false, and short answer items. The former items will require recognition of facts and definitions, while the short answer questions will involve more complex development of causal accounts and explanations, examples, and applications of important concepts and ideas. Note that all exams will require blue books and pens or pencils.

OTHER POLICIES TO NOTE:

Late Assignments:

The option of making up exams is available only to students with excused absences, i.e., those whose absences are due to Holy Days or official university functions, or for which sufficient documentation is presented to the instructor. Examples of the latter include doctor's notes, court documents, and the like. Otherwise, missed exams are scheduled at the discretion of the instructor, and only under very unusual circumstances. Without sufficient documentation, students can expect to receive a grade of zero (0) for the missed exam.

Attendance Policy:

Students with excessive unexcused absences, and those who habitually arrive late, will NOT do well in this course. An attendance sheet will be passed around at each class session, and a composite grade based on attendance patterns and pop quiz grades will account for 10% of the total grade (see course requirements above). Note that there is no provision for making up missed quizzes, although I may drop the lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester.

All students are responsible for lecture notes and for any changes in the syllabus or assignments that may be announced during any absence, whether excused or unexcused. Please do not e-mail me asking what you missed (or whether you missed anything important!) during classes that you missed; this is best covered in person during my office hours or by appointment. PowerPoint lecture slides will serve as guides for the lectures, but reading them will in no way substitute for attending class. Students must find a way to keep up with all materials missed due to absence.

Excused Absences (UTSA Policy):

Any student who is absent from class for the observance of a religious Holy Day (this means a Holy Day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20 of the Tax Code) shall be allowed to take an examination for that day within a reasonable time (normally within 20 school days) after the absence if, not later than the 15th day after the first day of the semester, the student notifies the instructor of each class the student had scheduled on that date that the student would be absent for a religious Holy Day. Notification of the planned absences must be in writing and must be delivered by the student either (a) personally to the instructor of each class or (b) by certified mail, return receipt requested, addressed to the instructor of each class. Any instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or examination within a reasonable time (normally 20 school days) after the absence. Each

instructor should inform the student, at the time the student notifies the instructor of a planned absence, of the deadline for completion of the missed examination.

Students shall be excused without penalty from class to participate in official University sanctioned student activity, such as intercollegiate athletic competition, forensics, music tours, and other similarly approved events. Students are responsible for the coursework for any time they are absent from class. Faculty or the university employee in charge of such activities shall file a list of students and the dates they request the students be excused from class with the Office of the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs. Deans, Division Directors, and faculty may check any names against the list by contacting the Office of the Provost.

Scholastic Dishonesty:

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission of work for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, giving inaccurate or misleading information in order to obtain an extension or delay in completing examinations, or any other act designed to give unfair advantage to a student, or the attempt to commit such an act.

Students with Disabilities:

The instructor will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with documented disabilities. However, students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (MS 2.03.18, 458-4157) in order to receive consideration and support services.

Additional Note:

Students are encouraged to utilize the academic support services available through the Tomas Rivera Center (TRC) to assist with building study skills and for tutoring in course content. These services are available at no additional cost to you. The TRC has several locations on the Main Campus. For more information, visit the web site at www.utsa.edu/trcss, or call 458-4694.

COURSE ORGANIZATION:

[NOTE: Dates for specific topics are approximate, and may vary depending on the rate of progress throughout the semester. Students are responsible for any announcements regarding changes in such dates.]

8/29

Topics:

- *Introduction
- *Overview of U.S. religious scene

Required readings:

- *Ellison and McFarland, "The social context of religion and spirituality in the United States"

Unit I: The Secularization Debate, Market Theories of Religion, and the Church-Sect Cycle

9/3-9/5

Topics:

- *Classic vs. market paradigms (review of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim)
- *Religion and rationality

Required readings:

- *Stark and Finke, introduction, chapters 1-3

9/10-9/12

Topics:

- *Market theories and religious vitality
- *Religious commitment and supernatural compensators
- *Conversion and affiliation
- *Network structure and growth of religious groups

Required readings:

- *Stark and Finke, chapters 4-5

9/17-9/19

Topics:

- *Religious group dynamics
- *Church and sect theory
- *Congregation size and social networks
- *Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, and sectarian movements

Required readings:

- *Stark and Finke, chapters 6-7

9/24-9/26

Topics:

- *Theoretical model of religious economies
- *Niches and competition
- *Supply and demand

Required readings:

- *Stark and Finke, chapters 8 and 10

10/1-10/3

EVALUATION WEEK: EXAM #1, 10/3

Unit II: Does Religion Matter in the United States Today?

10/8-10/10

Topics:

- *Fertility and family life
- *Sexuality

Required readings:

- *Stark, chapters 3-4

10/15-10/17

Topics:

- *Crime, deviance, and pro-social behavior
- *Generosity and charity
- *Civic engagement

Required readings:

- *Stark, chapters 2 and 6

10/22-10/24

Topics:

- *Mental health and psychological well-being
- *Physical health
- *Mortality risk

Required readings:

- *Stark, chapter 5

10/29-10/31

Topics:

*Education, achievement and stratification

Required readings:

*Stark, chapter 7-8 and conclusion

11/5-11/7 EVALUATION WEEK (EXAM #2, 11/7)

Unit III: Religion and AIDS in Africa

11/12-11/14

Topics:

*Cross-national variations in rates of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa

*Religious differences in AIDS

Required readings:

*Trinitapoli and Weinreb, introduction and chapters 1-2

11/19-11/21

Topics:

*Diverse interpretations and meanings of AIDS

*Levels and sources of knowledge

Required readings:

*Trinitapoli and Weinreb, chapters 3-5

11/26 (11/28 THANKSGIVING –NO CLASS)

Topics:

*Religion, culture and prevention

*Formal and informal religious responses to the AIDS crisis

Required readings:

*Trinitapoli and Weinreb, chapters 6-7

12/3-12/5

Topics:

*The unique contribution of religious communities

*Is AIDS reshaping the contours of African religion?

*Concluding remarks

Required readings:

*Trinitapoli and Weinreb, chapters 8-10 and conclusion

FINAL EXAM (EXAM #3), 12/12, 12:30-3

I. The Roadrunner Creed

The University of Texas at San Antonio is a community of scholars, where integrity, excellence, inclusiveness, respect, collaboration, and innovation are fostered.

As a Roadrunner,

I will:

Uphold the highest standards of academic and personal integrity by practicing and expecting fair and ethical conduct;

Respect and accept individual differences, recognizing the inherent dignity of each person;

Contribute to campus life and the larger community through my active engagement;

Support the fearless exploration of dreams and ideas in the advancement of ingenuity, creativity, and discovery.

Guided by these principles, now and forever, I am a Roadrunner!

II. The University of Texas at San Antonio Academic Honor Code

Preamble:

The University of Texas at San Antonio community of past, present, and future students, faculty, staff, and administrators share a commitment to integrity and the ethical pursuit of knowledge. We honor the traditions of our university by conducting ourselves with a steadfast duty to honor, courage, and virtue in all matters both public and private. By choosing integrity and responsibility, we promote personal growth, success, and lifelong learning for the advancement of ourselves, our university, and our community.

Honor Pledge:

In support of the ideals of integrity, the students of the University of Texas at San Antonio pledge:

“As a UTSA Roadrunner I live with honor and integrity.”

Shared Responsibility:

The University of Texas at San Antonio community shares the responsibility and commitment to integrity and the ethical pursuit of knowledge and adheres to the UTSA Honor Code.