

RELS 381/SOCI 327: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION
Syllabus Spring 2019
ONLINE

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Virtual Office Hours: anytime*; please allow 24 hours for a response.

*For a phone conversation with me, please schedule an appointment over email.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A very warm welcome to the sociology of religion! We are going to have an exciting journey this semester exploring ideas about religion and the interdependence of religion and its social context. To be clear on what we are embarking on, the sociology of religion assumes that religion is not something purely “spiritual”, but that religion shapes and is shaped by social processes. While religion is made up of the “stuff” of culture and society (like norms, values, music, language, symbols, etc.), religion is also one of the most powerful sources *upon* society in terms of its ability to establish social cohesion, order, meaning, disruption, protest, and change, both historically and today.

Throughout the course, we’ll learn how sociologists have studied and interpreted this interdependence between religion and society in the past, and we will also engage with contemporary debates in the field. In the process, we will learn about a variety of crucial analytical concepts and concerns in social science, such as social structure, group cohesion, identity, power, conflict, rationality, tradition, modernization, globalization, emotions, and the relations between religion and race, class, and gender.

We'll ask questions such as:

- What *is* religion? And can *religion* really be reduced to a category that can be meaningfully studied?
- What does “spiritual but not religious” really mean?
- Why are people religious or not religious? Why do people convert? Or lose their faith entirely?
- Why have conservative religious groups (evangelical, Islamist, etc.) become so powerful in recent decades?
- What is happening today at the global level when it comes to religious movements and their social, cultural, political, and economic impacts?
- Is society secularizing (becoming less religious)? If so, how do we explain the mass appeal of Zen and yoga? The strength and flourishing of conservative religious groups? And the growth of new religious movements?
- How are religion and gender connected? Religion and race? Religion and ethnicity? Religion and immigration?

As part of the course, you will gain experience in fieldwork, coming to understand in the process something about religious traditions other than those in which you may have been raised. As the comparative religionist Max Muller famously said (being yet unconcerned with inclusive language) “He who knows one, knows none.” A perk of doing this work, I always say, is that we will inevitably learn something of ourselves as we learn about others. So in addition to our coursework, I suspect we will come out of our explorations and our studies much more in tune with the forces that have affected and shaped our own religiosity, spirituality, or feelings otherwise.

REQUIRED TEXTS

I have chosen a textbook to guide us systematically through the main ideas and debates of sociology of religion, and I think you'll find the text both easy to read and interesting. The text is required and must be purchased or rented to find success in

the course. The two exams will largely be based on the textbook reading.

The required text is:

Keith A. Roberts, David A. Yamane. 2016. Religion in Sociological Perspective. **6th edition**. Sage Publications, Inc.

I bolded 6th edition above already, but I'll reiterate to please be sure to buy this version. The former versions will not line up with the chapters in the course schedule. This edition is available at the BOOKSTORE, and is also available in most formats through Amazon, and can be purchased for Kindle immediately.

There will be additional required readings posted on Blackboard either as pdf's or as links.

Lastly, we will watch a few movies that give us visual glimpses inside small religious communities, and personal accounts from the people who belong to them. Both movies are fully available online for free.

COURSE EVALUATION

Requirements/Assessment

Weekly Quizzes on Textbook Readings = 30 points (12 @ 2.5 points each)

Weekly Discussion Forums = 60 points (12 @ 5 points each)

Weekly Essays = 60 points (8 @ 7.5 points each)

Two non-cumulative Exams = 50 points (2 @ 25 points each)

Participant Observation Field Report = 100 points (1 @ 100 points)

Total = 300 points

DISCUSSION FORUMS

Twelve (12) threaded discussion questions will be offered, one per week except when noted. You will be responsible for completing ALL (12) of them.

The discussion questions are designed to facilitate a thoughtful discussion about the reading material and course content.

When responding to the questions, a good approach is to refrain from judging whether you think the readings are true or false, or whether you agree or disagree with them (or with one another). Your responses should reflect deep engagement with the material, and should connect the reading with the larger world and personal experiences. Be sure to reference the readings in your post(s), demonstrating your engagement with the material, while also connecting it to your wider experience.

Entries to discussion questions must be between 250-300 words, unless otherwise indicated. Grading will be based on the degree to which your response reflects a clear thesis, critical and analytical thinking skills and demonstrates that the material has been read. See the RUBRIC to understand what constitutes a high grade. NOTE that you must use formal academic writing style for all posts. This means to use proper grammar, punctuation, and paragraphs, too. I will remind you if you forget to do this in the first week. Thereafter, any posts without paragraphs, correct punctuation, and accurate grammar, will lose points.

In addition to your own original post, you are required to respond to at least two of your classmates' posts. These responses should be around 50 words. Though you may certainly respond to more than two, avoid responding to every post. In your response, focus on what resonated with/provoked you in what they wrote? Did your classmate's response cause you to think about the question in a new way? Reconsider your answer? Be polite in comments.

To recap the DB requirement, I will assign 12 Discussion Boards for the class; and you are required to complete all of them in the manner described above.

QUIZZES ON TEXTBOOK READINGS

Most weeks you will take a very short quiz on the textbook reading. The quiz will be between three and five questions, and will be multiple choice and/or short answer, or true or false.

Feel free, of course, to consult your textbook to answer the quiz questions (why wouldn't you??!)

There will be 12 quizzes in total. It is required to take all of them. Each quiz is worth 2 1/2 points.

WEEKLY ESSAYS

Your weekly essays are meant mainly to address the article assigned each week. For any week, you are to write about the article assigned outside the textbook chapter. Tying the article in to the main themes and ideas you read about in the textbook is always a good idea, but I want to be clear that the summary and reflection must be about the article. In some weeks, I will give specific questions for that week's essay. There will be EIGHT (8) Weekly Essays to submit for the semester. You must write all of them. Each is worth a maximum of 7.5 points. Be sure to weigh your essay against the rubric provided for best results.

In general, here are the instructions for how to approach your essays.

In each week's summary, you will first summarize and then respond to the article. In order to write a proper summary and response, you must have read the article in its entirety. Please do not submit if you have not done the reading. Good

summaries will need to go beyond the articles own summary of itself. (For example, do not just copy what the article says it will do in its introduction, nor what it says it did in its conclusion. It will be very obvious you did not read the article if you do this.) For a successful grade, you will want to prove you did the reading and have thought about it. Try these tips:

1) Essentialize or Summarize: What are the essential concepts, ideas, and insights in the readings, and how are they connected?

2) Demonstrate: Demonstrate your knowledge of the readings' arguments by comparing approaches and methods, raising questions or critical comments, discussing the relevance (or lack thereof) for designing sociologically based study, and/or analytically drawing out implications.

For example, if you read an article about conversion differences between males and females, do your best to state why this study is important (what hole in the field does it fill? Was it formerly assumed that men and women converted through the same processes?); and who exactly the scholars studied and how they studied them (any problems with their method? Did they only study men and women from one religious tradition? Or did they study them across multiple traditions? Might the results vary across traditions? Can we get to a water-tight theory about this kind of thing really?).

Also you might bring out if there are any theories this study is trying to disprove (if you know of them). Finally, why does knowing the different ways that men and women convert matter? How does this knowledge help us better understand people, religions, etc.?

3) Use quotes: Though not at all required, it's always a good idea to integrate actual quotes from the readings-- poignant ones that capture the essence of what the article is arguing. Be sure to cite correctly with author and page number in parentheses.

4) Reflect: Can you relate this study to the rest of the course content at all? In what way(s)? Did this article expand your understanding of sociology and/or religion in any way? How so?

In this reflection section, you can get creative, but please keep it focused. Please do not simply share your agreements or disagreements with the article, or your personal stories that help you relate to it. You may share these things, but bear in mind these are short pieces, and personal stories must be very succinct, and must be directly...and I mean directly...relevant to the article's content or approach.

Length:

Each of your Weekly Essays should be approximately 1 1/2 pages (about 300 words). Cite correctly when needed (using APA, Chicago, or Turabian).

Point Value:

There will be 8 essays required of you for the semester. Keep track to be sure you have completed and submitted all 8. Each essay is worth 7.5 points for a grand total of 60 points.

Note: No points will be given to submissions that 1) do not address assigned reading; 2) indicates little or no understanding of reading; 3) is significantly late without obtaining prior approval for an extension; or 4) is significantly less than than 300 words. Do not plagiarize. This will earn no points plus a formal write up of the academic offense. The internet has unfortunately made plagiarism as easy as copy and paste. I will know if you have done this. Trust me. Please

don't. If you need help, I much prefer you come to me with your questions and difficulties. By the way, it is ALWAYS okay to say in your essay that you had trouble understanding the article. This is an honest response that helps you work through in writing some of the challenges of the subject matter. Sometimes writing out the challenges and difficulties even enables you to have a breakthrough in understanding. The writing process can really accomplish this. Please take this honest, authentic approach in your writing if you are challenged; and/or give me a shout out and I will happily help.

Please know that I will always read your weekly journals, though I may or may not write significant notes on them in response.

TWO NON-CUMULATIVE EXAMS

You will complete two exams-- one mid-semester, one during the final exam period. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, true/false, and short essay.

They will be open book, but good notes will help you significantly in preparation. Exams, like all other written material, will be submitted through Blackboard. Detailed instructions will be provided.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FIELD REPORT

This exercise and corresponding report will involve participating in and observing a local religious group. The group should be one that is new to you and also accessible to you. You'll post the group you are considering in Week 08 of the course for instructor approval.

Your goal for this assignment is to try out ethnographic methods and begin to understand the group from both an insider's and a sociological perspective. Your final report may be solely a written document, but you are also very welcome

to get creative and include any pamphlets, video, photos, advertisements, etc. that you might find on the group.

Details of the method and process of this assignment are in the "Field Report Instructions" tab to the left.

COURSE GRADING AND POLICIES

Grade Scale:

279-300 A
270-278 A-
261-269 B+
249-260 B
240-248 B-
231-239 C+
219-230 C
210-218 C-
201-209 D+
180-200 D

Course Policies

Craftsmanship in Writing

Always strive to write with clarity and sound argumentation, and make sure to avoid spelling and grammatical mistakes.

One's writing improves through practice, so don't rely on quotations.

Late Assignments

Due to the nature of the online environment, I do not tend to accept late Discussion Board posts or DB responses to peers.

And I rarely make exceptions for Weekly Reflective Journals.

To be fair to other students who may have been able to do better with more time, other assignments will be penalized by one grade percentage per day. For example, a B+ paper that is one day late will receive a B. If it is two days late, it will

receive a B-. And so on. In case of medical emergency, contact me as soon as you are able to discuss alternative arrangements.

Having said all this, of course life happens. The best thing to do if you have a question or concern, if you are falling behind or confused about our material, or anything along these lines, is to be in touch with me. I'm very happy to help.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES (Courtesy S Pike)

Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course.

Please note that you may be required to show documentation for your disability. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, please email me to schedule a time to talk as soon as possible.

Please also contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) as this is the designated department responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services for students with disabilities. ARC will help you understand your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide you further assistance with requesting and arranging accommodations. The Accessibility Resource Center is in Student Services Center 170, or you can get in touch with them at 530-898-5959 or visit their website at www.csuchico.edu/arc.

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

State law makes university professors mandated reporters. This means I am required to report to the Title IX Coordinator whenever I learn about incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking that affect any member of the campus community. This includes disclosures that occur

during our communications, whether online, in person, during “class” discussion, or in your written assignments. Students may make a confidential report to the Counseling and Wellness Center (898-6345) or Safe Place (898-3030). Information on campus reporting obligations and other Title IX related resources are available here: www.csuchico.edu/title-ix.

Academic Dishonesty

If there is evidence that you have been involved in any form of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism or cheating on exams), you will receive an “F” grade for the course, and a report will be provided to Student Judicial Affairs for further action. Be careful in all of work (discussion board entries included) to properly cite your sources (including online materials). If you borrow the ideas of others in composing your written work, they must be cited; if you borrow the words of others, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited. If you have any doubts as to whether or not something needs to be cited, play it safe and cite it—or ask me about it. Any standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.) is fine. Please see the University Academic Integrity policy at <http://www.csuchico.edu/sjd/integrity.shtml>, and review the “Religious Studies Academic Integrity Policy” under “Programs” on the CORH Department home page (<http://www.csuchico.edu/corh/crel/programs/academic-integrity.shtml>). Ignorance of proper citation methods is not a legitimate excuse for violation of these policies.

Other campus resources

There are many resources available to students such as tutoring through the Student Learning Center, assistance with personal crises through the Counseling Center, help with research through the library, help for students with food insecurity at the Wildcat Food Pantry, etc. Check out the “Student resources” tab on our Blackboard page for more information.

Library Liaison

For help with research: George Thompson,
ghthompson@csuchico.edu, 898-6603, MLIB 305