

**Sociology 5384: Seminar in the Sociology of Religion  
Spring, 2018**

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Office hours (Holden Hall 269):  
T-Th 9:15-10:45 a.m. or by appointment

**Religion is a complex social phenomenon.** Individual circumstances and events, as well as complex social issues, inform and shape how individuals come to believe in a Divine Being, act out their beliefs in ritual, experience other-worldly events and emotions, organize, institutionalize and systematize these processes. Moreover, religion stands with myriads of political, educational, economic, familial, and medical partners in culture.

**This seminar is designed to provide students an opportunity to learn and engage the process of independent inquiry.** To the extent possible, it involves a process identical to the development, presentation, and evaluation of independent scholarship. In this class, students learn to frame a research question with a topic of their own interest and investigate relevant published research. Students use the results of that investigation to propose a research project and present findings to their colleagues in the classroom. The final paper – a formal research proposal – is designed to move students toward developing a presentation for a professional meeting of fellow scholars; it may also become the basis for a thesis.

Through the course of the semester, the class will explore several specific topics related to personal, organizational, and cultural religiousness. We'll do this in a variety of ways. Each class period begins with a didactic presentation on the week's topic. This includes lecture, media, and interactive discussion. The class then discusses the central issues raised by the readings for the topic, findings from their own investigation, and the instructor's presentation. Readings are from current research and are available online at no cost through the course web page.

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. It is expected that the students will learn how to access, understand, and extend their thinking about religion and society in America through reading and discussing current research.
2. It is expected that students will apply what they have learned by independently investigating a topic of interest acquired through reading current research and by framing a research question of their own which extends the logic of current literature.
3. It is expected that students will share what they have learned with their colleagues. This involves both informal and formal interaction in a professional, scholarly context.
4. It is expected that students will synthesize their reading, discussion, and review of research literature such that they experience how behavioral scientists discover, describe, and explain the behaviors and interactions concerning religion in American society. This culminates in the formulation of a research proposal that sets up and frames a project which, through additional development, could become a thesis, a paper suitable for presentation at a scholarly meeting, and/or submitted for publication in a scholarly journal.

## Methods for Assessing Learning Outcomes:

1. The instructor will lead the interactive discussion, conversing with and clarifying questions emerging from the students' reading of the assigned literature and from the instructor's didactic presentation. Assessing students' regular **Journaling** of this process will comprise 10% of the student's grade in the course.
2. Students will begin investigation their chosen topic of interest by compiling an **Annotated Bibliography** of at least 25 relevant sources from research. An assessment of this project by the instructor will comprise 25% of the student's grade in the course.
3. Students will share what they have learned through a short presentation of their research question, review of the literature, and proposed method of investigating the question. This presentation will be similar to what scholars do when presenting their work to colleagues at a professional meeting. An assessment of this **Presentation** will comprise 15% of the student's grade in the course.
4. Students will compile a synthesis of their work investigating some facet of religion, self, and society. This takes the form of a research proposal of approximately 15 pages in length. The paper includes three sections, Introduction, Theory, Methods. Drafts of these sections will be evaluated as the semester progresses. This enables students to set up their question emerging from scholarly investigation, reviews the relevant literature, present a theory, and propose a method by which they would begin independent investigation. An assessment of this **Paper** will comprise 50% of the student's grade in the course.

*Grading is secondary to learning in this class. Students are not in competition with each other for grades. The instructor is not an adversary to be overcome with tactical strategies. Rather, I consider the class a team and myself something of a coach in a process of advancing ideas. Pay attention to each other, do the reading, give the whole process serious thought and attention. The grades follow naturally, and are more or less incidental to the learning.*

## Readings:

All readings for weekly topics are available online through the course website. Each week's topic involves reading the assigned articles, links, or book chapters. It is expected that the readings assigned for each topic will be completed before each class session.

Students are also expected to search out, read, and present a summary of a research article or other work related to the week's topic each Wednesday throughout the semester.

## TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan 24:	Orientation, Introductions, Logistics.
Jan 31:	Theory and Methods.
Feb 7:	Religion and Solidarity.

Feb 14:	Religion and Oppression.
Feb 24:	Religion as Symbolic Interaction. <b>Annotated Bibliography due.</b>
Feb 28:	Prayer and Healing
Mar 7:	Religion and Health
Mar 14:	SPRING BREAK
Mar 21:	Religion and Diversity <b>First draft of Introduction due.</b>
Mar 28:	Religion, Politics, and Economics.
Apr 4:	Professional Meeting break. No class.
Apr 11:	Religion and Education. <b>First draft of Introduction and Theory due.</b>
Apr 18:	Religion and Family
Apr 25:	Religion and Deviance
May 2:	Student Presentations.

### **Final Paper Due May 9**

#### **Legalese:**

1. "It is the aim of the faculty of Texas Tech University to foster a spirit of complete honesty and a high standard of integrity. The attempt of students to present as their own any work that they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense and renders the offenders liable to serious consequences, possibly suspension."

#### **Please DO NOT test me on this one.**

2. Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note: instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact Student Disability Services in West Hall or call 806-742-2405.

3. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an exam or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence." The OP also states that a student may not be penalized for such an absence, but an instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to complete the assignment satisfactorily.