Course description:

Is same-sex marriage a religious issue or a political one? Was the first *Matrix* movie Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, or secular? Do people really get sucked into cults, and can deprogrammers get them out again? Why do so many ethnic groups have their own temples, mosques, or churches? What is witchcraft, and what does it have to do with feminism? This class invites students to consider religion through the lenses of sociology and cultural studies. It will explore the influence of religion on social institutions, politics, social movements, and popular culture, as well as considering the effects of society and culture on religion. Topics include: civil religions; religion and the social order; religion, gender, and race; new religious movements and “spirituality”; seekerism and secularization; religion and social change; religion in popular culture; and religion and violence.

Required texts:


Occasionally, articles will be posted on Blackboard to supplement your texts. All books will also be on reserve in Penrose.
Course requirements:

Final grades in this course will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Short essays (5 @ 10% each)</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Election project</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral final exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Short essays: At the end of each major unit of the course, you will be asked to write a 3-4 page essay that applies one or more of the concepts we have covered in that unit. You will have one week to complete the essay, using only the course materials (no outside research). Essays will be graded for grammar and structure as well as content. Due dates are listed in the course schedule.

Election project: Each year, this class undertakes a research project that applies the concepts we study to the world around us. With the upcoming presidential election looming large this semester, we will be focusing on civil religion and public Protestantism in the presidential campaigns. Along with one to three classmates, you will need to watch and read ads, speeches, debates, press releases, and any other public communication from the campaigns. Remember to take notes on your observations and to write down the date, time, and nature of each event in your notes. After the election is over (including the acceptance and concession speeches, assuming that they happen in early November this year), each group of students will produce a 16-20 page analysis of the roles played by civil religion and public Protestantism in the election. You may find the following web sites useful for transcripts of speeches, official platforms, visual use of civil religion and public Protestantism, and other resources: www.georgewbush.com, www.johnkerry.com, www.votenader.org. Election projects are due in class on Friday, November 12.

Final exam: The final exam in this class will be oral. Each student will be required to make a 15-minute appointment with me for finals week (Dec. 13-Dec. 17). You will receive a list of possible topics during the last week of classes; as with a written exam, you will be expected to be familiar with all of the topics and will be asked to discuss some of them. This is not an all-or-nothing exam, but rather a chance for you to demonstrate what you’ve learned during the semester.

Attendance and participation: This score will be based primarily on your presence in class and your preparation for each class session. Students who miss more than four class sessions without making prior arrangements with me will receive a low attendance score.
Course policies:

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resources Center (527-5213). I’ll be happy to help in whatever way I can.

Inclusive language: Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in every assignment you complete for this course. There isn't room in this syllabus to go into the evidence for the importance of inclusive language, but the simple explanation is that language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of man, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women as well. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might write: "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

Late fees: For the essays and the election project, five percentage points will be deducted for each day the assignment is late (yes, this includes weekends and holidays). There will be no make-ups for the final exam unless you make arrangements with me in advance.

Academic dishonesty: Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teachers, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests, copying others’ assignments, and plagiarism. The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.

This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of culturally and socially disempowered groups.
Course Schedule

NOTE: Please complete each day’s reading assignment before coming to class.

Part 1: What is religion?
Tuesday, 8/31: Introductions
No reading.
Thursday, 9/2: Conceptualizing religion
Read: Syllabus; McGuire Ch. 1
Friday, 9/3: Meaning and belonging
Read: McGuire Ch. 2

Part 2: Civil religion
Tuesday, 9/7: Binding or breaking society?
Read: McGuire Ch. 6
Thursday, 9/9: Civil religion(s) and public Protestantism
Read: Blackboard – Bellah and Albanese
Discuss election project and sign up for groups
Essay assignment #1 available in class

Part 3: Spirit, body, and society
Friday, 9/10: Religion and the individual
Read: McGuire Ch. 3
Tuesday, 9/14: Shaping and reading the body
Read: Griffith pp. 1-21
Thursday, 9/16: Bodily discipline
Read: Griffith pp. 23-26, 57-83, 98-109
Essay assignment #1 due in class
Friday, 9/17: Bodily and spiritual perfection?
Read: Griffith Ch. 3
Tuesday, 9/21: Dieting religiously
Read: Griffith Ch. 4
Thursday, 9/23: Religion, bodies, and social control
Read: Griffith Ch. 5 and Epilogue
Essay assignment #2 available in class

Part 4: Religion, race, and ethnicity
Friday, 9/24: Religion and the social construction of race
Read: Prentiss pp. 1-8, Ch’s 1, 3, 8
Tuesday, 9/28: Religion and self-identity
Read: Prentiss Ch’s 2, 4, 6
Tuesday, 7:00 pm (location TBA). Film night – Race: The Power of an Illusion (prod. Larry Adelman, 2003, 174 min.) If you cannot come to this showing, please watch the film on your own before Thursday’s class session (it’s on reserve in Penrose; be sure to get all three videotapes).
Thursday, 9/30: Religion and ethnicity
Read: Prentiss Ch’s 5, 11, 12; Blackboard - Warner
Essay assignment #2 due in class
Friday, 10/1: Religion and cultural identity  
Read: Prentiss Ch’s 9, 10, 13

Tuesday, 10/5: Religion, racism, and nationalism  
Read: Prentiss Ch’s 7, 14  
→ Film: Picture Me an Enemy (dir. Nathalie Applewhite, 2003, 29 min.)  
→ Essay assignment #3 available in class

Thursday, 10/7 and Friday, 10/8: Class cancelled.  
Please work on your essay assignment and your election study.  

Tuesday, 10/12: Fall Break – No class! 😊

Part 5: Religion, media, and culture  
Thursday, 10/14: Modes of religion  
Read: McGuire Ch. 4  
→ Essay assignment #3 due in class

Friday, 10/15: Religion and U.S. popular culture  
Read: Clark Introduction, Ch. 1

Tuesday, 10/19: The supernatural  
Read: Clark Ch’s 2, 3

→ Tues., 7:00 pm. Film night – The Matrix (dir. Wachowski Bros., 2001, 136 min.)

Thursday, 10/21: Mystics and experimenters  
Read: Clark Ch’s 4, 5

Friday, 10/22: Boundaries and definitions  
Read: Clark Ch’s 6, 7

Tuesday, 10/26: Nonofficial religion and U.S. culture  
Read: Clark Ch’s 9, 10  
→ Essay assignment #4 available in class

Part 6: New religious movements  
Thursday, 10/28: Church, sect, and (gasp) cult  
Read: McGuire Ch. 5

Friday, 10/29: Where do NRM’s come from?  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 4, 6  
→ Film: Voices of the Orishas (dir. Alvaro Perez Betancourt, 1993, 37 min.)

Tuesday, 11/2: Why do people join NRM’s?  

Election Day! Remember to vote if you’re eligible.  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 7, 8, 9  
→ Essay assignment #4 due in class

Thursday, 11/4: What about brainwashing?  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 10, 11, 12

Friday, 11/5: Are there really Satanists?  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 13, 15

Tuesday, 11/9: NRM’s in cultural context  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 19, 20, 21

Thursday, 11/11: NRM’s and violence  
Read: Dawson Ch’s 16, 17, 18  
→ Film: Waco: The Inside Story (dir. Michael Kirk, 1995, 60 min.)  
→ Essay assignment #5 available in class
Part 7: Religion, social change, and globalization

Friday, 11/12: Religion and social change
- Read: McGuire Ch. 7
- Finish film
- Election projects due in class

Tuesday, 11/16: Religion and oppression - opiate or liberator?
- Read: Blackboard – Marx and Lincoln

Thursday, 11/18: Religion and globalization
- Read: McGuire Ch. 8
- Essay assignment #5 due in class

Friday, 11/19: Class cancelled. Enjoy Thanksgiving break!

11/20-11/28: Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, 11/30: Violence, God, and Christ
- Read: Juergensmeyer xi-xiv, Ch’s 1, 2
  - Tues., 7 pm. Film night: Religion, War, and Violence (prod. Missy Daniel, 2003, 90 min.)

Thursday, 12/2: Violence in Judaism and Islam
- Read: Juergensmeyer Ch’s 3, 4

Friday, 12/3: Violence in Sikhism and Buddhism
- Read: Juergensmeyer Ch’s 5, 6
  - In-class film: In the Name of God (dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1992, 90 min.)

Tuesday, 12/7: Performative and cosmic violence
- Read: Juergensmeyer Ch’s 7, 8
  - Finish film
  - Sign-ups begin for oral exam appointments

Thursday, 12/9: The Good, the Evil, and the disempowered
- Read: Juergensmeyer Ch. 9 and pp. 190-210
  - Final exam study guide available in class

Friday, 12/10: Religion, politics, and violence
- Read: Juergensmeyer pp. 210-218, Ch. 11

Finals week: Oral exams by appointment 12/13 through 12/17