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 CLEo to supplement your texts. All books will be on reserve in Penrose, and you are also welcome to share books with a classmate in order to keep your expenses down.
**Course requirements:**

Final grades in this course will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short essays (4 @ 10% each)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral final exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Remember to keep all papers I return to you in case there are any discrepancies at the end of the semester. If you keep your papers, you can also track your own grade!

*Short essays:* At the end of each major unit of the course, you will be asked to write a 4-5 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. Essays will be graded for grammar and structure as well as content. Due dates are listed in the course schedule, marked by arrows. *Note that there are five essays listed in the syllabus but you are only required to write four; you may either complete four of the five, or complete all five and drop your lowest grade.*

*Group project:* This is your cumulative research assignment for the course; it will be completed in a group with three other people (i.e., groups of four) and presented on the last day of class (May 8). Your assignment is to investigate a religious phenomenon in the contemporary U.S., and analyze it from the perspective of the sociology of religion. Your final product should be a ten-minute presentation and a visual aid: a poster, a slide show, video clips, material culture, etc. Your possible topics are wide ranging: religion in the media, civil religion, church and state, religion and sexuality, new religious movements, religion and immigration, religion and race…whatever grabs your interest. Above all, be sure to select a topic your group finds engaging, otherwise this assignment won’t be any fun at all.

*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 (May 10-15). 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 have a conversation about some of them with me. 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 automatically lose at least 50% of their 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. If you suspect you have a learning difference but have not had your suspicions confirmed, the Academic Resource Center can help you to identify that difference and figure out how to adjust your learning style accordingly. _The only thing wrong with a learning difference is an inflexible educational system._

_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").

I am always happy to help you find more inclusive language for what you want to say – see me in office hours if you’d like assistance with this.

_Late fees:_ For the essays, 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 group project or 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

→ Watch for the arrows! They tell you when an assignment is due.

NOTE: Please complete each day’s reading assignment before coming to class, and please bring to class either the day’s reading or detailed notes on that reading.

Part 1: What is religion?
Tuesday, 1/16: Introductions
   Film: What Do You Believe? (dir. Sarah Feinbloom, 2006, 50 min.)
Thursday, 1/18: Conceptualizing religion
   Read: Syllabus; McGuire pp. 1-36

Part 2: Civil religion
Tuesday, 1/23: Binding or breaking society?
   Read: McGuire pp. 37-50, 195-220
Thursday, 1/25: Civil religion(s) and public Protestantism
   Read: CLEo – Bellah and Albanese
   Essay assignment #1 available in class

Part 3: Religion and popular culture
Tuesday, 1/30: Official and non-official religion
   Read: McGuire Ch. 4 (through p. 127 only); Forbes/Mahan pp. 1-7, 9-17
   → Movie night! The Da Vinci Code
   Thursday, 2/1: Religion in popular culture
   Read: Forbes/Mahan Ch’s 1, 2, 3
   → Essay assignment #1 due in class
Tuesday, 2/6: Popular culture as religion
   Read: Forbes/Mahan Ch’s 9, 11
Thursday, 2/8: Popular culture in religion
   Read: Forbes/Mahan Ch’s 5, 6, 7
Tuesday, 2/13: Religion and popular culture in dialogue
   Read: Forbes/Mahan Ch’s 13, 14
   Essay assignment #2 available in class

Part 4: Religion and sexuality
Thursday, 2/15: Talking about sex in church
   Read: Moon Ch’s 1, 2
Tuesday, 2/20: Everyday theologies
   Read: Moon Ch. 3
   → Essay assignment #2 due in class
Thursday, 2/22: Politics and emotions
   Read: Moon Ch’s 5, 7
Tuesday, 2/27: Dawne Moon will be here to talk with us about her book!
   Read: Moon Ch. 8, Conclusion – Please bring in three questions for Professor Moon (I will collect these at the end of class)
   Essay assignment #3 available in class
7:30 pm: Evening lecture by Professor Moon (extra credit opportunity!)
Part 5: New religious movements (NRM’s)
Thursday, 3/1: Conversion, commitment, and disaffiliation
   Special class session today – please make an extra effort to be here and to be on time!
   Read: McGuire Ch. 3
Tuesday, 3/6: Introducing NRM’s
   Read: Dawson Ch’s 1, 2
   ➔ Essay assignment #3 due in class
Thursday, 3/8: Understanding NRM’s
   Read: Dawson Ch’s 3, 4

MARCH 10-25: SPRING BREAK!

Tuesday, 2/8: NRM’s and controversy
   Read: Dawson Ch’s 5, 6
Thursday, 2/13: NRM’s and violence
   Read: Dawson Ch. 7
   Film: Waco: The Inside Story (dir. Michael Kirk, 1995, 60 min.)
   Essay assignment #4 available in class

Part 6: Religion, race, and nation
Tuesday, 4/3: Race and religion in the U.S.
   Read: Goldschmidt/McAlister Introduction, Ch. 3
Thursday, 4/5: Race and mission
   Read: Goldschmidt/McAlister Ch’s 5, 6
   ➔ Essay assignment #4 due in class
Tuesday, 4/10: No class – attend the undergraduate conference (extra credit opportunity!)
   Read: Goldschmidt/McAlister Ch’s 7, 8
Thursday, 4/12: Racial and religious others
   Read: Goldschmidt/McAlister Ch’s 10, 12
   Essay assignment #5 available in class

Part 7: Religion, social change, and globalization
Tuesday, 4/17: Religion and social change
   Read: McGuire Ch. 7 (through 265 only); CLEo – Marx and Lincoln
Thursday, 4/19: Religion and globalization
   Read: McGuire Ch. 8
   Group reading assignments for Tuesday’s class
   ➔ Essay assignment #5 due in class
Tuesday, 4/24: Religiously violent
   Read: Juergensmeyer xi-xiv, Ch. 1, plus one of the following: Ch. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
   Sign-ups begin for oral exam appointments
Thursday, 4/26: Movie day!
   Film: In the Name of God (dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1992, 90 min.)
   Read: Juergensmeyer Ch’s 7, 8

Thursday, 4/26: Extra credit opportunity! Joan Wallach Scott, “Cover Up: French Gender Equality and the Islamic Headscarf” (Evening talk)
Tuesday, 5/1: The Good, the Evil, and the disempowered
   Read: Juergensmeyer Ch. 9, 10
   Finish film
   Final exam study guide available in class
Thursday, 5/3: Religion, politics, and violence
   Read: Juergensmeyer Ch. 11
Tuesday, 5/8: Group project presentations
   Please respect your classmates by being present, on time, and awake!

Finals week: Oral exams by appointment, 5/10-5/15