I. Goals:

The primary goal of this class is to give students access to a comparative and critical understanding of religious institutions and practices that will help them to better understand religion and its impact upon societies, global-international events, and personal well-being. This overview of the nature, functioning, and diversity of religion will help students make more discerning decisions regarding cultural, political, and moral issues that are often influenced by religion.

II. Topics To Be Covered:

The course is laid out in two parts. The first section begins with a review of conventional and theoretical definitions of religion and an overview of the importance and centrality of religion to human societies. It emphasizes the diversity and nature of "religious experience" in terms of different groups, classes, and individuals. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the major religions in terms of beliefs, values, norms, practices, and rituals. The comparative analysis surveys Western, Eastern, New Age, and Native American religions, and unaffiliated groups in terms of their defining beliefs and practices. It concludes with an analysis of the major commonalities and differences between Eastern and Western Religions, New Age, Native American religions, and unaffiliated groups that include agnostics, atheists and existentialists. This section ends with a take home midterm.

The second part of the course begins with an overview of biological, historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, and philosophical explanations of the origin, development and practice of religion. This is followed by an analysis of religion in terms of social processes and phenomena that include, socialization, social control, social identity, authority, power, law, political behavior, stratification, culture, social change, deviance, and gender. This section also covers the relationship between religion and human well-being in terms of correlates regarding physical and mental health, achievement, deviance, marriage, divorce, and crime. This section concludes with a critical analysis of religion in terms of functions and dysfunctions and political, social and moral issues associated with religion. These issues will include patriarchy, prejudice, violence, sexism, conflicts between science and religion, modernity, separation of church and state, overpopulation, diversity, freedom, democracy, the environment, social change and terrorism. The course concludes with a study of master trends in religion in the 21st century. The final is a taken home exam given out on the last day of class.
III. Pedagogy, Exams, and Papers:

This class utilizes a variety of teaching approaches that include lectures, in class discussion, films, and guest speakers representing many different religious perspectives. There will be a midterm and a final exam. Both will be eight to ten page take home essay exams. Students are advised to stay at least one week ahead in the readings. Much of the class discussion will be based on the readings, so please complete the readings before class. It should also be noted that while it may appear that there are a lot of readings, most of them, particularly the readings in the Sociology of Religion Reader are very short, most being from two to five pages. Students who do well in this class, attend class and do the reading.

IV. Texts:


The Religious Experience. Classical and Philosophical and Social Theories. Irving M. Zeitlin


Assigned Readings on E. Reserve: These can be accessed online through the Student Portal. To do this, you should log on to My.Utah.edu with your UNID. Click on Academics and a list of your current courses along with any course reserves will be listed. Click on the course reserve for this course and the E-reserve readings will appear. Click on a particular reading and you can read it online or print it out.
V. Course Outline:


- Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction, Wade Clark Roof (1-4)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Classical Sociological Definitions of Religion, Patricia Chang (5-8)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: Elementary Forms of the Religious life, Emile Durkheim. (9-14)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: From Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, Karl Marx (15-16)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: Religion as a Cultural System, Clifford Geertz (16-22)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: The Sacred Canopy, Peter L. Berger (23-29)

Week Two (January 20): Introduction to Western Religions and Religious Experience and Practice.

- Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Belief and Ritual, Susanne Monahan (30-34)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: Salvation on Sand Mountain, Patrice Gaines (37-42)
- Sociology of Religion Reader: Civil Religion in America, Robert N. Bellah (43-46)

Week Three, (January 27): God, Devil, Heaven, Hell, Faith, Axial Age

- Gods in the Global Village: Chapter Two: A Sociological Tour: Turning East
- God's in the Global Village: Chapter Three: The Tour, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,
Week Four, (February 3): Judaism, Christianity, Islam
Week Five, (February 10): Judaism, Christianity, Islam
Week Six: (February 17): Hinduism, Buddhism, Native American Religion, Alternative Religion
Week Seven: (February 24): Comparative Analysis, East, West, New Age Religion

Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Race, Ethnicity, and Religion, Michael Emerson (78-79)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table, Prema Kurien, (83-89)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Alternative Religions: Wendy W. Young (258-262)

E-Reserve: Tomorrow's God, Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge. Neale Donald Walsch, Chapters 1, 2, 3.
E-Reserve: The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success, Rodney Stark, Chapter One: Blessings of Theology
E-Reserve: The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. Peter L. Berger, Chapter Three, The Problem of Theodicy

E-Reserve: Emma Goldman, The Philosophy of Atheism., from The Portable Atheist, Christopher Hitchens Editor.
E-Reserve: Mark Twain, Thoughts of God, From "Fables of Man, Bible Teaching and Religious Practice From Europe and Elsewhere" and "A Pen Warmed Up in Hell," from The Portable Atheist, Christopher Hitchens Editor.
E-Reserve: Albert Einstein, Selected Writing on Religion, from The Portable Atheist, Christopher Hitchens Editor.
E-Reserve: Salman Rushdie, "Imagine There's No Heaven", from The Portable Atheist, Christopher Hitchens Editor.

Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Gender and Religion, Lori Beaman (115-117)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Social Class and Religion, William Mirola (144-150)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Sexual Identity and Religion, William Mirola. (173-175)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Religious Organizations, Institutions, and Authority, Susanne c. Monahan (225-230)

Midterm #1 on comparative analysis of religion, distributed. Due in two weeks,
Week Eight: (March 3): Theodicy, Agnostics, Atheists, Existentialists

   The Religious Experience: Preface
   The Religious Experience: Chapter One: Rousseau
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Two: Hegel


   The Religious Experience: Chapter Three: The Young or Left Hegelians
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Four: Marx
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Five: Nietzsche

Midterm Due

Week Ten: (March 17): No Class Spring Break

   The Religious Experience: Chapter Six: Max Weber
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Seven: Max Weber on the World's Religions
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Eight: E. B. Tylor

Week Eleven: (March 24): Philosophical Anthropological, Psychological Theories of Religion

   The Religious Experience: Chapter Nine, James George Frazer
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Ten: Bronislaw Malinowski
   The Religious Experience: Chapter Eleven: Sigmund Freud

Week Twelve: (March 31): Philosophical, Anthropological, Psychological Theories of Religion.

   The Religious Experience: Chapter Twelve: Emile Durkheim
   E-Reserve, The God Part of the Brain, A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God, Mathew Alper, Chapter Three

Week Thirteen: (April 7): Sociological, and Biological Theories of Religion

   Gods in the Global Village: Chapter Five: Modernism and Multiculturalism
   Gods in the Global Village: Chapter Six: Religious Movements in a New Century
   Gods in the Global Village: Chapter Seven: Religion and social Conflict
Week Fourteen: (April 14): Modernity, Conflict, and Problems Associated with Religion, Interdisciplinary Critical Analysis:

No Class Friday: Thanksgiving  
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to the Secularization Debate, Susanne C. Monahan (196-200)  
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Science and Religion, Eric Gormly and William MacDonald (374-377)  
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Social Movements and Religion, William Mirola (399-403)  
E-Reserve, The True Believer, Eric Hoffer, Chapter Two: The Desire for Substitutes,  

Week Fifteen: (April 21): Fundamentalism, Terrorism

Review for Final Exam handed out.  
E-Reserve: Is Religion Killing Us, Chapter Two, Religion and Violence, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer,  
E-Reserve: Infidel, Ayann Hirisi, Chapter Two. Under the Tala Tree  
E-Reserve: The End of Faith, Chapter One, Reason in Exile, Sam Harris  
E-Reserve, God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Christopher Hitchens, Chapter Seven, Chapter Eight, Chapter 16.

Week Sixteen: (April 28): Master Trends in Religion

Turn in papers. Final exam handed out.  
E-Reserve: Does God Have A Future, Karen Armstrong.

Week Seventeen: (Monday May 4th) Final Exam turned in by noon at my office, room 429, Beh. Sci. Bldg.
VI. Suggested Readings:

Why God Won't Go Away, Brain Science & the Biology of Belief, Andrew Newberg, M.D., Eugene D Aquili, M.D., PH.D., and Vince Rause
Why I Am Not A Christian, Bertrand Russell
Civilization and its Discontents, Sigmund Freud
Varieties of Religious Experience, William James
Life is a Miracle, Wendell Berry
The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Emile Durkheim
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Max Weber
The "God" Part of the Brain, A scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God, Mathew Alper
The True Believer, Eric Hoffer
When Religion Becomes Evil, Charles Kimball
Escape From Evil, Ernest Becker
The Denial of Death, Ernest Becker
Consilience. Edward O. Wilson
The Sacred Canopy:  Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Peter L. Berger
The Sociology of Religion, Max Weber
The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success, Rodney Stark
The End of Faith, Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason, Sam Harris
Is Religion Killing Us?  Violence in the Bible and the Quran, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer
The Anatomy of Peace, The Arbinger Institute
The Devil, Peter Stanford
A History of God, Karen Armstrong
Fundamentalism, Karen Armstrong
The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions, Karen Armstrong
Wherever You Go There You Are, Jon Kabat Zinn
Mountains and More Mountains. Dr. Paul Farmer
Under the Banner of Heaven, A Story of Violent Faith, John Karkauer
Galileo's Daughter, A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love, Dava Sobel
Elmer Gantry, Sinclair Lewis
The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins
American Theocracy, Kevin Phillips
Beyond Good and Evil, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
Think on These Things, Krishnamurti
Infidel, Ayaan Hirsi Ali
Acts of Faith, The Story of An American Muslim, the struggle for Soul of a Generation, Eboo Patel
Tomorrow's God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge. Neal Donald Walsch, Atria Books
The Portable Atheist, Christopher Hitchens
God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Christopher Hitchens
Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know--And Doesn't, Stephen Prothero
In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror, Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg
Siddhartha, Herman Hesse
The Art of War, Sun Tzu (Taoist text)
The Glorious Qu’Ran, Marmaduke William Pickthall
Upanishads (Hindu philosophical meditations)
Rig-Veda (Hindu hymns to Pantheon of gods)
Quran (Koran)
Old Testament, Bible
New Testament, Bible
Torah (First five books of the Bible)
The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith
Wu Ching, (Confucianism, five classic works)
Sutra Pitka (Discourse of the Buddha)
Tao Te Ching, Lao Tse (Taosim)