I. Goals:

The primary goal of this class is to give students a sociological understanding of religion as a powerful, important, and influential social institution that is associated with many social processes and phenomena that motivate and influence how people act and see the world around them. The class will rely on a variety of methods that include comparative analysis, theoretical explanations, ethnographic studies, and empirical studies designed to help students better understand religion and its impact upon societies, global-international events, and personal well-being. This overview of the nature, functioning, and diversity of religious institutions should 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 denominations, cultures, classes, and individuals. This is followed by overview of sociological assumptions and theories and their application to religion. A variety of theoretical schools including, functionalism, conflict theory, exchange theory, sociology of knowledge, sociobiology, feminist theory, symbolic interactionism, postmodern and critical theory will be addressed and applied to religion.

The second part of the course begins with a comparative analysis of the major religions in terms of beliefs, values, norms, practices, and rituals as seen from different theoretical points of view. The comparative analysis surveys Western, Eastern, New Age, and Native American religions, and unaffiliated groups in terms of their defining beliefs and practices, and concludes with an analysis of the major commonalities and differences between Eastern and Western Religions, Alternative, Native American religions, and unaffiliated groups that include agnostics, atheists and existentialists. This is followed by a discussion of issues associated with modernity, fundamentalism, terrorism, a critical analysis of religion, and the future of religion.

Throughout the course issues associated with the benefits of religion, social change, patriarchy, prejudice, violence, sexism, conflicts between science and religion, modernity, and the separation of church and state will be addressed. The course concludes with a study of master trends in religion in the 21st century.
III. Pedagogy, Exams, and Papers:

This class will utilize a variety of teaching approaches that include lectures, in-class discussion, films, and guest speakers representing different religious perspectives. There will be a midterm, a final exam, and a paper. The midterm exam will be an objective multiple-choice exam given online. The final exam will be a five to ten page double-spaced take-home exam and you will have a week to complete it.

The paper can be from four to six double spaced pages in length. There are four options for the paper. The first option calls upon the student to do participant observer or ethnographic research on a religion or religious practice. The student who chooses this option will spend time throughout the semester in a particular religious institution or group that she is not affiliated with and record her experiences in a journal. The journal will conclude with a summary of her observations in terms of what she has learned and any insights or hypotheses that have been generated by her research. The second option allows the student to write a formal research paper that addresses a particular religion, religious practice, or political or moral issue associated with religion or influenced by religious views. The third option asks the student to develop a hypothesis regarding religion and carry out an appropriate experiment or survey that will shed light on it. The fourth option entails writing a sociological analysis or response to one of the books or movies on the suggested readings and movies lists. These papers should summarize the major themes and ideas and conclude with a critical analysis of the book or movie in terms of concepts and research addressed in the class.

Videos are essential to this class. There are three categories of videos, (1) Required, (2) Recommended, and (3) Suggested. Required and Recommended videos can be watched online on Blackboard. There are twelve Required videos and they must be watched and will be on exams. Some of these are very short, from 15 to thirty minutes. The Recommended Videos should be watched if you want a more complete and deeper grasp of the materials. Suggested videos are videos that you can watch and write a paper about. They are not online. You can find them at local video stores or the Marriott Library. Due to copyright laws, some of the online videos can only be posted for a week or two, so watch them as they come up on the syllabus.

Students are advised to stay at least one week ahead in the readings and assigned videos. Much of the class discussion will be based on the readings and videos, so please complete them in a timely fashion. Also, while it may appear that there are a lot of readings, most of the readings in the reader and on E-Reserve are very short, from two to four pages. The key to doing well in this class is doing the readings, watching or listening to the lectures, watching the assigned videos, and reflecting on the materials addressed in class. It is a reading, thinking, writing class.
IV. Online Course Requirements

While this is an online class, I want it to resemble a typical class as much as possible. With that goal in mind, I will have weekly video taped lectures, lecture outlines and assigned videos posted on Blackboard. Students can watch the lectures and download the appropriate lecture notes and refer to them while watching or listening to the lectures. These lectures will address the core material presented in the class and will complement the text and assigned readings that can be found on E-Reserve. Each lecture will be broken into two 30 to 40 minute segments. If students have any questions regarding the lectures, they can email me and I will be glad to respond in a timely fashion as often as is necessary. I will also be in my office during office hours and will answer any phone calls or emails directly at that time. Please email me through Blackboard.

There is also an online discussion board where students can post questions regarding the materials and compare their grasp and interpretation of the ideas put forth in the class with other students. I encourage students to take advantage of the chat room, and get to know other students in the class and if you so desire also set up study groups. As explained below, students can also earn 10 extra credit points by participating on the online discussion groups.

Try to stay ahead, and don’t get behind. The biggest mistake students make with online courses, is getting behind and finding out that they can’t catch up in time for exams. If you are a week ahead and something takes you away from your studies, you will not fall behind. If you are just staying up or you are already behind, and something happens, then you will be further behind. So stay ahead if possible. If you have any problems getting on to Blackboard, problems with emails, or a problem taking an exam on line, please contact TACC at 585-8985. If you still have problems please contact me by email or phone.

V. Exams and Grading

Grading for this class is based on two exams and a paper. There will be an online objective midterm worth 70 points, and a take-home final exam worth 70 points. Before each exam there will be an online review and time for the instructor to respond to any emailed questions concerning the exam. The paper is worth 60 points, making a total of 200 points possible.

Students can earn an additional 10 extra credit points. To earn 5 of these extra credit points simply go online to the class web cite and post a comment or question or reply on the discussion site 5 times during the semester. Make sure your responses have to do with class materials. Posting up to set up study groups or find out when the exam is won’t count as extra credit, so post up with a comment or response. Students can also receive an additional 5 points by watching one of the recommended online-videos posted on line, and writing a two page double spaced paper summarizing the video.
IV. Texts:


God and His Demons. Michael Parenti, Prometheus Books, 2010

Assigned Readings on E. Reserve: These can be accessed through the Marriott Library. To do this, you should go on line to the University of Utah, and under libraries, click on J. Willard Marriott. Then click on Student Course Reserves and a Search Box will appear. Type Frank Page 3440 in the Search Box. Then click the Go button and the list of reserve readings should appear. You can then click on the appropriate reading and read it online or print it out.

V. Course Outline:

Week One, (January 10): Defining and Studying Religion / Religious Vocabulary

Online Lectures.


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: Introduction to Religious Organizations, Institutions, and Authority, Susanne C. Monahan (225-230)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Race, Ethnicity, and Religion, Michael Emerson ((78-79)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Social Class and Religion, William Mirola (144-150)

Online Video: The Amish (Required)

Week Two (January 17): Basic Sociological Model and Religion / Institutions and the Social Order / Roles / Status, / Class, Stratification, Authority / Power / Social Change

Online Lectures


E. Reserve: Mountain People. Colin N. Turnbull
E. Reserve, Jonestown as Perverse Utopia, Rose Laub Coser.

Online Video: Magic and Religion (Required)
Week Three, (January 24): Sociological Theory Applied to Religion (Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Exchange Theory)

Online Lectures

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: Introduction to Belief and Ritual, Susanne Monahan (30-34)
Sociology of Religion Reader: The Sacred Canopy, Peter L. Berger (23-29)

E-Reserve. The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. Peter L. Berger, Chapter Three, The Problem of Theodicy

Week Four, (January 31) Sociological Theory Applied to Religion (Symbolic Interactionism, Sociology of Knowledge, Phenomenology)

Online Lectures

God and His Demons. Part I. All in the Bible.

Sociology of Religion Reader: Salvation on Sand Mountain, Gaines (37-42)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Gender and Religion, Lori Beaman (115-117)
Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Sexual Identity and Religion, William Mirola. (173-175)

Bill Moyers On Faith and Reason. Interview with Salmon Rushdie (Recommended)
Week Five, (February 7) Social Theory Applied to Religion (Feminism, Neo-Marxists, Critical Theorists, Post-modernists)

Online Lectures

God and His Demons Part II. Divine Design.

Sociology of Religion Reader: Civil Religion in America, Bellah (43-46)
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)

Online Audio Lecture: The Political Uses of Religion, Michael Parenti (Recommended)

Week Six: (February 14) Gods, Devil, Evil, and Faith as Social Constructions / Axial Age, Pre-Axial Age, Polytheism to Monotheism in the West.

Online Lectures

God and His Demons Part III. When the Ethereal Becomes Material
God and His Demons Part IV. Hypocrites, Reactionaries and Vipers
God and His Demons Part V. Theocracy, Past, Present and Future

Online Video: Evil in the Modern World (Susan Neiman and Bill Moyers) (Recommended)

Week Seven: (February 21) Review and online objective Midterm #1 on all materials from week one through week six.

Midterm Online: February 28, 12:01 – March 2nd, 12.01 – March 3rd, 11.59

Online Video: Ten Commandments; History Channel (Required)

Week Eight: (February 28): Zoroastrianism / Judaism and the Ten Commandments / Separation of Church and State

Online Lectures

Gods in the Global Village Chapter 3. The Tour: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (Judaism, Christianity)


Online Video: Inside Islam. (Required)
Week Nine: (March 7): Christianity & Islam

Online Lectures


Online Video: The Twentieth Century, True Believers (Required)

Week Ten: (March 14): Eastern Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucius, Daoism, Shintoism.

Online Lectures

Gods In the Global Village: Turning East.

Sociology of Religion Reader: Introduction to Alternative Religions: Wendy W. Young (258-262)

Online Video: Hopi (Recommended)

Week Eleven: (March 21): Alternative and Emergent Religions, Native American Religions, Comparative Analysis of East, West, and New Age Religions.

Online Lectures

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.

Online Video: Colin McGinn Atheist (Required)

Week Twelve: (March 28) (spring break) Atheists, Agnostics, and Existentialists

Online Lectures

Gods in the Global Village: Chapter 5, Modernism and Multiculturalism.

Online Video: Crisis of Faith (Required)
Week Thirteen: (April 4) Modernity, Conflict, Intolerance, and Problems Associated with Religion.

Online Lectures


Online Video: *The Glory and the Power: Fighting Back* (Required)

Week Fourteen: (April 11): Cults, Neo Nazis, Fundamentalism and Terrorism

Online lectures

*Sociology of Religion, Lundscow, Chapter 7, Cults.*


Online Video: *Inside the Mind of a Suicide Bomber* (Required)

Take home Midterm on Week Eight through Sixteen Posted online.

Week Fifteen: (April 18): Critical Interdisciplinary Analysis of Religion

Online Lectures

E-Reserve, *The True Believer*, Eric Hoffer, Chapter Two: The Desire for Substitutes,
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

Online Video: *Jesus Camp* (Required)

Final Papers due at my office Room 429 Beh. Science on or before Friday April 22nd. In emergencies, papers can be emailed to me.
Week Sixteen: (April 26): Trends in Religion, Secularization or New Axial Age.

Online Lectures


E-Reserve: Tomorrow’s God, Neale Donald Walsh, Chapter 1, 2, & 3.

Final Exam turned in at my office, room 429, Beh. Sci. Bldg on or before Monday Friday April 29th. In an emergency, exams may be emailed to me.

VI. Required Online Videos and Audios

The Amish (40 min.)

Religion and Magic (30 min.)

Ten Commandments (History Channel) (100 min)

Inside Islam: Religion in the Modern World (100 min.)

True Believers: In the Modern Century (100 min.)

The Polygamists (50 min.)

Jesus Camp (60 min.)

Inside the Mind of a Suicide Bomber. (60 min.)

The Glory and the Power: Fighting Back (60 min.)

Crisis of Faith (60 min.,)

Elmer Gantry (clip) (Fundamentalism) 14 minutes.

Lust for Life (clip) (Liberation Theology) 14 minutes.

VII. Recommended Online Videos
Evil in the Modern World (Susan Neiman and Bill Moyers)

Bill Moyers on Faith and Reason: Salmon Rushdie

Michael Parenti, Part One and Two. (audio only)

Bill Moyers: Ann Provost (Noah’s Arc), and David Grossman (Samson)

The Glory and the Power: This is Our Land (fundamentalism)

The Glory and the Power: Remaking the World (fundamentalism)

The Longest Hatred (Anti-Semitism)

End of Times, Left Behind (History channel)

Constantine’s Sword (James Carroll)

The World In Our Eyes (Native American Religion)

Richard Dawkins: An Atheists call to Arms.

Prayer In America

Tao Te Ching (audio only)

Western Religions (survey)

Eastern Religions (survey)

History of God, Karen Armstrong

The Power of Nightmares (Christian and Moslem neo-conservatives)

Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land. (Israeli Palestinian conflict and media, Noam Chomsky)

Inside the Great Silence (life in a monastery)

Letting Go of God. Comedians move to atheism

Voodoo Rituals

Satan: Prince of Darkness (History Channel)

The Four Horsemen.: Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Dnaiel c. Dennett, Sam Harris, (atheist dialogue)
VI. Suggested Readings:

The Origins of Totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt
Why God Won't Go Away, Brain Science & the Biology of Belief, Newberg & 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
The Dental of Death or Escape From Evil, Ernest Becker
Consilience, Edward O. Wilson
The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Peter 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., Fundamentalism, or The Great Transformation, 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
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
The Infidel’s Guide to the Koran, Robert Spencer
Acts of Faith, The Story of An American Muslim, Eboo Patel
The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation, A. L. Mauss
Mormon America, The Power and the Promise, R. N. Ostling and J. K. Ostling
Secret Ceremonies, Deborah Laake (Mormon experience with ostracism)
The Crucible, Arthur Miller (Salem Witch Trials)
Tomorrow's God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge, Neal D. 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, Steven Prothero
In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg
Siddhartha, Herman Hesse
Beyond the Chains of Illusion, Eric Fromm
Long Way Gone, Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, Ishmael Beah
The Art of War, Sun Tzu (Taoist text)
God’s Battalions, The Case for the Crusades, Rodney Stark
Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved, Frans De Wall
The World As I See It, Albert Einstein
How to Win a Cosmic War, God, Globalization and the End of the War on Terror, Reza Aslan.
Seven Theories of Religion, Daniel L. Pals
God and His Demons, Michael Parenti
American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon, Stephen Prothero
The Glorious Qur’an, Marmaduke William Pickthall
Upanishads (Hindu philosophical meditations)
Rig-Veda (Hindu hymns to Pantheon of gods)
Quran (Koran)
Old or 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 (Taoism)

Suggested Movies

For The Bible Tells Me So, (Critical documentary about gays religious experience.)
The Rapture, (fictional drama about evangelical beliefs regarding end times)
Everyman for Himself, and God Against All, (socialization without God)
When Nietzsche Wept, (bio on Nietzsche & Freud) Armand Assante, Ben Cross
Religulous, Bill Maher (atheist criticism of religion)
Elmer Gantry, Burt Lancaster (fundamentalist hegemony)
A Light in the Jungle, (Albert Schweitzer, a Christian life)
The Black Robe, (religious / cultural imperialism)
Gulliver's Travels, Jonathan Swift (social criticism of religion and government)
Moloki, The Story of Father Damien, (Christianity in practice with lepers)
The Ten Commandments, Charlton Heston (conventional view Old Testament)
Galileo's Daughter, (Knowledge and the conflict between religion and science)
What the Bib Do I Know? (human nature, epistemology, spirituality)
Jesus Camp, (documentary on aggressive evangelicals)
8: The Mormon Proposition, (Mormon politics)
Mind Walk, (existential and religious views on modernity)
Razor's Edge, (existentialism meets Buddhism) Bill Murray
The Mission, (religion and colonial exploitation), Robert De Niro
Jonestown, The Life and Death of the Peoples Temple, (Documentary)
The Last Temptation of Christ, (Radical dramatization of the crucifixion of Christ)
The Mormons, PBS
God in America, PBS
Friendly Persuasion, Gary Cooper (colonical American, Puritans, Syncretism)
The Crucible, Arthur Miller (Salem Witch Trials)
September Dawn, John Voight (Mountain Meadow Massacre)
Inherit the Wind, George C. Scott, (Scopes Trial)
Resurrection, Ellen Burstein (Gift of Healing)
The Bible, In the Beginning, George C. Scott, (Old Testament, Hollywood style)
A Serious Man, Cohen Brothers (anomie and religious culture)
Lust for Life, Kirk Douglas (Biography of Vincent Van Gogh)
Sons of Perdition, (ex Mormon Polygamists)
The Examined Life, (Morality, Existentialism, Modernity)
Martin Luther, Stacy Keach) bio-drama
The Four Horsemen: Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, (atheist dialogue)
The Scarlet Letter, Colonial Puritan America