

Rel 373R Special Topics in Religion and Society: Religion and Democracy

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General Education Program Requirements: This course fulfills HAP (Humanities, Arts, Performance) requirements.

Note: Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford and Emory faculty/staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Course Description

This course explores the role of religion in the public sphere and its relation to liberal democracy. Following Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the collapse of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, religion has returned to international and domestic political arenas. We will examine the presumed compatibility (or incompatibility) of some tenets of certain religions with modern democratic principles of governance, individual freedom, human rights, justice, the equality of all before the law, multiculturalism, and pluralism. The course is divided into three larger units: The first unit of the course will lay out the conceptual tools for analyzing the relationship between religion and democracy through the works of influential thinkers such as Charles Taylor, José Casanova, Peter Beyer, Jürgen Habermas, Jeffrey Stout, and Chantal Mouffe by focusing on the three themes: secularism, globalization, and multiculturalism. The second part of the course takes a number of case studies and examines significant moments in each related to the trajectory of the religion and democracy debate. The final part of the course will consist of debate sessions on challenging social and religious issues, such as same-sex marriage, homosexuality, wearing of headscarves, infant male circumcision and honor killings.

Course Objectives

The goals and objectives for you as a student in this course are:

- to gain a broader understanding of the concepts and theories of religion and democracy,
- to familiarize yourself with patterns, commonalities, and differences on a number of significant national and international issues concerning religion and democracy;
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications; and
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

Required Readings

All required and optional readings for the course will be accessible to you electronically through our Blackboard site. Often you will find pdf files of a specific journal article or section from a book you are required to read for a class session. In other instances you will be taken to the Library's Electronic Reserve site or to sites such as JSTOR, Proquest, MUSE or Lexis-Nexus—all useful research tools for scholarly journals which I discuss later.

Blackboard

This course will use the communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. You should update your Blackboard profile so you will be able to receive relevant emails. Grades will be posted on Blackboard as well as some helpful internet links. You would do well to acquaint yourselves with some of the web pages, and use them as a frequent point of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing.

Requirements and Grading

You do not need to have any prior experience with the academic study of religion to take this class. However, I do expect you to work hard, and to contribute to class discussions. If you are not comfortable with the expectations for reading and writing in this class, you should consider taking another class instead. Your final grade will be calculated according to the following:

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|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Preparation and Participation | 20% |
| 2. Academic Journal | 15% |
| 3. 2 (two) Reflective Analysis Papers | 30% (15% each) |
| 4. Research Paper | 35% |
| a. First Paper (15%) | |
| b. Final Revised Paper (20%) | |

(Grading Scale: A, B, C, D, F. Plus and minus grades may be given on individual assignments and final grades.)

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)

Attendance: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. The assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. Make sure you arrive for class on time. Latecomers will be counted absent at the very beginning of class. Should you be late, you are permitted to enter the classroom only if you do so silently and without disturbing class proceedings. You are **allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%.** This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy.

Professional Classroom Behavior: My expectations of professionalism extend, of course, to classroom etiquette. This includes such behavior as arriving on time, staying in the classroom until an official break or the end of the class period, packing up only when class has finished, and using a computer only for class purposes. You must not use cell phones and other wireless devices during class. If you use your phone, let's say, to tweet or to check the stock market, or if your phone goes off during class, you will be counted as absent for that day.

Preparation: You are expected to keep up with all reading assignments. The readings are engaging and heavy. If you have not done the readings, it will simply be impossible for you to participate in the discussion. Appropriate preparation means reading the material several times, making notes, and coming to class with specific questions. In the sixth edition of their *Writing Analytically* (2012) David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephan describe a number of "active reading" strategies. I strongly recommend you read Chapter 5 Writing about Reading: More Moves to Make with Written Texts (105-131).

Class Discussion: While I will lecture from time to time, the class will be conducted much more on a seminar model of examining your informed responses to the reading material. High-quality participation is key to the overall success of our class discussion. This means that I expect you to: raise thoughtful questions, analyze relevant issues, build on others' ideas, synthesize across

readings and discussions, expand the class' perspective, and appropriately challenge the texts' and each other's assumptions and perspectives. We will use a number of different techniques to prepare and conduct class discussion throughout the semester. All place a premium on mastering the content of a reading, evaluating it, and preparing cogent ways to convey your ideas before class. All also rely on public performance and evaluation.

- a. Short oral reports. In the first unit of the semester we will begin each class session with short oral reports. Each of you must prepare a one-minute oral report in which you summarize and evaluate the reading before class. In class, we draw the names of a few students to present their talks that day. The rest of the class and I evaluate the presentations aloud, examining strengths and weaknesses in content and delivery. After presenters and evaluators finish, we will have a whole-class discussion of the readings.
- b. Student discussion leaders: In the second unit each of you will be responsible to formulate key questions and be prepared to lead the class in a discussion on the day's readings. In class, we draw the name of one of you who will lead the discussion that day. At the end of the discussion, the rest of the class will discuss strengths and weaknesses of the leader's performance. I will usually remain silent for the first minutes to allow free rein to your ideas and then join as a co-discussion leader later.
- c. Harkness or Round Table Discussions: The final course unit will address legal, ethical, religious, and political issues in the interplay of religion and democracy. You will all participate in Round Table Discussions as a team to explore the issues at hand. (Additional guidelines will be made available on Bb.)
- d. Midpoint reflections: Roughly half-way through most of our class sessions, we will shift gears and turn the time over to one of you for a midpoint reflection. You will summarize one key point or idea from the discussion so far, and then direct our attention to one question or issue you feel has NOT been covered enough in the discussion to that point. (This might be something you noticed in your own reading that seemed striking, puzzling, moving, or annoying. Or it might be one of the study questions that we have not yet had time to address.) You should plan on using no more than 1-2 minutes for both of these steps combined. After you raise your question/issue, the other class members will join in discussion with you on that topic and ones related to it that occur to them.

2. Academic Journal (10%)

For this class you are asked to keep an academic journal. The academic journal is designed to encourage you to keep up with your reading, keep you engaged with the material, enrich class discussion (as you will already have something to say), help you practice your skills in thinking critically and writing fluidly, and, finally, provide a log of your thoughts at this state in your studies. We will use Blackboard's blog function to collect your entries which also allows us to read and comment on each other's writing. Additional guidelines and descriptions can be found on our Bb site.

3. Two (2) Analysis Papers (15% each)

You will write two (2) 1,200-1,500 word essays (12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) over the course of the semester. These are meant as opportunities for analysis and critical, scholarly reflection. The analysis essays (see course schedule for dates) encourage you to study one topic carefully and in its context, as you refine your ability to write clearly and argue persuasively within the academic study of religion. All essays will be take-home essays. I will post in advance of each assignment essay prompts as well as guidelines on how to write essays. I will be looking primarily for two things in your writing: a) evidence of your knowledge and understanding of class material and b) your ability to use or apply the material in ways that go

beyond what you have read or heard in class. This second part can be done in many ways: you can critique the material, apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. Regardless of your particular approach to the topic, you must have a specific point or claim to argue in your essay. I encourage you to write a thesis paragraph ahead of time and to discuss it with me. Many students have found that it improves the quality of their writing.

4. Academic Research Paper Project (35%): First Paper (15%), Revised Paper (20%)

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. Your research paper must be 3,000-3,600 words. The grade for the research paper project will be calculated as follows: First Paper (15%) and Final Revised Paper (20%). You cannot expect to produce your best writing when you first get started. Thus, revising your work is an integral part of successful writing. Revising is a process of rethinking your paper and differs from simple proofreading. As you revise your paper you will have to reconsider your argument, review your evidence, refine your purpose, and reorganize your presentation. You will find that I indicated different dates and deadlines for these activities on the course schedule at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers. Please familiarize yourself with the additional guidelines and instructions on our Bb site.

Office Hours and Opportunities for Conferencing about Your Writing

The number and nature of the writing assignments make this a writing-intensive course. Peer reviews, class discussion, and written feedback that I give you on your assignments are meant to help you reflect on your writing and to enhance your written work through a series of revisions. In addition to these formal procedures, I also encourage you to see me during my office hours in order for us to reflect together on how to improve your writing. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, I will be happy to make an appointment with you at a more convenient time. At a minimum, I expect everyone to stop by my office at least once in the semester—by yourself, in pairs, or in small groups. Bring a piece of writing together with feedback and comments so that we have something to start our discussion.

Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please also note the support provided by the Writing Center or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact Access, Disability Services and Resources (formerly the Office of Disability Services-ODS) to initiate the accommodation request process. More detailed information is available on the website at www.ods.emory.edu.

Academic Fairness

All students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work.” The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so we (and you) are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I will trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.