



## *Religion in American*

Professor Eric Silverman

Office: Longwood 10

Office phone: 617.879.2423

Office Hours: posed outside my office--and by appointment, of course.

Spring 2010

T, F 2:30-3:45

Email: [esilverman@wheelock.edu](mailto:esilverman@wheelock.edu)

### **Course Description**

God bless America. Or not. Either way, it is hard to escape religion in the United States. From bumper stickers to presidential addresses, religion permeates almost every aspect of American culture.

More than 92% of Americans believe in God or a Universal Spirit. Two-thirds of us understand our sacred texts as the Word of God. One-quarter of us sit in the pews, or kneel on the floor, weekly. Three-quarters of us believe in some sort of afterlife such as heaven, hell, nirvana, and reincarnation. One-third of us believe some higher power answers our prayers. We speak in tongues, believe in angels and demons, and send our children—almost 60% of them—to formal religious education. We are, to be sure, the most scientifically-advanced society ever on earth. But by any measure, we Americans are greatly religious.

Why? What does religion do for us? Why do we believe? This course will attempt to answer these questions from multiple perspectives. Our first general goal is to explore how social scientists over the past century have understood and explained religious rituals, beliefs, and practices.

Social scientists are a tempestuous lot. We rarely agree. We constantly argue over which paradigms can best illuminate the important features of social life (in this case, religion)—and we constantly argue about what those features are. Paradigms are competing. In this class, you will learn to compare and contrast theoretical paradigms and, most importantly, to offer a sound argument for and against certain paradigms. I want you to think carefully about the insights and limitations of each paradigm. And I want you to stake a theoretical claim: to make a case or an argument for why certain paradigms are better than others at illuminating what you think are the key facets or aspects of religion in America.

America is not just religious. We are also nation of enormous religious diversity. Metropolitan Boston hosts a Baha'i community, over 20 Buddhist religious centers (representing Zen, Tibetan, non-denominational, Korean, Cambodian, etc.), eight Hindu temples, ten Islamic centers and mosques, a Jain center, various Jewish synagogues (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Hasidic, unaffiliated), several Native American centers, churches that are Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Christian Science, Presbyterian, Quaker, Episcopal, American Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian, Lutheran, Congregational, Armenian Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic, as well as communities of Pagans, Sikhs, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. What are these religions? How did they get here? What are their beliefs and practices? And isn't this supposed to be a Christian nation? The second general goal of this course is thus to investigate different religious traditions in America, past and present. We are particularly interested in how religious communities retain their distinctiveness and also assert their identity as Americans. How do they balance citizenship and belief? What happens when one's religion diverges from the majority view of what a citizen, or religion, should look like? What are the tensions between "religious freedom" and the "common good"? Are some religions just not proper for America? Should every religion modernize, or is it okay for some religions to remain traditional?

The mission of Wheelock College is, as you well know, to improve the lives of children and families. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that most of the children and families you will encounter in your professional lives will derive meaning and guidance from some religious orientation. At the same time, even a cursory glance at the American political landscape shows that religious debates and conflicts fundamentally shape how public institutions interact with, and define, children and families. In this regard, the course will lend you intellectual tools that will help you in practical ways in your professional lives.

Last, I want you to apply various theories to your own body of data—to a study of a particular religion and religious institution in the greater Boston area. This way, you will gain first-hand experience with applying and evaluating course concepts.

### **Course Objectives**

- learn different social science theories and paradigms for explaining and understanding religion
- gain experience with applying theories to case-studies
- hone your critical thinking skills by assessing the merits and deficiencies of different paradigm
- make a scholarly argument about which paradigms you think are the most insightful
- gain insight into how social scientists “think”
- explore the moral or ethical dimensions of different social science paradigms
- learn the particulars of specific religious traditions in America
- hone your library and bibliographic research skills
- study certain debates over the relationship between religion and citizenship in America

All aspects of the course are intended to achieve one or more of these objectives. If you are ever uncertain about the relevance of any portion of the course, please re-read these goals.

### **Course Texts**

The following four books are all available at the Wheelock online bookstore ([wheelock.textbookx.com/](http://wheelock.textbookx.com/)):

Timothy Beal, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, 2005. A wonderful attempt to understand the religious meanings behind the myriad roadside religious shrines that line our highways—including Holy Land USA, Golgotha Fun Park, and Biblical Mini-Golf.

Diana L Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, 2002. An effort to ‘correct’ the common (mis)perception that America is primarily a Christian country—focusing on Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*, 2007. The “Left Behind” series of born-again, fundamentalist Christian novels—focusing on the idea of the rapture, whereby Jesus will return to earth to whisk away to heaven His true believers, leaving the rest of us behind to suffer—has sold tens of millions of copies. This book attempts to understand this important part of American evangelical culture.

Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*, 2001. A sweeping history of African-American religion in America.

In addition, I will assign several articles, which you can access through the class website at Wheelock-CT.

## **Student Commitment**

These are the requirements for this course—mandatory requirements, not recommendations or options:

- attend class
- be prepared for each class, as I discuss below
- participate actively in discussions
- ask questions (and tell me when I fail to answer them)
- read the texts carefully and on time
- synthesize course materials and think critically
- work regularly and insightfully on your assignments
- complete the assignments on time

The course incorporates a variety of learning styles: lectures, small group discussions, images, films, tests, essays, and different types of readings. It is possible that not everything we do in the course will appeal to all of you all of the time--but I hope to reach all of you more of the time.

## **Class Participation**

Class participation is vital to the success of this course. Class activities are not “bullshit sessions.” Class participation may include sharing homework, group discussions, non-graded quizzes, swapping outlines, note cards, and structured conversations. I expect to hear your voice! Your final grade for class participation will reflect the quality and frequency of your “voice.” I keep daily notes about who actively participates, and who does not. Additionally, I will call upon you at times to speak during class—to comment on the readings, to answer questions, to offer insights.

I reserve the right to ask you each periodically to make a 2-3 minute oral presentation to a small group, or even the entire class. Instead of merely summarizing the reading, you should evaluate the text, offer new ideas, grapple with troublesome points, agree, disagree, connect the reading to assignments, and so forth. We will begin these presentations in small groups, and perhaps work our way to the entire class.

I should also add that speaking in class about the material and readings implies much more than simply talking. Asking questions about the mechanics of a paper, a due date, a test, and so forth, does not qualify as intelligent class participation. The same holds for off-hand comments that are detached from the readings and content of the class. In other words, your comments should evidence careful thinking about course material. It is *your* responsibility to make it clear to me that you are reading and contemplating course material.

Class participation requires you to be attentive and prepared. It is, to repeat, a requirement that you speak. You will notice that class participation accounts for 20% of your final grade. I know that some of you are reticent about speaking in front of the class. But public speaking is an important skill, one you will need in your professional lives (especially if you plan to teach!), so you should strive to overcome any anxiety about public speaking. We will work together to create an environment in which everybody feels comfortable speaking.

Let me offer a final note. A student on RateMyProfessors.com recently commented that I require you to read the assignments. To this I say simply, Darn right! This is the most basic requirement of the class.

## **Classroom Etiquette**

I will absolutely treat you with respect, fairness, courtesy, and professionalism. I expect you to do the same to me, to the course, and especially to your classmates. There is a proper way to comport yourself in a college classroom. You must be attentive, prepared, respectful, and willing to talk and engage the material. It is *not*

okay to do any of the following—all of which I have experienced while teaching at Wheelock: nap, read material and work on assignments for other courses, scan the newspaper, chat with your neighbor, daydream, talk on your cell phone, fail to switch off your cell phone ringer, text-message, email, habitually arrive late, leave early, toss “attitude,” loudly yawn, be disruptive, pack up your things before the end of class, habitually visit the restroom during class (unless you have a medical condition), snack audibly, and so forth. I make note of these disrespectful and disruptive behaviors, and they will negatively influence your final grade for the course (as they would negatively influence your professional career if you so conducted yourself in the workplace). Basic courtesy is an important social skill.

Lately, students increasingly text during class, or pretend to take notes on their computes when they are actually doing other things. And students increasingly, albeit erroneously, think they can do so without my noticing—say, by holding the phone under the table. Please refrain from these activities. You may not email and text during class. Let me repeat this statement to avoid any ambiguity: You may not email and text during class. If you do so, you can expect your grade to suffer. Unless you anticipate an immediate life-and-death decision, I see no reason to read or send text-messages during class, to speak on your cell phone, or to leave the room to do likewise. I put my phone on “silent” during class; you will do likewise. I do not check my text-messages during class; you will do likewise. If you expect a dire emergency to arise during class that necessitates texting or telephoning, please let me know. But these requests must not be trivial. Again, basic courtesy is an important social skill. If you do these activities, you can expect your final grade for class participation to reflect this discourtesy.

Respect for others is essential to this class. I will not tolerate any intolerance in the classroom—nor will I tolerate any insults, nastiness, shaming, and so forth. We all have different, unique, and frankly limited experiences—experiences not often of our own making. Few college students actively choose their family, income, race, ethnicity, religion, neighborhood, and the body of their birth. If someone in the class does not fully understand your plight, experiences, outlook, and arguments, then you should find a compassionate, calm, and respectful way of conveying those differences.

Please bring all relevant materials to class, including paper, writing implements, and course texts for the day. Likewise, please complete all assignments before entering the classroom. It is absolutely crucial that you read in accordance with the schedule.

In short, I expect you to act the way a reasonable person would expect someone to act in a college classroom. (And you, of course, should me to act the way a reasonable person would expect a college professor to act.)

### **Diversity in the Classroom**

I want to add a note about diversity in the classroom—about ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, and sexual differences. The official values of Wheelock College include “multiculturalism and diversity” (<http://www.wheelock.edu/about/abomission.asp>). We are a diverse community. We infuse what we do with an appreciation for diversity, and we seek to learn about diversity. And, to state the obvious, any course about “American identity” must clearly confront diversity head-on.

But diversity is an awkward topic, to be sure, especially in the classroom where, to say the obvious again, there are often majority and minority groups (say, 20 students from Fiji, but only 2 Papua New Guineans). We all need to make certain that everybody in the class is treated equally as a person. You should not listen less closely, or more closely, to what someone says *because* of their identity. (“Gee, she’s Latina, and I really want to know how *those* people think.”) You should listen equally closely to what *everybody* says! We must treat each student as an *individual*, and respect each student for what she or he is—not for what you think they represent. We must *never* make assumptions about a person based on the groups they appear to belong in. (“She looks Asian, so I guess she, like, eats dogs.” Or “he is African-American so I guess he, you know, speaks Ebonics or something.” Or “she is Brazilian so I guess she is an illegal.” Or “he is gay so I guess he’s, like, not good at sports.” Or “she is Jewish so I guess she’s rich.” Or “she is from Zimbabwe so I

guess....”) Make certain that your language is inclusive. Make certain that you refer to other groups respectfully. (Don’t know how to refer to a group? Ask the class! Maybe somebody can answer. You might feel awkward asking, but one moment of discomfort today can help you avoid major embarrassment later!) Be cautious, too, when making assumptions about the “generic” person.

Nevertheless, I want you to feel that you can say what you want to say, and ask the questions you want to ask, without fear of ridicule or an angry response. We are all here to learn. We *must* censure ourselves from *intentionally* offending others, but we do *not* want to censor learning—even topics that are likely to inflame passions and anger. Any and all questions can be phrased respectfully. If you are not sure how to ask a question, please speak with me, and we can work on generating appropriate phrases.

Please, too, ask your questions to the entire class—do not direct a particular question, say about Samoan identity, to the one Samoan student in the class. He or she does not “speak” on behalf of all Samoans! He or she is not the elected representative of Samoa. Please do *not* put anybody on the spot. (“Heh, you’re Jewish. What do Jews think about that?”) Try not to make students feel as if they must act or say something on behalf of “their people.” How do you think the Samoan student feels when everybody passively listens to the white student, but then turns and stares at him when he speaks? Everybody enrolled in this class to learn; nobody enrolled as the spokesperson for an ethnic group. We must be careful not to implicitly frame somebody’s comments as representative of a particular group. And we certainly should not assign guilt or responsibility to students for historical events. We all inherit legacies not of our own making. Some of us may benefit more than others from history, but we ourselves did not create that history. And when we are discussing a particular ethnic group, do not expect a person from that group to necessarily want to comment. Likewise, the fact that each of you belongs to one or more groups does not really give you the privilege of speaking on behalf of that group—even if you want to do so. No group is homogenous. Every group, especially in the US, contains vast differences in wealth, experience, and outlook. You may be African-American. But you surely cannot speak for all other African-Americans.

We must also be sensitive to the fact that, in a highly multicultural and diverse society such as our own, it is almost impossible for any one person to be aware of all the ways she or he can offend someone who is different. We all have different experiences—and our experiences are all limited. It is one thing when a person intentionally says something offensive. But it is something entirely different when a person inadvertently says something distasteful due to limitations in their personal experiences. When this occurs, we can use the utterance as a “teaching moment,” and respectfully and helpfully guide the person and all of us to a new level of understanding.

What I am trying to say is that we want to enlist diversity in the classroom to enhance learning—to broaden our experiences. But we want to do so in ways that are courteous, respectful, and sensitive. This is not easy. But it is necessary.

If you are ever uncomfortable with the tone of class discussions, or how you are being treated by others in our classroom, please speak with me privately. We will work together to improve the situation...and I will do so in a way that maintains, if you wish, your anonymity.

Finally, let me say something about the topic of this course. We must treat all religions as *both* true *and* false. They are true in the sense that they lend meaning to some people’s lives, organize their experiences, guide them through challenges and uncertainties, shape their behavior, and help constitute their sense of self. Any religion is true in the sense that it has real significance to human lives. But we will not, as a class, consider any particular religion to be True with a capital “T”—that is, to have unique insights into Ultimate Reality lacking in other religions. At the same time, we will consider each religion to be false in the very specific sense that we will not take as truthful adherents’ accounts of the origins and explanations of that religion. Instead, we want to apply social science theories. We want to understand each religion’s theology—but we will not consider that theology to be a sufficient explanation. (Why do Orthodox Jews eat kosher food? Because, they will say, that is what God specified in the Law given to Moses atop Mount Sinai. We want in this class to understand that belief. But we also want to see if we can offer other explanations for that dietary

pattern—explanations that pertain to the social sciences.) In fact, this course will differ significantly in one crucial respect from most religions: we will analyze religion as a socio-cultural creation, not a revelation from some deity or transcendent power.

Many of you may likely have deep commitments to your faith traditions. You may be uncomfortable with the idea of analyzing your religion from a social scientific rather than theological perspective. Some conversations may prove difficult. Our discussions may bring together radical differences in beliefs. It is absolutely imperative that we extend respect, courtesy, and tolerance to all members of the class, and treat potential conflicts with maturity, respect, and empathy. It is vital that we all work together to create a safe community of learners.

Last, I note that “belief is no excuse for ignorance.” Just because you have a firm commitment to a particular religion does not absolve you of the difficult work of trying to master and apply theories of religion. All religions are legitimate grist for our conceptual mill. I consider it a sign of intellectual immaturity to refrain from applying course ideas to your own experiences. It is not my goal to change your beliefs. But it is my goal to challenge you!

### **Balancing Analytic Rigor with Emotional Self-Discovery**

Hopefully, many aspects of this course will resonate with your own personal experiences. After all, most of you likely practice some religion, and have religious beliefs—or you intentionally resist any such beliefs and practice. Some of you may even believe you have access to Truth—and therefore some of your peers are, by logical conclusion, living false lives. Many of you, too, may have experienced discomfort, even outright hostility, in regard to your religious beliefs.

I want you to bring your personal experiences—to the extent you feel comfortable—into the class and your coursework. But our class is not a therapy session. We still need maintain analytic rigor. I cannot give you any recipe for how to achieve this balance. But I would be happy to discuss your struggles. I would also be happy to suggest other resources on campus should you feel the need or desire to explore further certain aspects of your identity, personal experiences, and family histories that are important but not appropriate for the classroom. Additionally, as I discuss below, please seek out the Counseling Center if you feel the need to talk more personally with someone about difficult issues and situation.

### **Grades**

Your final grade will be determined from the following:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Two tests (15% total)   | 15% |
| Essay on <i>Roadside Religion</i> and religious <i>kitsch</i>     | 10% |
| Essay on <i>Rapture Culture</i> and the <i>Left Behind</i> Series | 15% |
| Boston religion research project                                  | 25% |
| Class participation (all the time!)                               | 25% |
| Take home reflection essay  | 10% |

I also reserve the right to give you quick pop-quizzes periodically, to be factored into your “class participation” grade. For these, there are no make-ups.

There are no extra-credit assignments.

Note that the dates on which I have scheduled the tests and assignments, as well as the films and readings, are liable to change if we need additional time to cover thoroughly the material.

Attendance is required at all class sessions. I view class participation as a crucial gauge of your commitment, preparation, and engagement with the course. Silence is not an option. Perfect attendance alone will not constitute satisfactory participation (and active participation will not compensate for poor attendance). If you must miss class (life often entails unforeseen contingencies), please inform me as soon as possible by email. There are reasonable and unreasonable absences. Reasonable absences arise from illness, emergencies, ill children who must stay home from school, snowstorms, deaths in the family, and so forth. For unreasonable absences, and more than a few reasonable absences, I reserve the right to lower your final grade by one-half or one-full letter grade. I am kind and reasonable but, to be fair to all students, I must penalize habitual absenteeism. If you miss more than the equivalent of two weeks of class, you may not be capable of receiving a passing grade.

If you miss class, it is *your* responsibility to obtain the material from other students. Moreover, it is unwise to email your professors with the question, “did I miss anything important?” Of course you did.

Anything said or done in class is ‘fair game’ for the tests, quizzes, and assignments. All material is important.

I like to think of each class as having two components. We will discuss the assigned reading. But I also want you to leave each class with new insights not from the reading. Hence, I will often give mini-lectures. But you should think of this class as a seminar. A seminar requires you actively to engage and discuss the material. The operative word here is “active.” By enrolling in this class, you agree to become an active participant, not a passive spectator. I see my goal mainly to provide clarification and enhancement of the readings, to facilitate discussions, and to offer additional case-studies and topics.

We will discuss and review each assignment during the semester. If my expectations are ever unclear, please ask—and please do so early during the assignment.

I will post all assignments, and other course material, of Wheelock-CT. It is vital that you familiarize yourself with Wheelock-CT. Please make certain that you have your password early in the semester. On the course website at Wheelock-CT, moreover, I have posted two documents you should read: a general set of goals applicable to all courses in the American Studies department, and a general grading rubric that will guide my assessment of your assignments.

## **Grading and Honor Code**

Grading entails both subtraction and addition. I eliminate points for errors and deficiencies, and I award points for insightful statements, critical thinking, and imaginative thought. A correct essay or response does *not* guarantee an excellent grade. Some responses are correct. Other responses are correct *and* show evidence of synthesis, insight, and creative thinking. I also expect your writing (in the essays) to communicate clearly your ideas. If your grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary contain numerous errors, thus making it difficult to understand fully your ideas, then I must factor those errors into your grade for that assignment. Clear writing is a crucial skill for college and your professional careers, and I would be remiss as a professor if I did not expect and promote a certain level of quality.

Generally speaking, grades in the A-range reward for *exceptionally high achievement*. Grades in the B-range correspond to *superior* work. C grades indicate *basic* achievement—work that fulfills the requirements of each assignment. I will also abide, as noted above, by the general grading rubric posted on the class website at Wheelock-CT.

Please read the Honor Code of Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook, which states:

As a citizen of the Wheelock College community, I am committed to acting honestly and with integrity in all aspects of academic life. I pledge to conduct myself ethically in my academic endeavors. I accept responsibility for what I write and what I say. In the spirit of trust, I will not misrepresent my academic work. I will not cheat and I will work toward creating a fair academic environment for all.

If you are *ever* uncertain about potential plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and questionable borrowing of ideas, it is *your* responsibility to speak with me or an appropriate on-campus academic resource. This is your only warning: all work in this class is your own. You may *not* cut-and-paste from the internet. Under *no* circumstances are you to consult *any* additional sources, persons, or coursework without permission. *Any* instance of plagiarism will result in an F for the assignment, and the lowering of your final grade by one whole letter grade. (As a policy, I file Academic Dishonesty Forms whenever I encounter an instance of plagiarism or cheating. You can see the form on the Wheelock website at <http://www.wheelock.edu/affair/acaddishonest.pdf>). You must fully acknowledge *any* and *all* sources that contribute to your essays. Forgetting to add a bibliographical endnote is *not* acceptable. I would be happy to chat about this issue further in class or individually.

Your work should represent your best effort. It should communicate that you are taking your studies seriously, and that you respect your professors, your education, and yourself. Your work should convey the values of effort, thoroughness, seriousness, care, and importance. If your work appears frivolous, then it suggests that you have a frivolous approach to your studies. Please do your best.

Late assignments will be accepted for only three extra days. I will also reduce your grade by one full letter. This policy ensures fairness to all students. The only exceptions are serious medical illnesses and related unforeseen events of considerable import. Conflict with an assignment in another class is not a valid reason for an extension—nor, for that matter, avoidable technological failures. Back-up your essays regularly and consistently as you write them.

If you miss an assignment, it is *your* responsibility to initiate conversation with me. Likewise, if I request, when I hand back an essay or quiz, a meeting with you, it is *your* responsibility to follow-up.

I do not give incomplete grades except for truly serious and extenuating circumstances—circumstances that require consultation by you with the Dean, Academic Services, or health/mental health professionals.

You should familiarize yourself with the policies and dates for drop/adds, withdrawals, pass/fail options, incompletes, and so forth, all in the Course Catalog.

## **Research Project**

A major component of this course is a research project on a specific religion that has some sort of formal presence or ‘place’ in the greater Boston area. Your project will consist of:

- Reading the equivalent of one scholarly book and several scholarly essays on that religion.
- Tracing its history in Boston and/or America.
- Visiting a ‘place’ of that religion in order to gather first-hand information or conduct a mini-ethnography.

It is my expectation that you will be able to focus your research on one or more specific topics: e.g., consumerism, the online ‘presence,’ legal issues, gender, etc. The precise parameters of each project will vary, depending on the availability of literature and scholarship, and your topic. We will discuss the project in great detail, beginning the very first week of class.

## **Email and Office Hours**

I will regularly communicate with the class by email. Please read your email regularly (but not in class!). My office hours are posted outside my office (Longwood 10). I also invite you to schedule an appointment to discuss the course, anthropology, American Studies, Human Development, the scholarly understanding of religion, and your own program of study.

## **Wheelock COMPASS Program: (Community Partnership for Student Success)**

### **What is a COMPASS Referral?**

This referral system provides an opportunity for instructors and staff members to alert advisors and the Student Outreach Task Force to concerns they have about students. The universal referral system is an important tool that creates opportunities for you to discuss your progress and utilize appropriate resources such as faculty, academic advisors, academic support, Student Life, Athletics, and the Counseling Center. You will know if a COMPASS has been submitted for you if you receive an email from compass@wheelock.edu.

### **Mid-semester Evaluations**

This assessment system provides faculty the opportunity to report the progress of each student in their class at mid-semester (applies to full semester classes only). Each faculty member will enter a “grade” of “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” on My Wheelock at mid-term in order to indicate your progress in meeting the goals and objectives of the class. This will allow you to assess your progress in each class and seek out appropriate support if necessary. These “grades” will not appear on your transcript or be part of your official record.

## **Academic Support Services**

Wheelock College provides free academic support services to all students.

- **Peer Tutors** provide academic help with specific courses or with general academic skills such studying or time management. Contact Julia Mears at ext. 2179 or at jmears@wheelock.edu
- **Writing Consultants** work with students on writing assignments on a drop-in basis most afternoons and evenings until 10 p.m. on the second floor of the library Contact Jenne Powers at ext. 2122 or at jpowers@wheelock.edu
- **Peer Coaches in Oral Presentation** are available to all students. Contact coaches at speakout@wheelock.edu or Jane Staab at jstaab@wheelock.edu or ext. 2235.

## **Disability Services**

It is the policy of Wheelock College to provide appropriate, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented learning, physical, cognitive, or psychiatric disabilities.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to meet with the course instructor. To receive appropriate accommodations students **must** request services. Please contact Paul Hastings, Director of Academic Assistance and Disability Services in Library 205, ext. 2304 or at phastings@wheelock.edu

## **Other Campus Services and Important Information**

I recommend that you seek when needed the services of the Counseling Center in the basement of Riverway House (Rooms 13, 14 and 15; for an appointment, you can phone 617.879.2413). The Counseling Center offers compassionate, well-trained professionals who can assist you with relationship issues, sexuality and sexual orientation issues, adjustment to college, moving into more adult roles, grief and loss, depression and anxiety, body image and eating concerns, etc. All services are free for Wheelock students. Counseling services has an excellent website with important information and useful resources ([http://www2.wheelock.edu/wheelock/Student\\_Life/Health\\_and\\_Wellness/Counseling\\_Center.html](http://www2.wheelock.edu/wheelock/Student_Life/Health_and_Wellness/Counseling_Center.html)).

College is a time of stress and anxiety. I sympathize with the emotional plight of college students. It is vital that you have some sort of emotional support system in college—friends, family, and so forth. The Counseling Center can assist you with finding an emotional support system. Please do not take offense if, after a conversation, I suggest that you visit the Counseling Center. We all need assistance from time to time getting grounded, working through issues, grappling with tensions.

Wheelock College Student Health Services is operated in conjunction with Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates, affiliated with Harvard Medical School, located a short walk from campus. For more information on services available to Wheelock students, visit the Harvard Vanguard web site for Wheelock students (<http://www.harvardvanguard.org/Wheelock/WheelockHome.asp#map>).

You should also familiarize yourself with our college Policies Against Harassment at: [www.wheelock.edu/hr/POLICY%20AGAINST%20HARASSMENT.pdf#search=%22harassment%22](http://www.wheelock.edu/hr/POLICY%20AGAINST%20HARASSMENT.pdf#search=%22harassment%22)

If you drink, don't drive. If you have sex, do it safely. Both the Counseling Center and Health Service can direct you to resources for sexuality and reproductive health matters, including contraception, pregnancy consultations, and professional advice on what to do after rape. If you do not know what constitutes consensual sexual relations, please contact Student Health Services for more information.

## **How to Read and Take Notes**

When reading, do not just underline or highlight text in book (and never do so in a library book). You need also write notes on the reading, and to bring them to class. Your notes can be brief—a few sentences, key phrases, important terms, responses, questions, etc. You can type your notes, or scrawl them on paper, but address at least some of the following:

- What are the key themes, terms, and concepts of the reading. What is the author's point? Summarize each chapter or sub-chapter.
- What is unclear?
- What is particularly persuasive or insightful?
- What did you learn?
- Can you offer alternative interpretations of the material?
- Do you think the author erred, or missed something crucial?
- Did you read something shocking or objectionable? Were you uneasy? Why?
- How does the reading relate to other course ideas, discussions, and readings—and even material from other courses?
- How does the reading pertain to class assignments? Can you tie it to your essays?

Your notes will become the basis of group discussions and class presentations.

## Course Schedule

Note: Anticipate that this schedule will change. In addition to possible errors in the schedule, some topics may require more time (or less) than I anticipated to address your questions, uncertainties, and interest.

**F Jan 22.** Introduction to the course. What is religion? What does it do? Why believe?

**T Jan 26.** Today we begin discussing the book *Roadside Religion*. I will also present material on some classic anthropological theories of religion pertaining to community, categories, sacred/profane, ritual, and magic (Durkheim and Malinowski).

Reading: *Roadside Religion* chaps 1-2.

Week 2: pick your religion for your research project, using the World Religions in Boston project.

**F Jan 29.** *Roadside* (continued). I will lecture on ritual, Van Gennep, liminality, bodily symbols, communitas, and rites of passage.

Reading: *Roadside* chaps 3-5.

**T Feb 2.** *Roadside* (continued). I will discuss a famous analysis of the dietary laws in the biblical book of Leviticus.

Reading: *Roadside* chaps 6-8.

**F Feb 5.** Psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to religion.

Reading: Spiro, "Religious systems as culturally constituted defense mechanisms"

Dundes," "The Psychoanalytic Study of Religious Custom and Belief"

both readings will be posted on Wheelock-CT)

**Note:** If you have not yet read the *Left Behind* novel, you have only two weeks to do so!

**T Feb 9.** Finish *Roadside*. Group discussions of your preliminary essay outlines. I will lecture on Marxism and materialism.

Reading: *Roadside* chaps 9-Conclusion.

Bring to class an outline about your preliminary assessment of Beal's analysis of these religious sites—and your own interpretations.

**F Feb 12.** While your instructor attends the annual meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, I would like you to view the film *Jolo Serpent Handlers*. This movie focuses on serpent-handling Pentecostal Christians in the rural US. Why, we ask, do they do this? How can we explain this religious behavior?

**Note:** By next Friday, I want you to inform me in writing of three religions/place that you would like to research for your project. The place to begin is *World Religions in Boston: A Guide to Communities and Resources*, which is part of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University. You can access this terrific resource through two portals:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralsm/98wrb/indexa.htm>

<http://pluralism.org/wrgb>

for other helpful resources from the same project, see <http://pluralism.org/resources/map/index.php>

After I approve your requests, I want you before Spring Break to (i) make contact with someone at your place, and (ii) turn in a preliminary bibliography of books and articles on your religious tradition and/or topic.

**T Feb 16.** Turn in Essay 1. I will then lecture on structuralism, animal sacrifice, and the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

- F Feb 19.** Today we begin to discuss the book *Rapture Culture*, focusing on the *Left Behind* series of books and why the idea of the rapture is so compelling in evangelical America.  
Reading: *Rapture* chaps 1-2.
- T Feb 23.** Rapture (continued). I will discuss Levy-Bruhl and worldmaking.  
Reading: *Rapture* chaps 3-4.
- F Feb 26.** Rapture (continued). I will then discuss so-called postmodern religion—or, religion without theology.  
Reading: *Rapture* chaps 5-6.
- T Mar 3.** Finish Rapture (continued). We will also view the film *Jesus Camp*.  
Reading: *Rapture* chaps 7-8.
- F Mar 5.** Test 1.
- T Mar 9, F Mar 12. Spring Break.**
- T Mar 16.** Swap outlines for your Rapture paper. Then, we will discuss the popular commoditization of Christianity.  
Reading: McDannell, “Christian Retailing”  
Nichols, “Jesus on a Bracelet”  
(You may also be interested in a variety of links to various Christian retailing organizations I posted to Wheelock-CT)
- Note: Please inform me in writing about your
- F Mar 19.** Religion, consumerism, and popular culture (continued). I will also discuss the burkini and other forms of religious consumerism.  
Reading: Huss, “All You Need is LAV: Madonna and Postmodern Kabbalah.
- T Mar 23.** Turn in Essay 2. Although we will continue to have assigned reading, you are now delving intensively into your research project, which we will discuss almost daily. Every Friday, you will hand me a written outline about how your research is progressing. I expect serious progress weekly!
- F Mar 26.** Today we turn to Eck’s book *A New Religious America*. We will also view a film sometime over the next week or so, although the title(s) are not yet decided (maybe Hell House, or A Life Apart, or something on Muslims in America)  
Reading: Eck chaps 1-2.
- T Mar 30.** American Hindus.  
Reading: Eck chap 3.
- F Apr 4.** American Buddhists.  
Reading: Eck chap 4.
- T Apr 6.** American Muslims.  
Reading: Eck chap 5.
- F Apr 9.** Religion, the law, and good citizenship.  
Reading: Eck chap 6.
- T Apr 13.** Religion, the law, and good citizenship (continued).  
Reading: Eck chap 7.

**F Apr 16.** Cyberpilgrimages and online Muslim marriage.

Reading: Hill-Smith, "Cyberpilgrimage: A Study of Authenticity, Presence and Meaning in Online Pilgrimage Experiences" (online at [http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art21\(2\)-Cyberpilgrimage.html](http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art21(2)-Cyberpilgrimage.html))  
Lo and Aziz, "Muslim Marriage Goes Online: The Use of Internet Matchmaking by American Muslims" (online at [http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art21\(3\)-MuslimMarriage.html](http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art21(3)-MuslimMarriage.html)).

**T Apr 20.** Test 2.

**F Apr 23.** Today we turn to a history of religion among African-Americans. Each day, too, we will hear 10-15 minute presentations on your research projects.

Reading: *Canaan* chaps 1-2.

**T Apr 27.** African-American religion (continued); research presentations.

Reading: *Canaan* chaps 3-4.

**F Apr 30.** African-American religion (finish); research presentations.

Reading: *Canaan* chaps 5-end.

**T May 4.** Open day.

**F May 7.** Last class. I will give you the take-home essays (your final).

**M May 10.** Turn in your research projects.

**F May 14.** Last day to turn in your final essays.