Contemporary Trends Shaping A Changing Religious Landscape (RS-668)
Tuesdays, 7:00 p.m. – 9:45 p.m.

The contemporary religious world is in a rapid state of flux. With increasing urbanization/suburbanization, emigrating populations and technological advances all adding to continual mission activities, the spiritual contours of the globe are undergoing significant shifts. This course will focus mostly on the pluralistic situation in North America but will also intentionally trace the major socio-spiritual transitions taking place in world religions throughout the globe and especially in the United States. The course will reflect on how these changes are making a profound difference in how all faith communities practice their religions.

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Aims of the Course:

1. To learn the basic facets and character in contemporary religious life.
2. To identify the changes that are taking place in modern society generally and specifically in a local context.
3. To better understand the relationship between the societal and cultural context and changing expression and shape of religion today.
4. To examine in-depth one religious phenomenon and its relationship to the ever-changing contemporary society.

Learning Outcome:

MA - #5 To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist.

Dmin - #1 To demonstrate knowledge of the larger social and cultural dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry setting.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance, class and web discussion participation 30 percent
2. 10 reading summaries posted to website 20 percent
3. Class presentation on a religious phenomenon 20 percent
4. 15-page paper exploring a contemporary religious phenomenon 30 percent
Readings – One or two books (depending on your level MA or Dmin will be chosen from a list of approved books) will be read and 2-3 page summaries for each of these will be posted to the course website. Additionally, there will be readings for each week of the course. These will mostly be scholarly journal articles, book chapters and other contemporary popular writings from webpages, blogs and current magazines. Short reflections on 10 of these readings will be posted to the Canvas site weekly.

Course Presentation – Each student is required to do a short class presentation on a contemporary religious group that exemplifies the social and cultural dynamic being studied the week of the presentation. See the instructions below under research project.

Research project - Each student will choose a contemporary religious phenomenon or trend to focus on throughout the course of the semester. During the appropriate week of class, each student will gather information about this religious phenomenon or group for presentation to the class. The purpose of this presentation is twofold: 1) to uncover primary sources related to this phenomenon, and 2) to introduce more information about the phenomenon or trend to the class. The primary source might include a group’s confessional statements, published materials from the organization, sermons, videos, news reports, web material and other items that furnish information about the phenomenon.

Students will use this material, plus other scholarly sources to write a 15-page (or longer, 20+ page if Dmin level) research paper on a topic related to this phenomenon or tradition and the place of this tradition in the contemporary global religious context. This paper must explore information about the phenomenon in relation to larger patterns of culture and societal changes that have taken place globally in the past twenty years. Please be prepared to sign up for a presentation topic by the third week of class and a preliminary idea of your final paper topic by the 7th week.

If anyone has any questions, suggestions, difficulties, or comments I would love to hear them and am always available by email sthumma@hartsem.edu or during my office hours.

MA, and DMin Seminary Grading Scale
A (95-100)  Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
A- (90-94)   Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
B+(87-89)    Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86)    Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.

C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.

C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.

F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Please note: A+’s and C-’s are not part of the grading system.

DMin Grading Scale: High Pass (95-100), Pass (83-94), Low Pass (70-82), and Fail (below 70)

General Classroom Policies:
Student Handbook can be found at http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/

Writing Style and Assistance:
All academic papers are to conform to conventional technical, grammatical, and stylistic standards referred to in the General Guidelines for a Research Paper which can be found in the online forms center of the Seminary website. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for the course. If you need writing assistance to produce an acceptably written MA/Dmin quality paper, the seminary offers free writing tutors. Please make use of them.

Plagiarism warning:
Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. Credit will not be given for written work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.

Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Faculty will report all instances of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean will then collect documented details of the case and advance any recommendations for further action to the Academic Policies Committee. Through this process the situation will be reviewed and any additional penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.

Attendance policy – The following practices are standard:
For a semester course—1-2 absences with prior notice is acceptable, or if not acceptable then the participation grade should be lowered, 3 - 4 or more absences without a serious reason should be an automatic failure “without explanation or permission.”

For online courses—3 or more weeks without posts equal 3 class absences and should be dealt with in the same manner.
If students cannot attend class but would like to join via Zoom I will make every effort to accommodate this request.

Inclusive language – Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another’s images of God.

Email Policy – The instructor will use the official Hartford Seminary student email address for all course communications. Students should check their hartsem.edu email account regularly.

The standard Seminary policies regarding plagiarism and writing style apply to this course. For more information about these policies see the student handbook or the Seminary’s website. Academic policies are listed at http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/.

TENTATIVE - The Schedule of Topics & Readings might change prior to the time the course begins.

Weekly Schedule: LIKELY TO CHANGE PRIOR TO START OF THE COURSE

Where we are headed

Week 1) Introduction to the course and the American religious context

Week 2) The Dynamic of Social and Religious Change

Peter Berger, “Sociological and Theological Perspectives” in The Sacred Canopy 1967

Robert Bellah, “Religious Evolution”
http://bit.ly/2c8Fvvz (Links to an external site.)

Week 3) Methods of studying religious phenomena

Scott Thumma, Studying Congregations, Methods chapter

Reflections on a worship service

Week 4) The Current National Context

Robert Putnam, American Grace excerpts in week 4 module

Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community pp. 48-64 in week 4 module
David Roozen, Faith Communities Today Decade of Change Report –
http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Decade%20of%20Change%20Final_0.pdf (Links to an external site.)

You only need to skim these two:

Ihsan Bagby, Mosque 2010 Report –
http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/The%20American%20Mosque%202011%20web.pdf (Links to an external site.)

Stephen Cohen, Synagogue 2010 Report –
http://synagoguestudies.org/sites/default/files/factreport.pdf (Links to an external site.)

A Changing Organizational Landscape

Week 5) Size – Bigger & Smaller are Better

http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/organizationalchangechapter.doc (Links to an external site.)

Scott Thumma, Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: their characteristics and cultural context. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html (Links to an external site.)

Alice Mann, The Smaller Congregation - Pathways in Challenging Times. in week 5 module

Optional: Scott Thumma & Warren Bird, Megachurch 2015 Report
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/2015_Megachurches_Report.pdf (Links to an external site.)

Optional: Surratt, Ligon and Bird, The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations pp. 9-42 in week 5 module

Week 6) Denominations versus Networks versus Independents

David Roozen & Kirk Hadaway, Denominational Growth and Decline
http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/bookshelf/Church&Denomgrowth/ch&dngrw-pt.1.pdf (Links to an external site.)

David Roozen and Adair Lummis, Congregational Splits & Denominational Apostasy
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/cong/congregational-splits.pdf (Links to an external site.)

Christopher Scheitle, Beyond the Congregation: The World of Christian Nonprofits Chap 1-2. in week 6 module
Scott Thumma, What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support  http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html (Links to an external site.)

Optional - US Religion Census 2012 overview  
www.rcms2010.org/press_release/ACP%2020120501.pdf (Links to an external site.)

**A Changing Demographic Landscape**

**Week 7) Generational and Family Patterns**


Gallup Marriage in Young Adults article.... in week 7 module


Optional: Youth Religion - Generational Shifts in week 7 module.

Optional: Stephen Warner & Rhys Williams, The role of families and religious institutions in transmitting faith among Christian, Muslims and Hindus in the US. in Collins-Mayo & Dandelion *Religion and Youth* pp.159-165 in week 7 module

**Week 8 & 10 ) An Increasing Diverse Population – Immigration and religious pluralism**

**Transnational Religious Networks and Becoming an American “Church”**

Stephen Warner Immigrants and the Faith They Bring  http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2946 (Links to an external site.) also in week 8 module


Michael Emerson, The Emergence of Multiracial Congregations in week 8 module

David Roozen, American Congregations Reach Out To Other Faith Traditions From Faith Communities Today 2010  
http://faithcommunitytoday.org/sites/default/files/American_Congregations_Reach_Out.pdf (Links to an external site.)


**Week 9) Changing Population – Urbanization & Suburbanization Globally**


Scott Thumma and Warren Bird  *Global Megachurches in the Megacity*  *in week 9 module*

Global Christianity *in week 9 module*

*A Changing Cultural Landscape*

**Week 11) Individualism & Consuming Faith**

Robert Bellah, et al. *Habits of the Heart*  pp. 219-245

5 Things Netflix Is Showing Church Leaders About the Future. [http://careynieuwhof.com/2014/07/5-things-netflix-is-showing-church-leaders-about-the-future/](http://careynieuwhof.com/2014/07/5-things-netflix-is-showing-church-leaders-about-the-future/) (Links to an external site.)


**Week 12) Spiritual not Religious and “Lived Religion”**


Nancy Ammerman, *Golden Rule Christianity*  [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/articles/Golden%20Rule%20Christianity.pdf](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/articles/Golden%20Rule%20Christianity.pdf) (Links to an external site.)

**Week 13) Nones and Others**

Pew Nonaffiliates Study  at [http://www.pewforum.org/unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx) (Links to an external site.)

Elizabeth Drescher, Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones chapter one pgs 16-52.


**Week 14) Is it the Internet’s fault? Where are we headed? And how might we get there?**


Scott Thumma, Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html) (Links to an external site.)