Religion as a Social Phenomenon: The Sociological Study of Religion

RS-536

Location: Online
Instructor: Dr. Erica Dollhopf
Email: (forthcoming)

I. Course Description:

This course is designed as an introduction to the broad field of sociology of religion. Through readings, class discussion, writing, observation in several congregations/religious settings, and exploration of the Internet, students will develop the theoretical perspectives and tools enabling them to gain a greater understanding of religion and congregational life.

II. Course Objectives:

By the end of this class, students will be able:

1. To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views by engaging in discussion of current sociological trends in religion with other students.
2. To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion's communities exist.
3. 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.

III. Required Texts, Readings, & Technology:


*The Sacred Canopy,* Peter Berger (Any edition ISBN 0385073054)

Additional readings will be available as PDF files.

Recommended Reading:
Required Technology:
- Regular and reliable computer and internet access
- Word processing program, such as Word
  - Written assignments need to be submitted as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf

IV. Course Assignments and Learning Outcome Assessment objective covered:

Master of Arts in Religious Studies: Learning Outcomes
To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist.

This learning outcome is addressed directly by the final paper and indirectly by 1 or 2 of the course exercises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date(s)</th>
<th>Learning Outcome assessed by assignment</th>
<th>% of final course grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Participation</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise #3? Paper</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>MA #5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>MA #5</td>
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V. Course Expectations and Classroom Policies:

Participation

1. All posts and assignments are due by 11:59 PM on Friday of the course week. Every day an assignment is late will result in a 10% reduction in the final grade for the assignment unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor for extenuating circumstances. For example, if an assignment is worth 25 points, submitting it between 12:00 AM-11:59 PM on the Sunday after it was due results in a 2.5 point reduction in the final grade. A maximum of half-credit will be given for assignments more than 5 days late.

2. The course discussions rely on and are enriched by weekly active participation from all of the students in the class. Each week, students are expected to post one substantial post in response to the weekly discussion question and two substantial posts in response to colleagues. Discussion board posts, as all assignments, are due by Friday at midnight. Missing two weekly posts in a row will result in an automatic lowering of the cumulative discussion board grade by 10%. Missing 3 or more weeks in a row of the discussion board will result in failure of the course. “Missing” a week means not posting by the weekly deadline (Friday at midnight) unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor due to an emergency.
3. **Extensions**: Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

**Communication**

1. Assignments will only be accepted through Canvas. Emailed assignments will not be accepted. Written assignments will be submitted through plagiarism-detection software.

2. The instructor will provide feedback as soon as possible to students on grades. Discussion board posts will generally be graded within 1 week; written assignments will generally be graded within 2 weeks.

3. Students will only use their Hartsem account to contact the instructor and the instructor will only use the Hartsem account to contact students.

4. I will respond to student emails as soon as possible; always within 48 hours but generally within 24 and often much sooner.

5. Students are expected to conduct themselves as professionals in the class. Online discussion forums are a wonderful opportunity to learn from one another’s beliefs and experiences; students are expected to always be respectful in language and expression in the discussion forum. Discussion board posts that are deemed to be inappropriate will be removed from the forum and the student will not receive any credit for that week’s post.

6. **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.

**Written Assignments**

1. The student handbook states: A paper submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course without the prior permission of both instructors. Hartford Seminary strictly adheres to the Plagiarism Policy. Written papers and theses must be typed and should conform to the styles and format for footnotes and acknowledgments announced by the course instructor. For additional information on format, proper footnotes, acknowledgments, etc., students are directed to consult the *Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper*. These guidelines can be picked up in the student forms center or downloaded from our website at: [http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/](http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/). Students may also consult Kate L. Turabian’s, *A Manual for Writers of...*

2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students.

Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one’s own previous work used in another course. See “Plagiarism” at http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/.

3. Official Handbooks: For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please check the student handbook: http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/ and seminary policies at Academic policies are listed at http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/

V. Grading Policy

Student Evaluations
Students are expected to read the assigned reading material on the week that it is assigned. Online forums and assignments will all be based on the topics covered in the reading. Grades will be based on the following:

1. Course scavenger hunt – this is an exercise designed to familiarize you with the various course components including the syllabus, discussion boards, assignment submission, and Hartsem email. Instructions for the assignment are available in the Course Introduction module.

2. Weekly post – response (3-4 paragraphs) to instructor-posted question related to the reading assignment. Students are expected to read and respond to one another’s posts. Students must respond to a minimum of two other students’ posts in order to receive full credit for the discussion board every week. Students are also expected to conduct themselves in a professional, respectful way on discussion boards. Inappropriate comments or language, including profanity, will be removed from the discussion board and will result in a 0 for that week’s comment grade.

3. Written Assignments – students will complete short written assignments (2-3 pages) which will include informal social life “observations” and an article review these will be related to reading and/or help students prepare for their final paper; topics for assignment will be posted at least two weeks in advance.
5. **Final paper** – There will be a research paper (12-15 pages) focusing on one well-defined issue that combines both theoretical and participant observation of some aspect of religion in practice. Additional details forthcoming.

**Grading System:**

- Course Scavenger Hunt = 20 points
- Assignments (5) = 125 points (25 points/each)
- Final paper = 100 points
- Online participation (11) = 110 points (10 points/week)
- Total for semester: = 355 points

**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.
VI. Content – Preliminary (subject to change; more detail forthcoming)

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<th>Topics and Assignment(s)</th>
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<td><strong>Reading:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Scavenger hunt due</td>
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<td>• Discussion board post due</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Sociological Perspectives on Religion</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Religion as Meaning and Belonging</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Religion and the Individual</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Official and Nonofficial Religious Expressions</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Religious Organizations and Institutions</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Religion, Social Cohesion, and Conflict</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Religious Leadership – Sociological Perspectives</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Catch up week</td>
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<td>Religion, Gender, and Family Life</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Religion, Social Movements, and Social Change</td>
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<td>Modern Religion and the Virtual World</td>
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<td>The Future of Religion</td>
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