

Religion as a Social Phenomenon: The Sociological Study of Religion

**RS-536
Fall 2019**

Location: Online

Instructor: Allison Norton

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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 that will enable 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 worldviews by discussing 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 of these dynamics for a ministry setting.

III. Required Texts, Readings, & Technology:

McGuire, Meredith. 2002. *Religion: The Social Context*. Fifth edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. ISBN 0-534-54126-7

Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor Books. (Any edition is fine.) ISBN 0-385-07305-4

Additional readings will be available electronically.

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.

Assignment	Due Date(s)	Learning Outcome assessed by assignment	% of final course grade
Active Participation	Weekly	MA #5	35.2%
Assignments 1-5	9/15, 10/6 10/27, 11/17, 12/8	MA #5	31.0%
Final Project	Dec. 19	MA #5	28.2%

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 Saturday 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. Student emails will be responded to 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. The syllabus is subject to change as the semester progresses; students will be given advance notice of any adjustments.

7. 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/>. Students may also consult Kate L. Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (6th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996), upon which the guidelines are based.

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 (2-4 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
<u>Online participation (12)</u>	<u>=110 points (10 points/week)</u>
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

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topics and Assignment(s)</u>
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<u>Sept. 5-8</u>	
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1. Introduction to the course

Reading:

- The course syllabus

Assignments

- Scavenger hunt due
- Plan/conduct observation for Assignment 1

Due Sept. 8 at 11:59 PM

<u>Sept. 9-15</u>	
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2. Sociological Perspectives on Religion

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, Chapter 1
- Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Appendix I & II
- Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System"

Assignments:

- Discussion board post due
- Assignment 1 due

Due Sept. 15 at 11:59 PM

Sept. 16-22

3. Religion as Meaning and Belonging

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, Chapter 2
- Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Chapters 1 & 2
- And ONE of the following:
 - Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Transnationalization of Religious Life”
 - Heilman, "Joking"
 - Aisha and Her Multiple Identities
 - Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Plan/conduct observation for Assignment 2

Due Sept. 22 at 11:59 PM

Sept. 23-Oct. 1

4. Methods for Studying Sociology of Religion

Reading:

- Ammerman, et al. *Studying Congregations* Chapters 2, 3, and methods chapter
- McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, Appendix A: Conducting Field Research

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Plan/conduct observation for Assignment 2

Due Sunday, Oct. 1 at 11:59 PM

Oct. 1-Oct. 6

5. Religion and the Individual / **Catch up week**

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, Chapter 3

Assignments

- Assignment 2 due

Due Oct. 6 at 11:59 PM

Oct. 7-Oct. 13

6. Official and Nonofficial Religious Expressions

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, Chapter 4
- AND one of the following:
 - Greil & Rudy, "On the Margins of the Sacred"
 - Neitz, "In Goddess We Trust"
 - Gray & Thumma, "The Gospel Hour"

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Plan/conduct interview for Assignment 3

Due Oct. 13 at 11:59 PM

Oct. 14-Oct. 20

7. Religious Organizations and Institutions

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, Ch. 5
- Dollhopf, Erica J., Christopher P. Scheitle, and John D. McCarthy, "Initial Results from a Survey of Two Cohorts of Religious Nonprofits."
- AND one of the following:
 - McMullen, "The Religious Construction of a Global Identity" (about the Bahai)
 - Nelson, "The Church and the Street" (Race & African American church)
 - Smith, "Religious Diversity in America" (overview article)
 - Lotfi, "Creating Muslim Space in the USA: Masjid and Islamic Centers" (Overview of Muslim organizational growth in the US)

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Plan/conduct interview for Assignment 3

Due Oct. 20 at 11:59 PM

Oct. 21-Oct. 27

8. Religion, Social Cohesion, and Conflict

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, Ch. 6
- Kniss, "Mapping the Moral Order"

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Assignment 3 due

Due Oct. 27 at 11:59 PM

Oct. 28-Nov. 3

9. Religious Leadership – Sociological Perspectives

Reading:

- Dollhopf, Erica J. and Christopher P. Scheitle. “Decline and Conflict: Causes and Consequences of Leadership Transitions in Religious Congregations.”
- Smith, Jonathan E., Kenneth P. Carson, and Ralph A. Alexander. “Leadership: It can make a difference.”
- Adams, Jimi. “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible: Organizational Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership.”

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- One-paragraph description of final paper
- Plan/conduct observation for Assignment 4

Due Nov. 3 at 11:59 PM

Nov. 4-Nov. 10

10. Catch up week/Start on final paper

Reading: None

Assignments

- Schedule time to discuss final paper with Dr. Dollhopf
- Plan/conduct observation for Assignment 4

Due Nov. 10 at 11:59 PM

Nov. 11-Nov. 17

11. Religion, Gender, and Family Life

Reading:

- Griffin, Wendy “The Embodied Goddess: Feminine Witchcraft and Female Divinity”
- Sechzer, Jeri Altneu. “Islam and Woman: Where Tradition Meets Modernity.”
- Denton, Melinda Lundquist. “Family Structure, Family Disruption, and Profiles of Adolescent Religiosity.”
- Ellison, Christopher G., Amy M. Burdette, and W. Bradford Wilcox. “The Couple that Prays Together: Race, Ethnicity, Couples’ Religion, and Relationship Quality.”

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Assignment 4 due

Due Nov. 17 at 11:59 PM

Nov. 18-Nov. 24

10. Thanksgiving

Reading: None

Assignments

- Work on final paper

Nov. 25-Dec. 1

12. Religion, Social Movements, and Social Change

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, chapter 7
- Social Movements and Religion in American History – Interactive Timeline on the ARDA - <http://www.thearda.com/timeline/tlMovements.asp>
- AND one of the following:
 - Warner, “Religion and New (post-1965) Immigrants.”
 - Ebaugh, “Religion and the New Immigrants”

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Work on Assignment 5 (final paper PowerPoint for your colleagues)

Due Dec. 1 at 11:59 PM

Dec. 2-8

13. Modern Religion and the Virtual World

Reading:

- McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, chapter 8
- Zaman, “From Imam to Cyber-Mufti - Consuming Identity in Muslim America”
- Lovheim, “Virtually Boundless?: Youth Negotiating Tradition in Cyberspace”

Assignments

- Discussion board post due
- Assignment 5 due

Due Dec. 8 at 11:59 PM

Dec. 9-15

14. The Future of Religion

Reading: None

Assignments

- Discussion board post due

Due Dec. 15 at 11:59 PM

Dec. 19

Final papers due at 11:59 PM