SOCILOGY 211B: ADVANCED TOPICS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION  
Brandeis University, Fall 2012

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Class Meetings: Tuesdays 9:00am-11:50am, Pearlman 202  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-2:30pm and by appointment

Course Description

This graduate level course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to the sociological study of religion in the United States. It is divided into three sections. In the first section, we discuss what the social scientific study of religion is by readings works by classic and neo-classic thinkers in light of several overviews of the field. The second section focuses on key issues important for anyone trying to understand religion in the United States. The final few weeks will focus on a few (of the many) topics you are interested in as a class. I will provide reading lists for the third section of the course shortly after the semester begins. Materials throughout the course are drawn from across theoretical and methodological approaches.

By the end of the semester you will be able to:  
- List key questions that are important to sociologists of religion  
- Describe core theoretical concepts in the field  
- Provide an overview of current debates in the field  
- Be prepared to enter those debates through your own research and teaching.

This syllabus is designed to include most, but not all, of the core readings you will need to read if you are preparing to complete a QPD in the sociology of religion.

Course Readings

The following books are on reserve in the library and for sale at the university bookstore.  

All other required course readings are available through Latte except for those listed with web addresses that can be located that way.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance is required. Please be on time out of respect for all of us. This is a seminar based class and will only work if everyone is present and engaged. I will take attendance in each class and will email you if you are not in class. Your class attendance is part of your final grade. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance and those due to serious illness.
2. **Reading** is required. I know I am asking you to do a lot of reading this semester. All course readings must be done for each week, though I encourage you to practice digesting an article or book without reading every word. Start with the contents and read for the main argument (skimming some sections and reading others – especially the introduction and the conclusion – carefully).

3. **Class Participation** is important. I hope this will be a relatively small class in which each participant will speak in every class session. We have all been in classes dominated by one or two voices (sometimes that of the professor!). Please work with me to make sure that does not happen.

4. **A Field Visit** to a religious organization, ceremony, center or location outside the tradition in which you were raised or with which you are most familiar. You do not have to write up field notes based on this visit but do need to make it before our class meeting on September 25th. For suggestions of where to visit you might consult:
   a. Centers listed through the Pluralism Project at Harvard University: [http://www.pluralism.org/research/profiles.php#MA](http://www.pluralism.org/research/profiles.php#MA)
   b. The Yellow Pages or Waltham Community Directory: [http://www.waltham-community.org/churches.html#BETHEDEN](http://www.waltham-community.org/churches.html#BETHEDEN)
   c. Brandeis University Chaplaincy’s Office [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/Chaplaincy/](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/Chaplaincy/)

5. **Written Assignments.** To help with your reading and any future research in this area, there are three types of writing assignments.
   a. **Annotated Bibliography:** To build your knowledge (and ability to cite) in this area, you are required to construct an annotated bibliography that includes all of the required readings for this course. I strongly recommend that you download EndNote for free from the LTS webpage [http://lts.brandeis.edu/techhelp/content/endnote.html](http://lts.brandeis.edu/techhelp/content/endnote.html) and put your notes about these articles/books in EndNote as you read them. This is meant to help you – not be busy work that gets in your way. Each entry should be at least a paragraph and should make clear what the author’s central question and argument is. Many people develop a system by which they answer certain questions in their EndNote files like: research question, sample, argument, why I am convinced or not, and how I might engage with this idea later so they can read their notes rather than the whole book or article again later. How you do this is up to you. Brief notes, incomplete sentences, etc. are fine. You can do this as a group sharing your files but each of you must hand in your own bibliography. By **December 13, 2012 at noon** please email me your annotated bibliography as a Word document (Endnote can output to Word). I will not grade your individual entries but will selectively look to see if they are complete. If the entries are complete, you will receive full credit for this assignment. If not, I will send it back and ask you to complete them so you can receive full credit.

   b. **Discussion Memos:** Three times during the semester you will be responsible for submitting a two-page (single spaced) discussion memo by **noon on the Monday before the class meets.** Please send these memos to the class email list to share what you learned and are thinking about. Think about these memos as thought pieces in process – not as finished pieces of writing. The goal is to raise questions for conversation and lay out what you thought about the readings. Students not writing memos for a given week are **required** to read the memos circulated before class each week. Please write your memo assuming that we all did the reading (i.e. don’t summarize). Please consult with the other person writing a memo the week you are to try to loosely cover all of the material for that week. The idea here is to help you share the labor and learn from one another. If I were you, I would be sure to put these memos in my EndNote files so I have them easily accessible for future reference. In your memos, please focus on questions like:
      i. What question is this author trying to answer?
      ii. How is that question connected to others we have talked about in this class?
iii. How is this author conceiving of religion? Is that definition implicit or explicit? What is the author assuming in her/his conceptualization? What other relevant ideas is the author making assumptions about in the article? Are those assumptions laid out? Are they problematic?

iv. If the article is empirical, are you convinced by the evidence? Why or why not? If you are not convinced, what else do you want to know and why?

v. What does this article contribute analytically to the theme for this week? What does it contribute to the sociological study of religion? To sociology more broadly?

vi. If you are feeling creative, write a conversation between this author and another author we talked about this semester. Or find a music or film clip you might use to teach this author’s ideas to undergraduates, put it in your memo, and comment on how it would help make this idea more accessible.

vii. Feel free to use a paragraph or so to think (or ask the class to think with you) about how the readings might inform research you are doing or thinking about doing.

While you are not formally required to lead discussion the week you write your memo, please come to class prepared to discuss it (and to share with us any music, film or other visual aids you included).

c. Final Assignments.

Proposal due Thursday November 1, 2012 (by 5pm by email)
Final paper due Monday December 17, 2012 (by 10am in hard copy)

This assignment can take many forms and is intended to give you the opportunity to synthesize what you have read this semester and apply it to a current or future research project of interest. Some options include:

i. A detailed and well-focused literature review that draws from material we read in this class and outside articles to frame a particular question or topic. This literature review might serve as a background section for a journal article or dissertation proposal. The goal is to identify and lay out theoretical and empirical debates relevant to a particular issue. This might be a good option for anyone interested in completing QPD in the sociology of religion.

ii. A research proposal or paper of your choosing related to course materials. If you are already working on a research project relevant to course themes or would like to start one, this might be a good option for you. If you share interests with a colleague in the course and can access data relevant to your question, you might consider putting together a first draft of a journal article and submitting it together as a joint final project. If we as a class share a substantive interest, I am not opposed to a class final project as long as everyone contributes equally and it has publication potential. We will discuss sources of publicly available data throughout the semester.

iii. Another option you propose and I approve.

During the last class meeting of the semester, you will give a short (10ish minute) “work in progress” talk about your final assignment to share with others what you have been learning.

Grades will be based on:

a. Class attendance and participation (25%)
b. Completion of Field Visit (10%)
c. Annotated Bibliography (10%)
d. Discussion Memos (10% each – 30% total)
e. Final Paper including proposal and presentation (25%)

Late Assignments: I anticipate a busy semester as, I know, do many of you. I plan time into my schedule when your assignments are due to read and comment on them. I will return all assignments handed in on time within a week. Please make every effort to submit your work on time. Discussion memos handed in late hurt the whole
class (especially people with Monday evening commitments who can’t read them at the last minute). If you are having trouble meeting the deadline for the annotated bibliography, final paper proposal, and/or final assignment please let me know as soon as possible. Do not assume that you can turn in all your assignments at the end of the semester without penalty and without first making arrangements with me.

**All written exercises must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**

University Policy on Academic Accommodations: If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please be in touch with me. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Katharine Linnehan (klinneha@brandeis.edu, x63418). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policy on academic integrity: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/ai/index.html. If anything is unclear, please ask.

Course Outline

I. Setting the Stage: Conceptualizing and Studying Religion and Spirituality

September 4. Introductions


September 11. Recent Overviews of and Approaches to the Field *
*We will be rescheduling this class meeting because I will be out of the country. We will talk about this on the first day of class.

Please read two of the following four articles:


Please also read


Supplemental Reading:

September 18. No class

September 25. The Classics: Marx, Weber and Durkheim


Please skim one of the following primary sources for the central ideas (they are not on reserve – let me know if you have trouble locating a copy through the library or a friend):


Supplemental Reading:


Please also come to class having made your field visit. As you think about your visit and these articles together, consider which aspects of what you observed would be captured by the various approaches to religion these authors advance and which would be overlooked. Think about the implications your answer to this question has for the sociological study of religion more broadly.

October 2. Two Neo-classics – Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz (Robert Bellah is usually considered the third)


Supplemental Reading:


October 9. No class
II. Key Issues

October 16. Secularization and Secularism


Supplemental Reading:

- SSRC Immanent Frame blog on “Rethinking Secularism:’” http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/rethinking-secularism/

October 23. Pluralism, Competition, and Rational Choice


Supplemental Reading:

October 30. Spirituality and Religious Individualism


Supplemental Reading:


*November 1, 5pm, proposal for final paper due by email*

November 6. Religion in American Public Life. An Overview in One Week

Please read at least four of the following:


Supplemental Reading:

November 13. Denominations and Congregations (in the Context of Trends)


Supplemental Reading:


November 20. Outside of Religious Institutions

- See also discussion of this book: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/the-gospel-of-an-icon/

Supplemental Reading:


III. Select Topics

November 27. TBA

December 4. TBA
December 11. Your Projects

*Class presentations of your final projects

December 13th noon, Annotated Bibliography Due by email

December 17th 10am, Final Paper Due in hard copy to my Department Mailbox

Additional Resources for the Sociological Study of Religion

Data Sources
Association of Religion Data Archives: http://www.thearda.com/
American National Election Studies: http://www.electionstudies.org/
General Social Survey: http://www3.norc.org/GSS+Website
World Values Survey: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/

Syllabi and Reading Lists
Wabash Center Guide to Religion:
http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide-headings.aspx

Places where interesting related conversation takes place
http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/
http://www.religiondispatches.org/
www.religioninsociology.org
http://pewforum.org/

Journals specifically focused on the Sociology of Religion
Review of Religious Research: http://rra.hartsem.edu/reviewof.htm
Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion: http://scp.sagepub.com/

Professional Associations specifically focused on the Sociology of Religion
Association for the Sociology of Religion: http://www.sociologyofreligion.com/
(and lots of Religious Studies Associations starting with the American Academy of Religion: http://www.aarweb.org/)

Handbooks


Textbooks


Sources of funding

See the list through: www.religioninsociology.org
Discussion Memo Sign Up

September 11. Recent Overviews of and Approaches to the Field
   1. 
   2. 

September 25. The Classics: Marx, Weber and Durkheim
   1. 
   2. 

October 2. Two Neo-classics – Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz
   1. 
   2. 

October 16. Secularization and Secularism
   1. 
   2. 

October 23. Pluralism, Competition, and Rational Choice
   1. 
   2. 

October 30. Spirituality and Religious Individualism
   1. 
   2. 

November 6. Religion in American Public Life, An Overview in One Week
   1. 
   2. 

November 13. Denominations and Congregations (in the Context of Trends)
   1. 
   2. 

November 20. Outside of Religious Institutions
   1. 
   2. 

November 27. Select topics TBA
   1. 
   2. 

December 4. Select topics TBA
   1. 
   2.