SOCIOLOGY 6143: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION
Fall Semester, 2012
CRN 15257
T 5:30-8:15
MH 3.03.14

Instructor: Christopher Ellison, Ph.D.
Office: MS 4.02.44
E-mail: christopher.ellison@utsa.edu
Office hours: R 1-2:30 (and by appointment)

OVERVIEW:

Since the classical sociological treatises of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, scholars have widely assumed that the vitality and social power of religion are being steadily eroded by the forces of modernity. However, contemporary developments call into question these time-honored notions of secularization. Indeed, many social scientists are embracing a more dynamic, market-oriented perspective on individual and collective religious life, especially (but not exclusively) in the United States. This debate between classic secularization approaches -- the "old" paradigm-- and the “new” market-focused paradigm has also reinvigorated the academic study of religion and spirituality, and has fostered fresh scholarly interest in the role of religious organizations, practices, and beliefs in American society.

In this course, we will examine the dominant theories of religion and look at the way sociologists use multiple types of empirical data --quantitative and qualitative-- to study religion as a social institution. We will begin the course by focusing squarely on the debate between "old" and "new" paradigms in the sociology of religion. The next phase of the course explores the dynamics religious affiliation and disaffiliation, and the reasons for the growth and decline of specific religious groups and communities, as well as the varied factors that influence individual religious and spiritual practices. Subsequent segments of the course will address such topics as: (a) the links between religion, ethnicity, and immigration; (b) religion, gender, and family life; (c) religion, health, and well-being; (d) religion and socioeconomic stratification; and (e) religion and politics.

READINGS:

In lieu of books, readings for this course will consist of academic journal articles and book chapters. Information about how to access these materials will be provided in class.

GRADES:

Grades will be based on the following components: two short (4-6 pages, single-spaced) response papers addressing specific segments of course materials (15% each); one class paper due at the end of the semester (50% total; 5% prospectus due at midterm, 45% final deliverable); and regular class attendance and participation, as described at the first class meeting (20%).

The term project should be of sufficient breadth as to demonstrate the student’s knowledge of the course content, and may take the form of a research proposal, empirical study, or critical review of the scholarly literature on a particular topic or issue relevant to the course. All specific project ideas must be summarized in a brief (2-3 page) prospectus, which must be submitted to the instructor for approval no later than Fri., 10/12. Students will then be expected to present their papers (as “works in progress” for group discussion) to the class during the latter part of the semester (i.e., 11/6, 11/13, 11/27, or 12/4). Additional details on this arrangement will be provided in class.
The two shorter papers noted above will focus on specific segments of course materials. They should be more than summaries of the relevant materials; rather, they should strive to integrate and synthesize these readings, to provide the respondent’s insights and to raise questions, and (where appropriate) to integrate small numbers of additional materials to supplement course readings. Here, too, additional details will be provided in class.

Seminar meetings will consist of a combination of lecture and student-led discussion. Therefore, it is essential that students come to class prepared to discuss the readings in detail. Each student will be expected to facilitate (that is, to lead) at least one class discussion over the course of the semester. Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory, per the policy outlined below.

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69%, F = below 60

OTHER POLICIES TO NOTE:

Late Assignments:

The option of making up exams is available only to students with excused absences, i.e., those whose absences are due to Holy Days or official university functions, or for which sufficient documentation is presented to the instructor. Examples of the latter include doctor’s notes, court documents, and the like. Otherwise missed exams are scheduled at the discretion of the instructor, and only under unusual circumstances. Without sufficient documentation, students can expect to receive a grade of 0 for the missed exam.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend every class meeting, unless they fall into the “excused” category defined by UTSA policy, or except in cases of documented illness or family emergency. The instructor reserves the right to deduct points from the final grade of any student who is deemed to have an excessive number of absences.

Excused Absences (UTSA Policy):

Any student who is absent from class for the observance of a religious Holy Day (this means a Holy Day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20 of the Tax Code) shall be allowed to take an examination for that day within a reasonable time (normally within 20 school days) after the absence if, not later than the 15th day after the first day of the semester, the student notifies the instructor of each class the student had scheduled on that date that the student would be absent for a religious Holy Day. Notification of the planned absences must be in writing and must be delivered by the student either (a) personally to the instructor of each class or (b) by certified mail, return receipt requested, addressed to the instructor of each class. An instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or examination within a reasonable time (normally 20 school days) after the absence. Each instructor should inform the student, at the time the student notifies the instructor of a planned absence, of the deadline for completion of the missed examination.

Students shall be excused without penalty from class to participate in an official University sanctioned student activity, such as intercollegiate athletic competition, forensics, music tours, and other similarly approved events. Students are responsible for the coursework for any time they are absent from class. Faculty or the University employee in charge of such activities shall file a list of students and the dates they request the students be excused from class with the Office of the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs. Deans, Division Directors, and faculty may check any names against the list by contacting the Office of the Provost.
Scholastic Dishonesty:

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, giving inaccurate or misleading information in order to obtain an extension or delay in completing examinations, or any other act designed to give unfair advantage to a student, or the attempt to commit such an act.

Students with Disabilities:

The instructor will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with documented disabilities. However, students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (MS 2.03.18; 458-4157) in order to receive consideration and support services.

Additional Note:

Students are encouraged to utilize the academic support services available through the Tomas Rivera Center (TRC) to assist with building study skills and for tutoring in course content. These services are available at no additional cost to you. The TRC has several locations on the Main Campus. For more information, visit the website at www.utsa.edu/trcss, or call 458-4694.

COURSE ORGANIZATION:

[NOTE: Dates for specific topics are approximate, and may vary depending on the rate of progress throughout the semester. Students are responsible for any announcements regarding changes in such dates.]

9/4: Introduction to Course
Readings:


9/11: Secularization and its Discontents
Readings:


9/18: The Growth and Decline of Religious Collectivities
[NOTE: 9/14 is the Fall 2012 Census date]
Readings:


9/25: The Growth and Decline of Religious Collectivities, continued
Readings:


10/2: Patterns and Social Sources of Individual Religious Affiliation, Belief, and Practice
[NOTE: Response paper option #1 due]
Readings:


10/9: Religion, Ethnicity, and Immigration
Readings:


10/16 Religion, Gender, and Family Life
Readings:


10/23: Religion, Health, and Well-being
Readings:
[NOTE: Response paper option #2 due]


10/30: Religion and Socioeconomic Stratification
Readings:


11/6: Religion, Politics, and Social Movements
Readings:


11/13: Class presentations
[NOTE: Response paper option #3 due]

11/20: No class (Thanksgiving)

11/27: Class presentations

12/4: Class presentations
[NOTE: Final class paper due on 12/4]

NOTE: All students are expected to be familiar with, and to abide by, the UTSA Roadrunner Creed. For more information, see www.utsa.edu/about/creed.