SOC 8790
Advanced Topics in Social Theory - Religion and Society

Completely Online and Synchronous - Thursday 11:45-2:15
Zoomlink:

Fall 2020 • 3 credits

Instructor

Penny Edgell, Professor, Department of Sociology (she/her)
Contact via email at edgell@umn.edu (48-hour response, M-F)
In emergency, contact through sociology department main office number: 612.624.4300

Online office hours via Zoom

Thursday 3-5 pm or by appointment (email me), https://umn.zoom.us/j/705280327

Course Overview

This course introduces classical and contemporary approaches to core theories, problems, and debates in the sociological study of religion. Classical sociological accounts began with the assumption that religion, a traditional institution, was increasingly in tension with modernizing societies. Later work has suggested that religion and modernity may “fit together” quite well, and debates about the “whether” and “how” of secularization continue. Contemporary approaches focus more on the contested and multi-vocal processes through which individuals, groups, and institutions define the sacred and build moral community, use religious symbols & discourses in cultural legitimation, and construct historically specific and contingent relationships between religion, boundaries, and inequality. A one-semester course cannot provide comprehensive coverage of the sociology of religion, so some important topics will be omitted. Students who wish to read in additional topics for the final paper may find the supplemental bibliography (attached) useful, and are encouraged to find their own supplemental readings, as well.

Readings

Articles are available through the usual library data-base options; some books are available at the library but others you may have to purchase.

Course Objectives

At the end of the course, you will be able to

• accurately summarize and critically assess original texts;
• appreciate the socially embedded, contested, and contingent nature of religious expression;
• understand the major theoretical approaches within the subfield, including classical Durkheimian (functional) and Weberian (substantive) frameworks, contemporary approaches rooted in cultural sociology and practice theory, and evolving understandings of the nature of the secular, secularization, and non-religion;
• chart the intellectual trajectory of the sociology of religion as a field of inquiry and evaluate it vis-à-vis your own valued scholarly and research objectives. Is the field interdisciplinary? How does the
field center white and male experiences, or foster white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy, or in other ways affirm existing power structures? How does the field produce or promote liberatory knowledge? How do analytical categories like “religion” and “non-religion” capture – and in what ways do they fail to capture – lived experiences in a variety of contexts and social locations?

**Instructional Time and Student Effort**

As per university guidelines on instructional time per course credit, I will spend 150 minutes per week for this three-credit course interacting with you during our online class sessions. As per university student workload guidelines, the expectation for undergraduates for a 3-credit class is 450 minutes per week. This includes 150 in direct instructional time with the professor, and 300 additional minutes per week completing the independent activities (e.g. reading, assignments, and related) for the course. This 450 minutes per week of student effort (attending class, completing independent activities) should be sufficient to earn a C in the course. The expectation for graduate students is that they will spend more than the minimum time required for undergraduates.

**Technology Requirements**

- a U of M internet ID (your official U of M email address
- reliable, high-speed internet access
- laptop, desktop, or tablet with a webcam, recommended less than 6 years old with at least 1GB RAM
- Zoom remote meeting software; the most recent Chrome/Firefox with JavaScript enabled
- recommended: a headset with a microphone

**Course Requirements, Grading, and Assessment**

**Class Participation (20% of Grade)**

This class is a seminar. **Attendance and class participation are required for all students, including auditors.** You are expected to have completed all of the readings for the week and to be prepared to discuss them in depth. To aid in establishing presence and create a better discussion atmosphere, you are expected to have your webcam on for class sessions.

**Critical Response to Class Readings (30% of Grade)**

During the first class, each student will be assigned responsibility for 2 weeks’ worth of class readings. On the Tuesday before class you will email to all class participants or post to the Canvas website (instructions forthcoming) a 1-2 page (single-spaced) written summary of each of the week’s readings and a list of discussion questions for the week. On the Thursday of your assigned class you will make a brief (10 minute) presentation and lead discussion. **If the class is large, on some weeks more than one person will be presenting/leading. We will coordinate this ahead of time.**

**Peer Feedback on Final Paper (10% of Grade)**

To aid in fostering collegiality and develop professional peer reviewing skills, you will read a draft of your peer’s final paper and give 1.5-2 single-spaced pages of written feedback. You will also schedule an in-person 20-minute Zoom conversation to discuss the draft and your feedback. **Rough drafts to be emailed to your peer reviewer by 5 pm on Dec. 3rd, peer feedback due 5 pm on Dec. 8th.**

**Final Paper (40% of Grade)**
The paper should be 18-20 pages long, excluding references/appendices/figures. You must choose one of the options below, or if you want to propose something else, make an appointment to talk with me during office hours on or before October 22nd.

Option 1: Write a research proposal that:
   a) poses a research question based in one of the theoretical frameworks covered in the course,
   b) shows how this question emerges from a critical review of the literature,
   c) identifies an appropriate research site/data source and research design, and
   d) displays an understanding of how the proposed project would constitute a contribution to the sociological understanding of religion.

Option 2: Take one of the areas of the literature in the supplemental bibliography, or construct your own supplemental bibliography on a topic in the contemporary sociological study of religion. Write a critical review of 3-5 books or 8-10 articles in this area (more if necessary to give an overview of the topic) that
   a) describes the main themes, questions, arguments, and theoretical frameworks that inform this area of inquiry, and
   b) brings this topic into critical dialogue with one or more of the theoretical approaches covered in the first half of our seminar, critiquing either the theoretical approach, the substantive topic area, or both, and
   c) proposes the best “way forward” for research in this substantive/topic area.

Option 3: Use the final class paper to work on one of your program requirements, e.g. a dissertation prospectus or a section of a preliminary exam. If you choose this option you must talk with me about it during my office hours and obtain my approved by October 8th.

Regardless of which paper option you choose:
   • A written topic statement (2 pages single spaced) and sample 1-page bibliography are due via email prior to the beginning of class on October 22nd.
   • The rough draft for peer review is due December 3rd, to be emailed to your peer reviewer and to me.
   • Peer review comments are due December 8th.
   • The final paper is due December 15th, 5 pm (submit via email).

Class Policies

In addition to the relevant departmental and university policies, there are policies which apply specifically to this class.

Assessment.
   • All written assignments will be submitted via email; I will return written assignments with comments and feedback via email.
   • Attendance and Leading class discussion will occur synchronously via Zoom. Technology-related excuses are not accepted as a legitimate excuse for missing class or not leading the assigned class discussion.
   • Late papers and assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each calendar day past the due date until they are received.
• **Incompletes (final paper).** I do not give incompletes unless circumstances are truly exceptional (for example, "exceptional circumstances" does not include having multiple other deadlines). If you have a health or family emergency, an incomplete will be given (after we consult in person) for a duration of three months, at which point if the paper has not been turned in, the incomplete will become an F. Students who do not turn in the final paper on time for any other reason can expect to receive a failing grade immediately, which can be converted to a different grade at a later date when the paper is submitted (with a letter-grade penalty for missing the original deadline).

**Classroom environment, technology.** As a courtesy to your classmates and to help us establish presence and to foster a more lively and engaging discussion, keep your camera on for our Zoom classes.

**Classroom environment, inclusion and respect.** It is the responsibility of each class member to maintain an inclusive and supportive environment for discussion. I expect hard-hitting critiques of ideas and arguments combined with a supportive and collegial stance toward the other members of the class.

**Appropriate use of course materials**
Sharing course materials with anyone outside of the class is a violation of intellectual property per Item 6 of the [U of M policy on student responsibilities](#).

**Academic integrity.** Students are expected to complete coursework with fairness and honesty. Scholastic dishonesty is a violation of the [Student Conduct Code](#) and may result in disciplinary action and/or a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the entire course. Per Section F of the [U of M policy on instructor responsibilities](#), I am required to report all instances of scholastic dishonesty, even if inadvertent, to the [Office for Community Standards](#).

**Sexual misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting, and in this class we will have zero tolerance for such behavior.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include [The Aurora Center](#), [Boynton Mental Health](#), and [Student Counseling Services](#).

**Equal access and opportunity.** Per the [U of M policy on equity, diversity, equal opportunity and affirmative action](#), the University will provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
Disability accommodations. If you have, or believe you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact me during the first week of classes to discuss how the accommodations will be applied in this course. If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations, please contact your access consultant/disability specialist.
Class Schedule

SOC 8790 – Religion and Society
Fall 2020

I. Theoretical Approaches

Sept. 10

Week 1. The Current Landscape – Overview


Recommended:


Sept. 17

Week 2. The Weberian Approach – A Substantive Definition of Religion.


Recommended:

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Sects in America and the Uniqueness of Western Rationalism*  
See supplemental list – look at Martin Riesebrodt’s book and work engaging with it.

**Sept. 24**  
Week 3. The Power of The Sacred and the Church as Moral Community  

--“Introduction” (note, before Book 1)  
-- Book 1, Chapter 1 (“Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion”)  
-- Book 2, Chapter 1 (“The Principle Totemic Beliefs: The Totem as Name and Emblem”)  
-- Book 2, Chapter 6 (“Origins of these Beliefs, Continued”)  
-- Book 2, Chapter 7 (“Origins of these Beliefs, Conclusion”)  
-- “Conclusion” (note, after Book 3)  

-- Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 4, Conclusion  

**Recommended:**  


**Oct. 1**  
Week 4. Religion as Practice  


Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Religion as a Cultural System.” Chapter 4 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.  

**Recommended:**  


**Oct. 8**  
Week 5. Market Approaches and Their Critics  

Introduction, Parts 1 and 4.

*Recommended:*


**Reminder: Last Date to Obtain Approval for using final paper to fulfill a program requirement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oct. 15</th>
<th>Week 6. Secularization? Historical Takes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Recommended:*


|---------|----------------------------------------|

*Recommended:*


**Reminder: Paper Topic Statements Due via Email before Class Meeting**
II. Studying Religion in a Reconfigured Terrain


*Recommended:*


Nov. 5 Week 9. Interrogating Assumptions about Religion and Well-being.


*Recommended:*


Nov. 12 Week 10. *Religion and the Politics of National Identity in the Contemporary United States Secularized*

Delehanty, Jack, Penny Edgell, and Evan Stewart. 2019. “Christian America?


*Recommended:*


Nov. 19  
Week 11. *An Intersectional Approach to Religion and Race*

Yuckich, Grace and Penny Edgell, eds. *Religion is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Read in order:
-- Introduction, pp. 1-18
-- Chapter 3 by Sikivu Hutchinson, pp. 58-73
-- Chapter 2 by Omar McRoberts pp. 40-58
-- Chapter 4 by Rhys Williams pp. 74-94
-- Chapter 9 by Jaime Kucinskas, pp. 178-200

*Recommended:*


Nov. 26  
**No Class, Happy Thanksgiving!**

Dec. 3  
Week 12. *Lived Religion -- Muslims in the United States*


Recommended:

Dec. 10

**Week 13. Gender and Religious/Nonreligious Experiences**


**Recommended:**


**THANKS FOR JOINING THE DISCUSSION THIS SEMESTER!**
Supplemental Bibliography

Theoretical Syntheses and Updates on or Critiques of Classical Approaches


On Ritual, and Sacred and Profane:


McGuire, Meredith. Ritual Healing in Suburban America, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10.


Beyond “Religion” -- Spirituality, Magic, Nonreligious Cosmologies, and More


**On Secularization:**


On the Religious Economy:


Religion and Politics:


*Measurement, Method, and Reflections on the Field*


*American Religion*


*Immigration & Immigrants:*


*Culture Wars:*


*The Black Church and the African-American Religious Experience*:


*Religion, Gender, Family, Sexuality*


