

**Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College**

**Wendy Cadge
Assistant Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Bowdoin College**

The Context:

Bowdoin College is a highly selective private liberal arts college in Brunswick, Maine. The college has 170 faculty members and about 1650 undergraduates from across the United States and several other countries, almost all of whom come to the College directly from high school. The majority of students have strong academic records (more than 80% of the first year class in 2004-2005 graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class), high standardized test scores, and strong motivations to succeed. Total fees for tuition, room, and board in 2004-2005 were \$39,680, and 42% of students received financial aid in 2003-2004.

This course is taught in the Sociology and Anthropology Department. The only course pre-requisite is Introduction to Sociology, which means that the course can and does include everyone from first year students who have taken one sociology course previously to seniors who are sociology majors. The majority of students in the class are usually sophomores and juniors, about half of whom are sociology majors. Some of these students have no formal exposure to the academic study of religion while others have taken several courses in the religion department. The number of students in the course can range from ten to thirty-five. A wide range of religious traditions are represented at the College and in this course, and no one traditional dominates. The course tends to attract students with strong personal religious backgrounds, those who are seeking, and those who are skeptical about religion and are interested in using sociological tools to grapple with their skepticism.

The course is designed to introduce students to the sociological study of religion and to various ways of conceiving of religion and assessing its presence and significance in public and private dimensions of American life. Questions that run throughout the course include: how to define religion (and the implications of various definitions), how to conceptualize and measure it (and the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches), and how to conceptualize the relationship between various parts of American society where religion is (and is not) present. I assume students have very little knowledge of American religious history and introduce them to the material needed to understand different sections of the course as it unfolds over the course of the semester. By the end of the course, I want students to understand the multiple ways sociologists conceive of religion (and the implications of these different approaches), to be able to gather and systematically analyze information about religion in American life (and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of so doing), and to have a stronger base of knowledge based on their readings, films, and field visits, about the content and practice of several different religious traditions.

Course Description:

This course introduces the tools and concepts central to the sociological study of religion. We ask what religion is, how it is present and influential in contemporary American public and private life, and how the boundaries of public and private are constructed and contested in relation to religion. Specific attention is devoted to people's religious *practices*, religious *communities*, and the *identities* people develop through their religious traditions. Central to this course are a series of assignments that ask you to select a particular religious tradition and map its contours, examine how its practitioners are involved in public life, and learn about practitioners' religious identities and communities in the United States. Readings, lectures, and course discussions are drawn from the range of religious traditions practiced in the United States.

Course Readings:

The following required books are available in the college bookstore.

- Ammerman, Nancy. 1987. *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hammond, Phillip E. 1998. *With Liberty for All. Freedom of Religion in the United States*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1992. *Rediscovering the Sacred: Perspectives on Religion in Contemporary Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

These books are also on reserve in the College Library. All other required course readings are available on-line via the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library.

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** I think of the professor-student relationship as a contract. I take my commitment to you as a teacher very seriously and expect you to take your commitment as a student seriously as well. As a result, I expect you to attend every class and to be on time. Your class attendance comprises 5% of your final grade and your class participation 5%. Everyone starts with a class attendance grade of an A. If you miss one class you will earn a B, two classes a C, three classes a D and four or more classes an F. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you speak with me about at least one month before the holiday. If you are too ill to attend class, I will excuse the absence only if you bring me a note from the Health Center. You are encouraged not only to attend class but to raise

questions and comments. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, I strongly encourage you to post questions or comments to the class email list.

2. Reading: It is essential for you to keep up with the reading and to read actively. Active reading means taking notes as you read, making a list of questions you have as you read, and reading far enough ahead that you have a chance not only to read but to **think** about what you have read. I expect that you will have read each week's readings for our first class meeting of the week (Tuesday) unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus.

3. Written Assignments: The written assignments in this class include two short papers (5-7 pages), two field reports (length will range) and a final paper (10-12 pages). In consultation with me and your classmates, you will select a religious tradition at the beginning of the semester and will complete the first two paper assignments about that tradition. One field report will be based on a visit to a religious center in that tradition and your final paper will also be about that tradition. I strongly encourage you to select a religion that you do not currently practice.

Paper #1: Organization and Demographics (5-7 pages). This assignment asks you to provide a very brief history (about one page) of the religious tradition you selected and to summarize the central beliefs of the tradition (about one page). You will also explain how the tradition is organized in the United States (i.e. into congregations, parishes, separate unrelated groups, etc.) and where these groups are located across the United States with reference to the religious restructuring that has taken place across the United States since 1965. You will also be asked to estimate the number of people who practice this religious tradition in the United States. More details about this assignment will be distributed on September 11. The paper is due on **October 2**.

Paper #2: Religion and Public Life (5-7 pages). Many religious organizations and practitioners are involved in public life and this assignment asks you to discover how the religious tradition you are studying is so involved and how that involvement compares to other religious traditions, based on class readings. Many groups have religious lobbying organizations in Washington D.C., have filed amicus curie briefs with the Supreme Court, and / or lobby about local or national issues. You will be asked to describe in detail one issue around which your group has taken public action. More details about this assignment will be distributed by October 14. The paper is due on **October 30**.

Two Field Reports (Lengths will vary). You will write **two** field reports this semester based on your visits to two different religious organizations in the Brunswick and Portland areas. One of these visits will be to a religious center in the tradition you are focusing on and the second will be based on your visit to a center in another religious tradition. Your field report is due to me **one week** after each field visit. Detailed guidelines for your visits, expectations for field reports, and samples of field reports will be distributed at the beginning of the semester

Final Paper (10-15 pages). Your final paper will be a traditional research paper or will focus on one main theme or question that you were struck by at the center you visited in your selected religious tradition. Your report should connect this theme to class readings and discussions. What can you learn about this theme and about the religious tradition you are examining from the center you visited? You cannot include everything in your report, so the goal is to identify a theme and then provide evidence from your field report, class readings and class discussions to teach your reader something about the theme and the religious tradition. Please see me about the theme for your final paper before you begin to write it. I expect that the theme for your final paper will be worked out collaboratively in conversation with me and your classmates. The paper is due on **December 11.**

I place a high premium on careful research and clear organization and writing. I will spend time in class talking about how to do each of these assignments. I will read drafts of your papers and provide feedback, so long as you get them to me at least three days before they are due. I will also accept rewrites of papers for up to one week after I return them. Rewriting a paper does not guarantee a higher grade but you will not get a lower grade than the grade you received initially. I expect you to properly cite and references all sources you use in each assignments. We will discuss when and how to cite sources in detail when the first paper assignment is distributed. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to raise them.

****All of your papers are due at the beginning of class on each of these due dates. Papers turned in to me after the beginning of class are late. You will lose one full letter grade for each 24 hours after the due date the assignment is turned in. Your field reports are due by 5pm seven days after the field visit (i.e. If you make a field visit on Saturday October 6, your field report is due to me by 5pm on Saturday October 13. Field reports can be emailed to me). ****

There will be no final exam. I reserve the right to schedule a final exam, however, if you are not keeping up with class readings.

5. Grading: Final Grades will be based on your class attendance (5%) and active class participation (5%), paper #1 (15%), paper #2 (15%), field report 1 (15%), field report 2 (15%) final report (25%) and oral presentation about your final report (5%). The grading scale, as outlined by the College in the Course Catalogue (p. 30-31) is as follows:

A: “the student has mastered the material of the course and has demonstrated exceptional critical skills and originality.”

B: “the student has demonstrated a thorough and above average understanding of the material of the course.”

C: the student has demonstrated a thorough and satisfactory understanding of the material of the course.”

D: “the student has demonstrated a marginally satisfactory understanding of the basic material of the course.”

*For the personal use of teachers. Not for sale or redistribution.
©Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, 2005*

F: “the student has not demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the basic materials of the course.”

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

Course Outline:

I. The “Social Scientific” Study of Religion?

September 4: Introductions

- Wuthnow, Robert. “Is There a Place for ‘Scientific’ Studies of Religion?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. January 24, 2003.

Week 1. September 9, 11: Theoretical Approaches to Religion

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Religion as a Cultural System.” P. 87-125 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wilson, John. 1988. “The Sociological Study of American Religion.” P. 17-30 in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams. Eds. *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*. New York: Scribner’s Sons.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1992. *Rediscovering the Sacred: Perspectives on Religion in Contemporary Society*. (Introduction, c. 1 “Sacredness and Everyday Life,” c. 2 “The Cultural Dimension”)

*Paper Assignment # 1 Distributed: **Due October 2***

II. Religious Pluralism in America

Week 2. September 16, 18: A Nation of “Religious” Immigrants

- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*. (c. 2 “Heritage and Vision,” c. 3 “A Vision of Promise and Peril”)
- Eck, Diana L. 2001. *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become America’s Most Diverse Nation*. New York: HarperCollins. (c. 1 “Introduction to a New Religious America,” c. 2 “From Many One”).

Week 3. September 23, 25: Developing a Sociological Map

- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (c. 1 “The Question of Restructuring,” c. 4 “Conscience and Conviction in Public Life,” c. 5 “The Declining Significance of Denominationalism,” c. 7 “The Great Divide: Toward Religious Realignment”)
- Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*. 98(5): p. 1044-1093.

- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California. (c. 9 “Religion”)

III. Religion in American Public Life

Week 4. September 30, October 2: Public Religion and Civil Religion

Tuesday September 30:

- Casanova, Jose. 2003. “What is a Public Religion?” P. 111-140 in Hugh Heclo and Wilfred McClay Eds. *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Heclo, Hugh. 2003. “An Introduction to Religion and Public Policy.” P. 3-30 in Hugh Heclo and Wilfred McClay Eds. *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thursday October 2:

- Bellah, Robert. 1970. *Belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world*. New York: Harper & Row. (c. 9 “Civil Religion in America”)

In class on Thursday we will read and discuss the first and most recent presidential inaugural addresses. I will provide copies of these addresses in class:

- Washington, George. 1789. First Inaugural Address.
http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/american_originals/inaugtxt.html
- Bush, George W. 2001. Inaugural Address.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/inaugural-address.html>

****Paper #1 Due Today****

Week 5. October 7, 9: The Separation of Church and State

Tuesday October 7:

- Hammond, Phillip E. 1998. *With Liberty for All. Freedom of Religion in the United States*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Thursday October 9:

- A Case Study in Free Exercise: *Wisconsin V. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972). Please read the full decision.

Establishment Cases:

Wallace v. Jaffree (1985) – prayer / moment of silence in schools

Lee v. Weiman (1992) – clergy speaking at high school graduations

Free Exercise Cases:

Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) – Amish parents challenging compulsory education law

Employment Division v. Smith – peyote case
Church of the Lukumi v. Hialeah (1993) – Santeria animal sacrifice

Week 6. October 14, 16: Religion and Social Service

- Skocpol, Theda. 2000. “Religion, Civil Society, and Social Provision in the U.S.” in Bane, Mary Jo et al Eds. *Who Will Provide: The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*. Boulder: WestviewPress.
- Chaves, Mark. 1999. “Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of ‘Charitable Choice’?” *American Sociological Review* 64:836-46.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 2000. “Linkages Between Churches and Faith-Based Organizations.” A Report to the Aspen Institute.
- Schneider, Jo Anne and Michael Foley. 2003. “Immigrant Churches and Immigrant Social Services: NonProfit and Congregation Connections in Washington DC.” Working Paper. Available at:
http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/docs/events/2003_spring_research_conference/schneider.pdf

*Paper Assignment # 2 Distributed: **Due October 30***

Week 7. October 21, 23: Religion and Public Advocacy

Tuesday October 21: No Class (Fall Break)

Thursday October 23:

- Fowler, Robert, Allen D. Hertzke and Laura Olson. 1999. “The Politics of Organized Religious Groups.” P. 54-86 in *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture and Strategic Choices*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Morris, Aldon. 1996. “The Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement: the SCLC as the Decentralized Radical Arm of the Black Church. in Christian Smith Ed. *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*. New York: Routledge.
- Berrien, Jenny and Christopher Winship. 2000. “Should We Have Faith in the Churches? The Ten Point Coalition’s Effect on Boston’s Youth Violence.” In Bernard Harcourt Ed. *Guns, Crime and Punishment in America*. New York: New York University Press.

IV. Religion in American Private Life (via Religious Institutions)

Week 8. October 28, 30: Inside Religious Institutions: Christian Fundamentalists

- Ammerman, Nancy. 1987. *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. (c. 1-8. c. 11).

Recommended:

- Talbot, Margaret. "A Mighty Fortress." *The New York Times Magazine* (Cover Story). February 27, 2000.

****Paper #2 Due Today (Thursday October 30)****

Week 9. November 4, 6: Inside Religious Institutions: Jewish Women

- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (c. 1-6)

Week 10. November 11, 13: Inside Religious Institutions: Post-1965 Immigrants

- Ebaugh, Helen Rose and Janet Saltzman Chafetz. 2000. *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*. New York: AltaMira Press. (c. 17 "Structural Adaptations to the Immigrant Context")
- Carolyn Chen. forthcoming. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigrants Converting to Evangelical Christianity and Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (Selections to be announced and made available)
- Levitt, Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (c. 6 "'When God is Everywhere:' Religious Life Across Borders")
- Kurien, Prema. 2002. "'We are Better Hindus Here' Religion and Ethnicity Among Indian Americans." P. 99-120 in Jung Ha Kim and Pyong Gap Min Eds. *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*. New York: AltaMira.

Week 11. November 18, 20: On the Margins? Religious and Sexual Identities

- Cadge, Wendy. 2002. "Vital Conflicts: The Mainline Protestant Denominations Debate Homosexuality." P. 265-286 In Robert Wuthnow and John Evans Eds. *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Warner, R. Stephen. 1995. "The Metropolitan Community Churches and the Gay Agenda: The Power of Pentacostalism and Essentialism." *Religion and the Social Order*. P. 81-108.
- Gray, Edward and Scott Thumma. 1997. "The Gospel Hour: Liminality, Identity, and Religion in a Gay Bar." P. 79-98 In Penny Edgell Becker and Nancy Eisland. Eds. *Contemporary American Religion: An Ethnographic Reader*. London: Alta Mira Press.
- Griffin, Horace. 2000. "Their Own Received Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches." P. 110-121 In Delroy, Constantine-Simms Ed. 2001. *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*. New York: Alyson Publications.

V. Religion in Everyday Life (Outside of Religious Institutions)

Week 12. November 25, 27: Lived Religion

Tuesday November 25:

- Orsi, Robert. 1997. "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion." P. 3-21 in David Hall Ed. *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gould, Rebecca Kneale. 1997. "Getting (Not Too) Close to Nature: Modern Homesteading as Lived Religion in America." P. 217-242 in David Hall Ed. *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thursday November 27 No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 13. December 2, 4: A Case Study

December 2, 4:

- Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 1-5 and Appendix)

VI. Religion in Maine - Your Turn

Week 14. December 9, 11:

- Short presentations of your final papers and discussion of what you have learned through your research this semester.

****Field Reports Due Today (Thursday December 11) ****

**Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College**

**Paper #1: The History, Teachings, Organization, and
Demographics of a Religious in America**

This assignment asks you to examine the history, teachings and organization of the religious tradition you have decided to focus your written work on in this class this semester. After selecting your tradition, please write a 5-7 page (double-spaced) paper that answers the following questions:

1. What is the history of this tradition in the United States? When did it arrive? Where and how did it arrive? Most traditions arrived at different times and in different pieces so please focus here on the most important arrivals. (approximately 2 pages)
2. What are the basic teachings of this tradition? (approximately 2 pages)
3. How is this tradition organized in the United States? Into congregations? Parishes? Mosques? Temples? Are these smaller organizations linked together into larger organizations like denominations at the regional or national level? Estimate how many centers there are in this tradition at different levels in the United States. (one half to one page)
4. Estimate how many people practice this religious tradition in the United States. If they tend to be located in a particular geographic region or share other social or demographic characteristics (like sex, race, age, country of origin) please mention these as well. (one half to one page)

You need to include a great deal of information in this paper so it is important that you write concisely. Think of (or look at) an encyclopedia entry as an example of how to do this. The purpose of the paper is for you to learn about the history and general organization of the tradition and to learn about the background needed for you to understand what is happening at the religious center you will visit.

Please consult at least four different books or articles in preparing this paper. In addition to these four, you may consult web pages. Read web pages with a bit of skepticism, however, and look for a second source to verify what you have learned on the web. Also, do not rely exclusively on materials written by members of the tradition itself. A list of helpful reference materials follows. Please be careful to cite and document all of the reference materials and sources you use following social scientific conventions described on the library webpage. We will have a library orientation in class on Tuesday September 23.

The paper is due at the beginning of class on **October 2**.

Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College

Paper #2: Religion in American Public Life

After visiting the United States in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville described religion in the States writing, “Religion in America, takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions...” (*Democracy in America* 1848). This religiosity remains a central component of American life. We have spent the past several weeks discussing the different ways it informs American public life via civil religion, church and state issues, social service, and public advocacy.

Please write a 5-7 page paper in which you define public religion and develop a typology for thinking about the different ways religion informs American public life. Start with the three domains (institutional, behavioral, philosophical) Hugh Heclo describes in his article, “An Introduction to Religion and Public Policy,” and point out the strengths and weaknesses of this way of thinking about religion in American public life. Illustrate Heclo’s typology (or your own improved version) with at least three examples of how people and organizations in the religious tradition you are examining in this class are involved in public life in Maine. Draw these examples from primary source documents, preferably written rather than electronic sources.

To locate primary sources, I would suggest that you rely primarily on the archives of the *Portland Press Herald*. To access the archive, search “Portland Press Herald Online” in the library’s card catalogue. Think broadly about the kinds of things that can illustrate your typology. If you have trouble locating relevant examples, please let me know.

This paper is due at the beginning of class on **October 30**.

Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College

Field Report Guidelines

You will write two field reports this semester based on your visits to two different religious centers. One center must be in the religious tradition you are focusing on in your written work for this class this semester. The second visit must be to a center in a religious tradition that someone else in the class is examining. We will visit these centers as a group. Details will follow about our departure times and locations.

Guidelines for Visiting

We will talk in class about the ethical issues involved in visiting and doing research at religious centers, and I want you to think carefully about these issues before our visits. It is important that you treat the people you meet at these centers with respect, you are their guest! But at the same time you are under no obligation to do anything (praying, chanting, etc.) that you do not feel comfortable with during your visit.

Guidelines for what to wear to a center vary depending on the religious tradition and the people who attend. As a sign of respect, it is generally appropriate to dress up a bit (no jeans or sneakers). Depending on the tradition, you might have to remove your shoes or cover your head when you visit. Watch what other people are doing and do likewise!

When you visit each center I encourage you to notice (and take notes if possible) about the following:

1. Demographics: What are the ages, sexes, races, and social classes of the people present? Do people who are attending differ from the leaders in some way? Do people attend as individuals? With their friends? With family members?
2. Physical Setting: What do the physical spaces look like? Are they large or small? Plain or ornate? Rented or owned? Shared or not? How are people dressed? Are the leaders and participants dressed differently? What sorts of props are there? Tables? Chairs? Microphones? Musical instruments? Religious texts? Symbols like crosses or Buddha images? Containers for money collections?
3. Description of Events:
 - How long is the whole gathering? Segments of the gathering?
 - What are the number and ordering of the segments? Songs, prayers, chants, testimonies, standing, kneeling, etc.
 - Who participates and how? How diffuse is the leadership? How many leaders? How do participants participate?
 - Tone and style of speech? Is the language vernacular or “churchly” or “priestly?” Is stylized language used?

4. Content of message: Be cautious here. Listen more than ask and don't get "snowed" by a preacher or activist. Read carefully anything that is passed out, read the words of the hymns, listen to the words of the prayers or teachings. Don't take everything literally but:
 - Look for "doctrine," especially the conception of the relationship between the "sacred" (or spiritual, godly, or supernatural) and the "secular" (or profane of everyday) world. Is the relationship close or distant, warm or cold, comforting or threatening?
 - What are the subjects that are being taught about? If you didn't know anything about this religious tradition what would you leave this gathering thinking that they care about? Are they talking about themselves? Other people? Particular issues?
 - How do you feel being at this event? What makes you feel this way?

Following Your Visit

As soon as possible after your visit (preferably as soon as you get home), it is essential that you write detailed notes about your visit. These notes will become your field report and are a summary of what you observed. When they are doing research, sociologists write field reports to systematically remember and keep track of what happened at the places they do research over the weeks and months they are "in the field." Your field report should be a description of the events and people you met at the center. You should answer the questions above in your field report and also include mention of other things of interest that happened at the center. At the end of your summary of the events, you should write a few paragraphs that include your personal reaction and thoughts about what you observed. You should also write a few paragraphs of analysis in which you begin to think about questions (based on the visit, class readings, and class discussion) that you have and would like to know more about. The length of your field reports will vary but it is not unusual for a field report from a one hour visit to a religious center to be at least 5-6 pages single spaced. I will distribute a sample field report from my own research in class.

Your field reports are due by 5pm seven days after the field visit (i.e. If you make a field visit on Saturday October 6, your field report is due to me by 5pm on Saturday October 13. Field reports can be emailed to me).

(Much of this document is based on "The Protocol: Some Things to Look for in Religious Events" written by R. Stephen Warner, University of Illinois at Chicago).

**Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College**

Final Paper and Oral Report Guidelines for Papers Based on Site Visits

Your final paper (of 10-15 pages) will focus on one main theme or question that you were struck by at the center you visited in your selected religious tradition. Your report should connect this theme to class readings and discussions. What can you learn about this theme and about the religious tradition you are examining from the center you visited? You cannot include everything in your report, so the goal is to identify a theme and then provide evidence from your field report, class readings and class discussions to teach your reader something about the theme and the religious tradition.

To decide on this theme, you might start by brainstorming about how the two centers you visited this semester were similar and different. How did the demographics, teachings, and activities at each center compare? Would people at one of the centers fit in at the other? Why or why not? Look closely at the main sermon, homily, dharma talk or teaching you heard at both centers. Think about who delivered it, where that person stood or sat in the room, and what they said. What can you learn about your selected religious tradition from that teaching? Or from who was listening to it? How is this similar or different from what you learned about your selected religious tradition in papers one and two?

For example: I visit a Buddhist temple and a Methodist church. My selected religious tradition is the United Methodist Church so I am writing my final paper about the Methodist Church I visited. I noted during my visit that the Methodist Church had two flags at the front – the first one an American flag and the second what someone there told me was the United Methodist Church flag. The minister praised George Bush in the sermon and at the coffee hour after church I overheard a few people making comments about issues in current politics. I noticed flyers on several bulletin boards about political events taking place in the community. At the Buddhist temple there was no American flag or discussion of current events. This reminds me of what I read in class about religion in American public life and what I learned about how the United Methodist church is involved in public life when I was writing paper two. The theme I identify for my paper is how people at the United Methodist Church I visited and United Methodists in the United States more broadly think and talk about American politics in their local congregations

I then outline my final paper as follows:

1. State the question: How do people think and talk about politics at United Methodist churches in the United States?

2. Explain why this question is important (i.e. class readings and discussions have shown that religion influences how people vote, how they think about different political issues, etc.)
3. Explain what I did to gather information to answer this question (no more than one page)
4. Provide evidence from the church I visited and possibly from other sources that shows that the ways United Methodists talk about political issues. Also include information from paper #2 that shows that the United Methodist denomination teaches particular things about involvement in American political life.
5. Explain, based on class readings, why United Methodists are involved in politics as they are (i.e. is it because of the demographics of this congregation? the interests of the leaders? how the leaders interpret Christian teachings? the location of the church? Provide evidence to support these interpretations when possible).
6. Clearly state in the conclusion what I learned about my question from #1 above this semester.

I encourage you to come and see me during my office hours to talk about possible themes and outlines for your paper. It is very important that your final paper brings together evidence from class readings and discussions as well as from your visits.

Your oral presentations will take place during the last week of class. Plan to speak for about 10 minutes about the topic and substance of your final paper. I will say more about this closer to the time.

Final Paper Due **December 11**

**Religion in American Life: A Sociological Approach
Sociology 229
Bowdoin College**

Final Paper Guidelines for Research Papers

Final research papers based primarily on library rather than field research should link to class readings and discussions or to your visits to religious centers as appropriate. This link might be something as simple as a sentence or two that says something like, “Many religious organizations are involved in social service efforts in the United States (cites from class readings on the topic). I examine how Mormon schools for children were started and how their teaching styles and educational goals compare to Christian Fundamentalist schools as described by Nancy Ammerman in *Bible Believers*. I argue...”

I would suggest organizing your paper as follows:

Introduction (1-2 pages). First state the topic of your paper and briefly situate this topic in terms of the topics and questions covered during this course. By the end of the second paragraph it is essential that you have told me what the purpose of your paper is and what your central argument / thesis is. If you read the first two paragraphs of your paper and the goals and purpose of the paper are not very clear, please revise. I would also suggest a “map” paragraph at the end of the introduction that tells me where we will be going in the paper. (For example, “I first explain....then argue....by presenting evidence about three themes....”)

Body (8-10 pages). In this section please present and development your argument by providing several distinct pieces of information / evidence in support of it.

If there is any relevant background to explain about your thesis / argument present that first. (For example, those of you writing about boundaries will need a few paragraphs here about what you mean by the term boundary. Or those of you writing about women and Islam might want to have a brief paragraph or two here about the history of women in the Muslim tradition). This section is not essential for everyone. You need to decide whether it is necessary to help your reader(s) understand. Think of your audience as me and other people in the class.

If much of your paper is based on the analysis of primary sources (newspapers, web pages, etc.), please be sure to explain how you located them (i.e. what your method was).

Then develop your argument by clearly presenting the evidence you have gathered in support of it. If you are comparing two or more traditions, this section will be organized around the themes around which you are doing the comparison. There are two ways to structure a compare and contrast paper. Pick the one that works best for you.

Theme 1
Tradition A

Tradition B

Theme 2

Tradition A

Tradition B

etc.

Or

Tradition A

Theme 1

Theme 2

Tradition B

Theme 1

Theme 2

etc.

Feel free to use section headings in this section and throughout the paper if it helps you organize your thoughts and presentation.

Conclusion (1-2 pages): By this point, your argument and all of your evidence should be clearly presented. Briefly summarize your argument here and think about what the implications of your argument are more broadly. If your findings raise questions about other topics covered in this class, please make those connections briefly here. If you have concluded, after writing this paper, that you want to know more about your topic, explain what the next steps might be. etc.

****After you have finished writing your paper, go back and read the introduction, the first sentence of each of your paragraphs, and your conclusion. From this, the point of your paper should be very clear. If parts of your argument are embedded in the middle of other paragraphs (so you don't see them when doing this little test), restructure your paragraphs. Also make sure that you don't conclude something that contradicts or is very different from what you say in the introduction. After finishing their first draft, most people need to take the conclusion to their paper and use it to rewrite their introduction!**

If you want me to help you make a more specific outline / list of questions to answer in your paper, please let me know. I am happy to work with you on this.