

# Religious Pluralism and the Politics of Difference

AMCULT 103: First-Year Seminar

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Prof. Melissa Borja (she/her)  
Email: mborja@umich.edu

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The U.S. is more multireligious than ever before, and Americans are often eager to proclaim their commitment to religious freedom and their respect for religious diversity. However, religious intolerance and hostility continue to be a problem in the United States, and religious difference remains a source of conflict. This first-year seminar explores the possibilities and perils of American religious pluralism, with attention to the changing religious demographics in the U.S. and the evolving ways that diverse Americans have attempted to live peaceably across boundaries of religious difference. Considering both historical and contemporary examples, this course considers religious pluralism in relation to several other aspects of American life, including immigration; race and racism; law, politics, and public policy; popular culture; economic life; health; and family. Moreover, this course introduces students to fundamental issues in religious studies—in particular, the contested meaning of “religion” and its implications for the academic study of religion, as well as the pursuit of justice and freedom in the U.S. today.

As a seminar, this course centers primarily on class discussion and thoughtful analysis of scholarly and popular culture materials. Other activities may include short writing assignments, film screenings, field trips, and projects to document and analyze the demographic realities and local practices of religious pluralism in southeastern Michigan, especially at the University of Michigan.

## LEARNING GOALS AND ASSESSMENT

This seminar has three primary goals:

- 1. To introduce you to the study of religion and to develop your knowledge of religious pluralism in the U.S.**
- 2. To develop your skills in college research, reading, and writing.** During this class, you will learn how to do the following:
  - A. Read secondary sources for argument
  - B. Analyze primary sources

- C. Create bibliographies and manage reading notes
- D. Use the U-M library system
- E. Write literature reviews
- F. Conduct oral history interviews
- G. Write analytical essays

**3. To build skills that are important for college success.** Designed specifically for first-year students, this course will teach you how to do the following:

- A. Navigate U-M's campus and use its resources
- B. Get to know your professors
- C. Make use of office hours
- D. Participate in class discussions
- E. Take notes
- F. Give and receive peer feedback

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There are five components of the final grade, and they will be weighted as follows:

1. Campus scavenger hunt – 5%
2. Proposal for class project – 5%
3. Annotated bibliography for class project – 5%
4. Literature review essay for class project – 10%
5. Proposal for oral history interview – 5%
6. Oral history interview – recording, forms, and transcription – 20%
7. Final essay rough drafts – 10%
8. Final essay final drafts – 15%
9. Participation - 25%

**Assignment #1: campus scavenger hunt.** This assignment will help acquaint you with important resources on campus, including the Sweetland Center for Writing, Shapiro Library, CAPS, University Health Service, and Prof. Borja's office.

**Assignment #2: proposal for class project.** In this 2-page assignment, you will briefly describe the topic and central questions that you would like to explore in your semester-long class project.

**Assignment #3: annotated bibliography.** For this assignment, you will create an annotated bibliography of five scholarly books and articles that relate to the topic of your class project.

**Assignment #4: literature review essay.** For this 5-6-page essay, you will discuss the readings in from your annotated bibliography and offer an overview of the scholarship on the topic of your class project.

**Assignment #5: proposal for oral history interview.** In this 2-page assignment, you will briefly describe the individual you would like to interview for your oral history assignment, your rationale for choosing that individual, and your timeline for completing the oral history.

**Assignment #6: oral history interview.** This interview must be at least 45 minutes in length, recorded digitally, and conducted according to the standards of the Oral History Association. This interview must relate to the topic of the literature review essay. A complete interview must include the following: a digital recording of the interview, a full transcription of the interview, completed release and consent forms, and (if relevant) completed donation forms.

**Assignment #7: rough draft of final essay.** In this 8-10-page essay, you will do a careful analysis of your oral history interview and relate it to the scholarly literature you read for assignment #4, as well as to the themes of the course. You will share your rough drafts to get feedback from your peers at the “workshop” held during week #14.

**Assignment #8: final draft of the final essay.** For this assignment, you will offer a fully revised and polished essay that analyzes your oral history interview and relates it to the scholarly literature and to the themes of the course. You must provide a cover page that describes how you incorporated the feedback from your peers and submit the final draft together with the rough draft that you submitted for Assignment #7.

**Assignment #9: participation.** This part of the class is, by far, the most important. As with other American Culture courses, this course requires a fair amount of reading. It is extremely important that you come to class prepared, having read both the secondary and primary source texts. I will post readings as PDFs or web links on the class Canvas site.

Each student will be responsible for leading class discussion on the assigned readings at least once in the semester. Students will sign up for leading discussion on the first day of class. Leading discussion involves offering a brief (10 minute) introduction about the texts, highlighting central issues and themes, posing questions to class, and facilitating a thoughtful (20 minute) conversation about the readings and their connection to the topic of the day.

It is very important that we establish a supportive community that can be a home base for all of you as you think critically about the complex problems we will discuss this semester. This class demands active and constant participation by every student. Doing the readings and assignments is vital to your success in this class, and responding to your peers will help you to get to know one another better and give all of us the chance to avail ourselves of your critical thinking and particular forms of expertise. Also, all interactions – whether face-to-face or online – should be respectful and caring, no matter what your perception is of someone else’s written comments.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for creating an environment in which everyone can learn and feel enriched by our time together. With this collaboration as a goal, full participation means that all of us make the effort to do the following:

1. To share our own thoughts, reflections, and questions about the course topics;
2. To listen to one another and create space for others to share;
3. To speak and behave respectfully toward everyone who enters our learning environment;
4. To prepare for each class session by completing all assigned readings and other assignments;
5. To engage authentically in the assignments and activities we do in class;
6. To allow our fellow learners to avail themselves of our expertise;
7. To ask for help when it is needed and encourage others to do the same; and
8. To arrive on time to class and be in attendance for each session.

During and at the end of the semester, I will give you an opportunity to reflect on these eight aspects of participation: presence, preparation, listening, sharing thoughts and ideas, behaving respectfully, reaching out for help, sharing expertise, and authentic engagement.

I welcome your constructive feedback along the way and seek to be a flexible guide, mentor, and facilitator. And, like you, I look forward to learning much in our collective space.

Please exchange contact information with at least 2-3 other members of the class so that you can reach out to your peers to catch you up in the event that you miss a class. I will not be responsible for helping students make up missed content.

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

### I. CITATIONS AND PLAGIARISM

For all written assignments, you must cite your sources properly, using MLA, Chicago Manual of Style, or Turabian formats. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for that assignment and the possibility of further disciplinary action. Please take time to review the university's standards and policies on academic integrity:

<https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html>. The University Library and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching has developed useful resources to guide students in avoiding plagiarism and putting ideals of academic integrity into practice:

<https://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity/resources-students>. If you have any questions, please discuss your concerns with the professor.

### II. SUBMITTING WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit written assignments electronically by 11:59 p.m. on the night of the due date. Please put your name and the title of the assignment in the subject line of the email and label your file with your last name.

### III. LATE POLICY

Late assignments will lose 10% for each day late. I will not accept any assignments more than one week after the initial due date.

### IV. WRITING ASSISTANCE

If you seek extra support in your writing assignments, I encourage you to meet with me to discuss your arguments, research approaches, sources, and outlines. In addition, I encourage you to share drafts of writing assignments with peers and to avail of the resources at the Sweetland Center for Writing: <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/>.

## **V. EVALUATING WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

I will evaluate all written assignments with a rubric, which I will discuss during class and make available to you well before the assignments are due. If you wish to appeal a grade for a particular assignment, you may request that the assignment be regraded. Should you pursue this option, you accept the possibility that the second, final grade may be lower than the original.

<b>CLASS POLICIES</b>
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### **I. ATTENDANCE**

You are expected to attend each class because lectures and reading discussions are critical to your success in this course. If you miss class for any reason, you are responsible for communicating with me to make arrangements for make-up work and, if necessary, other reasonable accommodations. If you anticipate that you will miss class, please communicate with me about your absence in advance.

### **II. ELECTRONICS**

Cell phone use and texting is prohibited when class is in session. You may use laptop computers or tablet devices during the lecture segment of the class session, but for class-related work only. Please minimize computer and tablet use during the discussion segment of class. If you are found using cell phones, laptop computers, or tablets for purposes other than class work, you will be asked to leave the class immediately. Students are not permitted to record the lecture without the permission of the professor.

### **III. COMMUNICATION**

Assignments, readings, useful websites, and other material will be available electronically on the course page on Canvas. You are responsible for familiarizing themselves with Canvas. In addition, you are responsible for checking the email account to which Canvas messages are sent. Many important communications are sent through Canvas and University of Michigan email accounts, and you must check and use these systems regularly. If there are any difficulties with receiving email or messages sent via Canvas, you must address these issues within the first week of class.

In keeping with academic etiquette and expectations of professionalism, please begin email communications with an appropriate salutation (“Dear Prof. Borja”). In addition, please sign your name and close the email properly (“Kind regards, *Your Name*”).

### **IV. SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND NEEDS**

The University of Michigan maintains a strong commitment to access and accommodation for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities must register with Services for Students with

Disabilities and bring me relevant documentation to ensure that reasonable accommodations are provided.

If you face challenges securing food or housing and believe this may affect your performance in the course, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so, in order for me to provide you any resources that I may possess.

#### **V. OFFICE HOURS**

Office hours provide an excellent opportunity for you to ask questions and understand course material in greater depth, receive help on writing assignments, prepare for exams, get valuable mentoring, and simply have pleasant conversations and build better relationships with your professors. I provide coffee, tea, and snacks at my office hours, so please come visit! If you are unable to visit my office on Wednesday mornings, please do not hesitate to contact me to schedule an appointment to meet at another time.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

Date	Reading	Skill Focus	Assignment Due
<b>Week 1: Introductions</b>			
September 3	None	Making sense of a syllabus; locating resources at U-M	
September 5	Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"	Making use of office hours	Scavenger hunt
<b>Week 2: Religious Encounters in Early America</b>			
September 10	Virginia Anderson, <i>Creatures of Empire</i> , Prologue, Chapter 1	Participating in class discussions	
September 12	Virginia Anderson, <i>Creatures of Empire</i> , Chapter 2	Participating in class discussions	
<b>Week 3: Anti-Catholicism in Antebellum America</b>			
September 17	Tyler Anbinder, <i>Five Points</i> , Chapters 1 and 2	Reading secondary sources for argument	
September 19	Tyler Anbinder, <i>Five Points</i> , Chapters 3 and 8	Reading secondary sources for argument	Proposal for class project
<b>Week 4: Asian Exclusion and "The Heathen Chinese"</b>			
September 24	Beth Lew-Williams, <i>The Chinese Must Go</i> , Introduction and Chapter 1; political cartoons by Thomas Nast and George Keller	Analyzing primary sources	
September 26	Angel Island poetry	Analyzing primary sources	
<b>Week 5: Anti-Semitism and the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act</b>			
October 1	1920 Congressional Report on Immigration; <i>A Bintel Brief</i> , excerpts; Mary Antin, <i>The Promised Land</i> , excerpts; Henry Ford documents	Analyzing primary sources	

October 3	None	Using the U-M library system; creating bibliographies with Zotero	Annotated bibliography for class project
Week 6: Japanese American Buddhists and World War II			
October 8	Duncan Williams, <i>American Sutra</i> , Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 1	Writing a literature review	
October 10	Duncan Williams, <i>American Sutra</i> , Chapter 2, 4, and 5	Writing a literature review	
Week 7: The Hart-Cellar Act, New Migration, and New Religious Diversity			
October 15	None	None	
October 17	Melissa Borja, "Migration and Modern Religious Pluralism"; Courtney Bender and Jennifer Snow, "From Alleged Buddhists to Unreasonable Hindus: First Amendment Jurisprudence after 1965"; Pew Research Center data	Writing a literature review	Literature review for class project
Week 8: Contemporary Issues – Border Politics			
October 22	Thompson, "The Voice of the Past: Oral History"; Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different"; Oral History Association, "Principles and Best Practices"	Conducting an oral history interview	
October 24	Grace Yukich, <i>One Family Under God</i> , Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2; documents related to contemporary sanctuary movements	Conducting an oral history interview	Proposal for oral history interview
Week 9: Contemporary Issues – The War on Terror and Islamophobia			
October 29	Moustafa Bayoumi, <i>This Muslim American Life</i> , Chapter 1; "Shouting Across the Divide," <i>This American Life</i>	Analyzing an oral history interview	



October 31	Moustafa Bayoumi, <i>This Muslim American Life</i> , Chapter 2; Muhammad Bilal-Mirza Oral History Interview	Analyzing an oral history interview	
Week 10: Contemporary Issues – Music and Racial Justice			
November 5	Su’ad Khabeer, <i>Muslim Cool</i> , Introduction	Writing analytical essays	
November 7	Su’ad Khabeer, <i>Muslim Cool</i> , Chapter 1	Writing analytical essays	
Week 11: Contemporary Issues – Modern Orientalism in Television and Film			
November 12	Jane Iwamura, <i>Virtual Orientalism</i> , Chapter 1; <i>The Karate Kid</i>	Writing analytical essays	
November 14	Jane Iwamura, <i>Virtual Orientalism</i> , Chapter 2; <i>Tidying Up with Marie Kondo</i>	Writing analytical essays	Oral history interview – recording, forms, and transcription
Week 12: Contemporary Issues – Religion and Consumer Culture			
November 19	Savitri D and Talen, <i>The Reverend Billy Project</i> , Introduction, Chapter 9; <i>What Would Jesus Buy?</i>	Writing analytical essays	
November 21	Savitri D and Talen, <i>The Reverend Billy Project</i> , Chapter 12; <i>What Would Jesus Buy?</i>	Writing analytical essays	
Week 13: Final Project Research			
November 26	None	None	
November 28	None	None	
Week 14: Class Project Workshop - Presentations and Project Feedback			
December 3	Class rough drafts	Giving and receiving peer feedback	Final essay rough drafts
December 5	Class rough drafts	Giving and receiving peer feedback	
Week 15: Conclusions			
December 10	None	Surviving and thriving during finals week	
December 12	None	None	
Week 16: Final Projects			
December 17	None	None	Final essay final drafts