

Conrad Kanagy Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Wade Clark Roof of the University of California, Santa Barbara. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

Elizabethtown College is located in central Pennsylvania. A comprehensive college of 1,500 students, it offers programs in both pre-professional areas and the liberal arts. The college was established in 1899 by the Church of the Brethren, a denomination with Pietist and Anabaptist origins. Today most ties with the Brethren Church are symbolic with no religious criteria required of faculty or students. The student body is largely white, middle-class, and about two-thirds female. Students come from eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, southern New York, Connecticut and other parts of the Northeast. About one-third of the student body is Catholic. Students--or their parents--seem to be attracted to the quiet, rural setting of a college in Amish country (Lancaster County).

I teach in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. We are a department of three full-time faculty, mine being the only position in Sociology. We have 20 Sociology/Anthropology majors and about 35 minors in Anthropology or Sociology.

This course, Sociology of Religion (SOC 317) is an upper-level elective for majors and non-majors. It does not fulfill any general requirement in the Core program of the College. The course is cross-listed in the Department of Religious Studies. In the two years I have taught the course, I have had more non-majors than majors, including some students with no sociological background. I have had a broad cross-section of students from other majors.

The academic diversity of student backgrounds has influenced my decision to teach this course from a generalist perspective. The first year I emphasized sociological theory, only to find many of my students floundering. This past year the course focused upon case studies and religion in everyday life.

In both years I played Berger's notion of the sacred canopy against the religious free market theories that currently dominate the field. I construct a continuum that ranges from traditional religious experience (the sacred canopy) to a religious free market. Students begin to use these two types to screen various religious experiences that we encounter in the course.

I use four books in the course. I found Chalfant et al. (1994) to be satisfactory as a text, although I am not convinced that sociologists of religion have gotten it together yet as far as excellent texts are concerned. Johnstone's text-which I used the first year-is too broad. The Chalfant et al. text is too specific. I'm not sure one is a lot better than the other. Greeley's reader has buried my students and I may abandon it when I teach this course again. The book does not contain enough continuity or context for introductory students. Students with no background in sociological theory find many of the readings completely overwhelming.

The two books that really worked were written by journalists. Gary Dorsey's experience at First Church really grabbed the students' interests. Those who knew nothing about mainline religion were as fascinated as those who grew up Methodist, Presbyterian, or Catholic. As far as I am concerned, Dorsey does a great job of grounding his experience at First Church in the sociology of religion while creating a truly human story. Dennis Covington's experience among the snake handlers had a similar effect upon students.

While the students enjoyed these books, I challenged them to consider whether either Covington or Dorsey were "doing" sociology. How would a sociologist look at First Church or the snake handlers? Did Covington's and Dorsey's questions differ from those a sociologist would have asked? Would a sociologist have become as involved with either religious group as these two journalists became? How did their close involvement affect the quality of their work? Again, I found both books very effective as pedagogical devices to use with rather novice sociology students.

Besides two exams, I required students to lead one class discussion. This assignment resulted in some very high quality presentations. The experience allows the instructor to be a kind of outsider to the material, and to raise challenging questions that sometimes put the student leader on the spot--in a constructive way. In many instances, I walked away having learned something new or having thought about something familiar in a different way.

The final course project is a term paper examining the secularization thesis. I encourage students to take a position on the thesis and defend it: What is secularization? Is American society becoming more secular? In what ways? In the entire country or only in specific regions? Are there differences in secularization between racial and ethnic groups? Between men and women? How do different definitions of secularization affect our conclusions about religion in American society? What about your own congregation, if you are churched? Where, if anywhere, has there been a change in religious participation, belief, authority, or any other religious indicator? Does the idea of a sacred canopy work to understand American religious experience today? Did it ever work? Is American religion a free market today? In what ways?

I was very pleased with the outcome of this assignment. Several students wrote high quality papers about changes in their own congregations and denominations.

While my student evaluations in this course have been high, I am still struggling to make the empirical study of religion interesting to introductory level students. In my opinion, a more interesting text or accessible reader would be useful.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

Sociology 317: Sociology of Religion Spring, 1998

Time: Monday 2:30-5:15 p.m.
Place: Nicarry 207

Instructor: Dr. Conrad L. Kanagy, Nicarry 217
Phone: 717-361-1301 (Office)
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Hours: Monday 12:30-2:30 p.m.
Wednesday 8:00-10:00 a.m.
Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:00 p.m.
By appointment also.

Required Texts

- Chalfant, H. Paul, Beckley, Robert E. and C. Eddie Palmer. Religion in Contemporary Society (3rd ed.), Peacock, 1994.
- Covington, Dennis. Salvation on Sand Mountain, Penguin, 1995.
- Dorsey, Gary. Congregation: The Return to Church, Viking, 1995.
- Greeley, Andrew M. Sociology and Religion, Harper Collins, 1995.

Goal of Course

To broaden awareness of the importance of religion to the social contexts within which humans interact; specifically, to understand how religion shapes society and how society shapes religion.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine how religion and the study of religion are shaped by our social contexts.
2. To become aware of the sociological differences and similarities of American religious forms.
3. To use the sociology of religion to better understand social interactions-- particularly those characterized by religious conflict and/or religious community.
4. To understand the social contexts within which our own religious biases have developed and exist, and to see how these biases affect our attitudes and behaviors.
5. To improve written and oral communication skills through presentation of course materials and writing projects.

Course Requirements

1. Two exams (20% each) 20% or 20 pts.
2. Lead class discussion 20% or 20 pts.
3. Secularization paper 20% or 20 pts.
4. Final exam 20% or 20 pts.

Grading

The course components when averaged together by their relative importance will generate a course grade based on the following scale:

90-100 =A Excellent
89-89 =B Good
70-79 =C Average
60-69 =D Poor
Below 60 =E Failing

A plus and minus grading system is used to make finer distinctions within each grade, i.e.,

70-72 = C-
73-76 = C
77-79 = C+

Sample Grade Calculation

Exam I = 80% x .20 = 16.00 pts.
Exam II = 90% x .20 = 18.00 pts.
Secularization paper= 90% x .20 = 18.00 pts.
Lead Class = 80% x .20 = 16.00 pts.
Final Exam = 90% x .20 = 18.00 pts.

Course Grade 86.00 pts. (B)

Evaluation of Written Material

Spelling, grammar, style and appearance will be considered in determining the grade for all written work. Late papers will lose 5 points for each day delinquent. Citation of sources must be done in one of the accepted academic styles. Failure to do will result in the loss of 25 points from the paper's score.

Examination Policy

Exams will not be given at times other than those indicated on the syllabus unless a written medical excuse is provided. Exams will cover assigned readings and the material presented in class sessions.

Plagiarism and Cheating

You are expected to follow the highest standards of academic integrity and honor. Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic integrity and according to College Policy will result in a course grade of F. Prior to exams students will indicate their willingness to abide by the Elizabethtown Code of Integrity by writing "I will honor" on the first page of each exam.

Class Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend class regularly and to be prepared for small and large group discussions of assigned material.

Course Components

Exams I, II (20%) The exams will be essay in format. Three questions will be randomly selected from a list of questions distributed prior to the exam.

Secularization Paper (20%) This 10-12 page paper will focus on the secularization and religious market debates currently raging within the sociology of religion. Using secondary sources, students may review the history of the debates, discuss one aspect of the debates, or provide their own empirical evidence in support of or opposition to a particular position. Major scholars participating in the debates must be cited. The works of these scholars will be placed on reserve in High Library.

Lead Class Discussion (20%) Students will be responsible to present and discuss one week's readings. Any presentation format may be used including guest speakers and videos, It is assumed that the presentation will utilize about two-thirds of the class period.

Final Exam (20%) The final exam will be cumulative and will be composed of four essay questions randomly selected from a list of questions previously distributed.

Class Schedule

Date Topic/Readings

1/19 Introduction: The Sociology of Religion

Chalfant I

1/26 Sociological Theories of Religion

Chalfant 2

Greeley 1,3,5,6

2/2 Sources of Religiousness

Chalfant 3

Greeley 7,9

2/9 The Organization of Religion

Chalfant 4

Dorsey (first third)

2/16 Religious Pluralization

Chalfant 5

Dorsey (second third)

Exam I

2/23 Religion and Other Social Institutions

Chalfant 10

Dorsey (last third)

3/2 Contemporary Trends in American Religion

Chalfant 6

Greeley 27,30

3/16 New Religious Movements

Chalfant 8,9

3/23 New Religious Movements

Covington (entire book)

3/30 Secularization: Arguments For It

Chalfant 14

Greeley 17,18

Exam II

4/6 Secularization: Arguments Against It

Chalfant 11

Greeley 11,12,14

4/13 Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism

Chalfant 7

Greeley 30, 31

4/20 African Americans and Religion

Chalfant 12

Greeley 34

Nelsen and Kanagy (to be distributed)

4/27 Women and Religion

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Chalfant 13

Greeley 24-26