

**College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2011**

RELS 250:001 Religion in America

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4A Glebe St., Room 101 (office of Dr. June McDaniel)

Office Hours: MWF 12:00 to 12: 50pm, M 3:00-4:10pm, or by appointment (email works best)

Email: levasseurtj@cofc.edu (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours)

Lectures: MWF 11:00-11:50 am, ECTR 103

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Major)

Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.

Course Description and Instructional Format: This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to some of the diverse religious traditions extant in the United States, past and present. The course is thematically designed around an historical perspective, beginning with the religious lifeworlds and cosmologies of the first continuous inhabitants of North America that began approximately 15,000 years ago and ending with America's unique contemporary religious diversity. The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, open class discussion, and small group discussion. It is hoped that, by the end of the semester, each student has gained an appreciation and understanding of some of our country's religions and why such an understanding is important for both a liberal arts education and also to being a world citizen.

Course Goals and Objectives: Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the study of US religion and some key methodologies for studying such religion.
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about the development and variety of American religions, as well as learning about key figures, sacred texts, important terms, influential sermons, and foundational concepts for a variety of American religions.
3. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and often times contentious ways in which religious cosmologies and practices have shaped American politics and society, especially beginning with the late 1600s onwards.
4. To help students encounter religious traditions outside of those in which they were raised/are most familiar with.

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of American religions and religion in America (note these are separate things).
2. To expose students to religions located in the Charleston area.
3. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions.

Required Texts: Available at the CofC and University bookstores (and most likely used copies on-line):

Letter to a Christian Nation. Harris, Sam. ISBN 9780307278777

Religion in American Life: A Short History. Eds. Butler, Jon; Wacker, Grant; and Balmer, Randall. ISBN 9780195158243

Religion in American History. Eds. Porterfield, Amanda; and Corrigan, John. ISBN 9781405161374

*Note: The entirety of the two edited books will not be covered or assigned. However, these are valuable sourcebooks on American religion and the history of religion in America. If you are interested in this field, these are foundational books written by leading scholars and are worth keeping in your library for accessibility and comprehensiveness regarding their subject matter.

There are also required readings that will be made available at Electronic Reserve online at ereserve.cofc.edu under my name [e-reserve password: americanreligion]. These readings are to be printed out and brought to class for discussion (hard copies are available at the CofC library reserve desk). *You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for they day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand.*

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for that day. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Notes or discussion of class material that have already been covered will not be provided by the instructor for any student. It is your responsibility to be present and to be to class on time. Only excused absences render the above moot. After 3 unexcused absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After 5 unexcused absences (i.e. your 6th unexcused absence), you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. Please observe the totality of this attendance policy. Lecture notes will not be shared and/or repeated, so it is your responsibility to contact other students to receive copies of notes for classes you have missed. Students are able to come to the office to borrow a copy of .ppt lectures if they were present the day of the lecture and were not able to fully capture all of the material during a lecture. .Ppt's will not be made available online.

2) *Common Courtesy:* As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Repeat violations of these rules will result in dismissal from the class. *Each time* a person is caught texting messages during class or engaging in activities on their computer that are not related to the immediate class lecture (such as checking Facebook or sending email), **they will be required to write a 10 page research paper of the professor's choosing.** Failure to complete this paper will result in an incomplete grade for the course.

3) *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating.

4) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cde/index.htm>

5) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

6) *Assignments*: Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

A. Class Participation—This course is capped at 20 students, which means it is a perfect size for a seminar-themed course. While the course itself is not a seminar, there will be ample time to discuss readings and concepts. How well you contribute to such discussions, and especially evocative questions you may raise about class material, will influence this part of your grade. There will also be “pop quizzes,” to be given at my discretion. These will cover the reading assigned for the class meeting in which the quiz is given. Quizzes will be closed book but open notes, meaning if you read and took notes on the reading, you may utilize these notes. 10% of grade.

B. Tests—There will be 3 tests given throughout the semester. Each test will cover the material presented and assigned for each of the course’s 3 units (Colonial era; 1800s; religion in America post-1900) and will be a mix of short answer, fill in the blank, multiple choice, lists, and analysis of primary texts. The first test is worth 14%; the second, 16%; and the final exam is worth 20% of your grade, respectively. (50% total)

C. Papers—You will have to write 4 short papers throughout the semester. These break down as follows:

- i) A paper on a pivotal religious figure or event that occurred in the 1700s.
- ii) A paper on a pivotal religious figure or event that occurred in the 1800s.
- iii) A paper on a place of worship constructed in Charleston prior to the 1900s.
- iv) A review of Sam Harris’s book.

Paper (i) and (ii) are worth 8% of your grade; paper (iii) is worth 10%; and paper (iv) is worth 14%. *The criteria for each paper will be emailed and covered in class.* Hard copies of all four assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned day; late

papers will be marked down 1/3 grade for every 24 hours they are late from the start of class period; late papers must be a hard copy, either handed to me directly or placed in my mailbox in the Religious Studies Office. Emailed papers will not be accepted.

D) Extra Credit-- There will be options for extra credit as the semester develops. Most likely these will include attending guest lectures, watching movies, writing book reviews, and/or analyzing a current source of conflict over religion in America that is garnering media attention. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion in America and contain connections to what we have covered in class. Each student may earn a total of 4 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final score. The final day to turn in extra credit work is Friday April 22nd.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

Course Schedule

*readings assigned for a day are to be read by the beginning of that class period; for example, Chapter 2, "Cosmology," assigned for M 1/16 is to be read by the start of class on Monday, 1/16.

UNIT 1: Colonial America: 1500-1800

- M 1/10 First class; discuss paper #1 and #2
- W 1/12 read Pluralism Project Case Study (.pdf to be emailed); EReserve #1, "The Elephant in the Dark" by Catherine Albanese
- F 1/14 read EReserve #2 "The Green Corn Ceremony of the Muskogees" by Joel Martin; and EReserve #3 William Penn "Letter to the Indians"
- M 1/17 No Class; read Butler, et al Chapter 1 and EReserve #4 Letters by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison
- W 1/19 read Chapter 2, "Cosmology" by John Corrigan, in ed. Porterfield; EReserve #5 Peter Williams "The African Background of New World Religions"
- F 1/21 read Butler, et al Chapter Three; EReserve #6 John Winthrop "A Model of Christian Charity" and Increase Mather "Sleeping at Sermons..." and sections from "Seventeenth-Century Conversion Narratives"
- M 1/24 Jon Sensbach, "Politics" from ed. Porterfield; EReserve #7 Jonathan Edwards "Some Thoughts. Concerning..."
- W 1/26 Butler, et al Chapter 6; EReserve #8 John Wesley "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection"
- F 1/28 Martha Finch, Chapter 8 "Practice" from ed. Porterfield; EReserve #9 "Native American Visionary Experience and Christian Missions" by Michael McNally
- M 1/31 paper # 1 due
- W 2/2 Test #1

UNIT 2: The Nineteenth Century

- F 2/4 Butler, et al Chapters 9 and 10
- M 2/7 EReserve #10 “‘Believer I Know’...” by Charles Joyner
- W 2/9 EReserve #11 Ann Braude “Women’s History IS American Religious History” and
 - http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pittsburgh_program.html Pittsburgh Platform of Reform Judaism
- F 2/11 Mark Noll Chapter 9 “Politics” in ed. Porterfield
- M 2/14 Butler, et al Chapter 14
- W 2/16 EReserve #12 Charles Reagan Wilson “The Religion of the Lost Cause”
- F 2/18 EReserve #13 Jan Shipps “The Genesis of Mormonism” and EReserve #14 “The Articles of Faith” and “Revelation”
- M 2/21 Paper #2 due
- W 2/23 Chapter 10 Robert Fuller “Cosmology” in ed. Porterfield
- F 2/25 Butler, et al Chapter 16
- M 2/28 EReserve #15 Laurie Maffly-Kipp “Eastward Ho!...”
- W 3/2 no reading
- F 3/4 Test #2

UNIT 3: Religion from 1900 until Today

- M 3/14 Butler, et al Chapter 18 and EReserve #16 Gaston Espinosa “Tongues and Healing at the Azusa Street Revival”
- W 3/16 Butler, et al Chapter 19 and EReserve #17 Harry Fosdick “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”
- F 3/18 Peter Williams Chapter 15 “Community” in ed. Porterfield; EReserve #18 Dianne Ashton “Hanukkah Songs of the 1950s”
- M 3/21 no reading; work on paper #3
- W 3/23 Butler, et al Chapter 22; EReserve #19 Hortense Spillers “Martin Luther King and the Style of the Black Sermon”
- F 3/25 paper #3 due
- M 3/28 EReserve #20 Robert Wuthnow “Old Fissures and New Fractures in American Religious Life”
- W 3/30 EReserve Jerry Falwell #21 “The Imperative of Moral Involvement”
- F 4/1 George Lakoff “Metaphor, Morality, and Politics” found at
 - <http://www.wgcd.org/issues/Lakoff.html>
- M 4/4 Sam Harris pgs vii-32
- W 4/6 33-62
- F 4/8 62-86
- M 4/11 87-115
- W 4/13 EReserve #22 excerpts from *Roadside Religion*
- F 4/15 Candy Brown Chapter 16 “Practice” in ed. Porterfield
- M 4/18 EReserve #23 Manuel Vasquez “Charismatic Renewal among Latino Catholics” and Butler, et al Chapter 24
- W 4/20 visit <http://www.pluralism.org/>

- F 4/22 Reading TBD (possible class vote), or possibly no reading
- M 4/25 last class
- Final Exam: Friday, April 29th 12-3pm