

**College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2020**

RELS 298/ POLI 119: “The Religion of Trump”
MW 2:00-3:15 PM Live on Zoom and, when possible, in Ed Center 219

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler

Email: sieglere@cofc.edu

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom [here](#), or if possible, at 4 Glebe St. #201

Was Donald Trump chosen by God? Or is he a “cult” leader? Why did 81% of white evangelicals vote for him in 2016, despite him being biblically illiterate? What is Trump’s own religious background and how does that connect him to broader currents in American culture? How does the religious worldview of Trump’s VP, Attorney-General, and Secretary of State drive U.S. policy? How can studying American religious history and classical theories of religion help us understand Trump? This interdisciplinary, discussion-based class will help us find out.

This course will fulfill the Humanities General Education Student Learning Outcomes: Student Learning Outcome #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.

Student Learning Outcome #2: Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These two learning outcomes will be assessed by the final exam (worth 20% of the final grade), which will ask students to analyze primary sources, in terms of the religious, political, and cultural ideas they express.

There is one required book:

[Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump](#) by John Fea. The paperback currently sells on Amazon for \$13.99, and on Kindle for \$7.35. Either is fine.

The rest of the readings is on OAKS.

Course Requirements:

5 quizzes, all on OAKS x 4% = 20%

Religio-Political Autobiography, due Mon Aug 31 = 5%

Online Presentation (in pairs), due Wed Sept 23 = 10%

Take Home Midterm Essay, due Wed Oct 14 = 15%

Current Events Assignment, floating deadline = 10%

Take Home Final Exam Essay, due Fri Dec 11= 20%

Participation (Zoom and in-class discussion, posting on OAKS) = 20%

All work must be original and all sources correctly cited. The university's **Honor Code** will be strictly enforced. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available [online](#).

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

[This schedule is subject to change. Always check OAKS for the up-to-date version.]

Wed 8/26: What is this class about? (Live on [Zoom](#))

Read: [Interview with Christopher Moloney](#); syllabus (Take Quiz #1)

Watch: [In God We Trump](#) (85 mins)

Mon 8/31: How do we talk about religion and politics? (Live on [Zoom](#))

Read: see Autobiography Assignment Guidelines

Due: Religio-Political Autobiography

Recommended: "[Christianity Will Have Power](#)"

Wed 9/2: The 81% question (Live on [Zoom](#))

Read: Fea Introduction and Ch. 1

Recommended: "[A We Like Any Other](#)"

Mon 9/7: Evangelicalism, Culture, and Gender (Live on [Zoom](#))

Read: *Jesus and John Wayne*, excerpts (PDF on OAKS)

Recommended: Curtis Ch. 3 (PDF on OAKS)

Wed 9/9: The Religious Voter (Live on [Zoom](#)) Special Guest: Dr. Gibbs Knotts

Read: *First In the South*, excerpts (PDF on OAKS); "[White Evangelical Approval](#)"; "[Will Trump's Weakness...](#)"

Mon 9/14: How did the Religious Right Gain Political Power? (Live on Zoom)

Read: Fea Ch. 2 ; [Interview with Sarah Posner](#)

Recommended: Fea Ch. 3; "[Trump's Religious Attack on Biden...](#)"

Wed 9/16: Is America a Christian Nation? (Live on Zoom)

Read: Fea Ch. 5 and Conclusion

Recommended: Fea Ch. 4

Async: Post Paired Online Presentations, then comment on each other's presentations

Mon 9/21: What is Trump's Religious Background? (in class ☺; Group A)

Read: [Norman Vincent Peale](#); [The Faith of Donald Trump](#); [Trump's Spiritual Adviser](#)

Wed 9/23: What is Trump's Religious Background? (in class ☺; Group B)

Read: [Norman Vincent Peale: The Faith of Donald Trump](#) ; [Trump's Spiritual Adviser](#)

Async: Read "[New Film](#)" then watch the film *The Trump Prophecy* free on Amazon Prime (1hr 50 min; you can fast-forward) and post comments.

Mon 9/28: Prophecies & Spiritual Warfare (in class; Group A)

Read: "Voting in the Kingdom" (PDF on OAKS); "[Demon Sperm](#);"

Recommended: "[Doomsday Prophet](#)"

Wed 9/30: Prophecies & Spiritual Warfare (in class; Group B)

Read: "Voting in the Kingdom" (PDF on OAKS); "[Demon Sperm](#);"

Recommended: "[Doomsday Prophet](#)"

Async: Watch the Netflix documentary *The Family* and read about it [here](#). Then post comments.

Mon 10/5: The Religious Nature of Trump's Rallies (in class; Group A)

Read: "[American Preacher](#);" "[He is the Gospel](#)"

Wed 10/7: The Religious Nature of Trump's Rallies (in class; Group B)

Read: "[American Preacher](#);" "[He is the Gospel](#)"

Mon 10/12: Midterm Catch-Up and Review (Optional "in-class" Drop-in)

Wed 10/14: Take Home Midterm Exam

Mon 10/19: Pre-millennialism and Christian Zionism (Live on Zoom)

Read: "[Embrace of Premillennialism](#);" "[Jerusalem Embassy](#);" "[Bible Prophecy](#)" (watch 7-min film); "[Christian Zionism](#)"

Wed 10/21: Trump and the Jews (Live on Zoom) Special Guest: Dr. Josh Shanes

Read: "[Divided Judaism](#);" "[Kristallnacht](#);" "[Disloyalty](#);"

Recommended: "[Stoking anti-Semitism](#)"

Async: Readings and discussion on Trump and Islam TBA

Mon 10/26: Applying Theories of Religion (in class; Group A)

Read: [Manseau](#); "[Church of Trump](#);" [Siegler](#)

Recommended: [Taylor](#)

Wed 10/28: Applying Theories of Religion (in class; Group B)

Read: [Manseau](#); "[Church of Trump](#);" [Siegler](#)

Recommended: [Taylor](#)

Mon 11/2: Is the QAnon Conspiracy a Religion? (in class; Group A)

Read: "[Nothing Can Stop What is Coming](#)"; "[Church of QAnon](#)"

Tues 11/3: VOTE!

Wed 11/4: Is the QAnon Conspiracy a Religion? (in class; Group B)

Read: "[Nothing Can Stop What is Coming](#)" "[Church of QAnon](#)"

Async: Discuss on OAKS religious angles of election night coverage

Mon 11/9: Magic! (in class; Group A)

Read: Aspren; Egizi (both PDFs on OAKS)

Wed 11/11: Magic! (in class; Group B)

Read: Aspren; Egizi (both PDFs on OAKS)

Async: Discuss on OAKS thoughts about Hassan interview

Mon 11/16: Is Trump a Cult Leader? (in class; Group A)

Read: [Interview with Steven Hassan](#); "[What Cult Rhetoric Reveals](#)"

Wed 11/18: Is Trump a Cult Leader? (in class; Group B)

Read: [Interview with Steven Hassan](#); "[What Cult Rhetoric Reveals](#)"

Mon 11/23: What Is "Religious Freedom?" (Live on Zoom)

Read : Curtis Introduction and Ch. 4 (PDF on OAKs); [Reinbold](#)

Thanksgiving Break

Mon 11/30: Civil/Uncivil Religion (Live on Zoom) Special Guest: Dr. Finbarr Curtis

Read: Curtis Ch. 5 and Ch. 7 (PDF on OAKs)

Recommended: Curtis Ch. 6 (PDF on OAKs)

Wed 12/2: Final Discussion: Into the Future (Live on Zoom)

Take Home Open Book Final Exam Essay, due Fri Dec 11

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FIVE TIPS FOR DOING WELL IN AN ONLINE CLASS

1) Compete Course Assignments on Time

Stay on top of the course assignments and do not procrastinate. It is on you to make sure that you don't get behind, especially in a class where the format is constantly changing.

2) Log in Frequently to OAKS and check your email!

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. Readings will be found at the Content Tab; Discussions Thread will be found under the Communication Tab; Office hours and mandatory live Zoom discussions will be found on the Zoom tab; Quizzes and the Assignment Drop Box will be found under the Grades tab. So you need to access **OAKS** several times a week; remember that I can see when you log onto OAKS and monitor your progress! Also, check your **CofC email** frequently because I will often send you updates and advice that way. Keep up with the course schedule, and be aware that the most current copy of the course schedule will be on OAKS. In other words, check OAKS rather than downloading copies of the syllabus, as it may have changed.

3) Write Excellent Posts on the Discussion Threads:

Discussion boards can be found on OAKS (Select the Communication Tab, then Discussions). After you have reviewed the materials for the Unit, and watched the film, you will respond to my prompt. Look and listen carefully for the instructions each time as they may differ, but I will always be asking you to post a thoughtful response/analysis and to respond to others' posts in some way. *Bear in mind that discussion posts are primarily intended to foster discussion among the students. I will chime in now and then, but for the most part, the posts will be student to student. What is an "excellent" post? It's not just the number of posts that is important. You must respond with thoughtful, detailed, and reflective posts. What is considered an "excellent" (deserving of an A grade) post? In a nutshell, your post will be several sentences, will refer to the content of the course, will exhibit critical thinking, etc. Of special importance is to support your analysis with specific evidence. Go to the reading or lecture to support the claims you make. Writing quality is also very important. Edit your post in Word before posting it. Turning the question around, what is a "poor" post? Posts that simply agree or say, "good point." Posts that don't contribute anything new, or that do not refer to course content. Posts that are not respectful or make personal attacks also are not acceptable. It is fine to respectfully disagree with a post—and provide your evidence for your position. I will try to give you feedback on the quality of your posts—I can't necessarily comment on each of your specific posts for every topic, but you should read all my replies to all students as well as the comments from other students to learn more. It is important to read your email daily because some feedback from me may come this way.

4) Observe Proper “Netiquette” in your Discussion Posts:

- A) **Pay Attention to Your Words!** Thoughtful, critical, and even argumentative language is fine! BUT, remember that there is no place in our classroom community for abusive, offensive, aggressive or otherwise violent speech. Remember that you are not an anonymous commenter, but rather that you are part of a classroom community.

- B) **Remember that no one can hear your tone!** Because we are not communicating with voices and without the benefit of seeing one another’s face, we need to pay attention to the actual text that comprises our words. Remember, for example, that ALL CAPS is the equivalent of yelling. Engage in civil and respectful discussion by observing standard typographical and grammar rules in our discussion threads. Likewise, remember that sarcasm and dry humor can be wildly misinterpreted. Strive for clarity at all times!

- C) **Help each other.** If you notice a colleague has asked a question or written about a problem, jump in and offer assistance. This will be rewarded with participation points! This is especially true in the “General Questions” discussion board.

5) Reach out to your Professor

- A) If you need to reach me for a private or individual question, you may contact me via email at any time at sieglere@cofc.edu. If possible, I will email you back right away; if not, you can expect a response within 12-18 hours.
- B) If you have a question about course content or details of an assignment, please do not email me. Instead, post your question to the “General Questions” discussion board so that all students can benefit from your question and my response! You can expect a response within 12-18 hours.
- C) Make an appointment with me! We can meet on Zoom [here](#), at your convenience.
- D) In an emergency, or if you can’t reach me any other way, you may call or text me on my personal cell: (843) 818-3110

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Technology Troubles:

If you are having trouble with any particular link in OAKS, you may contact me directly via email at sieglere@cofc.edu or via the “General Questions” discussion thread if you believe your question is relevant to other class members. For tech troubles related to your CofC login, OAKS, or computer problems, please contact the CofC IT department at helpdesk@cofc.edu or by phone at (843) 953-3375. Instructions on how to use OAKS can be accessed here: http://it.cofc.edu/education/webctoaks/oaks/index_old.php. (Computer failure and/or unavailability does not constitute an excuse for failure to complete an assignment on time. If you experience recurrent technical problems that prohibit you from completing multiple assignments, you may be asked to withdraw from the course.)

Other Types of Support:

The Center for Student Learning (CSL) will provide online academic support services in course content, writing skills, and study strategies. For more information regarding CSL, please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843) 953-5635.

Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at snap@cofc.edu.

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KEY COVID INFORMATION

Due to social distancing requirements, this class will include a variety of online and technology enhanced components to reinforce continuity of learning for all enrolled students. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances. This class is synchronous, and your live, active presence is required. Neither the Zoom nor the in-class meetings will be recorded unless there is a special reason to do so. If you have to miss a Zoom or an in-class meeting, do what you would do during a normal semester: keep up with the reading, and ask a classmate what you missed. If tech issues or health/safety issues arise that prevent you from attending class synchronously, let's have a confidential conversation about it. We can make arrangements.

Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction:

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

Mental & Physical Wellbeing:

At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.