

## RELIGION IN AMERICA TODAY

RS 152

Winter, 2012

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This course offers an overview of current religious trends in the United States. Given the size and diversity of the country, obviously only a few of the more important trends can be examined. The goal is to sensitize us to a variety of issues across several domains of American experience and to develop a sociological imagination of the diversity and complexity of religion. A crucial feature of our society is that, religiously speaking, it is fluid and dynamic, always evolving and taking on new forms. At any given time, we catch only snapshots of the religious situation.

### Books to Be Read:

Smith, C and P. Snell, Souls in Transition  
Covington, D., Salvation on Sand Mountain  
Eck, D., A New Religious Pluralism  
Marti, G., Hollywood Faith  
Einstein, M., Brands of Faith

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1)Two Written Exercises: 15 points each. Exercises are NOT accepted by email; must be turned in at the beginning of class on the date assigned. Grammar, organization, style, documentation all very important.
- 2)Mid-term – Worth 30 points.
- 3)Final Examination – Worth 35 points.
- 4)Class Attendance – Worth 5 points.

A word about class attendance: Attendance will be taken at random within 5 minutes after class is scheduled to begin. Students coming to class late, i.e., after the first five minutes, are considered late. Each absence (including late attendance) reduces the course grade average by one point. Only acceptable excuses for missed classes or examinations are written medical reports and obituaries.

GRADING: 10 Point Scale, i.e., 90=100; B= 80-89,etc.

## RESOURCES

[www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)

[www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)

[www.materialreligion.org](http://www.materialreligion.org)

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/profiles/listalpha.htm>.

[www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/)

<http://religions.pewforum.org/>

## TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Jan. 10-12,  
17-19

### THE CHANGING AMERICAN SETTING

Cultural Worlds of Emerging Adults

Generational Themes

The Religious and the Spiritual

Regional Patterns

Religion Inherited, Religion Reconstructed

READING: Souls in Transition

Check Out:

<http://strangemaps.wordpress.com/2008/01/27/237-regionalism-and-religiosity/>

Jan. 24-26,  
31-Feb. 2

### AN EXPANDING/DIVISIVE RELIGIOUS AMERICA

Diversity versus Pluralism

Defining Pluralism

Culture Wars

Progressive versus Conservative Movements

READING: A New Religious Pluralism

EXERCISE #1: Go to [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org). Go to bottom on right to US Religious Landscape. Select TWO constituencies, compare and contrast them on demographics, beliefs, social and political attitudes. Cite at least TWO additional references for documenting why one or the other religious constituencies are as they are. Not to exceed 6pp., double-spaced. Due Feb. 7 at beginning of class.

Feb. 7-9,  
14

### NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

“Cults” and “Sects”

Types of Movements

Why They Emerge/Life-Cycles  
Religion and Violence

READING: Salvation on Sand Mountain

Feb. 16 MID-TERM EXAMINATION

Feb. 21-23 CIVIL RELIGION  
God's Country  
Rituals, Beliefs, Symbols, Sites  
Priestly and Prophetic  
Civil Religion, or Religious Nationalism?

MARKETING RELIGION

28-March 1-6 The Changing Religious/Spiritual Marketplace  
New Shape of Evangelicalism  
Designer Spirituality  
Individual Autonomy and Choice

READING: Brands of Faith

EXERCISE #2: Go to:

<http://religiousmovements.libvirginia.edu/profiles/listalpha.htm>

Once into the site, go to religious group profiles. Select TWO groups. Compare and contrast them on beliefs, history, and anything else you think is important. Cite TWO references, one on each of the groups to document what you say about them. Not more than 6 pp., double-spaced. Due on March 13, beginning of class.

March 8, CALIFORNIA  
13-15 Overview of Religions and Trends  
Religious or Secular Setting?  
Hollywood Faith

READING: Hollywood Faith

FINAL EXAMINATION

