

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA  
Spring 2017

**Sociology of Religion**  
SOI 3543, Section 1

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Monday & Wednesday, 2-3:15 PM, Pafford 306

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Dr. Emily McKendry-Smith (aka Dr. Smith)  
Office: Pafford 319

Office hours: Mon. 1-2, 3:30-4:30, Tues. 1-5, and Weds. 11-2, 3:30-4:30, or by appointment  
Email: [mckendry@westga.edu](mailto:mckendry@westga.edu) (do NOT email me on CourseDen!)

**Course Description and Goals:**

The overarching purpose of this course is to examine religion as a part of the social world. In order to achieve this goal, we will examine sociologists' major theoretical ideas regarding religion. We will examine religion as an individual-level phenomenon, looking at people's particular beliefs and practices, as a group-level phenomenon, looking at congregations, and consider the interplay between these two levels. We will examine how religion interacts with other forces, institutions, and ideologies at play in the social world. Finally, we will explore how sociologists study religion and conduct sociological research on religion ourselves.

An initial goal of the course is to be able to read and comprehend sociological writings on religion, and to be able to articulate that understanding both verbally and in writing. Additionally, you will learn to recognize how readings and ideas intersect and relate to each other and to articulate the nature of that intersection. You will also learn to analyze theories and research and develop your own informed opinion on their utility for explaining the social world. Ideally, both your reading comprehension and ability to express yourself in writing will be enhanced as a result of this course!

As this is a course on religion as a part of the social world, it is NOT a theological study to determine the doctrinal correctness of various beliefs. We will be studying what people think and do regarding religion and how religious groups behave, without evaluating them compared to some religious "ideal." We are here to learn and think, not to judge.

**Course Etiquette:**

- I expect everyone attending class to have done the assigned readings and to be prepared to discuss them.
- I expect everyone to practice sensitivity and respect in all course discussions. You should feel free in class discussions to share as much as you are comfortable with about your

experiences and background, but you must keep in mind that your classmates' beliefs and experiences may be different from yours and are equally deserving of respect. I expect you to also respect everyone's race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion, etc.

- **We will begin and end class on time.** In addition, unless you have an emergency or an extremely compelling reason, you should plan to stay for the entire class period.
- **Do not use your cell phone during class.** Keep cell phones in your bag/pocket, not out on your desk. If you are texting in class, I will ask you to leave.
- You may use computers during class only for course-related activities.
- Please check your UWG email and CourseDen daily M-F.
- **Course assignments must be turned in to me at the beginning of class in hard copy.** I will not accept or grade assignments turned in over email.

### **Contacting the professor:**

The best way to contact me outside of class is to visit my office hours. If you can't make these hours, please let me know and we can arrange to meet at another time. If you feel that you are having a problem, please come with specific questions so that I can help you. You should also feel free to visit even if you are not having a "problem" in the course and just want to chat about something. I will also usually be available for a few minutes before and after class.

For more complicated questions, I recommend that you contact me via email – [mckendry@westga.edu](mailto:mckendry@westga.edu). I check my email frequently and will respond to you within two business days. When you email me, remember to note in the email which class you are taking, and also to use correct grammatical English and normal capitalization.

### **Preparing for class:**

For each hour spent in class, you will probably need to set aside at least two hours for work outside of the class session such as reading, reviewing your notes, and completing your assignments.

Readings are listed in the syllabus on a daily basis. It is your responsibility to prepare for class each day. I recommend doing the reading for the each day before our class meeting, and then reviewing them again briefly afterwards. Your readings are an important resource to succeeding in this course. You will need to be familiar with the terms and concepts we discuss, and periodically reviewing your readings is the best way to stay familiar with important ideas. In addition, you will find our discussions much more meaningful if you spend some time before class to make some notes listing what you think are the main points of the author's argument, as well as any questions you have about the reading.

### **Honor Code and UWG Policies:**

The University Honor Code is in effect for all written assignments and exams. Please read the provisions of the Honor Code carefully, and make certain that you understand and follow them. Violations of the Code will not be tolerated.

In addition to the Honor Code, you should review the University's policies on the Americans with Disabilities Act, Email, and Credit Hours, as these change periodically.

You can view the Honor Code and other policies here: <http://tinyurl.com/UWGSyllabusPolicies>

I expect you to do all of your own work. Initial instances of academic dishonesty (ie plagiarizing on an assignment or cheating on a quiz/exam) will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment/quiz/exam. Additional instances of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course.

### **Readings:**

I have assigned the following two books for our course. They are available for purchase at the university bookstore and online. I strongly encourage you to obtain your own copy of these books.

- Scheitle, Christopher P. and Roger Finke. 2012. *Places of Faith: A Road Trip across America's Religious Landscape*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Abdullah, Zain. 2013. *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davidman, Lynn. 2014. *Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*. New York: Oxford University Press.

All other course readings will be available on CourseDen.

### **Course requirements and evaluation:**

All written assignments must be turned in hard-copy and to the appropriate CourseDen dropbox. I will not grade papers that I receive over email. Grammar and composition are not a formal part of your assignment grades, but both are necessary to clearly present your ideas and experiences in a relatively small number of pages. If I cannot understand what you are trying to say, it is as though you have not said it, which may result in a lower grade.

I do not accept late assignments.

Although regular class attendance and participation are necessary for achieving a good grade in this course, they are not formally part of your course grade. You will simply do much better on

the assignments and exams if you attend class each day and actively participate in discussions and group-work.

Your final grade will be based on the following required assignments:

- Reading Responses (20%)
- Self-Directed Field Trip Assignment (20%)
- Midterm Exam (20%)
- Interview Assignment (20%)
- Final Exam (20%)

Details for assignments will be provided in class on the day they are assigned and will be available on CourseDen.

**I do not give grades, you earn them.** You will receive point values, but not letter grades, for individual tests and assignments. I will award final grades using this scale:

A = 90-100    B = 80-89    C = 70-79    D = 60-69    F = 0-59

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1**

**January 9<sup>th</sup>: Course Introduction**

**January 11<sup>th</sup>: Thinking Sociologically About Religion**

- Schmalzbauer and Mahoney, “American Scholars Return to Studying Religion” (CourseDen)
- Wuthnow, “From Dwelling to Seeking” (CourseDen)

### **Week 2**

**January 16<sup>th</sup>: MLK DAY – NO CLASS**

**January 18<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Introduction & Ch 1

### **Week 3**

**January 23<sup>rd</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 2
- Chaves, *Congregations in America* excerpt (CourseDen)

**January 25<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 3
- Kurien, “Being Young, Brown, and Hindu” (CourseDen)

#### **Week 4**

##### **January 30<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 4
- Marti, "Affinity, Identity, and Transcendence" (CourseDen)

##### **February 1<sup>st</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 5

#### **Week 5**

##### **February 6<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 6
- Schaefer and Zellner, "The Jehovah's Witnesses" (CourseDen)

##### **February 8<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 7
- Cone, "Martin and Malcolm: Integrationism and Nationalism in African American Religious History" (CourseDen)

#### **Week 6**

##### **February 13<sup>th</sup>: The Diverse American Religious Landscape**

- Sheitle and Finke, Ch 8 & Conclusion

##### **February 15<sup>th</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 1 & 2

#### **Week 7**

##### **February 20<sup>th</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 3

##### **February 22<sup>nd</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 4

#### **Week 8**

##### **February 27<sup>th</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 5

##### **March 1<sup>st</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 6

#### **Week 9**

##### **March 6<sup>th</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 7

**March 8<sup>th</sup>: Religious Communities in Context**

- Abdullah, Ch 8 & 9
- Review for Midterm Exam

**Week 10**

**March 13<sup>th</sup>: Midterm Exam**

**March 15<sup>th</sup>: New Religious Movements**

- Jurgensmeyer, “Cosmic War” (CourseDen)

**March 20<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

**Week 11**

**March 27<sup>th</sup>: New Religious Movements**

- Melton, “Modern Alternative Religions in the West” (CourseDen)

**March 29<sup>th</sup>: New Religious Movements**

- Schaefer and Zellner, “The Church of Scientology” (CourseDen)

**Week 12**

**April 3<sup>rd</sup>: New Religious Movements**

- Lewis, “Court Decisions, Legislation, and Government Actions” (CourseDen)

**April 5<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religion**

- McGuire, “Rethinking Religious Identity, Commitment, and Hybridity” (CourseDen)
- Pearce and Denton, “Profiles of Religiosity in Adolescence” (CourseDen)

**Week 13**

**April 10<sup>th</sup>: Individual (Non)Religion**

- Smith, “Creating a Godless Community” (CourseDen)
- Worth, “From Bible-Belt Pastor to Atheist Leader” (CourseDen)

**April 12<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 1

**Week 14**

**April 17<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 2

**April 19<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 3

**Week 15**

**April 24<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 4

**April 26<sup>th</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 5

**Week 16**

**May 1<sup>st</sup>: Individual Religious Change**

- Davidman, Ch 6
- Review for Final Exam

**FINAL EXAM: Monday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2-4 PM**