

SOCI/RELG 288-01: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Fall 2017 – Course Instructor: Jonathan Coley, PhD

COURSE INFORMATION

- **Class Location:** Wallace Hall 113; **Class Time:** TTh 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
- **Office Location:** Wallace Hall 3; **Office Hours:** MW 12:30 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.; TTh 12:45 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.; & by appointment
- **Office Number:** 309-457-2185; **E-mail:** jcoley@monmouthcollege.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sociology has much to say about religion as a social phenomenon. Although sociologists do not assess the truthfulness or validity of religious claims, sociologists use quantitative and qualitative research methods to answer questions about the prevalence of religious belief and practice, the role of religion in everyday life, social inequalities in religious life, and the relationship between religion and social change.

This course will focus on religion in the United States, particularly Christianity. We will be reading a sociology of religion textbook, which will give students a broad view of this field, along with two monographs exploring specialized topics in the sociology of religion (one on cults and one on religion, sexuality, and social change). Students will be evaluated in terms of their ability to master and apply course content through effective in-class participation, reading quizzes, two essays, and three in-class exams. The course is perfect for sociology and religious studies majors alike, as well as for anyone seeking to understand both the social construction of religion and the role of religion in society.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following books are required in the course:

- Erzen, Tanya. 2006. *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roberts, Keith A., and David Yamane. 2016. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Zeller, Benjamin E. 2014. *Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion*. New York: NYU Press.

EVALUATION

The total course grade will be calculated accordingly:

- Attendance and Participation 10%
- In-Class Quizzes and Exercises 20%
- Essays (2) 20% (10% each)
- In-Class Exams (3) 50% (1st and 2nd exam, 15% each; 3rd exam, 20%)

The **attendance** and **participation** grades are based on your regular attendance in class and thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Attendance will be taken every class period; all students are allowed two absences, but one percentage point will be deducted for every additional class period missed. (Note: two “tardies” will equal one absence.) **Please note: in case of emergencies, such as a death in the family or documented illness, I may excuse students from missing class, but I must be notified prior to or within a day of the absence.**

In-class quizzes will include multiple choice or short answer questions that cover information from the readings. Students are expected to come to class prepared to take a quiz every day. From time to time, I may also assign in-class **exercises** that will count toward this quiz average.

Students will be required to write two 5-to-7-page **essays**. Specifically, at least two weeks prior to the essay due dates, I will hand out a prompt (a question or series of questions) about the process of becoming religious (for the first essay) and religion and social change (for the second essay). The prompts will require students to draw on information that they have gained through the course readings and lectures, although they may also require additional readings.

Finally, the three **in-class exams** will include short answer and essay questions that cover information from the readings and the course lectures. The first two exams cover only a select number of chapters, but the final exam is comprehensive.

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following distribution:

- 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- = 60-62%
- F = < 60% ☹

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Hours per Week Work Expectations** – Students should expect to work an average of twelve hours each week. This includes the 2.5 hours of class time and the remaining 9.5 hours outside of class closely reading texts, studying for quizzes and exams, writing essays, and meeting with me. This is only an average: some weeks will demand more than others depending on the nature of the assignments due those weeks.
2. **Considerate Attendance** – Students should arrive on time for class and notify the professor if they need to leave class early. Violations of this policy will result in points deducted from the attendance/participation grade.
3. **Respectful In-Class Behavior** – Students should refrain from using cell phones in class; **students who are texting or otherwise using their phones during class will be counted as “absent” for the day**. Students are discouraged from using laptops. Finally, students must avoid sleeping in class, holding personal conversations, and engaging in any behaviors that disrupt me or other students. Violations of this policy will result in points deducted from the attendance/participation grade.
4. **Make-Up Policy** – Students will receive a make-up exam or quiz ONLY in cases of excused absences (as defined in the section on attendance grades above). Those exams or quizzes must be taken on the day you return to class (or as otherwise negotiated with the professor). However, students will not be able to make up the final exam.
5. **Late Assignment Policy** – Written assignments will be docked a letter grade for each day that they are late. No essays will be accepted beyond the final exam.
6. **Academic Integrity** – Students will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity. This includes not plagiarizing or presenting other people’s work as your own when writing papers, as well as not cheating in any way on exams. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade on the assignment in question and referral to the dean.
7. **Academic Support** – The Monmouth College Writing Center offers unlimited, free peer tutoring sessions for students at MC. Peer writing tutors work with writers from any major, of any writing ability, on any type of writing assignment, and at any stage of their writing processes, from planning to drafting to revising to editing. Peer speech tutors are also available on a limited basis to assist student speakers at any point in the process of designing a speech – from outlining to delivery. They are located on the 3rd floor of Mellinger and are open Sunday-Thursday 7-10pm and Monday-Thursday 3-5pm on a first-come, first-served basis. No appointment necessary! Learn more about the Writing Center at their website: <http://blogs.monm.edu/writingatmc/writing-center/>
8. **Disability Policy** – Students with disabilities can apply for accommodations at the Teaching and Learning Center. Please see <http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/disability-services/default.aspx> and notify me if you are granted accommodations.

9. **Syllabus Changes** – Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class or through e-mail and will not entail any additional work on your part.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN THIS CLASS

1. **Read all assigned chapters** word for word. If you find that your mind wanders off as you read, try engaging with the readings more closely by creating outlines of each chapter or by drafting short summaries of each section of a chapter.
2. **Take notes during class lectures and discussions.** It is not enough just to “show up” to class -- if you do not take notes in class, it becomes too easy for your mind to wander off, and time passes by more slowly. Taking notes will help you stay engaged with the class and will provide you with great study materials for exams.
3. **Discuss** what you are learning from the readings and course lectures. When you talk about the things you are learning – whether in class or in private settings with friends – you are much more likely to retain those ideas. You may also discover that you do not understand certain ideas as well as you thought and will have a better idea of where you need to focus your energies when studying for exams.
4. **Come to office hours regularly** or make appointments with me to ask questions about the course content or to get a better understanding of my expectations for course papers and exams. Be sure to ask clarifying questions well in advance of paper due dates or exam days so that I have enough time to give you a full response.
5. **Don't procrastinate – begin writing papers and studying for exams early!** Ask yourself, who is likely to have better teeth when they show up to the dentist – someone who spends a few minutes each day brushing and flossing, or someone who brushes and flosses for several hours the night before a dental appointment?

COURSE SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE

I. WEEKS ONE THROUGH FIVE: RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND PEOPLE

A. Week One (August 22, 24)

- August 24 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter One, “What Do We Mean by the Term Religion?” (pp. 1-24)

B. Week Two (August 29, 31)

- August 29 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter Three, “Religion in the Larger Society: Macro Perspectives” (pp. 50-70 ONLY; SKIP pp. 71-77)
- August 31 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter Five, “Becoming and Being Religious” (pp. 102-131)

C. Week Three (September 5, 7)

- September 5 – No Reading; In-Class Documentary: Jesus Camp
- September 7 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter Six, “Conversion and Switching” (pp. 132-156)

D. Week Four (September 12, 14)

- September 12 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter Seven, “Organized Religion: Churches, Sects, Denominations, and Cults” (pp. 158-186; but SKIP pp. 174-177)
- September 14 – Roberts and Yamane, Chapter Eight, “Organized Religion: Denominationalism and Congregationalism” (pp. 187-222)

E. Week Five (September 19)

- **September 19 – Exam #1!**

II. WEEKS FIVE THROUGH EIGHT: CASE STUDY: HEAVEN’S GATE

A. Week Five Continued (September 21)

- September 21 – Zeller, “Introduction” (pp. 1-16)

B. Week Six (September 26, 28)

- September 26 – Zeller, Chapter One, “The Cultural and Religious Origins of Heaven’s Gate” (pp. 17-42)

- September 28 – Zeller, Chapter Two, “The Spiritual Quest and Self-Transformation: Why People Joined Heaven’s Gate” (pp. 43-63)

C. Week Seven (October 3, 5)

- October 3 – Zeller, Chapter Three, “The Religious Worldview of Heaven’s Gate” AND Chapter Four, “Understanding Heaven’s Gate Theology” (pp. 64-125)
- October 5 – Zeller, Chapter Five, “Religious Practices in Heaven’s Gate” (pp. 126-170)

D. Week Eight (October 10)

- October 10 – Zeller, Chapter Six, “Why Suicide?: Closing Heaven’s Gate” AND “Afterword: Heaven’s Gate as an American Religion” (pp. 171-226)

First Essay Due at Beginning of Class on October 10

FALL BREAK – NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 12

E. Week Nine (October 17, 19)

- **October 17 – Guest Speaker: Dr. Benjamin Zeller!**

III. WEEKS NINE AND TEN: RELIGION, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A. Week Nine Continued (October 17, 19)

- October 19 – Roberts and Yamane, “Religion, Economics, and Social Class” (pp. 224-247)

B. Week Ten (October 24, 26)

- October 24 – Roberts and Yamane, “Religion and Race” (pp. 248-275)
- October 26 – Roberts and Yamane, “Religion, Gender, and Sexuality” (pp. 276-308)

C. Week Eleven (October 31, November 2)

- October 31 – Roberts and Yamane, “Religion, Inequality, and Social Activism” (pp. 309-338)
- November 2 – **Exam #2!**

IV. WEEKS ELEVEN THROUGH SIXTEEN: CASE STUDY: EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT EX-GAY ACTIVISM

A. Week Twelve (November 7, 9)

- November 7 – Erzen, “Introduction” (pp. 1-21)

- November 9 – Erzen, Chapter One, “Steps Out of Homosexuality” (pp. 22-51)

B. Week Thirteen (November 14, 16)

- November 14 – Erzen, Chapter Two, “New Creations” (pp. 52-84)
- November 16 – Erzen, Chapter Three, “A Refuge from the World” (pp. 85-125)

C. Week Fourteen (November 21)

- November 21 – Erzen, Chapter Four, “Arrested Development” (pp. 126-159)

THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23

D. Week Fifteen (November 28, 30)

- November 28 – Erzen, Chapter Five, “Testifying to Sexual Healing” (pp. 160-182)
- November 30 – Erzen, Chapter Six, “Love Won Out?” and “Conclusion: Walking in a Dark Room” (pp. 183-230)

E. Week Sixteen (December 5)

- December 5 – Final Class/Review Day

Second Essay Due at Beginning of Class on December 5

Final Exam (Comprehensive) on Monday, December 11, at 8:00 a.m.