

**Sociology 129a. Religion in American Life:
A Sociological Approach
Brandeis University
Spring 2016**

Instructors:

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Wednesdays, 11:30-12:30pm, Pearlman 104.

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 10:00-10:50am, Lown 203

Course Description

This course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to the sociological study of religion in the United States. We ask what religion is, how it is present and influential in public and private life, and how and where people from different religious traditions interact in the contemporary United States. Specific attention is devoted to people's religious *practices*, religious *communities*, and the *identities* people develop through their religious traditions. Questions about religious pluralism, diversity and multi-religious citizenship on campus and beyond are central to the conversations we will have throughout the course.

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Provide substantive and functional definitions of religion and spirituality and explain how these approaches have been influenced by scholars in the past one hundred years
- Analyze how religion and spirituality are present on campus at Brandeis and in American public life and how issues related to diversity and pluralism have been addressed in specific examples.
- Describe how religion and spirituality influence people over the life course and how that influence varies across individuals.
- Consider the place of humanists, atheists and agnostics in the American religious context.

- Compare and contrast how religion and spirituality are addressed in secular institutions including on university campuses, in healthcare organizations and in the military
- Present and defend your own approach to religious literacy.

Unlike courses in history or religious studies that often focus on one religious tradition, you will learn a little bit about several religious traditions in this course. If you are looking to better understand the history of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity or another religious tradition, this may not be the course for you. While we will certainly pay attention to history and religious teachings in this course, our focus as sociologists will be on the ways individuals live their religions in day-to-day life. Sometimes these experiences may seem to be in contrast to texts or religious leaders, an issue we will discuss throughout the course. Similarly, some of what we cover in this course may challenge what you know of your own or others' religious traditions. We ask you to be patient, to reserve judgment, and to remember the commitment Brandeis makes in its mission statement to be "a center of open inquiry and teaching."

This course is built around course readings, ongoing discussion, occasional films and guest speakers, and several writing assignments that ask you to bring theoretical ideas into conversation with religion as it is lived by the people around you. You are also required to make a field visit to one religious gathering on campus or in the greater Boston area. We encourage you to visit a gathering and learn about a religious tradition that is new to you and to see this class as an invitation and an important step in conversations about religion in all of our lives. This course counts towards the major in Sociology and Minor in Religious Studies. It is a Writing Intensive (wi) course and fulfills the School of Social Science Distribution Requirement (ss).

Course Readings

The following required books are available in the bookstore.

- Cadge, Wendy. 2013. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Frederick, Marla F. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press.

These books are also on reserve in the library. All other required course readings are available through Latte except for those listed with web addresses that can be located that way.

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for us and your classmates. Your class attendance counts as 5 points towards your final grade. If you miss zero or one class, you will receive 5 points. If you miss 2 classes, you will receive 4 points. If you miss 3 classes, you will receive 3 points. If you miss 4 classes, you will receive 2 points. If you miss 5 classes, you will receive 1 point. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will receive 0 points. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email us about at least one week in advance. For the health of all, absences may also be excused if you think you have the flu. If you are not feeling well, please email me to let me know you are ill. *Please make sure to sign the attendance sheet that will be passed around in class.* Signing in for someone else is a violation of University policies on academic integrity that we take very seriously.
2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for Monday of each week unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. To help you keep up with the reading, we will ask you to write five one page single-spaced “response papers” throughout the semester. We will give you the question for each response paper in the class meeting before it is due. These response papers are due on **February 4, February 25, March 10, March 17, March 24** as noted in the syllabus and should demonstrate that you have completed the reading and are thinking about the issues we talked about in class and the topics the authors discussed. We will read and comment on your response papers and you will receive five points for each one you complete thoroughly (25 points total for the semester). Response papers cannot be made up if you are not in class when the question is announced or when the paper is due unless your absence is excused.
3. **Class Participation** is central to this class, and we ask that you participate fully in class, section, and the small group discussions we will sometimes have as a part of class. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, please participate by meeting with us during office hours, sending related articles to the class email list, etc. You are allowed to have computers and cell phones in class only if you are using them to take notes or look at readings. **Please sit in the front two rows of the classroom if you will be using a computer during class.** We will reduce your participation grade when we see you reading Facebook, surfing the web, sending text messages, etc. Class participation will count as ten points toward your final grade. Feel free to check with us about your participation grade at any point in the semester.
4. **Written Assignments:** In addition to the respond papers, there are three main written assignments in this class:
 - a. A field report that describes your visiting to a religious gathering. This assignment is being distributed with this syllabus. It is due on **January 28** and is worth ten points

- b. A 15-20 page research paper this semester about some aspect of religion / spirituality at Brandeis. Additional information about this project is also being distributed with this syllabus. You may complete the research for this assignment individually or in groups of two or three. Each person must write his or her own project summary, progress reports, and research paper that will be graded independently. You will also present a short oral report (10 minutes) about the findings from your project at the end of the semester.

Unlike “traditional” papers you might write for other classes, this assignment cannot be completed at the last minute. It requires that you spend time identifying sources of information, gaining access to research sites, making appointments with informants (which requires being flexible to their schedules!), and gathering and managing the data you gather before you start to write your paper. Scheduling dilemmas and unforeseen surprises are part of the research process and you need to plan and be prepared for them. If you are having difficulty with this assignment, please let us know *as soon as possible* so we can work together to find a solution.

To help you complete this assignment, there are several interim deadlines. Each part of this assignment will be graded as follows:

- One paragraph summaries of five articles that were published about religion at Brandeis in *The Justice* in the year you are assigned is due in class on **February 11**. These summaries will be copied and distributed to the class to spark thinking about your research projects. (5 points)
- A one page summary of your topic / question, the people you will work with, if any, and the data you will gather with details about how you will collect it is due in class on **March 3** (5 points)
- A one page progress report is due on **March 31** (5 points)
- A one page progress report OR a rough draft is due on **April 14** (5 points)
- The final paper is due on **May 2** (20 points)
- Oral reports will be scheduled on **April 18 and April 20** (10 points)

We place a high premium on careful research and clear organization and writing. We will spend time in class talking about how to do each of these assignments and encourage you to use the Writing Center as you work on your papers. We expect you to use proper citations and reference all sources you use in each assignment. We will discuss when and how to cite sources in detail. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to raise them. You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdje/ai/>).

Summaries, progress reports, and papers related to this project are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers turned in after this are late. You

will lose one full letter grade for each 24 hours after the due date that the assignment is turned in (i.e. if you would have received an B on a progress report but you turned it in one day late, you will receive a C etc.). We will not accept papers by email. We expect you to use proper citations and reference any articles from the syllabus you use when completing these assignments. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

5. **Final Grades** will be based on your class attendance (5 points), class participation (10 points), response papers (25 points), field report (10 points), Justice summaries (5 points), paper topic statements (5 points), first progress report (5 points), second progress report (5 points), final paper about religion/spirituality on campus (20 points) and oral presentation (10 points). Final grades will be calculated using the following point distribution:

98-100 A+	77-79 C+
94-97 A	74-76 C
90-93 A-	70-73 C-
87-89 B+	67-69 D+
84-86 B	64-66 D
80-83 B-	60-63 D-
	<60 F

There are numerous written assignments in this class so that you can improve over the course of the semester. If you are struggling or are not happy with how you are doing, please see us sooner rather than later so we can work together to help you improve.

****All written assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class****

6. **University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact Wendy and give her a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
7. **University Policy on Academic Integrity:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>). We will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to being required to attend educational programs and receiving a failing grade for the course.,

Course Outline

I. Getting Started: Conceptualizing and Studying Religion and Spirituality

January 13, 14. Introductions (Wendy)

Wednesday:

Introductions

Thursday:

- Bender, Courtney. 2007. "Religion and Spirituality: History, Discourse, Measurement." Social Science Research Council Essay Forum on the Religious Engagement of American Undergraduates: <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Bender.pdf>
- "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious." The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Please read the overview. Released November 3, 2015.

January 20, 21. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Scholars (Margaret)

Monday:

- No class, MLK Day

Wednesday:

- Durkheim, Emile. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The Free Press (c. 1 Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion)
- If you want to know more about Durkheim's approach to religion, read: O'Toole, Roger. 1984. *Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, p. 76-110. It is up on the Latte site but is *not* required reading for today.

Thursday:

- Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (c. 1 Religion and World Construction).

January 25, 27, 28. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Practitioners (Wendy)

Monday and Wednesday:

- Frederick, Marla. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (p. 1-130).

Thursday

- *First Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Field Report Due*

February 1, 3, 4. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: The View from Brandeis

Monday (Margaret):

- Schmalzbauer, John. 2013. "Campus Religious Life in America: Revitalization and Renewal" *Society* 50(2): 115 – 131.
- Please select any three of the essays posted here and come to class prepared to talk about what you read: <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/>

Wednesday (Wendy):

- Sachar, Abram 1995. *Brandeis University: A Host at Last*. Revised edition. Hanover: Brandeis University Press. Details (c. 2, 3, 13, 14)
- Packet of Materials about the chapels at Brandeis on Latte
- We will visit the chapels today as a class

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Response Paper 1 Due*

II. The Context: Steps in the Development of American Religious Pluralism

February 8, 10, 11. Some Historical Context and the Question of Secularization

Monday (Margaret):

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 3 Religiosity in America: The Historical Backdrop and c. 4 Religiosity in America: Shock and Two Aftershocks)
- Please skim Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. "Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*. 98(5): p. 1044-1093.

Wednesday (Wendy):

- Introduction to the Robert D. Farber University Archives with Maggie McNeely and discussion of possible research topics.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Summaries of five articles about religion/spirituality at Brandeis from The Justice in the year you selected due today.*

February 15-19. no class

February 22, 24, 25. Religion in America and at Brandeis – Including and/or Excluding? (Wendy)

Monday:

- Bellah, Robert. 1970. *Belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world*. New York: Harper & Row. (c. 9 Civil Religion in America)

Please bring copies of the following to class:

- Washington, George. 1789. First Inaugural Address.
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html
- Sachar, Abram. 1947/8. Inaugural Address.
- Lawrence, Frederick. 2011. Inaugural Address

Wednesday:

- 2008. “Driven by Faith or Customer Service? Muslim Taxi Drivers at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport (A)” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Response paper 2 due about the article below*

III. Developing Religious and Spiritual Selves

February 29, March 2, 3. Growing Up “Religious” or “Spiritual” or “Mixed” or “Nothing” (Margaret)

Monday:

- Putnam, Robert D. and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (c. 5 Switching, Matching, and Mixing)

Wednesday:

- Smith, Christian and Patricia Snell. 2009. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Ch. 7, "The Teenagers of *Soul Searching* Five Years Later")
- We will watch, “Soul Searching: A Movie About Teenagers and God.” A film based on Smith, Christian with Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press. (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1161652/>)

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *One page summary of research topic / question due today*

March 7, 9, 10. Converting to Orthodox Judaism (Wendy)

Monday and Wednesday:

- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (c. 1-6)
- Monday: Guest Speaker, Jonathan Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Response paper 3 due*
- Peter Berger will be on campus for lunch and to give a talk in the afternoon. Details TBA

March 14, 16, 17. Agnostics and Atheists in America (Margaret)

Monday:

- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wednesday:

- Please skim Edgell, Penny, Joseph Gerteis and Douglas Hartmann . 2006. "Atheists as 'Other:' Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society." *American Sociological Review*, 72(2):211-234.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Response paper 4 due*

IV. Experiencing Religious Diversity in the United States and at Brandeis

March 21, 23, 24. Creating Spaces, Cultivating Chaplains...(Wendy)

Monday:

- Grubiak, Margaret. 2012. "The Danforth Chapel Program on the Public American Campus," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*. 19(2): 77-96
- Cadge, Wendy. 2012. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (chapter 3)
- Cadge, Wendy, Alice Friedman, Karla Johnson and Margaret Clendenen. 2012. "Sacred Space in a Secular Nation of Believers: A Working Paper."

Wednesday:

- We will watch part of the new film *Chaplains: Faith on the Front Lines* in class. (<http://journeyfilms.com/chaplains/>)

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Response paper 5 due*

March 30, 31. Religion in Prisons (Margaret)

Wednesday

- “Religion in Prisons: A 50 State Survey of Prison Chaplains.” Pew Research Center. Released March 22, 2012.
<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-exec/>
- Today and on Thursday we will watch the film Dhamma Brothers in class. (<http://www.dhammabrothers.com/>)

Thursday

- *One page progress report about research project due today*

April 4, 6, 7. Religion and Spirituality in the Military (Wendy)

Monday

- Bergen, Doris. 2004. *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. (Introduction)
- Slomovitz, Albert Issac. 1999. *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History*. New York: New York University Press (c. 7 Adapting to a Changing World).
- Hansen, Kim. 2012. *Military Chaplains & Religious Diversity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (chapter 4).

Wednesday

- Guest speaker: Larry Bazer, National Guard Chaplain

Thursday

- Meet in section

April 11, 13, 14. Religion and Spirituality in Healthcare (Wendy)

Monday and Wednesday:

- Cadge, Wendy. 2013. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Introduction, chapter 1, 4, 6, 7, 9)
- Monday: Guest speaker Mary Martha Thiel, Hebrew Rehabilitation Center, Hebrew Senior Life.

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*

- *Second progress report or rough draft due today*

April 18, 20. Reporting back about Brandeis (Wendy and Margaret)

Monday and Wednesday

- Oral Reports about your final papers

April 22-29. no class

V. Concluding

May 2. Wrapping Up (Wendy and Margaret)

Monday:

- Prothero, Stephen. 2007. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*. New York: HarperCollins. (Introduction and c. 5).
- *Final Paper due in class today*