



**RLGN 399
SENIOR SEMINAR
IN RELIGION:
THE CWRU
PLURALISM PROJECT**



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Office Hours: Tues & Wed 1:00-2:30 or by appt.

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Clark Hall 104
Mondays 3:30-6:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This Senior Seminar in Religion will be a collaborative, semester-long research project aimed at gaining a greater understanding of the religious pluralism of the CWRU undergraduate student body. Our main goals, in order of priority, are as follows:

First, to map the religious landscape of the CWRU undergraduate student body as comprehensively and complexly as possible;

Second, to gain greater understanding of the variety of ways that religion impacts undergraduate education and life at CWRU; and

Third, as time and resources allow, to identify current university programs aimed at addressing issues of undergraduate religious life and religious diversity, to assess their effectiveness, and, based on our research, to make recommendations for other programs.

This course will provide students will direct, hands-on experience with collaborative research in religious studies. Evaluation will be based on full project participation, a research and reading log, and contribution to the final presentation.

DYNAMICS AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a *seminar*, in which a small group of students and faculty work together to achieve a kind of depth and clarity of understanding that is beyond what any individual can achieve alone. The success of our seminar therefore depends on the full preparation and cooperative participation of every one of us. We will work to respect every class member as a colleague with something important to offer the group as a whole. The professor will avoid lecturing and short-circuiting discussion, and the students will avoid competition and personal ownership of ideas and information.

As a Senior Seminar in Religion, this course is meant to be a *capstone*, not a foundation

stone. It is assumed that everyone comes with experience on which we can build, including: (a) a foundational understanding of theories and approaches to the academic study of religion (from Rlgn 102 and/or other religion courses); (b) further experience, building on that foundation, in particular aspects of the study of religion; and (c) expertise and/or knowledge in other areas of scholarship and presentation that will enrich and expand our work together. It is also assumed and that everyone here is self-motivated to give full and thoughtful attention to assigned readings, seminar discussions, and research.

Finally, this course is designed as a *collaborative research project*. Its success will depend on the active, collegial participation of every seminar member in the process of gathering, interpreting, and presenting our research.

READINGS

1. Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002).
2. Diana Eck, "Dialogue and Method: Reconstructing the Study of Religion," from Pattona nd Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells* (copy).
3. Conrad Cherry, Betty A. De Berg, and Amanda Porterfield, *Religion on Campus* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
4. Sharon Daloz Parks, "Young Adulthood in a Changing World: Promise and Vulnerability," from *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (copy).
5. Martin Marty with Jonathan Moore, "Just What Are We Talking About, Anyway?," from *Education, Religion, and the Common Good* (copy).
6. Tom Beaudoin, excerpts, from *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*.
7. Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

REQUIREMENTS

1. Class participation and preparation (40 pts). This course is structured like a graduate school seminar, with one weekly meeting and an emphasis on student research and participation. In the first part of the course (I. Orientation and Planning), you will be doing extensive reading in preparation for class discussions, which will focus on establishing our research goals, scope, procedures, etc. In the second part of the course (II. Research), your preparation work will involve gathering information, individually and in groups, and organizing that information in order to share it in class. In the third part of the course (III. Presentation), your work will shift from gathering information to interpreting it and developing a final presentation of it.

Attendance at all class meetings is important. Don't miss class. Don't be late.

2. Research and reading log (30 pts). Keep a log of your reading notes, activities, meetings, thoughts, and research data. It may be handwritten or wordprocessed. *Always bring your log to class and keep it up to date.* (On occasion, without warning, I may collect and review all logs.) Your log will include the following four types of entry (indicate which kind you're writing at the top of the page): "Reading Notes," "Research Notes," "Research Information," and "Final Assessment."

"Reading Notes": Write a page or so in response to each assigned book and a paragraph or so in response to each assigned article. Focus your response on points that might be instructive or otherwise noteworthy concerning our own collaborative research project. Be sure to give the author name and title at the top of the entry.

“Research Notes”: Keep track of the dates, times, and agendas of all meetings and research activities. Report on the progress of your work. Also use this kind of entry to write down any thoughts you have on the research process, initial interpretations of the data, ideas for how to present the material, etc. These may be very rough or sketchy.

“Research Data”: Keep all information gathered from your research in this notebook, or attached to it. Provide as much documentation and context information as possible for everything.

“Final Assessment”: Before you hand your log in at the end of the semester, write a final assessment (1-2 pages) of your experience of this collaborative research project overall and of your own contribution to it. Be sure to describe clearly your contribution to the final presentation as well as to the research process. Also, feel free to make comments, positive or negative, on group dynamics and workload equity issues.

3. Final presentation (30 pts). The results of this research project (the information we gather and our interpretations of it) will be presented in two venues. First, the results will be published in print and /or web format and made available to all members of the university community. Second, the results will be presented to a group of interested university administrators, professors, staff members and students in a public forum. The nature of your contribution to this presentation will depend on your particular skills and interests. Some will focus on writing text or presenting data in graphs, while others will focus on visual layout and/or web design, while still others will focus on oral presentation. You will not be evaluated on the final presentation as a whole, but on your contribution to it.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. ORIENTATION AND PLANNING

- 1/13** Course introduction, syllabus overview
IRB approval, IRB form (handout)
Brainstorming on research focus, questions, problems
- 1/20** NO CLASS -- MLK Jr. Day
- 1/27** **A New Religious America: Changing Landscapes**
For today: Read Eck, *A New Religious America* (all)
Read IRB form
Remember to respond in your log
- 2/3** **Religious Pluralism on the CWRU Campus**
Guests: members of the CWRU Inter-Religious Council
For today: Read *Religion on Campus* (all, but focus on 1-81 and 275-304)
Beaudoin, excerpts from *Virtual Faith*
Eck, "Dialogue and Method"
- 2/10** **Religious Pluralism on the CWRU Campus (cont'd from 2/3)**
Mapping existing resources (organizations, researchers, university offices)
Delegate responsibility for researching existing resources
For today: Gather information (organization names, personal names, contacts, numbers, etc.) on potential resources -- institutional, individual, etc. -- that will be of use to us in our research. E.g., particular offices and people in student life and undergraduate studies, affiliated and unaffiliated religious groups, and individual researchers. We don't want to redo what's already been done. Get as much contact information and detail as possible. If you can make contact and tap the resource, by all means do so! Log everything.

II. RESEARCH

- 2/17 Report and assess research on organizations**
Reassess: what do we know, what do we want to know? How to proceed?
Organize individual and small group tasks for the next four weeks of field work
For today: Collect and organize data from existing resources. Document all sources fully. Get hard copies. Log everything. Be prepared to share.
Also, Read Daloz Parks, "Young Adulthood in a Changing World", and "Interviewing in Qualitative Research" <www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-874204-5chap15.pdf> (sent by email 2/10)
- 2/24 Report/update/assess progress, discuss/interpret data**
Complete and submit IRB Form no later than this week
For today: Come with information, documentation, notes, etc. from your research on (1) and (2), above. Log everything.
- 3/3 Report/update/assess progress, discuss/interpret data**
For today: Field work. Log everything.
- 3/10 NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK**
- 3/17 Report/update/assess progress, discuss/interpret data**
For today: Field work. Log everything.

III. PRESENTATION

- 3/24 So, what've we got? Report on last research activities**
Begin planning for final presentation (format, layout, responsibilities, schedule)
For today: Field work. Log everything.
Wrap up loose ends of research in progress.
Take "Research Notes" on how we might present our work.
- 3/31 Presentation work**
For today: TBA
- 4/7 NO CLASS**
Use class time to meet in groups, or groups of groups, as needed.
By today: TBA (Complete final versions of all material for the presentation.)
- 4/14 Review, revise and rehearse public presentation**
For today: TBA
- 4/21 Public presentation**
For today: TBA
- 4/28 Assessment and evaluation**
For today: Hand in logs, including "Final Assessment"