

XIDS 2002-12
What Do You Know About
Religion in American Politics
Fall 2017

Instructor: Dr. Dan Williams
Office Hours: TLC 3207
T, Th, 9:30-10:30am
Wed., 10am-12pm, 2-5pm
(Additional office hours available by appointment)
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Class Location:
Pafford 208
Friday, 9:55-11:35am

Description:

This is a seminar course that will give you the opportunity to evaluate and discuss a variety of perspectives about religion in American politics in both the past and the present. The course will give you the tools to understand the reasoning behind different political points of view and will offer you the opportunity to develop your own perspective on these questions through class discussion and writing exercises.

Learning Outcomes:

The assignments in this course will require students to:

- 1) Adapt written and oral communication to specific rhetorical purposes and audiences.
- 2) Recognize and begin to implement the skills necessary to become life-long, active learners through the exploration of an academic topic that focuses on a contemporary and/or enduring topic, question, or problem.

Assessment:

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation	25%
CourseDen discussion posts	30%
First essay assignment	25%
Second essay assignment	20%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

Grading Methodology: This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A-

/ B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision. In computing final course grades, I convert all grades into numeric scores according to the following system:

A = 95

A/A- = 94

A- = 92

A-/B+ = 90

B+ = 88

B+/B = 87

B = 85

B/B- = 84

B- = 82

B-/C+ = 80

(A similar pattern is used for grades in the C-range and D-range).

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C. A grade average of 59.5, which converts to a D, is the lowest possible passing grade in the course.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade on an essay assignment, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and the ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources, as well as an accurate understanding of the material and good writing technique. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of the assigned documents, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain factual inaccuracies, errors in interpretation, inadequate use of the assigned documents, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

D-range and failing grades are assigned to work that fails to meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

Class participation: This is a seminar class, so you will be expected to participate in class discussions for each class session.

You can earn an A for class participation by attending all classes and making thoughtful contributions to the class discussions each week – that is, contributions that indicate that you

have engaged with key ideas from the assigned readings. You are allowed to miss up to one class without experiencing any adverse effect on your grade, but additional absences will count against you unless they are excused absences (e.g., medical emergencies or university-related, officially sanctioned absences such as athletic competitions) supported by appropriate documentation. For those absences, you must also submit written summaries of the readings in order to receive credit for class attendance in absentia.

B-range grades for class participation will be given to students who attend most of the class sessions (that is, no more than three class absences for a high-B participation grade or four absences for a low-B grade) and participate in most of the discussions, but whose comments may not demonstrate the same level of engagement with the readings that would be required for an A-level participation grade.

C-range participation grades will be given to students who attend at least 60 percent of the class sessions and make at least periodic contributions to class discussions.

Because of the importance of class participation in this seminar, you should talk to me as soon as possible if you find that you are uncomfortable speaking up in class. I realize that some students may feel more comfortable speaking up than others, but I want to give every student a chance to share their ideas with their classmates, and I want to do whatever I can to make every student feel comfortable speaking in this environment.

CourseDen discussion posts: Each week, you will be asked to submit a CourseDen discussion post in response to the assigned question listed on the syllabus for that week's readings. Your post, which should be approximately two paragraphs long, should draw on the information from the assigned readings to answer the assigned question and should then conclude with a question of your own about the readings. After submitting your post, you should then submit short responses to questions posed by two of your classmates. I will not assign grades for your individual discussion posts, but I will give you a grade at the end of the semester that will reflect the total quality of your CourseDen posts. You will receive midterm grades for your class participation and CourseDen posts at the end of each month (August, September, and October), so you will be able to track your progress in this area throughout the semester. You are allowed to skip up to three CourseDen posts throughout the semester without suffering any impact on your grade.

Essay assignments: There are two 3-5 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) essays assigned in this course. The assigned essay questions are listed on the syllabus. The first draft for the first essay is due on October 27. I will return these drafts with my comments the following week, and you will then have until November 17 to complete the revised version of your essay. You will also be required to write another 3-5 page essay in response to a second essay question, and that essay is due on December 4.

Plagiarism policy: Plagiarism, which is the presentation of someone else's words or ideas as your own, is a serious offense that will not be tolerated. It should go without saying that all papers that you write in this course must be your own work. Any students who are caught copying words or ideas from another student's work, a website, a textbook, or any other source,

and presenting these words or ideas as their own work without proper attribution, will be charged with plagiarism. Students who have engaged in academic dishonesty will automatically fail this course and will be reported to the university administration for possible further disciplinary action. Please look at the CourseDen page for this class to find guidelines on proper footnoting procedures, tips for avoiding inadvertent plagiarism, and a detailed explanation of what constitutes plagiarism. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, please ask, because I will be happy to provide explanations. Ignorance is not an excuse for plagiarism; it is your responsibility to read the materials on plagiarism that are posted on the course website and to take all necessary steps to avoid plagiarizing someone else's work.

More information about the university's honor code and the consequences for violating it can be found here:

http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf.

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester.

Class communication: I may send out periodic email communiqués to students in this course, so please check your UWG email account regularly. If possible, please use your UWG email account or CourseDen email for all electronic communications that you send me. I make it a priority to respond to student emails within a few hours of receiving them. (I should note, though, that you will probably receive a much faster response if you contact me via my UWG email than if you send me a message through CourseDen).

To protect students' privacy rights, I will not return graded papers or exams to any third party (e.g., a student's friend or relative who asks to pick up a student's work on that person's behalf) unless a student gives me permission in writing (e.g., an email) to do so. There are occasions when I must disclose a student's grade to university administrators, other history department faculty (e.g., the department chair), or athletic coaches who need to know the academic status of students on their team, but in all other cases, I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of students' grades.

I would like to do whatever I can to help you succeed in this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a question about any subject pertaining to this class. I make it a priority to respond promptly to emails from students, and I am happy to talk with students during my office hours, so please feel free to stop by my office to introduce yourself and discuss any concerns that you may have about this course. I believe that this will be an excellent semester, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this class.

Assigned readings: There are no assigned books for this course. All of the assigned readings consist of short documents or articles that are posted on CourseDen or are available online at the URLs listed on the syllabus. Because each class session will consist of a discussion of the assigned readings, you will need to complete these readings before class.

Class schedule:

(It is very important that you complete the assigned readings before class and come to each class session prepared to discuss the scheduled readings).

- 8/11 Religion in American politics: initial perspectives
 Student discussion of personal perspectives on religion in contemporary American politics
 CourseDen discussion post (due by 11:59pm on 8/14): How would you describe your own political philosophy? What influences have shaped your political views? What questions do you most want to explore in this course? What concerns or anxieties (if any) do you have about this course or about any of the topics that we plan to discuss this semester?
- 8/18 The Founders, the Constitution, and the First Amendment (history)
 Readings to discuss (choose five of the following to read):
- 1) John Adams's Letter to Abigail Adams, 1774 (CourseDen)
 - 2) Abigail Adams's letter
 (http://www.beliefnet.com/resourcelib/docs/76/Letter_from_Abigail_Adams_to_John_Adams_1.html).
 - 3) Excerpt from George Washington's Farewell Address (CourseDen).
 - 4) Thomas Jefferson's letter on a "wall of separation" between church and state (CourseDen).
 - 5) Thomas Jefferson's Religious Beliefs (<https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>).
 - 6) Thomas Jefferson's Religion
 (https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Jefferson_Thomas_and_Religion#start_entry).
 - 7) A secular view of Thomas Jefferson: <https://www.nobeliefs.com/jefferson.htm>.
 - 8) A secular view of the founders: Jeff Schweitzer, "Founding Fathers: We Are Not a Christian Nation," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-schweitzer/founding-fathers-we-are-n_b_6761840.html.
 - 9) Daniel Dreisbach's view of Jefferson's "wall of separation"
 (<http://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/the-mythical-wall-separation-how-misused-metaphor-changed-church-state-law>).
 - 10) Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter S. Onuf, "Thomas Jefferson's Bible Teaching"
 (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/04/opinion/thomas-jeffersons-bible-teaching.html?_r=0)
 - 11) David Sehat on "The Myth of American Religious Freedom,"
<http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2011/01/myth-of-american-religious-freedom.html>
- CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 8/17): What did the "founding fathers" believe about the relationship between church and state? What common misconceptions do you think many people have about the founders' views? Did anything that you read this week about the founders' views on religion and politics surprise you?
- 8/25 Two moral reform movements of the 19th century: Antislavery and Prohibition (history)
 Readings to discuss (choose six of the following to read):

- 1) William Lloyd Garrison's "No Compromise with the Evil of Slavery"
(<http://www.blackpast.org/1854-william-lloyd-garrison-no-compromise-evil-slavery>).
- 2) David Walker's Appeal (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2931t.html>).
- 3) "10 Things You May Not Know about Nat Turner's Rebellion"
(<http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-nat-turners-rebellion>).
- 4) William Lloyd Garrison's biography
(<https://newpittsburghcourieronline.com/2013/02/07/william-lloyd-garrison-headed-the-abolitionist-movement-to-free-slaves/>)
- 5) Charles Grandison Finney (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-20/charles-grandison-finney-father-of-american-revivalism.html>).
- 6) Religion among African American Slaves
(<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history2.html>).
- 7) Baptists and the American Civil War (<http://civilwarbaptists.com/featured/slavery/>).
- 8) The Roots of Prohibition (<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/roots-of-prohibition/>).
- 9) Richard P. Hobson's Arguments in Favor of Prohibition
(<https://prohibition.osu.edu/hobson>).
- 10) Frances Willard's temperance speech
(<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/prohib/policy.html>).
- 11) Temperance Cartoons (<https://prohibition.osu.edu/prohibition-party-cartoons/introduction>).
- 12) Should Prohibition Be Repealed? (1925)
(<http://americaninclass.org/sources/becomingmodern/divisions/text4/prohibitionrepeal.pdf>)

CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 8/24): What similarities and differences do you see between the antislavery movement and the 19th-century campaign against alcohol? What role did religion and moral claims play in each movement?

- 9/1 The civil rights movement and the black church in American politics (history, political theory, and philosophy)
Readings to discuss:
Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail
(https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)
CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 8/31): What moral claims did Martin Luther King Jr. make in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"? What justification did he give for these moral claims?
- 9/8 Civil religion (religious studies, political science, history)
Readings to discuss (Read Bellah's article and then select two inaugural addresses to read):
- 1) Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (1967)
(http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm)
 - 2) Harry S. Truman, Inaugural Address (1949)
(http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm)

- 3) Ronald Reagan, First Inaugural Address (1981)
(<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>)
- 4) Bill Clinton, First Inaugural Address (1993)
(<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=46366>)
- 5) George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address (2005)
(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172>)
- 6) Barack Obama, First Inaugural Address (2009)
(<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/01/21/president-barack-obamas-inaugural-address>)

CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 9/7): Using Robert Bellah's definition of "civil religion" as a guide, what themes of civil religion do you see reflected in the presidential inaugural addresses that you read? What beliefs about God and America do you think American presidents are expected to hold? Why do you think this is the case?

9/15 Secularism and pluralism (political theory)

Readings to discuss (Read four articles from a variety of perspectives):

- 1) Defense of secularism: Excerpt from James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State*, pp. 217-240 (CourseDen).
- 2) Defense of secularism: Terry Sanderson, "In Defense of Secularism"
(<http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2010/07/secularism-faith-opposes-india>).
- 3) Defense of secularism: Mark Lilla
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/19/magazine/19Religion-t.html>)
- 4) Defense of secularism from an atheistic perspective: Rob Boston
(<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/save-the-day-celebrating-real-religious-freedom>)
- 5) Critique of secularism: Michael J. Sandel, "Towards a Just Society"
(<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/feb/20/just-society-civic-virtues>)
- 6) Critique of secularism: Richard John Neuhaus
(<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/01/religion-and-politicsthe-great-separation>)
- 7) Alan Levinovitz, "The Problem of Religious Tolerance"
(<http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Problem-With-Religious/233593>)

CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 9/14): What is secularism? Do you find the defenses of secularism convincing? What do you think are the strongest arguments *against* secularism and the strongest arguments *for* it?

9/22 The natural law perspective (political theory)

(Guest discussion leader: Dr. Bob Schaefer)

Readings to discuss: TBA

9/29 Four perspectives on religion in recent American politics: Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Jewish (religious studies)

Readings to discuss:

- 1) Catholic: "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship"
(<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>), read pp. 20-26.

- 2) Mainline Protestant: “A 21st-Century Social Creed”
(<http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/christian-unity/a-21st-century-social-creed/>)
- 3) Evangelical: Amy Black, “Evangelicals and Politics,”
<https://www.nae.net/evangelicals-and-politics/>, and “7 Types of Evangelicals”
(<http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/22/politics/seven-types-of-evangelicals-and-the-primaries/index.html>).
- 4) Jewish: Cynthia Ozick, “Church & State & the Jews”
(<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/church-state-the-jews/>).

CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 9/28): How would you summarize the main ideas of each of the four perspectives on religion in politics that you read this week? What ideas do they share in common? What differences or potential points of conflict did you note?

10/6 No class (fall break)

10/13 The Religious Left and the Religious Right (history)

Readings to discuss:

- 1) Religious Left: Martin Luther King Jr., “Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam” (1967)
(<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificviet/riversidetranscript.html>).
- 2) Religious Left: William J. Barber’s website (<http://www.breachrepairers.org/>).
- 3) Religious Right: Jerry Falwell, “Listen, America”
(https://www.ens.fr/IMG/file/concours/2014/BL/sujet_anglais_BL_2014.pdf) (read first 2 pages)
- 4) Religious Right: James Dobson: “Why I am Voting for Donald Trump:
(<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october/james-dobson-why-i-am-voting-for-donald-trump.html>)

CourseDen discussion post question (due by 11:59pm on 10/12): Why do you think the Religious Left and the Religious Right can appeal to the same religious texts and yet come to such different political conclusions? What are the key areas of concern for each group?

10/20 The debate over abortion policy (history, political science, philosophy, and law)

Readings to discuss (Read four articles from multiple perspectives):

- 1) Excerpt from the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision (CourseDen)
- 2) “The Best Pro-Life Arguments for Secular Audiences”
(<http://www.frc.org/arguments>)
- 3) Frederica Mathewes-Green, “The Bitter Price of Choice”
(<http://www.feministsforlife.org/the-bitter-price-of-choice/>)
- 4) Nicole Russell, “Pro-Lifers Are Today’s Abolitionists”
(<http://thefederalist.com/2015/08/03/pro-lifers-are-todays-abolitionists/>)
- 5) Bob Smietana, “When Does Personhood Begin?”
(<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/july/7.24.html?start=1>)
- 6) Howard Kainz, “Natural Law and Abortion”
(<http://www.crisismagazine.com/2010/natural-law-and-abortion>)
- 7) Arguments for and against Abortion (<http://abortion.procon.org/>)

- 8) Keli Goff, “A Christian Case for Abortion Rights?” (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/a-christian-case-for-abortion-rights>)
- 9) Mary Lunsford, “15 Reasons to Be Pro-Choice” (<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/15-reasons-pro-choice>)
- 10) Arthur Caplan, “When Does Human Life Begin?” (<https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/articles/5639>)

CourseDen discussion post (due by 11:59pm on 10/19): What are the key areas of controversy in the debates over abortion? What conflicting sets of rights are at stake in this debate? How do religious beliefs influence the way that people evaluate this issue?

10/27 No class (instructor at conference)

First 3-5 page essay assignment (draft) due by 11:59pm (submit via CourseDen).

Question: Using the information that you learned in this class, how would you respond to a friend who asked you, “Why is there so much religion in politics in the United States? I thought we had separation of church and state in this country!”

11/3 The debate over LGBT rights (history, political science, philosophy, and law)

Readings to discuss (Read four articles from multiple perspectives):

- 1) Excerpt from the Supreme Court’s *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision (CourseDen)
- 2) Robert P. George on same-sex marriage (<http://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/marriage/marriage-can-we-have-justice-without-it>)
- 3) Sherif Girgis on same-sex marriage (<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/02/7942/>)
- 4) United Church of Christ, statement on marriage equality (<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/2005-EQUAL-MARRIAGE-RIGHTS-FOR-ALL.pdf>)
- 5) ACLU, “End the Use of Religion to Discriminate” (<https://www.aclu.org/feature/end-use-religion-discriminate>)
- 6) “Gay Marriage Victory at Supreme Court Triggering Backlash” (2016) (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2016/05/29/gay-lesbian-transgender-religious-exemption-supreme-court-north-carolina/84908172/>)

CourseDen discussion post (due by 11:59pm on 11/2): What are the key areas of controversy in the debates over same-sex marriage and LGBT rights? What are the various ways in which religious beliefs influence people’s views on these issues?

11/10 Recent court cases on religious liberty and religious establishment (legal history)

Students will be assigned specific Supreme Court cases to research online.

CourseDen discussion post questions (due by 11:59pm on 11/9): Give a brief synopsis of the issues involved in your assigned Supreme Court case. Why did the Court decide to rule as it did? What were the dissenting arguments?

11/17 The rights of religious minorities in the contemporary US (journalism and law)

(Guests: Dr. Farooq Khan and other guests)

Final version of first 3-5 page essay assignment due by 11:59pm

11/24 No class (Thanksgiving break)

12/1 Student roundtable discussion: Religion and politics from your perspective

12/4 **Second 3-5 page essay assignment due by 11:59pm (submit via CourseDen).**

Option 1: Question: Choose *one* of the following issues – (abortion policy, LGBT rights, or the rights of religious minorities (including atheists) – and use the relevant readings in this class to explain why this issue has been so controversial. Discuss the ways in which religious views have influenced the arguments on both sides of the debate. How successful has US policy been in protecting the rights (or addressing the concerns) of people on both sides of this issue? Can you suggest a policy that might be more satisfactory?

Option 2: Question: Choose *one* of the following issues - abortion policy, LGBT rights, or the rights of religious minorities (including atheists) - and interview at least two people who take opposing points of view on this question. Explain their arguments and the reasons for their differing positions. Then use the relevant readings from this class to explain the larger assumptions and ideas that might have shaped each of your interview subjects' views, as well as the larger issues that might be at stake in this debate. Explain each position as charitably as you can, and then assess whether there is any political compromise that might address the concerns of people on both sides of this controversial issue.