

# Karin E. Gedge Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Philip Gleason of the University of Notre Dame. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

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## I. Syllabus Justification

### Explanation and Rationale

If you're confused by this syllabus and its complicated format and requirements, imagine a student's reaction. But there is method in my madness. First, the syllabus lets students know that the course is demanding. They can't read a textbook, memorize some information, and pass the course. They should know that upfront. Second, the syllabus outlines not only the content of the course, but the developmental skills taught in the course—both what they will know and what they will be able to do at the end of the course. Third, the syllabus gives some indication of the variety of content areas and activities that will make this course not only demanding but interesting. Fourth, the syllabus demands constant reference and clarification. Students need to look ahead, plan ahead, and ask questions when they're confused. Those are good strategies for them to develop. I usually provide more details for each assignment in a class handout and make available models or samples on reserve in the library and in my office. Finally, the syllabus demands that students constantly engage the subject by making choices and being held accountable for those choices. All students have several opportunities to pursue particular interests and to be responsible for sharing their new knowledge with the class and with the instructor in a variety of ways. The assignments are so specific that it's nearly impossible to plagiarize from other students, or secondary and tertiary sources, including the internet. I've tried to make it very difficult to do minimal work without letting all of us know that you've shirked the work. On the other hand, it's pretty easy to identify those students who've met or gone beyond the minimal expectations. Ultimately, I've tried to design a course that helps students learn how to be historians, whether or not history is their major, whether this is their first or last history course. By the end of the semester they will have been introduced not only to the religions of America but to the methods of history and the conventions of historical writing. The course leads students through the various processes of constructing a historical research paper even though a major term paper is not assigned. This course was designed for West Chester University, a fairly small public university in southeastern Pennsylvania, but based on my experiences teaching at a variety of public and private universities enrolling students with diverse academic experiences and talents. I have not road-tested this course yet, but I've used a format, concepts, and strategies that have worked well in other courses. It works best in a group of no more than 25-30 students, but might be adapted to larger sections by dividing students

into small permanent groups of 5-8 for discussion. Instructors or students who prefer more structure and less choice, might select more specific and common reading assignments. The course is not tied to these required textbooks, either. Instructors might easily substitute a different synthetic text and/or put together a coursepack of documents on favorite topics. I chose the Wentz text because I wanted my West Chester students to have a very accessible narrative text. Given a different population, I would have chosen a more scholarly text on religion and culture such as Peter Williams. I chose the Gaustad documents because I wanted to give students as wide a range of choices as possible. Instructors might supply this breadth of choice by placing documentaries on reserve. Finally, the written assignments in the portfolios might be reduced and replaced with essay exams. Any syllabus is a work in progress and students should expect that changes might occur even during the semester.

## II. Introductory Course Syllabus

West Chester University  
**History 474: American Religions**

Fall Semester

### Course Objectives:

Students in this course will acquire a broad overview of American religions from pre-European contact to the present with an emphasis on continuity and change over time, the remarkable variety and intensity of voluntary religion, and the sources of both conflict and consensus within and between various traditions. Since this is an advanced level history course, students will be required to demonstrate not only knowledge of course content but also skills in note-taking, inquiry, research, analysis, synthesis, and historiography. No prior knowledge of American religions or religious history is required. However, a basic working knowledge of American political and social history is an asset. This is a very demanding course, but students will have the opportunity to acquire interesting, valuable knowledge and skills they will be able to use and apply beyond this course.

### Required books:

Students are strongly encouraged to purchase the short coursepack and the following titles:

- Richard E. Wentz. *Religion in the New World: The Shaping of Religious Traditions in the New World*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
- Edwin S. Gaustad, ed. *Documentary History of Religion in America*, vols. 1 and 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982 or most recent reprint)

These texts and a variety of other primary, secondary, and tertiary sources on American religious history will be on closed reserve in the library and available for students to read or copy. Most assignments will not require any research beyond these sources. Please note that you will be responsible for the assigned readings on the assigned dates, whether or not you own the books.

### Minimum course requirements:

Students will compile and submit a portfolio of written assignments and projects over the semester. Assignments will be graded individually and an overall grade assigned for the entire portfolio which will reflect the student's organization, effort, and progress over the semester and account for 55% of the final

course grade. In addition, unannounced short quizzes (5), a midterm (10) and a final exam (20), all objective, i.e. multiple choice, matching, identification or short answer, will account for 35% of the course grade. Finally, class participation and informal oral presentations account for 15% of the final grade. Students will be required to work individually, in small groups, and as a whole class.

The portfolio assignments include:

1. A one-paragraph working definition of American religion, (5)
2. One of the three following assignments: (5)
  - A. A three/five-paragraph religious autobiography and/or family tree; OR
  - B. A written observation of a religious service outside your own tradition; OR
  - C. A tape or transcript of a brief interview with a person of faith outside your own family and tradition.
3. A two/three-page analysis and comparison of the excerpts from primary source, film, and textbook coverage of EITHER (10)
  - A. Cabeza de Vaca OR
  - B. Jesuit Relations and Black Robe.
4. A four/five-page description, synthesis and historiographical essay on a religious tradition of your choice drawing from at least 2 secondary sources and 3 tertiary sources (15)
5. A four/five-page analysis of at least 1 primary source of your choice, including historical context and significance (10)
6. A time-line, concept map, or extended analogy of your own design that traces American religious history from pre-Columbian contact to the present. (5)
7. An alphabetized cardfile or glossary of at least 50 significant terms and vocabulary and their definitions (i.e., who, what, when, where, and why is it significant?) (5)

Due dates for each assignment are included in the syllabus. Those submitted prior to or on the original due date may be revised once and resubmitted (with the first draft and my comments) within two weeks for a new grade. Late assignments may not be revised and resubmitted unless you have received an exemption for extenuating circumstances before the due date.

## **Grading Rubric:**

A= Student demonstrated outstanding effort, organization and progress over the semester and generally exceeded minimum course requirements. (90-105)

B= Student demonstrated above-average effort, organization and progress over the semester while meeting all minimum course requirements. (80-89)

C= Student met all minimum course requirements with demonstrated competence.(70-79)

D= Student met nearly all minimum course requirements with competence. (60-69)

E= Student failed to meet minimum course requirements with competence.(59 or below)

## **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

Week 1: Introduction and Definitions

Tues: Review syllabus and begin defining religion, history, and America

Thurs: Read Wentz, Ch. 1 (Definitions), 2 (Myths) Submit one-paragraph definition. Discuss ways of organizing American Religions-mainstream and branches, center and periphery, mosaic, etc.

Week 2: Background Native American, African, and European religions pre-contact

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 3 (Reformation), 9 (Roman Catholic Traditions) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 1, National Religion

Thurs: Read Wentz, Ch. 4 (Native American), (p. 45-58); 16 (African heritage) (p. 268-78) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 1, National Religion.

Autobiography, observation, or interview due. (This assignment requires field research, but no additional sources.)

Week 3: Reading primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Two case studies.

Tues: Groups A and B read selections from Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relationes*. Group C and D read selections from *Jesuit Relations*. All groups should compare the textbook and/or encyclopedia (tertiary source) treatments and definitions with the primary sources and be prepared to discuss what confirms, contradicts, or complicates their understanding of continuity and change from European and Native American religious and cultural perspectives.

Thurs: Groups A and B have viewed the 1992 Mexican film *Cabeza de Vaca*; Groups C and D have viewed the 1990 American film *Black Robe* (both fictionalized interpretations and secondary sources) and are prepared to discuss the similarities and differences between primary, secondary, and tertiary source treatments.

Week 4: Colonial Puritan Traditions

Tues: Papers on De Vaca or *Jesuit Relations* due. Read Wentz, Ch. 5 (Puritan Tradition) and at least one primary source from Gaustad, Ch. 2, *The English and the Indian*.

Thurs: Read selection from John Demos, *Unredeemed Captive* (secondary source) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 2 (Massachusetts) and Ch. 3 (Congregationalism), e.g. John Winthrop, the Anne Hutchinson trial, Salem witch trials, Roger Williams

Week 5: Colonial Diversity  
Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 6 (Anglicans), 7 (Reformed) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 2 (Virginia) or Ch. 3 (Anglicanism).  
Thurs: Read Wentz, Ch. 8 (Lutherans), 9 (Methodists) and at least one primary source from Gaustad, Ch. 4 on Methodism.

Week 6: The Revivalist Tradition

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 11 (Revivalist Tradition), Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried" (secondary source).

Thurs: Read at least two primary sources from Gaustad (vol. 1 or 2) or coursepack on revivalism, e.g. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Benjamin Franklin, Charles Finney, Peter Cartwright, Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham

Week 7: Centripetal Forces--Republican and National Religion

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 12 (Public Religious Tradition) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 4.

Thurs: Glossary check, review, and Midterm Exam.

Week 8: Restorationist Traditions

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 13 (Christians to Latter-Day Saints) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 5.

Thurs: Read Wentz, Ch. 16, (African-American Traditions) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 6 (Human Rights and American Religion)

Week 9: Centrifugal forces-Immigration, syncretism and increasing diversity.

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 9 (Roman Catholic), Ch. 14 (Jewish Tradition) and 15 (Eastern Orthodox)

Thurs: Read at least one primary source in Gaustad (Vol. 1 or 2) on each of the traditions discussed on Tuesday and selection from Robert Orsi, Madonna of 115th Street (secondary source).

Week 10: Centrifugal forces--Liberal

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 17 (New Thought and Positive Thinking) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad (vol. 1) on Rational Religion, Transcendentalism, or Spiritualism

or (vol. 2) Ch. 8, Love and Justice.

Thurs: Brief Bibliographical and Historiographical Essay on a religious tradition of your choice. (Requires some outside research to locate two secondary sources-either books or scholarly articles).

Week 11: Centrifugal forces-Conservative

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 18 (Millenarian, Holiness, and Pentacostals) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 9 on above traditions.

Thurs: Read Wentz, Ch. 19 (Fundamentalist and Neo-Evangelicals) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 10 or 11.

Week 12: Increasing Pluralism

Tues: Read Wentz, Ch. 20 (Traditions Ancient, Asian and Arabesque) and at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 12.

Thurs: Analytical Paper on a Primary Source (which can be taken from course textbooks or coursepack, or outside research, especially to locate a graphic source, artifact, or ritual)

Week 13: Religion in Post-WWII and Contemporary Culture and Politics

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Tues: Read at least two primary sources from Gaustad, Ch. 11 or 12 and at least two recent newspaper and/or magazine articles on contemporary religion. (Requires use of periodical guides.) Suggested topics include Vatican II, civil rights, feminism, abortion, school prayer, pacifism, Christian Coalition, cults, overseas missions, etc.

Thurs: Time-line, concept map or extended analogy due, Review of cardfile/glossary terms. Submit portfolio.

TBA: Final Exam