

“Religion in Postwar America” Syllabus Justification

Young Scholars in American Religion
2003-2004

David Yamane

This syllabus is for an upper-division course that I will offer for the first time at Wake Forest University in the spring of 2005.

The Setting

Wake Forest is a private, secular university located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It is very-expensive (\$37,110 tuition and fees) and highly-selective, with an enrollment of just over 4,000 students in the undergraduate college. (Although the university has medical, law, business, and divinity schools, few arts and letters disciplines offer graduate degrees.)

The student to faculty ratio in the college is 10:1, allowing for small courses and extensive student-faculty interaction, inside and outside of class. Moreover, students and administrators expect faculty to employ pedagogies that actively engage students.

Although Wake is located in the south and was formally affiliated with the North Carolina Baptist Convention until 1986, the university draws an increasingly national student body and manifests surprising religious (if not racial) diversity. For example, when I taught a sociology of the family class during my interview, I conducted a survey and found the 29 students to display some religious diversity, albeit with a distinctive Baptist and evangelical accent (see the table below). Baptists accounted for just over 20 percent of the class and 31 percent of the students in the class characterized themselves as “Born Again.” At the same time, Catholic, Jews, and “Nones” were well-represented, and there was even one Baha’i in the class.

Tradition	Percent of Protestants	Total Percent
Protestant		58.6
* <i>Baptist</i>	35.3	
* <i>Non-denominational</i>	23.5	
* <i>Presbyterian</i>	23.5	
* <i>Methodist</i>	11.8	
* <i>Pentecostal</i>	5.9	
Roman Catholic		17.2
None		13.8
Jewish		6.9
Baha'i		3.4

My Approach

In organizing my classes, I try to view students not as empty vessels that need to be filled with information, but as agents capable of taking an active role in learning. Research on student development strongly supports the idea that an active approach to learning is essential. “The theory . . . *students learn by becoming involved*,” writes Alexander Astin, “seems to explain most of the empirical knowledge gained over the years about environmental influences on student development” (*Achieving Educational Excellence*, 1985). According to Charles Bonwell and James Eison, “Analysis of the research literature . . . suggests that students must do more than just listen: They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems” (*Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*, 1991).

In every class I teach, therefore, I seek to involve students as much as possible in their own learning. During class, this means placing an emphasis on problem solving and discussion. Outside of class, the emphasis is on writing papers that require students to do some amount of “research” (collecting and analyzing primary data). This active learning pedagogy is reflected in the core requirements for the “Religion in Postwar America” course I have developed (some of which I discuss under “The Substance” below).

20 percent of the students' grades are based on in-class discussions. Students are expected to participate consistently, thoughtfully, and actively in class discussions, and I try to judge not only the quantity but also the quality of participation. Another 5 percent is allocated to in-class presentations students give in which they offer an overview of the readings for one class and present a series of questions which guide the class discussion for the day. A latent function of this is to encourage the students to see themselves as able to take the lead in shaping the class's response to the course material.

This 25 percent of the total grade allocated to in-class activities is meant to signal to the students the importance of this aspect of our work, and to reward them for their effort and achievement in this area.

The Substance

As the syllabus' course overview indicates, "Religion in Postwar America" surveys the major developments in religious life in the United States since the 1950s. Students will read some of the most important recent sociological studies on this subject and discuss them in class.

The overall aim of the course is to cultivate a *sociological imagination* and apply it to religious life. According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination allows us to see our lives "as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society" (*The Sociological Imagination*, 1959, p.7).

Students will exercise this sociological imagination by crafting of a "sociological autobiography." Robert K. Merton has written that "the sociological autobiography uses sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings, and analytical procedures to construct and to interpret one's own life history." Students will construct such a written interpretation of their own life histories—including comparisons between their own relationship to religion and that of their grandparents, parents, and peers.

As the syllabus indicates, this sociological autobiography is completed in three parts over the course of the semester, with each section incorporating a component of the tripartite formula for the sociological imagination: biography (paper 1), history (paper 2), and society (paper 3).

This paper assignment is meant to encourage students to use the sociological study of religion as a window onto their lives, and to use their lives as a springboard to understanding the changing role of religion in American social life.

For the personal use of teachers. Not for sale or redistribution.
© Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, 2004

Religion in Postwar America Syllabus

OVERVIEW

This course surveys the major developments in religious life in the United States since the 1950s. We will read some of the most important recent books on this subject and discuss these works in class.

The overall aim of this course is to cultivate a sociological imagination and apply it to religious life. According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination allows us to see our lives “as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society” (*The Sociological Imagination*, 1959, p.7).

You will exercise this sociological imagination by crafting of a “sociological autobiography.” Robert K. Merton has written that “the sociological autobiography uses sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings, and analytical procedures to construct and to interpret one’s own life history.” You will construct such a written interpretation of your own life history—including a comparison of yourself to your grandparents, parents, and peers—over the course of the semester.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following books are available at the campus bookstore, as well as at many used bookstores (e.g., <http://www.bookfinder.com>):

Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998)

Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999).

Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

Robert Wuthnow, *Growing Up Religious: Christians and Jews and Their Journeys of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999)

COURSE REQUIREMENT SUMMARY

1. Class Participation (20%)
2. Lead Discussion (5%)

For the personal use of teachers. Not for sale or redistribution.
© Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, 2004

3. Three Part Sociological Autobiography (20% + 25% + 30%)
4. Office Visit (-5% for failure to complete)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of this semester, I hope we will all make some progress in the following areas:

1. In the ability to describe and analyze the major trends in the way religion is practiced in postwar American society.
2. More importantly, in the ability to apply a sociological imagination to our own religious lives and development. We want to be better able to use sociological studies of religion as a window onto our lives, and to use our lives as a springboard to understanding religion in social life.
3. In general, we want to cultivate and employ the intellectual habits that are central to scholarship: reading critically, discussing thoughtfully, and writing carefully. These analytical habits are portable from this class to others, and from classes to life and work in general. In particular, we want to appreciate the importance of the process of discovery which is at the heart of our knowledge of ourselves and the social world. Ideally, through regular reading, writing, and discussion, this course will become the process of discovery institutionalized.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are *100 total points* which can be earned in this class. They are distributed as follows:

Class Participation (20 points): You will be expected to participate thoughtfully and actively in our class discussions. Ground rules for participation will be collectively determined in the second week of class. Although class attendance is not the same as participation, it is a prerequisite; therefore, you will earn 10 of the 25 points for regular class attendance. To earn more than 10 points, however, *you must participate*.

Lead Discussion (5 points): You will sign up to give an overview of the reading for one class and present a series of questions which will guide our discussion for the day. At least 24 hours prior to class, you will email the instructor a copy of the questions for feedback. Bring enough copies of the questions for everyone in class. Grading: the quality of the presentations and usefulness of the questions will be graded by the class collectively. Each non-presenting student and the instructor will assign a score from 0 to 5, and the grade will be the average of those scores.

Sociological Autobiography (75 points): You will research and write a sociological autobiography that analyzes your religious life and development in three parts, each part developing and incorporating one aspect of Mills's tripartite understanding of the sociological imagination:

- **Paper 1: Biography (20 points):** In at least 5 pages, you will take a first crack at writing a sociological autobiography focusing on your religious life. Drawing on Gallup & Lindsay and Wuthnow, describe your current religiosity and/or orientation to religion and how you came to be this way.
- **Paper 2: History (25 points):** This paper incorporates Paper 1 and adds at least 5 more pages. It develops the historical dimension of the sociological imagination in two ways. First, you will interview at least two of your older relatives (one from your parents' generation and one from your grandparents' generation) about their religious lives and development. This material will provide a concrete historical point of reference for understanding your own religious life and development (which you elaborated in Paper 1). Second, you will interpret this biographical and historical material by drawing on the ideas and perspectives in Wuthnow's two books which focus on religious development over the life course and generational differences in orientations toward religion.
- **Final Paper: Society (30 points):** This paper incorporates Papers 1 and 2 and adds at least 5 more pages. In it, you will develop the societal dimension of the sociological imagination by interviewing at least three of your peers (not other students in this class) about their religious lives and development. This material will allow you to compare your religious life and development to that of other people of your same generation. You will also interpret this material by drawing on the ideas and perspectives of Cimino & Lattin and Davidman.

The final document you submit will be a complete sociological autobiography, integrating your biography, history, and social context. If your final paper is better than the average of your first two papers, the final paper will count for all **75 points** and the other two grades will be discarded. Improvement counts!

Note that I have only indicated minimum page requirements for these papers. It is my hope that you will find the researching and writing of your sociological autobiography personally enriching and will develop the written documents to whatever extent you want. The only limitation in terms of the class is that the paper must be coherent, whatever its length.

Office Visit (5 point penalty for not completing): By February 12th, you will see me for a 15-20 minute appointment outside of class so that we can become better acquainted. Failure to see me by February 12th will result in a 5 point deduction from your final grade. We can meet either during my office hours or by separate appointment.

GRADES

The scale for grades based on the number of points earned over the course of the semester is as follows:

A: 94-100	A-: 90-93	B+: 87-89	B: 83-86	B-: 80-82	C+: 77-79
C: 73-76	C-: 70-72	D: 60-69	F: Less than 60		

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

1. "Virtual" office hours are made possible by the wonders of electronic mail. If you have a question or comment, you can send it to me electronically. I will reply to your question or comment, and may send my reply to the entire class if I feel it is appropriate and instructive. Although you will not be personally identified as the original sender in any message I forward to the class, if you would like the correspondence to remain private, please so indicate prominently in your note. Electronic mail, it should be emphasized, is not an appropriate medium for highly personal or confidential correspondence. Finally, because I may not immediately receive or reply to your messages, pressing issues should be handled in person or by phone.
2. On handing in assignments: Whenever you hand in an assignment, be sure to *make a hard copy* to keep for yourself in case the assignment you turn in disappears (this is known to happen quite often, unfortunately). Simply keeping a "copy" on a computer disk (fixed or floppy) is *not* a recommended backup, since difficulties frequently arise with magnetic media, especially around the time papers are due!
3. On late assignments: Assignments must be emailed to me or handed in to me in person by the *beginning* of class on the due date. Any assignments submitted after that time will be graded down one full grade (e.g., from A to B, B to C) *per day late*. One second late = one day late. 24 hours and one second late = two days late. Etcetera. If you cannot turn a late assignment in directly to me, take it to the Sociology Department Office, have the secretary *sign and date* the assignment, and have him/her put it in my mailbox. If the paper is not signed and dated by a secretary, I will assume you turned it in the day I pick it up (which will not necessarily be the same day you turn it in). *Under no circumstances should you put late assignments under my door!*
4. On disabilities: According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with a physical or mental impairment ("disability") are entitled to equal access, integration and the provision of reasonable accommodation by Federally-supported institutions like Wake Forest. The University is required to make "*academic adjustments*" for qualified disabled persons (if you are in this class, you are "qualified"). These adjustments may include modifications to *academic requirements* as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate against a qualified handicapped student. Adjustments may also include modifications to course examinations or other procedures for evaluating students' academic achievement. If these Section 504 protections apply to you, or you *think* that they might apply to you, please contact me or the Office for Students with Disabilities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE: DIAGONAL LINES INDICATE NO CLASS MEETING

WEEK OF...	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
Week 1	**GETTING STARTED**	
	First Class Administration	Course Overview
Week 2	**SURVEYING THE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE**	
	Gallup & Lindsay, pp. 1-80	Gallup & Lindsay (cont.)
Week 3	**GROWING UP RELIGIOUS**	
	Wuthnow, pp. ix-65	Wuthnow, pp. 69-120
Week 4	Wuthnow, pp. 123-93	Wuthnow (cont.)
Week 5	Paper Workshop	Paper 1 Due
Week 6	**SOCIETY AND FAITH SINCE WORLD WAR II**	
		Wuthnow, pp. 1-51
Week 7	Wuthnow, pp. 85-113, 168-98	Wuthnow (cont.)
Week 8	Interviewing Workshop	
Week 9	**SPRING BREAK**	
Week 10	Paper Workshop	Paper 2 Due
Week 11	**SHOPPING FOR FAITH**	
		Cimino & Lattin, pp. 1-51
Week 12	Cimino & Lattin, pp. 55-128	Cimino & Lattin, pp. 187-89
Week 13	**TRADITION IN A ROOTLESS WORLD**	
	Davidman, pp. 1-73	Davidman, pp. 74-135

WEEK OF...	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
Week 14	Davidman, pp. 136-73, 191-206	Davidman (cont.)
Week 15	Finale	
Finals	Paper 3 Due	