

Progressive Religion in America

Grace Yukich

Young Scholars in American Religion (Fall 2015)

Institutional Setting and Teaching Approach

Quinnipiac University is a private, coeducational university in Hamden, CT with about 6,500 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students. It began as a small college and has grown rapidly during the last 15 years, transitioning to a national university with eight schools and colleges on three campuses. Most students major in one of the health, law, or business pre-professional programs. Those of us in arts and sciences seek to broaden the perspectives of students by emphasizing the core values of a liberal arts education. While most students identify as white (78%) and are from the northeast (92%), students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and many are first-generation college students. The level at which students prepare for classes varies, with some highly prepared and motivated students and others who come to class with little preparation.

Relatively small class sizes (typically ranging from 20 to 35 students) enable professors to structure courses in a variety of ways, with some emphasizing lectures and others using a wider variety of pedagogical approaches, including group discussion and exercises. Hands-on learning is valued and encouraged at Quinnipiac, so many courses incorporate activities that allow students to engage in their communities in practical ways in order to learn the course material and develop new skills.

Progressive Religion in America is a new upper-level course in Sociology. I also regularly teach *Religion and Society*, an upper-level sociology of religion course, as well as other sociology courses, including ones on immigration and social movements. Upper-level courses have a maximum enrollment of 20 students and meet either three times a week for 50 minutes or two times a week for an hour and 15 minutes, depending on the semester. Students must have taken two previous sociology courses to enroll in the class, though no prior religion courses are required.

Living in an area of the country where religious affiliation is less common than elsewhere in the U.S., most students have limited knowledge about the basic histories, teachings, and similarities and differences of different religious traditions. As a result, the first two weeks of the course will focus on examining the diversity of religious traditions in the U.S. and upending common assumptions that all religion is necessarily conservative. These weeks will be more lecture-based, though with a mix of discussion. The remainder of the course will include a mix of lecture, student presentations, class discussion, group activities, and student research. I will frequently incorporate audio and video clips and have included a few examples in this syllabus. I will also use additional primary documents and contemporary newspaper articles as conversation starters for class discussion and debate about the assigned readings that form the core of the course.

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SO 300

Dr. Grace Yukich

Quinnipiac University

Course Goals

We hear a lot about religion in the media these days, but much of what we hear is about religious people who are fighting against same-sex marriage, abortion, or perceived loss of religious liberty. Religious conservatism is a powerful force in American society, but not all religious people are conservative. Indeed, many of the most important movements for social change in American history—from the abolition of slavery to civil rights to women’s rights—have been fueled in part by progressive religion. In this course, we will examine religion from a social scientific perspective. Social science approaches to religion are not about whether a particular religion, its beliefs, or its followers are good or bad, true or false. Instead, social scientists study how religion shapes society, which social factors shape religion, and how and why the shape of religion changes over time. Using sociological research, we will address questions like: What do we mean we talk about “religion”? What counts as “progressive religion” and who decides? How does “progressive religion” differ from “conservative religion”? Does being part of a marginalized religious tradition make it more likely that you will fight for progressive causes? How do race, class, and gender shape people’s approaches to progressive religion? How does progressive religion shape politics, gender & sexuality, and other parts of society? We will explore these questions by focusing on a wide array of religious traditions and contemporary topics.

Required Readings

1) Texts are available for purchase in the QU Bookstore and online. If you are ordering books online, you must ensure that the texts will arrive in time for you to read them before the class discussions.

1992. *Autobiography of Malcolm X (as told to Alex Haley)*. Ballantine.

Daniel Berrigan. 2004. *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. Fordham University Press.

Dorothy Day. 1997. *The Long Loneliness*. Harpercollins.

Edward Orozco Flores 2013. *God’s Gangs: Barrio Ministry, Masculinity, and Gang Recovery*. NYU Press.

James K. Wellman, Jr. 2008. *Evangelical vs. Liberal*. Oxford University Press.

Richard L. Wood and Brad R. Fulton. 2015. *A Shared Future: Faith-Based Organizing for Racial Equity and Ethical Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

2) All other readings are available online or on the Blackboard course website under “Course Materials.”

Online:

American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), “Pursuing Peace”

The Catholic Worker, “Aims and Means”

Jenkins, Jack, "Turns Out, Being Progressive and Religious is Hilarious" (*Think Progress*)
Jewish Voice for Peace, "Israel/Palestine 101"
King, Martin Luther, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
Loskota, Brie, "'Progressive' Religion or Just Religion?" (*Religion Dispatches*)
Merritt, Jonathan, "The Rise of the Christian Left in America" (*The Atlantic*)
Muslims for Progressive Values, "Muslims for Progressive Values Support Marriage Equality and an End to DOMA"
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Truth, Sojourner, "Ain't I a Woman?"

Blackboard:

Ahmed, Leila. 2011. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From the Middle East to America*. Yale University Press. (excerpts)
Carter, Heath W. 2015. *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago*. Oxford University Press. (excerpts)
Fuist, Todd, Ruth Braunstein, and Rhys Williams, eds. Forthcoming. *Progressive Religion and Social Activism*. NYU Press. (excerpts)
Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette. 2008. *God's Heart Has No Borders*. University of California Press. (excerpts)
Interfaith Worker Justice. 2007. "For You Were Once a Stranger." (excerpts)
Lerner, Michael. 2011. *Embracing Israel/Palestine*. North Atlantic Books. (excerpts)
Morris, Aldon D. 1986. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. Free Press. (excerpts)
Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2008. *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement*. Cambridge University Press. (excerpts)
Queen, Christopher S., ed. 2012. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Wisdom Publications. (excerpts)
Rauschenbusch, Walter. 2010. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. Martino Fine Books. (excerpts)
Sayeed, Sarah, Aisha al-Adawiya, and Ihsan Bagby. 2013. "Women and the American Mosque." Islamic Society of North America.
Smith, Christopher. 1996. *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*. University of Chicago Press. (excerpts)
Wilde, Melissa J. and Sabrina Danielsen. "Fewer and Better Children: Race, Class, Religion, and Birth Control Reform in America." *American Journal of Sociology* 119(6):1710-60.
Young, Michael P. 2002. "Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. National Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 67: 660-688.
Yukich, Grace. 2010. "Boundary Work in Inclusive Religious Groups: Constructing Identity at the New York Catholic Worker." *Sociology of Religion* 71:172-96.
Yukich, Grace. 2013. *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America*. Oxford University Press. (excerpts)

Assignments/Grading

1) Class Project & Presentation: The main course assignment is a semester-long course project. You may choose whichever of two options interests you the most. (See the appendix for descriptions and specific requirements for each project option. **Note: You must select your project by the end of the second week of class.**) Several weeks we will devote some class time to group meetings for the purposes of project planning and assessment. However, the projects will also require ongoing cooperative work outside of the class throughout the semester. As part of the project process, each student will provide a **Statement of Work** halfway through the semester. This will be a 3-page, double-spaced paper responding to prompts that will be provided ahead of time in class. The main goal of the statement is to assess the role you are playing in the group and to ensure both you and your group are making sufficient progress on your project. The projects culminate in a **final individual paper** and a **final group presentation**. The Statement of Work is worth 10 percent of your final grade, the final paper is worth 25 percent, and the final presentation is worth 15 percent. Students will be graded individually based on their contributions to the project. In total, the course project is worth 50% of your final grade.

2) Exam: There is one exam for this course: a final at the end of the semester. It will be a cumulative short answer and essay exam that covers the most important concepts from class readings and discussions. The final exam is worth 20% of your total grade.

3) Class Participation: Participation from students is the backbone of this class. Participation has **four parts:** **1)** Active participation in class discussion is central to success in this course. Class time is structured around discussion and debate about the course readings and the questions they raise. For each class period, you should come prepared to discuss the readings, to share your thoughts on the questions they raise, and to back up those thoughts with arguments and evidence from the readings. This will help you develop your critical thinking skills and your public speaking skills. It also makes class more interesting and fun. We are discussing controversial topics: please be respectful of each other's opinions even when you disagree. Participation in class discussion is worth 10% of your final grade. **2)** Your presence is necessary for your participation, so you have **three** "free absences" (whether excused or unexcused). After that, one percentage point will be deducted from your participation grade for each additional absence. (Because promptness is important to the smooth operation of the class, coming to class more than 5 minutes late counts as $\frac{1}{2}$ an absence. The attendance sheet will circulate in the first five minutes of class, so if you come in late you must see me before you leave in order to be counted present.) **3) You will start off class discussion once during the semester (in pairs).** This portion of class should last no more than **15 minutes**. You should focus on the **main argument** from that class period's readings, using either a news article, a video clip, or a website to raise at least two questions for discussion. The point is not to present the material from the reading, other than articulating the main argument, but to raise questions about it and to get your classmates discussing those questions. This will be worth 5% of your final grade. **4)** All students must meet with me one-on-one during the first week of class. This will provide an opportunity for us to get to know each other and for us to discuss your class

project. I will provide different time slots for the meetings, both inside and outside of my regular office hours. They will last 5 minutes, so **come prepared to talk about your project plans**. This will be worth 5% of your final grade. Participation is worth a total of 20% of your final grade.

4) Journals: Each student will keep a journal reflecting on his or her own thoughts about religion in light of the course readings and discussions. One entry per week is required. The entries should be posted in the “Assignments” section of Blackboard by Friday at 5pm of each of the 14 weeks of the course (so the first is due by 8/31 and the last is due by 12/7). You have 4 “free” weeks, for a total of **10 journal entries for the semester**. The reflection should be between 250 and 500 words (two or three paragraphs) and should be typed. The first paragraph should summarize **the main argument/main point** of one of the readings for that week, and the other paragraph(s) should discuss your response. You should not just say “I liked the reading” or “I didn’t like the reading.” Instead, you should analyze the argument in the reading, discussing why you agree or disagree and how it might have changed (or confirmed) views you already held on the topic. The point of the journals is to have students reflect on the course material, in part as preparation for class discussion and debate. This means that some of the content in your journals might be controversial or lack political correctness in order to create honest reflection about religion. However, discussion of hatred of other groups of people will not be tolerated. Only the professor will have access to the journal entries: otherwise they are completely private. Journal entries should use complete sentences and correct grammar. If a student’s journal entries show a trend of superficial reflection or a lack of engagement with course material, I will ask the student to write new entries. I recommend writing a paragraph right after you read, raising a question you can bring up in class discussion, and then writing a second paragraph after the class discussion before you turn in the final journal entry. Journals are worth a total of 10% of your final grade, with each entry worth 1%.

Grading Breakdown:

Course project	50%
Exam	20%
Class Participation	20%
Journals	<u>10%</u>
	100%

The **grade scale** for this course is: A+ (100- 97), A (96.9-93), A- (92.9- 90), B+ (89.9-87), B (86.9-83), B – (82.9-80), C+ (79.9-77), C (76.9-73), C – (72.9-70), D+ (69.9-67), D (66.9-63), D – (62.9-60), F (<60).

Late Assignments Policy: Late assignments are only accepted if the student was ill on the due date or if there was a death in the family. Documentation is required. The same documentation is required for make up exams.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy: Laptops and cell phones are not allowed in class. Please turn off your cell phones before class begins and keep them stored in your bags. If you need to leave your phone on for an emergency reason, please let me know before the beginning of class. If you text or email during class, I will ask you to leave the classroom.

Academic Integrity: Integrity is a crucial part of the academic experience. I expect you to be honest with me in all conversations and discussions and to treat me and fellow students with respect. You should also familiarize yourself with QU's Academic Integrity policy: <https://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1179.xml>. You must always do your own work, and you may never plagiarize or chat on tests or papers. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): 1) Quoting word for word from a source, such as a website or book, without using quotation marks and directly citing that source; 2) Paraphrasing ideas from a source without directly citing that source. All work you turn in must be completed for this specific class. Failure to follow these policies could lead to an "F" in the course and even expulsion from the university. If you have any questions regarding this policy please speak to me at any time.

Students with disabilities: QU provides academic support for students with disabilities, though they must be documented through QU's Learning Center. For more information on documentation, contact John Jarvis, the Coordinator of Learning Services, at 203-582-5390. If you already have a disability documented through QU and have special needs for this course, please inform me during the first two weeks of class.

The Learning Center: In addition to meeting with me during office hours, all students seeking to improve their performance should take advantage of the resources QU's Learning Center provides, such as the Peer Tutoring program and seminars on study skills and writing. It is located in the library.

Class Schedule

Note: Read the listed readings BEFORE the class under which they are listed

Week 1: What is "Religion"?

Readings:

- James Wellman, *Evangelical vs. Liberal*

Week 2: What is "Progressive Religion"?

Readings:

- Todd Fuist et al., *Progressive Religion and Social Activism* (excerpts)
- Jack Jenkins, "Turns Out, Being Progressive and Religious is Hilarious"
- Brie Loskota, "'Progressive' Religion or Just Religion?"
- Jonathan Merritt, "The Rise of the Christian Left in America"

Week 3: Abolition & The Roots of Progressive Religious Activism in America

Readings:

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (excerpts)
- Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?"

- Michael Young, “Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. National Social Movements”

Week 4: The Social Gospel: Race, Class, and Progressive Religion

Readings:

- Heath Carter, *Union Made* (excerpts)
- Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (excerpts)
- Melissa Wilde and Sabrina Danielsen, “Fewer and Better Children: Race, Class, Religion, and Birth Control Reform in America”

Week 5: Radical Religious Approaches to Poverty: The Catholic Worker

Readings:

- The Catholic Worker, “Aims and Means”
- Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*
- Grace Yukich, “Boundary Work in Inclusive Religious Groups”

Guest Speaker, Amistad Catholic Worker

Week 6: Religion and the Civil Rights Movement

Readings:

- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (as told to Alex Haley)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*
- Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (excerpts)

Week 7: The Catholic Left & the Anti-War Movement(s)

Readings:

- Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*
- Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (excerpts)
- Chris Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (excerpts)

Class Performance: *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*

Week 8: Complicating Categories: Is Jewish Pro-Israel Activism “Progressive” or “Conservative”?

Readings:

- American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), “Pursuing Peace”
- Jewish Voice for Peace, “Israel/Palestine 101”
- Michael Lerner, *Embracing Israel/Palestine* (excerpts)

Week 9: Are Conversion and Redemption “Progressive”? Gang and Prison Ministries

Readings:

- Edward Flores, *God’s Gangs*
- Christopher Queen, *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (excerpts)

Week 10: Can Veiling Be Progressive?: Gender and Sexuality in Islam

Readings:

- Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution* (excerpts)
- Muslims for Progressive Values, “Muslims for Progressive Values Support Marriage Equality and an End to DOMA”
- Sarah Sayeed et al., “Women and the American Mosque”

Film: “The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud”

Week 11: Does Being Progressive Require Civil Disobedience?: Immigration and a Global God

Readings:

- Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *God’s Heart Has No Borders* (excerpts)
- Interfaith Worker Justice, “For You Were Once a Stranger” (excerpts)
- Grace Yukich, *One Family Under God* (excerpts)

Week 12: The Future of Progressive Religion: Faith-Based Community Organizing

Readings:

- Rich Wood and Brad Fulton, *A Shared Future*

Week 13: Presentations

No Readings

Week 14: Presentations & Conclusions

No Readings

****FINAL EXAM, TBA**

Course Project

The course project is the main component of this course. Whichever project you select requires a good deal of time and effort, so choose carefully. For your project, choose whichever of the following options most interests you. For each option, you will work with a small group of other students (2-4 total) throughout the semester. During a few weeks, you will have in-class time devoted to meeting with your group, troubleshooting the group project, and making plans for the coming week’s work. A good deal of work outside of class will also be required, both individually and with group members. **Both options require an individual paper and a group presentation, though the first one requires a slightly longer paper, while the second requires more outside-of-class group work.**

Option 1: Observing Progressive Religion

Students selecting this project should be interested in learning about progressive religious traditions using ethnographic research methods (similar to people-watching—we will discuss this methodology further in class). With a group of 2-3 people, you will choose two

religious traditions to study, at least one of which should be different from the tradition in which you were raised. During the semester, you will attend services at local branches of the two traditions with your group members, attending the services of EACH tradition at least 3 times, and taking in-depth field notes on what you experience and observe.

Observation sites must be confirmed by the professor.

a) Papers—Individual papers (12-15 pages)

b) Presentations—Will be coordinated with other members of your group.

Option 2: Documentary: Religious Diversity on Campus

Students selecting this project should be interested in exploring religious diversity, religion among college students, and/or in filmmaking. Quinnipiac University's student population includes people from a variety of different religious backgrounds. How is religious diversity changing on QU's campus? Do members of different religious groups interact with each other? Do religious students feel discriminated against by other students? Are nonbelievers a growing group on campus, or merely non-practicing believers? Are there "progressive" and "conservative" religious groups on campus? How do theological and political differences shape how religious groups interact with and understand each other? For this project, students will create a documentary film that tells the story of religion on QU's campus, how it has changed, and what effects religion has on students' lives. Students engaging in this project will conduct library research, interviews, and focus groups as part of their project. Finally, they will work with cameras and film editing software in order to create the documentary film. Prior experience with this technology is not required, though students will have to familiarize themselves with the equipment/software in order to complete the project.

a) Papers— Individual papers (5-6 pages).

b) Presentations—Will be a screening of the documentary film.