

Eric K. Gormly 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. Wade Clark Roof of the University of California, Santa Barbara. 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.

I. Syllabus Justification

The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Telecommunication is a unit consisting of 24 fulltime faculty, more than 25 adjunct faculty, and some 1,200 students, 100 of whom are graduate students. The School offers a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism (encompassing print journalism, public relations and print media management), a Bachelor of Arts in Broadcasting (encompassing broadcast journalism and broadcast media management), and a Master of Mass Communication.

The School is located on the Arizona State University campus in Tempe, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. Recently named a Research I institution by the Carnegie Foundation, the university now registers nearly 44,000 undergraduate and graduate students, making it the fifth largest university in the nation. The students represent great diversity in ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and geography.

The Course:

This is a newly developing area of study, which draws broadly from the disciplines of sociology, religious studies, anthropology, cultural studies, communication and mass communication. Equally, the methodological tools used to conduct research in this field reach across qualitative, quantitative, and critical/cultural approaches. As a result, the course should attract a wide range of students, as well.

I have designed the course as a graduate seminar for students from journalism/telecommunication as well as communication, sociology, religious studies and cultural anthropology. I can assume most will come in with some exposure to basic methods and some of the theory involved, but it would be problematic to assume too much. My key objective is to provide a broad but selective set of readings that will introduce students from a wide range of backgrounds to the various theoretical constructs on which the course material is based. In short, to make for meaningful discussion the level of material has to be balanced such that it must be challenging but accessible to most if not all the students involved.

A course of this kind is has never been taught at Arizona State University. This would be an inaugural endeavor for me as well as my institution.

II. Course syllabus

Media, Religion and Culture

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This course emerges from the intersection of three areas whose boundaries are becoming increasingly less distinct in our society. The questions we ask about purpose and meaning manifest within and are contextualized by our cultural environment, most of which is established and learned through mass media. The various media frame and carry the discourse of our society, of which inherently religious questions are an integral part.

Among academics, there is a growing awareness of the need to examine media, religion and culture from perspectives simultaneously informed by religious studies, sociology, cultural studies, journalism, and studies in communication and mass communication. It is a nascent, crossdisciplinary field that relies on the full range of methodological approaches available to the contemporary scholar. Because the field has developed so recently, little has been done to synthesize these areas and advance the field. This course represents an early attempt at fusing these elements into one comprehensive framework.

This course is a graduate level seminar that meets once a week for the 15week duration of the semester. Because the class will be conducted as a seminar; we will engage in an intensive discussion each week on the issues addressed in the readings. Along with the required readings, your syllabus lists suggested readings that can supplement your understanding of the issues, and can provide more ideas for your research papers. Needless to say, class attendance and discussion participation are essential.

Your grade will be determined by three papers and a media portfolio presentation you will deliver to the class. The first two papers will be relatively short (57 pages), and should center on a narrow subtopic that lies within one of the broader topics of study. Your final paper should run approximately 20 pages, which will give you greater leeway in breadth and development of your topic. All topics should be submitted to me for approval prior to your beginning work on the paper; a two to three paragraph sketch of the paper will suffice. Your papers are expected to conform to the style guide of the American Psychological Association.

You will also be required a media study and presentation, in which you will gather and present concrete examples of some manifestation of what we will loosely call religion or religious expression via one or more media forms. You may choose a particular medium, genre, format or phenomenon to study, or engage in a comparison between or among various media. As the focus of your study and presentation, you will develop some form of content or textual examination of the phenomenon in question, analyzing it and assessing its religious/cultural functions. You can take your media examples from any print, still photo, radio, videotape, computer or other sources as you deem appropriate. As is the case with the papers, the topic must be approved by me.

You will need to keep your presentations to about 20 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes set aside for discussion. This should allow for five to six presentations during a threehour class period. Any arrangements for technical support for your presentation are your own responsibility.

Due dates are as follows:

Paper 1 (15% of final grade) due: Class 4

Paper 2 (15% of final grade) due: Class 7

Final paper (40% of final grade) due: Class 15 (last class of the semester)

Presentations (30% of final grade) due: Classes 11 and 12 (specifics later)

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

The following books have been ordered (full citations are given in the course bibliography):

- Wuthnow, *Rediscovering the Sacred*
- Carey, *Communication as Culture*
- Hoover & Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture*
- Stout and Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media*
- Hoover, Venturelli & Wagner, *Religion in Public Discourse*
- Ferré, *Channels of Belief*
- Alexander, *Televangelism Reconsidered*

Additionally, you will need to purchase the reading packet developed for this course. All assigned readings should be read prior to the class meetings during which discussion of the related topic will commence.

PART 1 Focussing on the Obvious: Overtly Religious Expression

Topic 1: Toward A Framework for Considering Religion in Contemporary America

Required Readings:

Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Preface, Chapters 1,2 & 9).

Wuthnow, *Rediscovering the Sacred*

Recommended Readings:

Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*

Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*

Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*

Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (remainder).

Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (especially Introduction, Chapters 1 & 6, and Conclusion)

Berger, P. *The Sacred Canopy*

Video: *The World's Religions*, Huston Smith, with Bill Moyers

Topic 2: Toward A Framework for Considering Sociological and Cultural Aspects of Media

Required Readings:

Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Introduction, Chapters 14, 6)

Downing, Mohammadi & Sreberny Mohammadi, *Questioning the Media* (Part I)

Newcomb, *Television: The Critical View* (Introduction)

Recommended Readings:

Berger, Arthur Asa, Cultural Criticism
Downing, Mohammadi & Sreberny Mohammadi, Questioning the Media (remainder)
Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death
Olson, Parr & Parr, Video Icons & Values

Topic 3: Combining the Frames: An OverView of Media, Religion and Culture

Required Readings:

In Hoover & Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture: Hoover & Lundby, Clark & Hoover, White, Christians (Chapters 14)
In Stout and Buddenbaum, Religion and Mass Media: Stout & Buddenbaum, Buddenbaum & Stout (Chapters 12)
Hoover, Venturelli & Wagner, Religion in Public Discourse (Chapters 14)

Topic 4: Religion and the News Media

Readings:

Hoover, Venturelli & Wagner, Religion in Public Discourse (Chapters 58)
In Ferré, Channels of Belief: Buddenbaum (Chapter 4)
In Stout & Buddenbaum, Religion and the Mass Media: Buddenbaum, Buddenbaum & Hoover (Chapters 910)
Gormly (conference papers)

Recommended Readings:

Gans, Deciding What's News
Nieman Reports, God in the Newsroom
Dart and Allen, Bridging the Gap: Religion and the News Media
Hubbard, Reporting Religion: Facts and Faith
Said, Reporting Islam

Topic 5: Religious SelfPresentation: Use of (Primarily Electronic) Media by Religious Groups or For Religious Purposes

Required Readings:

Hoover, Mass Media Religion
Alexander, Televangelism Reconsidered (Introduction, Chapters 18, 13)
In Ferré, Channels of Belief: Ferré (Chapter 5)

Recommended Readings:

Abelman & Hoover, Religious Television
Schultze, Televangelism and American Culture
Peck, The Gods of Televangelism
Alexander, Televangelism Reconsidered (remainder)

PART 2 Extending the Boundaries: Religion and Ritual in Secular Media

Topic 6: The Sacred and the Story Tellers: Mediate Myth Making in Contemporary Culture

Required Readings:

In Ferré, Channels of Belief: Schultze, Newcomb, Alley and Fackler (Chapters 13, 6).
In Hoover & Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture: Murdock, Martín-Barbero, Goethals, Bar-Haim, Lundby (Chapters 59)

Topic 7: The Shifting Institutional Landscape

Required Readings:

In Hoover & Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture: Horsfield, Arthur, Alexander, Tomaselli & Shepperson (Chapters 1013)
In Stout & Buddenbaum, Religion and Mass Media: Jelen, Buddenbaum, Schultze, Bendroth, Stout (Chapters 37).

Topic 8: Perspectives on the Audience: Individual Practice or Social Phenomenon

Required Readings:

In Stout & Buddenbaum, Religion and Mass Media: Rimmer, Lindlof (Chapters 8, 11)
In Hoover & Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture: Peck, Badaracco, Linderman, Hoover, Lundby & Hoover (Chapters 1418)

Recommended Readings:

In Stout & Buddenbaum, Religion and Mass Media : Case Studies (Part IV)
Video: The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers

Topic 9: Conclusions and Implications

Potential Topics, Issues and Questions

Historical aspects of religious presentation in media

Extending the traditional worship service

The megachurches

Radio preachers, early and contemporary

Religious television and its various forms

Religious networks

Media as a tool of the Religious Right: The Moral Majority, The Christian Coalition, Rush Limbaugh, and so on

PSAs

Infomercials

Christian Music radio (both Christian Rock/Pop and more traditional religious musical forms)

Community Access Television

The Religious program audience

Hate-Speak and intolerance

Religion on the Internet

Role of religion in art (historical or contemporary)

Role of religion in music (historical or contemporary)

Role of religion in theatre (historical or contemporary)

Religious themes/images in secular film

Religious themes/images in secular print publications

Religious themes/images on secular prime time television

Religious themes/images on secular talk radio

Religious themes/images on secular music television

Religious response (various) to secular programming

The resurgence of chant music

Documentary programs dealing with religious themes

Religion in Popular Culturean overview

Further develop the concept of Television as Story Teller, Myth Maker, Religion Creator & Conveyor

Examine Carey's Ritual vs. Transmission models in religious experience. How does the mediated religious experience differ from what is experienced in real life? How do the spatial and temporal shifts in the medium play a role? What new fundamental religious experiences are created by media?

In what various ways can television (or another widely used medium) engage a ritual role.

Examine TV talk shows, any identifiable religion within them, and therapeutic aspects from such shows being experienced as religion.

Influence of the entertainment and commodification aspects inherent in American television on the religious experience.

How well do various media represent religion (comparison study)?

Examine examples of religion news reporting within one or more secular news media outlets; conduct a content or textual analysis.

Find a contemporary issue in American culture, society, or life in general dealing with religion. Consider how one could cover it as a story. See how others have. Critique and develop a presentation, with examples. Conversely, find a major news story that does not deal directly with religion and find potential religious aspects.

Do a content or textual analysis of a series of newscasts done by the 700 Club or some other religious broadcast organization.

Examine televised worship services through a breakdown of techniques, logistics, production aspects, how they relate to religious aspects of the liturgy/service, and so on.

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS

Stewart:

Three papers One short, a content or textual study; One observation of media interpretive practices; One final research paper, on a topic approved by me.

Shriver & Carey

One medium monitored

One interview with religious leader

One observation report on a religious event, ensuring it is from a religion you do not practice

A course project media

Good list of paper topics at end of syllabus.

Parr

Portfolio (group of 34 people gather materials together into a media materials pool, then each draws on those materials to write/develop individual reports. Also, all will be involved in the audience research aspects (*good, concise description in Relig & Ed journal, p 88).

Plus, 2 short (23 pages) and 1 long (57 pages) papers, and one presentation on the readings.

Good list of topics, page 90.

Martin & Ostwalt book

Berger, Sacred Canopy

Something on freemarket model, (Durkheim?)

objectives/overview and structure of the course; mention the various major topics

required submitted work/assignments

Papers

Readings summaries?

Exams

Presentations, with media

study questions

subtopics with each section to describe what is to be covered

Religion on the Internet

Suggested Readings:

Brasher, O'Leary, Fernbeck papers

Carey, Chapters 5, 7 & 8)

In Stout & Buddenbaum, Religion and Mass Media: Schement and Stephenson (Chapter 18)

Assignment: Choose one of the above topics, or develop your own, find a focus, get approval, and research the topic. You will develop a presentation, bringing in examples of the subgenre you examine.

As an alternate, you could choose from the religion in secular media topics.

Find an example of religious media (TV or radio), listen to three hours, write a description/critique, and research the history/background of the program or radio station. Prepare a 15minute presentation that includes examples. If it's Christian rock, for example, discuss the station/program, get comments from the DJ and program manager, play some of the music, discuss lyrics and generalities of style, audience, etc.

Listen to or read one of the following for a week (?), gather trends and lay them out. Or, go for an interview with ???

Watch Odyssey; write a critique/review of a program.

Read the religion section of the paper.

Research some aspect of religion in the media examine and bring in examples/artifacts, such as radio minister, PTL, certain publications, films, news coverage of a major religious event, etc.

Media, Religion and Culture Bibliography

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NEWS

*Sharon, R.L. & Cox, N. (Eds.)(April 1994). Religion, television and the information superhighway: A search for the middle way. Conference report, Annenburg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Waymark Press.

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INTERNET

Brasher, O'Leary, Fernbeck papers

Stout & Buddenbaum, Chapter 18

ALSO:

Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture
Real, Super Media
Eliade, Myth & Reality
Goethals, The electronic Calf
Nelson, Your God Is Alive and Well ...
Ringer, Queer Words, Queer Images: ...

Films & Videos:

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