

Syllabus  
Sociology of Religion  
Sociology 326-500  
Spring 2022  
Texas A&M University

## **INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Andrew McNeely

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Telephone: 979 845-5133. Leave message

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 – 11:00 A.M. @ Village Café in Bryan;  
Friday 2:00 – 4:00 P.M. @ Academic Building, Room 427; Remote by appointment

## **COURSE INFORMATION**

In person (face-to-face) format, M/W/F 12:40 – 1:30 P.M.

Harrington Education Center Classroom Building (HECC) 201

Credit hours: 3

Prerequisites: None

## **ABOUT THE COURSE**

### *Course Description*

In this course we will explore the foundational and current practical elements of the sociology of religion. We will discuss the concept of religion, learn and analyze classical and contemporary sociological theories of religion, and explore current trends and issues regarding religion in modern society. While we will cover a broad range of topics, we will spend most of our class time discussing and reading about religion as it applies to everyday life, particularly in the United States, as opposed to global trends or broad theorizing. Our emphasis will be on the presence, role, and development of religion as a vital part of our society. Following the ‘flipped’ classroom design of most social science courses, readings are to be done prior to the class period, and analysis, discussion, and application activities are done during the class period.

### *Course Goals*

The goals of this course are that students will

- Enhance their ability to observe, analyze, and discuss religion from a sociologically informed position
- Use a critical perspective in assessing the impacts of religion in everyday life
- More effectively communicate complex ideas and multiple perspectives in the context of religion

## *SOCI 229 Learning Outcomes*

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Identify and discuss sociological theories of religion
- Articulate an inclusive and analytically sound definition of religion
- Analyze the religious aspects of a given social behavior
- Apply a sociological lens to document and discuss their own experiences within a religious culture

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

### *Required Books*

- Beckford, J. A., & Demerath, N. J. (2007). *The SAGE handbook of the sociology of religion*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Print ISBN:9781412911955. Ebook ISBN:9781848607965
  - Available as Ebook in TAMU library\*
- Day, A. (2020). *Sociology of Religion: Overview and Analysis of Contemporary Religion* (1st ed.). Routledge. eBook ISBN 9780429055591
  - Available as Ebook in TAMU library\*
- Prentiss, C. (2003). *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*. New York: NYU Press. eBook ISBN 9780814768822
  - Available as Ebook in TAMU library\*

\*Ebooks can be accessed through the [TAMU library website](#) and using the search function to look up the book title, and selecting the search results that indicate “ebook available”. In some cases, portions of the book can be downloaded, up to a certain number of pages.

*Other course readings will be available on Canvas*

### *Tutorials for Atlas.ti*

- Indexed and organized guide for Mac and PC versions (OAL uses Windows): <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/qualitative/atlas>

### *Recommended material for qualitative work*

- Mini Composition Book (google that term; \$0.99 at Walgreens; 3-pack on amazon for \$5), for keeping notes and jottings while in interviews or field research
- External lapel microphone, for making clear and useful recordings of interviews (inexpensive and can be used in a standard 3.5mm aux jack; limited number available to borrow from me)

- Audio mixing software (i.e. *Audacity*; free, small download), for editing and playback of audio files of recordings

## **Graded Course Components**

- The following is a description and the grade value for each course assignment. More information and instructions for each assignment will be available on Canvas, and each assignment will be discussed in class. See the calendar for assignment due dates. With the exception of the reading quizzes, assignments will be submitted through Canvas, and submission links can be found on the “Assignments” tab of the menu as well as the course calendar in Canvas.

### *Final Paper (80 points, 20% of your grade)*

- Your final paper for this class will consist of a 10-page report, either an ethnographic or autoethnographic (your choice; we will discuss both in class) analysis of a religious group, event, practice, or media selection. We will discuss possible topics and methods throughout the semester, and you will turn in progress checks to help develop your final submission (see below).

### *Topic Proposal (30 points, 7.5% of your grade)*

- You will submit a topic for your final research paper early on in the semester. I will provide feedback and request resubmission if necessary.

### *Field Notes Review (two at 25 points **each**, 6.25% of your grade **each**)*

- Twice during the semester, you will compile and turn in your field notes from your ongoing ethnographic research. I will review your notes and provide feedback on your style and content, with the intention of helping you develop your data and analysis for your final paper

### *Reading quizzes (three at 20 points **each**, 5% of your grade **each**)*

- We will have three multiple choice quizzes during the semester. Each quiz will cover the readings and lectures from the weeks preceding it. Each quiz will be online through Canvas and administered during the class period (you must bring a laptop or tablet capable of accessing Canvas to class on these days). You may use notes and readings while taking the quiz but you may not collaborate with other students (remember your Aggie Honor Code). Quizzes will be timed (30 minutes), and the rest of the class period will be dedicated to additional lecture/material

### *Original Online Posts and Replies (100 points, 25% of your grade)*

- Throughout the semester you will make **five** original posts to the Canvas discussion board, and **five** replies to the posts of your classmates. Each original

post is worth 15 points, and each reply is worth 5 points. These posts will be in response to a prompt related to that week's readings.

### *Group Discussion Assignments (60 points, 15% of your grade)*

- Throughout the semester, you will be required to work with a group of your classmates to formulate a response to a prompt related to that week's readings. This group will be randomly assigned and group membership will change once after the midterm. Group size will depend on the class size at the beginning and middle of the semester, likely no more than 4 students per group. There will be **six** group posts in total, each worth 10 points. You will need to work with your group outside of the class period to discuss your post. The method of your collaboration is up to your group (in-person, zoom, text, email, etc.)

### *Group Member Evaluation (20 points, 5% of your grade)*

- To encourage full participation from group members, you will be graded by your group. Twice during the semester, you will evaluate your group members for their contribution to the group discussion and work. They will assess your contribution as well. Each evaluation is worth a total of 10 points, and will be the average of your group members' score for your contributions.

### *Extra Credit*

- Students will have the opportunity to earn extra credit. At the start of the semester, I will open a sign-up sheet for each day of class in which we have a lecture. Students will be able to sign up on a first-come, first-serve basis to give a presentation on that day. The presentation will be a reflection and analysis of the reading associated with that class day, or a relevant reading I assign if one is not already on the calendar.
- Presentations will be 8-10 minutes and include criteria explained in further detail (see Canvas site).
- The point value of the extra credit will be an additional 3% (12 actual points) towards your final grade

### *Make-Up Work*

- Students who provide University Excused absences from class (see attendance policy section below) will be allowed to turn in assignments on their return to class. If an exam is missed as a result of a University Excused absence, it can be taken for full credit and same format as the in-class quiz by arranging a time with me when providing the excuse documentation.
- University Excused Absence documentation must be provided to me as soon as possible, either directly through email or in-person upon your return to class.
- Unexcused absences should still be reported to me if mitigating circumstances are affecting your participation in class or in your group work. I will work with you as best I can to help you overcome any challenges you're experiencing that limit

you success in this class, but please be aware that my ability to do so is limited by my time constraints and the university's policies on unexcused absences.

### *Technology Issues?*

- If you expect technology problems, please inform me as soon as possible, and seek advice from the Office for Academic Innovation or Help Desk Central (contact information below).
- If you encounter technical problems accessing information, posting or submitting, you should take screenshots. Then contact the Office for Academic Innovation immediately (979 458-3417; aihelp@tamu.edu) and ask them to file an incident report. If you receive no response, contact Help Desk Central (979) 845-8300; helpdesk@tamu.edu). Also inform me, and send me the screenshots and incident report emails from the Office for Academic Innovation or Help Desk Central.

### **Grades and Grading Policies**

Tables 1 and 2 below show course components, how each contributes to your final course grade, and how course grades are determined.

Table 1. Course Components and Contributions to Final Grade

| <b>Category</b>                    | <b>Component</b>                  | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Raw Points</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Participation</b>               | Original Online Posts and Replies | <b>25</b>         | <b>100</b>        |
|                                    | Group Discussions                 | <b>15</b>         | <b>60</b>         |
|                                    | Group Member Eval                 | <b>5</b>          | <b>20</b>         |
| <b>Final Paper Progress Checks</b> | Topic Proposal                    | <b>7.5</b>        | <b>30</b>         |
|                                    | Field Notes Review 1              | <b>6.25</b>       | <b>25</b>         |
|                                    | Field Notes Review 2              | <b>6.25</b>       | <b>25</b>         |
| <b>Tests</b>                       | Reading Quizzes                   | <b>15</b>         | <b>60</b>         |
| <b>Final Paper</b>                 | Final Paper                       | <b>20</b>         | <b>80</b>         |
|                                    |                                   | <b>100</b>        | <b>400</b>        |

Table 2. Calculation of Final Grades

| <b>Points Earned</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Grade</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 360 – 400            | 89.6 – 100        | A            |
| 320 – 359.5          | 79.6 – 89.5       | B            |
| 280 – 319.5          | 69.6 – 79.5       | C            |
| 240 – 279.5          | 60 – 69.5         | D            |
| below 240            | below 60          | F            |

### *More about Grading*

- FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) law prohibits transmitting any information about student status or grades via telephone, text, direct message or email, even with student permission or at student request. Grades can be discussed in person or in a private Zoom meeting with proper security settings.
- Students can access their grades on Canvas. Students are urged to check their Canvas grades often and report grade posting errors or omissions to me immediately. For their own protection, students are responsible for keeping copies of all work submitted and keeping graded work until final grades have been posted.
- Notify me early in the semester about any issues that might negatively affect your performance in the class. Waiting until late in the semester to discuss such issues makes addressing the problems more difficult.
- I will not assign a grade of “Incomplete” (I) unless I have received detailed documentation of a serious crisis (e.g., severe illness of student, death in the immediate family) occurring so late in the semester that the student is unable to finish the course. The grade will not be assigned just because the student is doing poorly or has fallen behind.
- All points must be earned. You will not be given a higher grade just because you need it or because you are close to the next grade.

### *Format for Papers*

- Margins: All margins (top, bottom, right and left) must be 1 inch. If you are using Microsoft Word, click on File; click on Page Set up; under Margins, enter the number “1.” If you have trouble doing this, SEE ME prior to turning in the paper.
- Spacing: Double-spaced, except for any lengthy (taking up more than four lines of text) quotations, which should be indented and single spaced. Do NOT put an extra blank line between paragraphs.
- Font: You must use 12-point font, Times New Roman.
- Length: Adhere to the page-length requirement in the syllabus for each paper assignment – these length requirements are meant to highlight the need for editing to make your paper more concise and clearer. If, before you turn in the paper, you find that you are more than a line or two under or over the required length, this is a signal to you that you need to do some re-writing.
- Grammar and Proofreading: Adhere to standard American English spelling and grammar requirements. Proofread your papers, as spell-checking with a computer program is not the same thing as using language properly, and spell-check will not alert you to typographical errors other than misspelled words. If you have concerns about your proof-reading skills, ask a classmate to proof your paper for you, as it is often easier to catch someone else’s mistakes. You may also go to the Writing Center in the English Department – for a help session or more information: <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>

- Sources/Works cited/Bibliography: If the paper is a research rather than a short response paper, please include a full bibliographic section, in alphabetical order (by last name of the first author) of the sources you used. Within the text itself, you may use whatever citation format with which you are most comfortable. If you are unfamiliar with citation formats, use the Purdue OWL ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\\_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html)) website. I suggest the ASA, APA, or Chicago styles. Whichever you choose, be consistent and accurate.

### **Other Course Policies**

- Check your TAMU email daily (or better yet, have it forward to your smartphone email automatically)
- Satisfactory class participation includes arriving on-time for each class session. If there are mitigating factors (bus routes, distance traveled, etc.) that will result in chronic tardiness, please let me know as soon as possible
- I will not repeat lectures outside of class. Notes for class lectures that you miss must be obtained from classmates.
- PowerPoint slides are not intended to be exhaustive notes on the topics; they are only guideposts for discussion. I will post my slides on the canvas site, but do not rely on these alone for adequate comprehension of the material.

### *Masking Policy in Class*

To help protect Aggieland and stop the spread of COVID-19, Texas A&M University urges students to be vaccinated and to wear masks in classrooms and all other academic facilities on campus, including labs. Doing so exemplifies the Aggie Core Values of respect, leadership, integrity, and selfless service by putting community concerns above individual preferences. COVID-19 vaccines and masking — regardless of vaccination status — have been shown to be safe and effective at reducing spread to others, infection, hospitalization, and death

### *Participating in Real-World Research*

During this class you may be participating in activities outside of the classroom setting. As such, you need to be aware of safety precautions as well as ethical considerations that come with your involvement as a representative of Texas A&M University and a member of the local community. We will discuss these ideas more thoroughly in class, but for reference, please keep in mind the following:

- Participation in real-world settings always has inherent risk. If at any time you feel unsafe, threatened, or uncomfortable with *any* aspect of the research activity you are performing, immediately cease the activity and leave, and contact me as soon as possible to discuss the situation. No research project or grade is worth risking your physical or emotional well-being.
- You represent Texas A&M University as well as a number of other identities unique to your social position. As such, not all research sites will be equally appropriate for your participation. You will be expected to always keep the ethical considerations of active research investigations in mind, and treat research sites and participants with respect and consideration.

### *Territorial Acknowledgment for the College Station campus of Texas A&M University*

We acknowledge that Texas A&M University (College Station) is situated on the land of multiple Native nations, past and present. These original homelands are the territory of Indigenous peoples who were largely dispossessed and removed. We specifically acknowledge the traditional stewardship of this land by the Tonkawa, Tawakoni, Hueco, Sana, Wichita, and Coahuiltecan peoples. We pledge to support and advocate the histories, cultures, languages, and territorial rights of historic Indigenous peoples of Texas and the Indigenous people that live here now. This statement affirms continuous Indigenous presence and rights, acknowledges the ongoing effects of settler colonization, and supports Indigenous struggles for political, legal, and cultural sovereignty.

### *Diversity and Civility Statement (Feb. 2020)*

The Department of Sociology supports the TAMU commitment to diversity and welcomes individuals of all abilities, ages, citizenships, educations, ethnicities, family statuses, gender identities, languages, military experiences, nationalities, political views, races, religions, sexual orientations, sexes, socioeconomic statuses, and work experiences (<http://diversity.tamu.edu/>). Class discussions should be evidence-based and presented in a respectful manner when engaging with classmates, teaching assistants, and instructors. This applies inside and outside the classroom, including online spaces. Student Conduct Code Rule 21 regarding appropriate classroom behavior will be strictly enforced (<https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule21/>). Disruptive or disrespectful behavior (i.e., rude, unprofessional, inappropriate, and/or harmful to others) in class or during class-related communications outside of lecture (online or in-person), will be handled by the instructor or teaching assistant following department and university disciplinary guidelines. See <https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/sociology/home-page/diversity/> for more information about these principles and rules of conduct.

## **University Policies**

### *Attendance Policy*

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

### *Makeup Work Policy*

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.



Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor” ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

“The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence” ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

### *Academic Integrity Statement and Policy*

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

“Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one’s work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at [aggiehonor.tamu.edu](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu).

### *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy*

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit [disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu).

### *Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality*

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether to pursue a formal investigation. The University’s goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University’s [Title IX webpage](#).

### *Statement on Mental Health and Wellness*

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student’s academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus

Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](#).

## **Tentative Course Calendar**

*Week 1: 1/19 – 1/21*

Wednesday: Intro to class and introductions

Friday: Studying religion; read: Day Ch2

*Week 2: 1/24 – 1/28*

Monday: Classic Statements; read Day Ch1

Wednesday: Classic Statements, cont.

Friday: Discussion on final paper and topic proposal assignment

*Week 3: 1/31 – 2/4*

Monday: Definitions and boundaries; read: Dillon Ch4

Wednesday: Du Bois; read: Du Bois

Friday: Ethnography and Field Notes Discussion

*Week 4: 2/7 – 2/11*

Monday: Civil Religion; Read, Bellah 1967

Wednesday: NO CLASS

Friday: Barak Obama and Civil Religion

*Week 5: 2/14 – 2/18*

Monday: Weber, The Protestant Ethic

Wednesday: Secularization; read: Chaves 1994

Friday: Secularization cont.; Restructuring of American Christianity

*Week 6: 2/21 – 2/25*

Monday: Reading quiz 1; Landscapes of the Secular (for Monday's class, watch *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* <https://awakethefilm.org/>. This will not be included on the reading quiz)

Wednesday: Faith-Based Initiatives

Friday: Christian Nationalism

*Week 7: 2/28 – 3/4*

Monday: Religion and attitudes about climate change; Read: Veldman et al. 2014, Ch16 "Healing the Land" by Noor Johnson

Wednesday: Religion in digital games; Read: McNeely 2020

Friday: Religion and response to COVID-19; Read: Campbell 2020 (Intro and Part 1)

*Week 8: 3/7 – 3/11*

Monday: Race and the church in North America; read: Prentiss Ch1

Wednesday: Christianity and African American Communities; read: Gomez 1998

Friday: The Brown Church; read: Romero Ch4

*Week 9: 3/14 – 3/18*

Spring Break

*Week 10: 3/21 – 3/25*

Monday: race and religion: moving targets 1

Wednesday: race and religion: moving targets 2

Friday: race and religion: moving targets 3; read: Moshin & Crosby 2018

*Week 11: 3/28 – 4/1*

Monday: Reading quiz 2; Womanist Perspectives; read: Keri Day 2013

Wednesday: read: Narrative of Sojourner Truth

Friday: Gender and Religion; read: Mahmood 2011 Ch5

*Week 12: 4/4 – 4/8*

Monday: Culture in Action; read: Swidler 1986

Wednesday: Voluntary religion

Friday: Lived Religion; read: McGuire 2016 & Ammerman 2007 Ch11

*Week 13: 4/11 – 4/15*

Monday: Civic religion expressions; read: Ammerman 2007 Ch8

Wednesday: Revisiting Faith-Based Initiatives

Friday: No class

*Week 14: 4/18 – 4/22*

Monday: Embodied practices, healing; read: McGuire Ch6

Wednesday: Lived religion and practices; read: Dillon Ch19

Friday: Ritual; read: Wuthnow 1989 Ch4

*Week 15: 4/25 – 4/29*

Monday: Spiritual not religious; read: Ammerman 2013

Wednesday: Rise of the Nones; read: Day Ch12

Friday: Does society need religion?; read: Dillon ch24

*Week 16: 5/2 – 5/6*

Monday: reading quiz 3; in class office hours, work day for final paper

Wednesday: class does not meet; Final paper due at 11:59 p.m. on Canvas

Friday: class does not meet; have a good summer!