

Religions in America

The United States is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, and that religiousness has a particular, fascinating, even sometimes violent history—which too often goes unexamined in US history courses. This class offers a corrective by considering aspects of US history through the lens of American religion, with an emphasis on the history of religious pluralism: from convent to temple to court to the contentious public square, from television to the internet to the halls of Congress. You'll be introduced to a variety of religious perspectives, peoples and denominations in America's past and present, as well as to a variety of scholarly approaches to religious studies. At the end of the course you will not only be familiar with a wider range of belief systems found in our community and nation, but you will be able to better understand why America is so uniquely pluralist in its religious landscapes.

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Course Website: <http://www.wsu.tonahangen.com/hi345>

Prerequisite: HI 111, 112 or 113

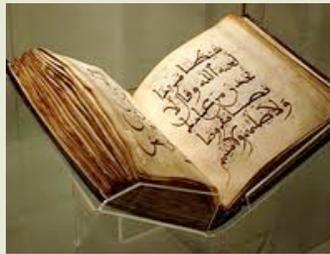
LASC: WAC + DAC + (TLC or USW)

Course Information

The course is designed as an upper-level seminar for students with prior history background, so some knowledge of the basic outlines of US history is presumed. That said, it is intended to be challenging even for advanced students, with a very demanding reading load and a strong emphasis on writing and seminar-style discussion. You will conduct one small-scale fieldwork exercise and digital history project and write a well-conceived original research paper, in addition to smaller writing assignments and written exams. If you want a refresher on US history or assistance with writing, please be proactive in seeking out the university's resources in these areas, including my office hours, the Writing Center, the library reference desk, or campus tutoring services as appropriate.

Required Reading

David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (University of North Carolina, 2007) ISBN 978-0807856604 paperback



Some of our reading will be from the three assigned books; other readings will be delivered as PDFs, or linked online, or will incorporate religious history and journalism blogs and news feeds.

Diana Eck, *A New Religious America* (Harper San Francisco, 2002) ISBN 978-0060621599 paperback

David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2011) ISBN 978-0195388763 hardback only

You will also be required to read—or at least follow—ongoing discussions among religion journalists, historians and scholars throughout

the semester. We will discuss these during “Friday Forums” and/or in an online discussion forum – details to be decided once class begins. Please subscribe to

- [Religion in American History](#)

And at least TWO of the following blogs:

- [Get Religion](#)
- [CNN Belief Blog](#)
- [USA TODAY Faith & Reason](#)
- [Washington Post On Faith Blog](#)
- [Huffington Post Religion](#)
- [Religion Dispatches](#)
- [Religion News Service](#)

This news and these groups move really fast – you'll want to check in often. On Twitter? Use:

<https://twitter.com/#!/tonahangen/hi345religionsamerica>



Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to....

- Explain the development of the distinctive American religious experience
- Craft a robust working definition of religion
- Increase your individual religious and historical literacy; hone moral, ethical and historical thinking
- Document local and national religious landscapes
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret cultural texts

Things That Must Be Said Up Front

Religious studies brings up special considerations for scholars and students, and so there are some ground rules for this course.

All religions are true to their believers. All religious rituals, acts, beliefs, and doctrines make sense in context. If something doesn't make sense to you, then you need more context. Don't think "how could they believe that?" but instead seek understanding: "Why was this believable to them?" Take statements of religious belief or disbelief at face value (but not necessarily as historical fact).

2. No religious concept should be dismissed as weird, crazy, or abnormal. There is no "normal." You can certainly have your own opinions and personal beliefs about religion, but those don't belong in our classroom discussion.

3. Except for the first writing assignment, you will approach your scholarship as a historian, rather than as a believer or a skeptic. This is a history class, not a CCD or Sunday School class. While religious doctrines will be discussed, it is never with the intent to prove a religion right or wrong. No one may use our class as a platform for either proselytizing their faith to convert others, or debunking the faith of others to lessen their commitment. Our class is going to be made up of a variety of faiths and degrees of religious involvement which we should all respect. In this course, we model best practices for a pluralist society.

Course Policies

Course information and material is available online in TWO places: on Blackboard, and on a public website/blog. That way, if Blackboard is down, our work goes on. You should bookmark the course blog's url (<http://www.wsu.tonahangen.com/hi345/>) or, better yet, subscribe to its RSS feed in the same way that you subscribed to the religion news blogs. You may also find it helpful to add the course's Google calendar to your own to keep track of due dates and assignments.

Email: Your worcester.edu email account is your official email address for course and college-related correspondence. Please check it regularly. All email correspondence from you should originate from your worcester.edu address. Email is the best way to reach me (thangen at worcester.edu) – I check it several times a day, although I am more likely to answer it during regular business hours.

Office Hours: My office is in the History and Political Science Department, S-327D. My regular office hours are posted on the office door. I am on campus M and W-F.

I also hold weekly office hours in the Honors Office (Library 218); see schedule on the course website.

More Fine Print

My in-class technology policy: we will be busy in every class session, and we don't need any technological distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If you choose to bring a laptop, iPad or tablet to class, I expect that you will be using it **only** for taking notes or accessing the course's relevant electronic documents to refer to during discussion. Do not use your laptop or tablet in class to surf the internet, check your email or Facebook, or the like.

I will review with you the proper citation method for papers in this course (Chicago Style is preferred in history). In all your writing, you **must** cite the sources of any quotations, information or ideas which are not your own work. Plagiarizing writing is a very serious offense, resulting in an automatic zero on the assignment and a likely fail in the course. Please familiarize yourself with the university's policy on Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise), and you need a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please consult with me immediately at the outset of the course so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.

#	Date	What to Plan For	What to Read	What's Due
Unit 1: Course Introduction – Concepts, Ideas, and Basics				
1	W 9/5	Course Intro	None (get doc packet in class)	
2	F 9/7	Friday Forum 1/ Religious America	Hemeyer "Religious America" PDF + Eck, Ch 1	
3	M 9/10	Civil Religion's Greatest Hits	Unit 1 Document Packet	Personal Statement
4	W 9/12	Whose Religious History?	Braude PDF	
5	F 9/14	Exam 1	None	
Unit 2: Is American Religious Freedom a Myth? – Historical Backgrounds				
6	M 9/17	Site Visit Instructions	Being a Good Guest... + Pluralism Project website	
7	W 9/19	Unit Overview	Sehat, Intro + AHR Review	RP1
8	F 9/21	Friday Forum 2/ Moral Law	Sehat, Part I	
9	M 9/24	Challengers	Sehat, Part II	
10	W 9/26	Outsiders	Carter + Beechwood PDFs	RP2
11	F 9/28	Friday Forum 3/ Retrenchment	Sehat, Part III	
12	M 10/1	Fragmentation	Sehat, Part IV	
13	W 10/3	Re-examining Religious Freedom	Sehat, Conclusion	
14	F 10/5	Exam 2	None	Complete site visit by 10/8
Unit 3: Worcester's Religious Landscape – Then and Now (Note: NO SCHOOL on Monday, Oct 8)				
15	W 10/10	World Parliament, 1893	Eck, "In the Name of Religions" PDF	
16	F 10/12	Friday Forum 4/ The World Comes to Worcester	TBA from AAS	
17	M 10/15	Digital Project Workday 1	Melton, "Mega-Trends" PDF	
18	W 10/17	Digital Project Workday 2	None	
19	F 10/19	Friday Forum 5	None	Digital Project
Unit 4: Case Study – A Stone of Hope, Religion in the Civil Rights Movement				
20	M 10/22	African-American Religion	Long PDF	
21	W 10/24	Beyond King	Chappell, Intro + Ch 1	
22	F 10/26	Friday Forum 6/ Prophetic Religion	Chappell, Ch 3	
23	M 10/29	The CRM as Revival	Chappell, Ch 4-5	
24	W 10/31	White Resistance	Chappell, Ch 6-7	RP3
25	F 11/2	Friday Forum 7/ Segregationism as Religion	Chappell, Ch 8	SPRING BREAK 3/19-3/24
26	M 11/5	A Stone of Hope	Chappell, Conclusion (179-193)	Research Paper Topic
27	W 11/7	Music of the CRM	Ward, "People get Ready" online	
28	F 11/9	Exam 3	None	NO SCHOOL Mon 11/12
Unit 5: Religious Pluralism in Contemporary America				
29	W 11/14	From Many, One	Eck, Ch 2	
30	F 11/16	Friday Forum 8/ Digital Religious Pluralism	Online list; choose one	
31	M 11/19	Peer Review Day	None	Research Paper draft
Thanksgiving 11/21 – 11/25				
#	Date	What to Plan For	What to Read	What's Due
32	M 11/26	American Hindus	Eck, Ch 3	
33	W 11/28	American Buddhists	Eck, Ch 4	
34	F 11/30	Friday Forum 9	None	Research Paper
35	M 12/3	American Muslims	Eck, Ch 5	
36	W 12/5	Afraid of Ourselves	Eck, Ch 6	
37	F 12/7	Friday Forum 10/ Bridge Building	Eck, Ch 7	RP4
	W 12/12	Exam 4		



Course Requirements

Please stay on top of reading and assignments throughout the semester. A good grade in this course reflects consistent work across many small assignments and classroom experiences, since there is an exam or a writing due date nearly every week on top of your course readings. You'll need to speak up in class and demonstrate active learning, not passive absorption. Learning is not a spectator sport.

Attendance and Participation (10%): I take attendance in each class session. You should be on time and ready for discussion each day. My expectations for class discussion are that it will be lively, substantive, respectful and demonstrate your thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading or task. Please bring the relevant reading to class on the day we are scheduled to discuss it. Not having the reading with you, either in physical format or on laptop/mobile device, will count the same as an absence on that day.

Forums and Discussion (13%): We will collectively determine the exact parameters of the grading for Friday Forums and religion-blog discussions, but these will collectively represent 13% of your course grade.

Response Papers (12%): 4 are due on the dates listed. They are short (2-3 pages) but well-written commentaries on an assigned course reading. You'll be given a writing prompt for each one. Note: these are NOT intended to be opinion pieces, but rather small works of critical analysis demonstrating your intellectual curiosity and engagement.

Exams (30%): We will have 4 exams, all taken in class. The last exam will be during finals period but is equivalent to the other exams, i.e. not a cumulative final for the entire course. The lowest exam will be dropped. There are no makeup exams.

Personal Statement (5%): Your first assigned paper is a reflective paper, due in the second week of class.

Site Visit and Digital Project (15%): You will attend a worship service of a church or religious sanctuary (not your own, if you usually attend one) in September or the first week of October. Everyone visits a different place (believe me, Worcester has plenty to choose from), and you may not duplicate a previous student's site. From the field notes you take during your visit, you'll craft a profile of that congregation/religious community which will be posted in an online archive of Worcester history, <http://digitalworcester.org>. The profile should be accompanied by some multi-media content, such as a printed service program, brochure, photographs (with permission) or audio/video (again, with permission) which we will upload to the site. The project also includes a short reflection paper for my eyes only.

Research Paper (15%): An 8-10 page original research paper on a topic related to the history of American religious pluralism, chosen in consultation with the instructor. Part of the grade is having an early draft prepared for the peer review day on 11/19

Your grade will be determined this way:

Attendance & Participation	10%	Silent attendance will not earn full credit
Friday Forums & Discussion	13%	Dates as listed in the syllabus
Response Papers, 4 at 3% each	12%	Due dates: 9/19, 9/26, 10/31, 12/7
Exams, best 3 of 4	30%	Exam dates: 9/14, 10/5, 11/9, 12/12
Site Visit and Digital Project	15%	Due 10/19
Personal Statement	5%	Due 9/10
Research Paper	15%	Due 11/30
	100%	