



UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCH
SEMINAR

American Religious History

HIST 3360
SEC 01

TUE & THU
2:00-3:20

LOCATION:
AB4 305

Course Introduction and Philosophy

Welcome to a Semester of Intellectual Engagement and Historical Analysis!

Religion has long been a central part of American history. From the puritans who fled religious discrimination and established their own religious hierarchy to our own contemporary debates over Muslim immigration, religious thought and practice have permeated nearly every part of the nation's culture. This course examines both the centrality and diversity of religions in America, with a focus on both its influence on American culture as well as its many diverse expressions.

The class has four primary objectives:

1. Gain knowledge of the main themes, moments, and events in American religious history. This includes examining key people, movements, and principles.

2. Hone the ability to analyze questions and themes concerning religion in America, assess historical information accurately, and distinguish between questionable and valid historical assertions in exams and papers.
3. Learn through example and practice in classroom activities, papers, and exams to evaluate primary and secondary sources skillfully and honestly.
4. Learn to skillfully integrate data into coherent arguments expressed through a clear, well-written style in exams, papers, class discussion, and other classroom learning activities.

Beyond these primary historical goals, this course aims to refine the critical thinking tools necessary for many fields and duties outside the humanities. Students should leave the class better prepared to read critically, think analytically, and argue persuasively.

This course will be run as a seminar, meaning that each day students should be prepared to discuss the assigned reading. Classes that take place on Tuesday will involve a general overview of a topic, and class on Friday will be devoted to discussion of that week's theme and reading assignment..

Contents

How to take this course	2
Class Policies	2
Reading Assignments	3
Class Assignments	3
Classroom Etiquette	4
Online Resources	4
Blackboard	5
Class Schedule	5
University Policies	6

how to take this course

It's not what you "get" in the course, but how deep you go. Students take history courses for a variety of reasons, usually variations of "it's required." However, this class is an elective, so while I will not take for granted that you are excited to be here and are enthusiastic to learn new things, I will expect you to become as engaged as possible and be prepared to learn and participate.

It is entirely possible to do well in this class without being transformed with newly discovered knowledge, but that would be a damn shame. This course, just like any course, can operate on three different levels. Imagine yourself on a seashore, and the course is the ocean. Enter as deep as you dare...

wading

You need the basic outlines of America's religious past, the highlights, the main characters and ideas, the basic context.

There is nothing wrong with staying in the shallows; this approach may work for you if all you want is a certain grade.

"Waders" are mostly concerned with **WHAT** happened and what was said, and hold little interest in the tensions, paradoxes, and deeper issues involved.

snorkeling

You have a grasp of the basics and are interested in more questions and exploring what's below the surface.

Perhaps you have taken a few history classes, and are ready to step up and answer nagging questions.

"Snorkelers" challenge basic assumptions, are not satisfied with basic answers, and seek to understand the **HOW** of the discussion.

scuba diving

You want to go deeper into the topic, and employ the cognitive equipment and tools of critical thinking.

You are aware of issues, tensions, and controversies, and actively seek new ideas, sources, and interpretations

"Divers" don't take any of the course's structure and content for granted. They see, and fill in the course's gaps. They are concerned with **WHY** the discussion **MATTERS**.

Course Policies

Class Participation

Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. Students are required to make at least one comment every other class session. If students are unable or unwilling to comment in class, they are allowed to comment through blackboard or other digital media. I reserve the right to adjust borderline grades up or down according to attendance and participation.

Grading Policies

Students are accountable to demonstrate mastery of the course content. This can generally be accomplished by reading the text and completing other assignments thoroughly, in addition to being actively engaged in class meetings. Students are expected to attend each class, to arrive on time, to stay to the end, and to work diligently. Some seem to confuse average and excellent performance; students do not earn grades reflective of excellence unless they manifest excellence in class discussions, assignments, or the exam.

Grading Scale

A	465-500
A-	450-464
B+	435-449
B	415-434
B-	400-414
C+	385-399
C	365-384
C-	350-364
D+	335-349
D	315-334
D-	300-314
F	299 and below

Late Work

Each assignment is due at the beginning of class. "On Time" means submitted at the start time of class that day. Assignments turned in later that day receive a five-point penalty. Assignments turned in the following day (note: not the following day of class) receive a ten-point penalty. Assignments turned in thereafter are worth no credit. Genuine emergencies and extenuating circumstances, as determined by me, will be considered on a case-by-case basis.



YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Benjamin E. Park
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Office Hours:
Tuesday and Thursday
9:30-11:30

Reading Assignments

Required Texts:

Marie Griffith, *American Religions: A Documentary History* (Oxford UP, 2007).

Elaine G. Breslaw, *Tibuta, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York UP, 1997)

J. Spencer Fluhman, "A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America (UNC Press, 2014)

Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd ed. (Yale UP, 2010).

Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton UP, 2001).

Class Assignments

Attendance and Reading

As with any college course, learning and progression are dependent upon class participation and attendance. Therefore, markings of attendance and reading will make up a considerable portion of the student's overall grade. A sheet will be passed around every class period which will record both your attendance and the percentage of reading you have completed. Students must never mark the roll on behalf of anyone else, present or absent. The choice to disobey this rule, if discerned, results in failure of the course. While this emphasis on attendance and preparation places a lot of responsibility on the individual to keep up on reading assignments, it also rewards the diligent student by granting twenty percent of one's grade merely by preparing for and attending every class period. You are allowed to miss two classes without punishment, and three more can be made up through extra credit. More than five unexcused absences results in failure of the course.

addressed, stamped envelope, or arrange to pick it up from my office.

Commonplace Books

Throughout the semester, students will be required to keep a "commonplace book." You are expected to purchase a notebook of your choice which will then serve as your own commonplace book. Each Thursday class of the semester should have at least one page devoted to the reading and topic, and should include two things: a transcribed quotation from that week's reading assignment as well as two paragraphs of reflection on that week's topic. I will periodically check these commonplace books on Thursdays, and they will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Class Debate

One of the most heated debates today is whether America should be considered a "Christian Nation." Obviously, there is not an easy answer to this question, otherwise we wouldn't still be debating it. The class will be broken into four groups, two in favor of the motion and two against, and each group will come up with fifteen minutes worth of material to present in class to argue for your proposition. You can film a video, script a performance, stage a presentation—you name it. Grades will be awarded as a group, and will be based on both a demonstration of knowledge as well as creativity in preparation. This exercise should develop group skills as well as build classroom camaraderie. More information will be given as the time approaches.

Point Breakdown

CLASS ATTENDANCE	50
READING	50
RESPONSE PAPERS	50
CLASS DEBATE	50
ELECTION SPEECH	50
MIDTERM	75
FINAL PAPER	100
FINAL EXAM	75
TOTAL	500

Submitting Written Work

Students will submit hard copies of all work in class. They must be on white paper, black ink, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, and Times New Roman. The front page should include your name, class #, and date, and pages should be stapled together. If you are unable to provide a hard copy—for instance, if you have printer issues—email me BEFORE CLASS ON THE DAY IT IS DUE. I will not excuse late work if you do not alert me beforehand. If you would like your final paper returned to you after it is graded, please alert me on the front page of the paper and attach a self-



Class Assignments (Cont.)

Election Speeches

Given that this is an election year, we will be getting in on the campaigning fun. (The campaigns are fun, right?) However, with a religious twist: though neither candidate this year has a controversial religious past, that has not always been the case. From Thomas Jefferson's alleged "atheism" to John F. Kennedy's Catholicism, and even recently with Barack Obama's Jeremiah Wright controversy and Mitt Romney's Mormonism, presidential candidates have had to explain their religion to the American public. Students will make up a fictional candidate with a controversial religious affiliation and write a speech assuaging the American public of their fears.

Final Paper

The primary writing assignment, and highest percentage of your overall grade, is loosely titled a "final paper." I have left the title loose because the parameters of what you can write about are similarly loose. Students will choose a topic related to American religious history that they would like to explore through a five- to six-page paper. The papers that receive top grades are those that demonstrate critical thinking, deep contemplation, and scholarly rigor. Topics must be approved by me prior to 11/3, either by email or in person, and all papers will be due by the final day of class. Alternatively, students may propose some form of a performative presentation related to class, though the project must be pre-approved.

Useful Online Sources

1. Religion in American History Blog (usreligion.blogspot.com)
2. Religion and Politics (religionandpolitics.org)
3. Religious Dispatches (religiousdispatches.org)
4. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)
5. God in America (www.pbs.org/godinamerica/)
6. Religion and the Founding of the American Republic (www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/)

Midterm & Final Exam

A midterm exam will be administered halfway through the semester to gauge your progress. The final exam is comprehensive and will be administered in class on the assigned date. The test will include multiple choice, short answer, term identification, and a few essay questions. A study guide will be provided before both exams.

Extra Credit

Small amounts of extra credit will be available throughout the term and will be entirely comprised of extra reading. Students will be provided with an approved reading list (books and articles that are not on the list, but are approved by me, will also be eligible), and for every one hundred pages read there will be five extra credit points rewarded. Credit will be assessed by the student visiting my office and discussing the book or article, specifically relating how the text has enriched his or her understanding of American religious history.



Classroom Etiquette

Let's face it: our facebooking generation is not good at classroom etiquette. We like to think of ourselves as multi-tasking experts able to tweet, work on homework, message our friends, and listen to lectures all at the same time. But in reality, this just leads to ineffective class time. While I welcome laptops/iPads/do-dads in the classroom (heaven knows I've forgotten how to take hand-written notes), I ask that they only be used for taking notes.



Relatedly, please turn phones on silent, and please resist the urge to text. I acknowledge that my insights may be brilliant enough to merit immediate dissemination to the world, but please make sure you wait until after class is finished to do so.

Failure to follow these rules will result in a stiff penalty ranging from the loss of participation points to drops in letter grades.



Blackboard

If this is your first semester at Sam, you may not be familiar with blackboard. This will quickly change. We will be using blackboard as the digital hub for our class. Course materials—including the syllabus, grades, assignment information, announcements, and study guides—will be housed within that program. If you have difficulty accessing the website please let me know.

Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
8/25	Introduction to Course	-Familiarize yourself with the syllabus and course expectations -David Chidester, "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll"
8/30 & 9/1	Colonial Foundations	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 1-3
9/6 & 9/8	Origins of Religious Diversity	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 4-6
9/13 & 9/15		-Breslaw, Tibuta, <i>Reluctant Witch of Salem</i>
9/20 & 9/22	The Great Awakening(?)	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 6-9
9/27 & 9/29	Religious Disestablishment(?)	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 10
10/4 & 10/6	New Awakenings	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 12-14 (10/4) -CLASSROOM DEBATE: Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? (10/6)
10/11	Threats to Mainstream Christianity NO CLASS ON 10/13	-Fluhman, <i>Peculiar People</i> (10/11)
10/18 & 10/20	MIDTERM WEEK	-Review Session (10/18) -MIDTERM EXAM (10/20)
10/25 & 10/27	Religion in the Progressive Era	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 16, 17, 19

Class Schedule (cont.)

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
11/1 & 11/3	The Religious Life	-Orsi, <i>The Madonna of 115th Street</i> -FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE (11/3)
11/8 & 11/10	ELECTION DAY Birth of Fundamentalism	ELECTION SPEECHES ON 11/8 -Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , ch. 21
11/15 & 11/17	The Culture Wars	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 24-26
11/22	Modernity and the Problems of Pluralism	-Griffith, <i>American Religions</i> , chs. 27, 29, 30
11/29 & 12/1	Jerry Falwell's America Semester Review	-Harding, <i>Book of Jerry Falwell</i> (11/29) -FINAL PAPER DUE (12/1)
12/6	Final Exam	Exam will take place in our classroom at 3:30pm

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. A copy of the University policy is available on the Sam Houston State University website. If you need clarification about what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask or see me during office hours.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

SKILL OBJECTIVES

Critical Thinking: Students will be taught to think critically and analytically, and to ask appropriate questions about different historical societies and cultures, integrating and synthesizing knowledge they gain in the course, forming conclusions, and building an informed belief system from the complex of information presented in the course content.

Communication: To include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication. Communication skills will be addressed in this class through class participation, the reading and discussion of historical texts, attending lectures, and/or watching films. Students will learn through the use of historical materials to critically evaluate the time periods in which these materials originated.

Personal Responsibility: To include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making. Personal responsibility will be addressed in this course as students articulate how to make sound ethical judgments based on the development of their personal value system. By studying how individuals in the past drew upon their cultural belief systems to make ethical choices students will learn how their personal choices based upon ideas, values, and beliefs influence their larger society and culture today.

Social Responsibility: To include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities. Social Responsibility will be addressed in this course as students learn about the ways in which individuals and groups in the past made decisions aimed at promoting civil discourse, civic participation, and other social values so as to improve society for all. Students will thus learn about their own social responsibilities in improving current American society.