

**Sociology 129a. Religion in American Life:  
A Sociological Approach  
Brandeis University  
Spring 2019**

Wendy Cadge

Office Location: Pearlman 109

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-3:30pm at Einstein's in the SCC and by appointment

Telephone: 781-736-2641

Email: [wcadge@brandeis.edu](mailto:wcadge@brandeis.edu)

Teaching Assistant: Lijun Lin ([lijunlin@brandeis.edu](mailto:lijunlin@brandeis.edu))

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 1:00-1:50pm, Rosenstiel Basic Med118

### **Course Description**

This course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to the sociological study of religion. We ask what religion is, how it is present and influential in public and private life, and how and where people from different religious traditions interact in the contemporary United States. Specific attention is devoted to people's religious *practices*, religious *communities*, and the *identities* people develop through their religious traditions. Questions about religious pluralism, diversity and multi-religious citizenship are central to the conversations we will have throughout the course. By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Provide substantive and functional definitions of religion and spirituality and explain how these approaches have been influenced by scholars in the past one hundred years
- Analyze how religion and spirituality are present in American public life, how this is changing, and how issues related to diversity and pluralism have been addressed in specific examples.
- Describe how religion and spirituality influence people over the life course and how that influence varies across individuals.
- Consider the place of humanists, atheists and agnostics in the American religious context.
- Compare and contrast how religion and spirituality are addressed in secular institutions such as on university campuses, in airports, seaports, and healthcare organizations
- Present and defend your own approach to religious literacy.

Unlike courses in history or religious studies that focus on one religious tradition, you will learn a little bit about several religious traditions in this course. If you are looking to better understand the history of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity or another religious tradition, this may not be the course for you. While we will certainly pay attention to history and religious teachings in this course, our focus as sociologists will be on the ways individuals live their religions in day-to-day life. Sometimes these

experiences may seem to be in contrast to texts or religious leaders, an issue we will discuss throughout the course. Similarly, some of what we cover in this course may challenge what you know of your own or others' religious traditions. We ask you to be patient, to reserve judgment, and to remember the commitment Brandeis makes in its mission statement to be "a center of open inquiry and teaching."

This course is built around course readings, ongoing discussion, occasional films and guest speakers, and several writing assignments that ask you to bring theoretical ideas into conversation with religion as it is lived by the people around you. You are also required to make a field visit to two religious gatherings on campus or in the greater Boston area. We encourage you to visit gatherings and learn about religious tradition or spaces that are new to you and to see this class as an invitation and an important step in conversations about spirituality and religion in all of our lives. This course counts towards the major in Sociology and Minor in Religious Studies. It is a Writing Intensive (wi) course and fulfills the School of Social Science Distribution Requirement (ss).

### **Course Readings**

The following required books are available in the bookstore.

- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Frederick, Marla F. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. 2014. *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

These books are also on reserve in the library. All other required course readings are available through Latte except for those listed with web addresses that can be located that way.

### **Course Requirements**

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for us and your classmates. Your class attendance counts as 5 points towards your final grade. If you miss zero or one class, you will receive 5 points. If you miss 2 classes, you will receive 4 points. If you miss 3 classes, you will receive 3 points. If you miss 4 classes, you will receive 2 points. If you miss 5 classes, you will receive 1 point. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will receive 0 points. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email us about at least one week in advance. If you are not feeling well, please email me to let me know you are ill. *Please make sure to sign the attendance sheet that will be passed around in class.* Signing in for someone else is a violation of University policies on academic integrity that we take very seriously.

2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for Monday of each week unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. To prepare for class and be in conversation with us about what you are reading, response questions are listed on the syllabus and on Latte after many of the readings. You must respond to one of these questions **eight times** over the course of the semester. Each response should be one page long (single spaced) and written in a google doc. Please share your google doc with your discussion section leader to turn in these response papers and work from the same google doc through the whole semester. This allows us to write comments back to you and you to respond when you do your next response. **You can pick which eight questions you respond to during the semester but your response is due by 6am on the day class will meet.** Each response is worth 2 points towards your final grade (16 points total).
3. **Class Participation** is central to this class, and we ask that you participate fully in class, your small groups and section. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, please participate by coming to office hours. You are allowed to have computers and cell phones in class only if you are using them to take notes or look at readings. We will reduce your participation grade when we see you reading Facebook, surfing the web, sending text messages, etc. Class participation will count as nine points toward your final grade. Feel free to check with us about your participation grade at any point in the semester.
4. **Written Assignments:** There are four written assignments in this class:
  - a. Two field reports that describe your visits to spiritual or religious gatherings or sites. This assignment is being distributed with this syllabus. The first one is due on **January 31** and the second is due on **April 18**. Each is worth ten points. One of these can be to an on-campus gathering and one must be to an off-campus gathering.
  - b. The first 5-7 page (doubled spaced) paper assignment asks you to analyze prayers delivered in a state or federal government setting in the United States in light of class readings and conversation about civil religion and spiritual governance. This assignment will be distributed on February 4 and due on **February 28**. It is worth 15 points.
  - c. The second 5-7 page (double spaced) paper asks you to gather some information from an interview or social media about the development of someone's spiritual or religious identity and describe that development in the context of class readings. This assignment will be distributed on March 11 and due on **April 4**. It is worth 15 points.
  - d. There will also be a take home final exam distributed on April 29 and due on **May 7**. It is worth 20 points

This is a writing intensive class which means we will be focusing on writing as much as content in these assignments. We are happy to read drafts of papers and / or strongly encourage you to take them to the Writing Center before you submit

them. We expect you to use proper citations and reference all sources you use in each assignment. We will discuss when and how to cite sources in detail. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to raise them. You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdje/ai/>).

Papers are due through Latte at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers turned in after this are late. You will lose one full letter grade for each 24 hours after the due date that the assignment is turned in (i.e. if you would have received an B on a progress report but you turned it in one day late, you will receive a C etc.).

5. **Final Grades** will be based on your class attendance (5 points), class participation (9 points), reading responses in google docs (16 points), field report (10 points each), Paper 1 (15 points), Paper 2 (15 points) final exam (20 points). Final grades will be calculated using the following point distribution:

98-100 A+	77-79 C+
94-97 A	74-76 C
90-93 A-	70-73 C-
87-89 B+	67-69 D+
84-86 B	64-66 D
80-83 B-	60-63 D-
	<60 F

There are numerous written assignments in this class so that you can improve over the course of the semester. If you are struggling or are not happy with how you are doing, please see us sooner rather than later so we can work together to help you improve.

**\*\*All written assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class\*\***

6. **University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact Wendy and give her a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, [brodgers@brandeis.edu](mailto:brodgers@brandeis.edu)). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
7. **University Policy on Academic Integrity:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai/>). We will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but

not limited to being required to attend educational programs and receiving a failing grade for the course.

## Course Outline

### I. Getting Started: Conceptualizing and Studying Religion and Spirituality

#### January 16, 17. Introductions

Wednesday:

Introductions

Thursday:

- Bender, Courtney. 2007. "Religion and Spirituality: History, Discourse, Measurement." Social Science Research Council Essay Forum on the Religious Engagement of American Undergraduates: <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Bender.pdf>
- "Where Americans Find Meaning in Life." The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Please read the overview. Released November 20, 2018.

#### January 22, 23, 24. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Scholars

Monday:

- No class, MLK Day

Tuesday

- Please listen to one podcast through: <http://www.harrypottersacredtext.com/>
- Durkheim, Emile. 1955 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The Free Press (c. 1 Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion)
- If you want to know more about Durkheim's approach to religion, read: O'Toole, Roger. 1984. *Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, p. 76-110. It is up on the Latte site but is *not* required reading for today.

Wednesday:

- Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (c. 1 Religion and World Construction).

Thursday:

- Wuthnow, Robert. 2015. *Inventing American Religion: Polls, Surveys, and the Tenuous Quest for a Nation's Faith*. New York: Oxford University Press (c. 1 and c. 8)

#### January 28, 30, 31. Theoretical Approaches to the Study: Views of Practitioners

Monday and Wednesday:

- Frederick, Marla. 2003. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (p. 1-130).

Thursday

- *First Discussion Section Meeting – put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*
- *Field Report Due*

## **II. The Public Context: Secularization? Diversity? Pluralism?**

February 4, 6, 7. Market Models and Civil Religion

Monday:

- Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*. 98(5): p. 1044-1093.

Paper Assignment 1 Distributed

Wednesday:

- Bellah, Robert. 1970. *Belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world*. New York: Harper & Row. (c. 9 *Civil Religion in America*)

Please bring copies of the following to class:

- Washington, George. 1789. First Inaugural Address
- Trump, Donald. 2017. Inaugural Address

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting – put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*

February 11, 13, 14. Spiritual Governance

Monday and Wednesday:

- Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. 2014. *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Please focus on the Introduction and c. 1, 4, 5 and the Afterward)
- This might help: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_uJOtknn6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_uJOtknn6Q)

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting– put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*

February 18-22. no class

February 25, 27, 28. Brandeis University as a Case Study?

Monday: No class, Wendy is at a conference

Wednesday:

- Sachar, Abram 1995. *Brandeis University: A Host at Last*. Revised edition. Hanover: Brandeis University Press. Details (c. 2, 3, 13, 14)

OR

- Packet of Materials about the chapels at Brandeis on Latte  
We will meet today in the three chapels area

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting* — put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte
- *Paper 1 Due*

### March 4, 6, 7. Negotiating Public Dimensions of Diversity and Pluralism

Monday:

- 2008. “Driven by Faith or Customer Service? Muslim Taxi Drivers at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport (A)” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

Wednesday:

- 2012. “Invitation to a Tri-Faith Neighborhood (A).” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

Thursday:

- “A Question of Membership (A).” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

### **III. Personal Contexts**

#### March 11,13,14. Converting to Orthodox Judaism

Monday and Wednesday:

- Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (c. 1-6)
- Monday: Guest Speaker, Jonathan Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University

Paper 2 Distributed

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting* put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte

#### March 18, 20, 21. Converting to Atheism?

Monday and Wednesday:

- Stedman, Chris. 2012. *Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Please skim Edgell, Penny, Douglas Hartmann, Evan Stewart and Joseph Gerteis. 2016. "Atheists as Other Cultural Outsiders: Moral Boundaries and the Non." *Social Forces*, 95(2):607-638.
- This might help: <http://faitheistbook.com/>

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting - put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*

March 25, 27, 28. Thinking about Spirituality and Religion Among Millennials

Monday:

- "How We Gather" Report and website
- 2010. "Religion Among the Millennials: Introduction and Overview." Pew Forum.
- 2018. "Black Millennials are more religious than other Millennials" Pew Research Center

Wednesday:

In class activity TBD

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting - put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*

#### **IV. Experiencing Spiritual and Religious Diversity in Daily Life**

April 1,3,4. Seeing and Creating Shared Physical Space

Monday:

- Please review this website. Check out some of the virtual tours and primary documents as well: <http://www.hiddensacredspaces.org/>  
We will meet in the library today to look at the printed photographs from this project that are hanging there (and maybe check out the new meditation room)

Wednesday:

- Grubiak, Margaret. 2012. "The Danforth Chapel Program on the Public American Campus," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*. 19(2): 77-96
- Cadge, Wendy. 2012. *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (chapter 3)



- Cadge, Wendy. 2017. “The Evolution of American Airport Chapels: Local Negotiations in Religiously Pluralistic Contexts” *Religion & American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*. 28(1):135-165.

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Paper 2 Due*

April 8, 10, 11. The Work of Chaplains

Monday:

- Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. 2014. *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Please focus on c. 2 and 3)
- Listen to a few podcasts / reports here:  
<http://chaplaincyinnovation.org/resources/multimedia-resources>
- OR read one of the following: Cadge, Wendy and Michael Skaggs. 2018. “Humanizing Agents of Modern Capitalism? The Daily Work of Port Chaplains” with Michael Skaggs. *Sociology of Religion* OR Cadge, Wendy. 2017. “God on the Fly? The Professional Mandates of Airport Chaplains” *Sociology of Religion*. 78(4): 437-455

Wednesday

- We will watch part of the film *Chaplains: Faith on the Front Lines* in class or have a guest speaker. (<http://journeyfilms.com/chaplains/>)

Thursday:

- *Discussion Section Meeting - put your questions and ideas in the google doc on Latte*

April 15, 17, 18. Class choice - TBD

Monday and Wednesday:

- TBD

Thursday

- *Discussion Section Meeting*
- *Field Report 2 Due*

April 22-26. no class

## **V. Concluding**

April 29, May 1. Looking Forward

Monday:

- Prothero, Stephen. 2007. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*. New York: HarperCollins. (Introduction and c. 5).
- Another article may be added

Final Exam Distributed

Wednesday

Final Exam Due May 7 by noon