

## **Sociology of Religion – SOC XXXX**

(Date), (Location), (Time)

### **I. Introduction**

This course introduces students to the sociological study of religion. We will first explore how classical sociological thinkers understood religion. Then, we will move onto areas such as recruitment, conversion, charisma, and ritual to build our analytic toolkit. Next, we will discuss new religious movements before beginning a case study on one of the most well-known UFO “cults” – Heaven’s Gate. Following an extensive case study, we will discuss areas such as religious extremism, holy terrorism, and martyrdom. We will close class by understanding the role of religion in social and cultural change, followed by a focus on paranormal beliefs, evangelicalism, and atheism. Through this course, a wide range of audio and visual materials will be analyzed in class, including radio call-in shows, mass conversions, televangelists, political debates, and an eclectic mix of religious beliefs and rituals.

#### **Objectives:**

When you have finished this course, you will be able to:

- Identify and evaluate the central theories, concepts, and debates that define the academic study of the sociology of religion.
- Apply critical thinking skills and a sociological imagination in oral and written capacities when assessing the nature and role of religion in society.
- Engage extant theory and empirical evidence to construct convincing arguments related to religious processes and consequences.

#### **Required Text & Tools:**

- Zeller, Benjamin. “Heaven’s Gate: America’s UFO Religion”
- Course eReserves (through Sakai)
- A cellphone that you can use to access PollEverywhere (via text or a web browser). If this is a problem, let me know today!

#### **Web Tools:**

This course is supplemented with materials on <http://sakai.nd.edu> (also accessible through insideND). You will need to visit the website to access various course materials – powerpoint slides, online readings, examples, and assignments – and to keep up with your grades. We will also utilize podcasts and videos throughout classes.

#### **Contact Information:**

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Office Hours: Tues. 2-3pm & Thurs. 1130-1pm, or by appointment

### Contacting:

Before emailing me with a question, please check the syllabus and/or Sakai to see if it has been answered somewhere else. When you do email, please be patient and ***please write SOC XXXXX in the subject of your e-mail.*** For example, your e-mail title might say ‘SOC XXXXX Exam Question’. I might respond immediately, I might not. Give me a day (or a weekend) to get back to you. You don’t need to schedule an appointment to come by during office hours, but if you want to meet outside of my regular office hours, contacting me to set up an appointment is the best way to ensure I am available.

## II. Expectations and Policies:

### Attendance:

Since sociologists like statistical facts so much, I’ll drop one here – the single largest predictor of a final grade in any course is attendance (Credé, Roch and Kiezczyńska 2010), with doing the reading following a close second. That said, I will not take attendance or reduce your grade simply because you do not show up for class. However, I will not be held responsible for anything that you miss. I will not provide lecture notes or review what you missed during office hours, and even if you miss class, it’s not an excuse to skip the assigned readings. I strongly encourage you to find a few “soc buddies” in the class with whom you can contact when you need to miss a class. In addition, remember that the days that you miss you will not be here for in-class assignments and activities which – depending on your performance when here *or* if you’re chronically absent – could adversely affect your grade.

### Participation:

Just being present is not enough. While you will not be evaluated directly on participation, it will surely factor in to your success in this course. Students do better if people participate. The student who is participating gets the answers they need and the others in the class gain a better understanding of something they might need help with as well.



There are a number of ways that you can participate: If you need me to slow down or to provide another example, *raise your hand and tell me*. If you have a question, *ask*. If you need something clarified, *let me know*. If you have an example that better illustrates what we’re talking about, *share it*.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Academic misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated in my course. If I have reason to believe that you have violated the honor code, I **will** follow through with the guidelines in the academic code of honor handbook: <http://honorcode.nd.edu>. You should all be familiar with the honor code and most punishable forms of cheating. If you have any questions or are in doubt, please ask me.

### **Class Conduct:**

As a sign of respect to me and to your fellow classmates, please get to class on time. Do your best to avoid walking in late, stepping out, or leaving early. Put away laptops when class begins – as they are not allowed during class time unless you have an accommodation from the university – and only use cell phones for approved uses. Please don't read *The Observer*, talk to your friends, text, sleep, listen to music, or pass notes during class. Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to me and your classmates, but they also limit your ability to participate in class and understand the material – it's basically a bad time for everyone. If you think you're being sneaky, you're not – I was a student once too.

### **III. Assignments & Evaluations:**

Realizing that students have various strengths and weaknesses, I incorporate a number of different evaluation styles in my grading system:

- **In-Class Quizzes, Activities, and Responses (22%):** These exercises are varied and can be anything from quizzes on the readings to activities to class reactions to applications of what we are discussing. We will have these *nearly* every non-exam day, meaning there should be more than 20 opportunities (mostly in-class and a few out of class) for these. I will only count your 20 *best* scores.
- **Reflections (17%):** A crucial skill you must learn in college is how to write clearly, persuasively, and succinctly (and in this class, thoughtfully). The best way to acquire this skill is through practice. To this end, during the semester you are required to write three 3 page papers that reflect on how class materials, lectures, and/or readings relate to your everyday experience. There will be five opportunities. You will choose the opportunities that work best for you (whether based off due-date, topic, or procrastination comfort level). Due dates – when reflections must be turned in at the beginning of class – are marked with an asterisk (\*) in the syllabus.
- **Examples from Everyday Life (4%):** I will use a number of examples from everyday life in lectures. This asks you to find your own examples of the concepts or theories that we are talking about in lecture or the readings to post on Sakai. You'll post a brief entry detailing what you found, how it can be explained with course material, and a link (if it's from the media).
- **Exams (57%):** There will be three exams for this course – two given during the semester and one during finals week. The exams will be comprised of three sections – multiple choice & true/false, short answer, and essay. The final is cumulative only in the sense that sociological concepts build on each other and that students *can* draw on all the readings (but won't be required to).

**\*\*No late assignments will be accepted\*\***  
**Exams – including the final – will only be administered on the scheduled dates**  
**Be sure to check the syllabus and plan accordingly**  
 (Exceptions will only be made with a documented *official* university excuse.)

**Grading:**

Final grades will be determined based on the total number of points that you earn on exams and assignments. Please note that I do not round grades up.

<i>In-Class Exercises</i> (20, worth 5 points each)	100	A >93%	C +	77-79.9%
<i>Reflections</i> (3, worth 25 points each)	75	A- 90-92.9%	C	73-76.9%
<i>Example from Everyday Life</i> (1, worth 20 points)	20	B +	C- 70-72.9%	
<i>Mid Term</i> (2, worth 90 points each)	180	B 83-86.9%	D	60-69.9%
Final Exam (worth 75 points)	75	B- 80-82.9%	F	<60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>			

Sometimes students have questions about what particular grades mean. According to Notre Dame's Faculty Handbook, letter grades reflect the following:

- A Truly Exceptional** – Work that meets or exceeds the highest expectations.
- A- Outstanding** – Superior work in *all* areas.
- B+ Very Good** – Superior work in *most* areas.
- B Good** – Solid work across the board.
- B- More than Acceptable** – More than acceptable, but falls short of solid work.
- C+ Acceptable: Meets All Basic Standards** – Work meets all the basic requirements and standards.
- C Acceptable: Meets Most Basic Standards** – Work meets most of the basic requirements and standards in several areas.
- C- Acceptable: Meets Some Basic Standards** – While acceptable, work falls short of meeting basic standards in several areas.
- D Minimally Passing** – Work just over the threshold of acceptability.
- F Failing** – Unacceptable performance.

#### IV. Topics, Assigned Readings, and Due Dates



Readings listed must be read *before* class the day listed. Students should come prepared on the first day ready to discuss the readings listed. Due dates and exam dates have an asterisk next to the date.

- 08.23.16      **Introduction**  
Berger, Peter. "An Invitation to Sociology"
- 08.25.16      **What is religion?**  
Winchester, Daniel. "Religion as Theoretical Case, Lens, and Resource for Critique: Three Ways Social Theory Can Learn from the Study of Religion"  
  
Roberts and Yamane. "What do we mean by the term religion?" (Ch 1)
- 08.30.16      **Durkheim**  
Durkheim, Emile. 1905. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Pp TBA
- 09.01.16      **Durkheim, contemporary**  
Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger*. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2
- 09.06.16\*      **Marx**  
Marx, Karl. 1978. "Theses on Feuerbach." "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction." "The German Ideology: Part I" (up to A2). In Robert Tucker (ed.). 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Norton.
- 09.08.16      **Marx, contemporary**  
Comaroff, John and Jean. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp TBA
- 09.13.16      **Weber**  
Selected readings. Weber, Max. "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," "The Prophet," "Different Roads to Salvation," "Asceticism, Mysticism, and Salvation Religion" in *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*
- 09.15.16\*      **Weber**  
Weber, Max. 1905[2002]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Pp. TBA  
Suggested Reading: Summers-Effler, Erika and Deborah Kwak. 2015. "Weber's Missing Mystics" *Theory and Society*.
- 09.20.16      **EXAM #1**
- 09.22.16      **Recruitment and Conversion**  
Lofland, John and Rodney Stark. 1965. "Becoming a World-Saver: a Theory of Conversion." *American Sociological Review*. 30: 862-875.

Snow, David A. and Cynthia L. Phillips. 1980. "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment." *Social Problems* 27(4):430-47.

Suggested Reading: Goldman, Marion S. 1999. *Passionate Journeys: Why Successful Women Joined a Cult*.

09.27.16

**Charisma**

Joose, Paul. 2017. "Max Weber's Disciplines: Theorizing the Charismatic Aristocracy" *Sociological Theory*.

Collins, Randall. "Jesus in Interaction: The Micro-Sociology of Charisma" <http://sociological-eye.blogspot.com/2014/04/jesus-in-interaction-micro-sociology-of.html>

Suggested Reading: Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1954. "Magic, Science and Religion." In *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. New York: Doubleday.

09.29.16

**Ritual**

Collins, Randall. 2010. *The Microsociology of Religion*.

Suggested Reading: Wellman, James K., Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk. 2014. "'God Is Like a Drug...': Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches." *Sociological Forum* 29(3):650-72. doi: 10.1111/socf.12108.

Suggested Reading: Wollschleger, Jason. 2012. "Interaction Ritual Chains and Religious Participation." *Sociological Forum* 27(4):896-912. doi: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2012.01361.x.

10.04.16\*

**Commitment**

Kanter, R.M. 1968. "Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities."

Coser, Lewis A. 1974. *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*. Pp TBA

10.06.16

**Beliefs and Practice**

Snow and Malchek. 1982. "On the Presumed Fragility of Unconventional Beliefs."

Suggested Reading: Smilde, David. 2007. *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism*.

10.11.16

**Growth**

Phillips, Rick. 1998. *Religious Market Share and Mormon Church Activity*.

Iannaccone, Laurence. 1994. *Why Strict Churches are Strong*.

10.13.16\*

**EXAM #2**

10.18.16

**No Class – Mid Term Break**

10.20.16

**No Class – Mid Term Break**

- 10.25.16 **Heaven's Gate: A case study**  
Zeller, Benjamin E. 2014. *Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion*. New York: NYU Press. Pp TBA
- 10.27.16 **Heaven's Gate: A case study**  
Zeller, Benjamin E. 2014. *Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion*. New York: NYU Press. Pp TBA
- 11.01.16\* **Heaven's Gate: A case study**  
Zeller, Benjamin E. 2014. *Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion*. New York: NYU Press. Pp TBA
- 11.03.16 **Heaven's Gate: A case study**  
Zeller, Benjamin E. 2014. *Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion*. New York: NYU Press. Pp TBA
- 11.08.16\* **Religious Extremism**  
Brym, Robert J. 2007. "Six Lessons of Suicide Bombers"
- 11.10.16\* **Religious Extremism**  
Sageman, Marc. 2004. *Understanding Terror Networks*. (Chapter 3)
- Iannaccone and Berman. 2006. *Religious Extremism: The good, the bad, and the deadly*.
- 11.15.16 **Holy Crusades**  
Phillips, Jonathan. 2009. *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*. (Chapter 1)
- 11.17.16\* **Holy Terrorism**  
Hoffman, Bruce. 1995. "Holy Terror": The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative.
- 11.22.16\* **EXAM #3**
- 11.24.16 **Thanksgiving Break**
- 11.29.16 **Religion and Social Change**  
Morris, Aldon. 1996. "The Black Church in Civil Rights Movement: The SCLC as the Decentralized Radical Arm of the Black Church"
- Suggested Reading: Kurzman, Charles. 2004. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University
- Suggested Reading: McRoberts, Omar M. 2003. *Streets of Glory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 12.01.16 **Paranormal America**  
Bader, Mencken, and Baker. 2011. *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture*. (Introduction and Chapter 5)
- 12.06.16 **Evangelical America**  
Smith, Chris. 1996. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. (Chapter 4)
- 12.08.16 **Atheism in America**  
Smith, Jesse M. 2010. "Becoming an Atheist in America" *Sociology of Religion*

Suggested Reading: Edgell, Penny et al. 2006. "Atheists as "Other": Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society." American Sociological Review

12.13.16\*

**FINAL EXAM Time TBA Location TBA**