Religion in American Politics

Description

Should citizens’ religious identities be treated like any other aspect of identity when it comes to political discourse? Should political figures be public about their religiosity or keep it “private”? Does concern about “moral values” dictate that religious Americans should play a more prominent role in American politics? What are the rights of American citizens to be free from religious influences in politics? What are the rights of religious minorities in a society that supposedly respects the religious freedom of all of its people?

This course offers an opportunity to explore such questions. It offers a broad, critical overview of the relationship, and some of the perpetual tensions, between religion and politics in the United States. We will learn about a number of current “hot button” issues like debates over same-sex marriage and contraception rights. But we will also review how the historical presence of a variety of American religious groups has impacted the nation’s often conflicted sense of identity as well as the tenor of our ongoing debates about—and within—religion in American politics. Different theoretical perspectives will frame our understanding of the “separation of church and state” and help us interpret the unique influence of religiosity on American political culture. In the last half of the course, we will explore how a spectrum of different groups, including Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Latinos, African Americans, and secularists are addressing the role of religion in American political life, and consider how conservative and progressive variations of religion in politics play out differently, including in Colorado and local politics.

The course will be run seminar-style and will require active participation of all students.

Objectives

In this course, students will have an opportunity to:

- interrogate preexisting assumptions about the relationship between religion, the U.S. constitutional system, and American citizens
- learn about how debates about religion at the nation’s founding, and debates within major religious traditions, impact the current political milieu
- improve understanding of the power dynamics between religious majorities and minorities in the U.S.
- explore how religion has influenced “family values” politics over time
- hone critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and argumentation skills, and
- learn to co-facilitate rigorous class discussions in a seminar-style learning environment.
FAIR WARNING CLAUSE: This is a reading- and discussion-intensive seminar geared toward political science and religious studies majors. It will be a lot of work but also fun. Staying on top of the course reading is imperative, and your grade will suffer if you don’t. Please be realistic about whether you have the time to put into the course and, if you aren’t sure, consider taking it another quarter when you have more time.

Required Course Readings:
Regular (off syllabus):

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (http://pewforum.org). We will be paying attention to the Pew Forum’s weekly reports on issues related to religion and American politics. Please sign up on their website to receive weekly reports in your email box.

Textbooks
The following required books are available at the DU bookstore (or, if you prefer, any online source), and can be checked out through Penrose. We will be reading them in the order listed:


J. Matthew Wilson, Ed., *From Pews to Polling Places*, Georgetown University Press, 2007. Note: The bookstore has copies of this book, but needs commitments from students to order more as it is a print-on-demand text. Please make sure you order it either from our bookstore or online before Week 5.

Other resources
As a discussion and possible reading comprehension facilitator, we will be using a tool called Top Hat, which allows you to respond to questions in class, using your cell phone, laptop, or other mobile device in class. A $20 subscription provides access for a full year, including to other classes using this service. To get started, see class handout, also posted to Blackboard.

Course Requirements
In addition to the regular course reading, students will complete the following. (Guidelines are given in the next section.)

1. **30%: In-Class and Online Participation.** This class, and your learning, succeeds or fails based on your participation. Participation means (a) completing all the readings and having thought about them before class; (b) participating actively in Blackboard or other mechanisms when given opportunities; (c) contributing productively, respectfully, and in a non-dominating way in class; and (d) generally helping move our class conversations forward across the quarter, individually and in groups.

2. **15%: One well-prepared co-facilitation of class,** with 2 partners. This includes a written outline and discussion questions list emailed to me at least 2 hours before
class meets. I will hand out a co-facilitation sign-up list during the second week of class.

3. **20%: Midterm Critical essay (5-7-page).** I will hand out essay topic options on **Wednesday, September 25th**. Papers will be due **Friday, October 10th** by noon, via email.

4. **25%: Final Exam, November 17th.** This is a combination of multiple choice, short essay, and longer essay in-class exam. This exam is somewhat cumulative, asking you to synthesize material from the first and second half of the course.

5. **10%: Attendance.** I will take roll daily. Any more than two unexcused absences will impact your attendance grade.

If students are not keeping up with the reading, I reserve the right to add a Blackboard discussion comments assignment.

**Assignment Guidelines**

**Co-facilitation of class discussion:** Students will work in small groups to co-facilitate the class discussion on at least one part of the assigned reading for one given class session. The point of co-facilitation is to take collaborative leadership of class discussion in an interesting and productive way. You can be creative with this assignment. In the past, students have come up with games, group work, debates, creative exercises—anything to productively engage your peers in a good discussion of course material. I will help move the discussion along if necessary, but the co-facilitators essentially have the stage for getting things moving. This responsibility will include:

1. **Meeting ahead of time as a group** to discuss the readings. This can be done through a discussion group on Blackboard if it is more convenient for you, but working together is not optional. DO NOT divvy up the assignment between group members and then not talk about it together. This is a cooperative assignment and must be treated as such.

2. **Providing some additional information,** whenever possible, about the topic we will be discussing. This means doing a little research as a group (or as individuals, but everyone needs to do something). For example, the Wilson book looks at different groups’ orientations to religious politics. If you are covering one of those chapters, you might provide a bit of background on the group’s beliefs or activities. You may want to provide a hand out of information you are covering. You can email this to me beforehand and I will make copies.

3. **Turning in a written component** of your co-facilitation. **Whatever you came up with, please send me a formal written version of it at least 2 hours before class starts.** This should include (1) a basic outline of your co-facilitation plan, including your teaching objectives, (2) the discussion questions (games, exercises, etc.) you organized, (3) outside research you did, (4) and the presentation itself. I will return this with a group grade based on the clarity and effectiveness of your co-facilitation.
Critical analysis paper guidelines: I will hand out full paper assignments when the class roster has stabilized. But, in general, please know that I expect your papers to be thoughtful, clear, reasoned essays in response to the assignments I will hand out. If you already know your writing skills need improvement, please take extra time on your paper and, if possible, get some outside help through DU’s Writing Center. Though I’d love to, I won’t have time to teach writing in this class, but I am happy to work with you during my office hours if you are struggling.

I will grade your written work according to the following considerations:

1. Do you have a thesis – that is, a central assertion, argument or analytical question up front according to which the rest of the essay is organized?
2. Do you use concrete evidence from the readings or class material to support your thesis?
3. Have you written clear transitions that lead the reader from one idea to the next?
4. Did you proofread your work for typos and grammar?
5. Did you push yourself to think carefully and critically – not just throw out a sloppy, impressionistic, last-minute document that you expect at least a B on? (You won’t get it.)

Late papers and missing assignments: Work handed in late will lose 1/3 grade per day. Work not handed in at all will receive a minus grade, which then will be averaged in with your other grades. If you face a legitimate emergency, contact me beforehand and perhaps an extension can be arranged.

Exam: I will discuss these further as we get closer to them.
Course Policies

Reading is not optional.
Your success, and the success of the class, depends on your active participation in discussions about the reading. Students are required to complete the assigned readings at the beginning of each topic or week and the co-facilitators assigned to that discussion will lead discussion. Out of respect for your peers and yourself, please come prepared with comments and/or questions about the reading even when you are not co-facilitating. This means managing your time well, particularly when we have written assignments due.

Respect the academic honor code.
I will search for and report any plagiarism—that is, writing that I suspect is not yours or that you have not cited as belonging to someone else. I reserve the right to ask you to rewrite a paper if I suspect plagiarism. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will fail the assignment and possibly the class. You can find DU’s academic honor code at http://www.du.edu/ccs/honorcode.html.

Attendance factors into your grade.
I will take attendance daily. If you come to class less than 90% of the time, your grade will be impacted, because it will affect in-class participation and group work. I will post paper assignments on Blackboard. If you have to be absent, it is your responsibility to find out what the assignment was (please start by communicating with a classmate; all emails are available via Blackboard) and to communicate with any groups you may be working with about what you need to do to carry your weight in the group work.

Under most circumstances, you will be penalized for late work.
If a legitimate emergency prevents you from turning in an assignment, I need to know the relevant details as soon as possible and we can probably work out an agreement. Otherwise, late individual work will be marked down a third of a grade for each day that it is late. Late group work will not be accepted, which means that if you tend to be late, you need to try to break the habit so as not to impact your group.

Group work matters.
Your individual contribution to your formal group will be evaluated periodically (and with a score at the end of the quarter) by you, the members of your group, and by me. That means that any “free riders” will be exposed and we will try to correct the problem. Please don’t take this course if you don’t think you are able to carry your weight in a cooperative learning environment.

Classroom behavior is important.
I expect you to come to class well prepared to engage in the multi-directional learning/teaching process. Feel free to question and, at times, disagree with your peers, the reading, or the instructor regarding thoughts and feelings on particular issues. If you disagree with material presented, do so respectfully and with an aim to facilitating, rather than impeding, the learning process for others. If you are disrespectful, I reserve the right to dismiss you from class.
Classroom etiquette

- If you are disruptive in class, I reserve the right to dismiss you immediately. (Ringing cell phones, incidentally, are disruptive; turn them off.)
- The class may raise provocative and/or emotional issues for some of us; please respect that we come from different perspectives and always avoid personal attacks when making a point.
- It is important that we respect a safe climate for debate and discussion. That also means taking the time to listen carefully to one another.
- Whenever possible, use evidence from the course material to make an argument or ask a question. This will enhance your credibility, and factor into your final grade.
- Try not to interrupt each other during discussion. In small groups, you may want to select a discussion facilitator to make sure that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak.
- If you tend to dominate discussion and have a lot to say, do hold back sometimes so that other people have a chance to jump in. Likewise, if you tend to be quiet, push yourself to engage more actively than you are used to doing. It’s all good for intellectual growth.

Students with Disabilities

I encourage students with disabilities, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury and attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or other psychiatric disabilities, to see me within the first two weeks of class so that necessary accommodations can be made to facilitate the learning experience. See me either after class or during my office hours. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit the relevant letter from Disability Services Program early in the semester so that your needs may be addressed. For more information about disability services at DU, go to http://www.du.edu/disability/.
Course Schedule
The course schedule is subject to change – with notice – during the course of the semester, in which case I will post a new schedule to the course website and let you know that there has been a change. YOU are responsible for using the most updated schedule.

Part 1: Key Debates and Historical Perspectives

Week 1 Framing Religion in American Politics
(M) September 8 What Do We Know about Who Are We Right Now?
Course introduction and overview. We will watch and discuss the “2012 American Values Survey: Assessing Political and Moral Views on the Economy and Social issues in a Shifting Religious Landscape,” Brookings Institute, October 23, 2012. Also available on Blackboard (06:20 to 1:45:00).

(M) September 10: Religion and Politics Demographic Overview
☐ [Before class] Canvas (C) reading: Go to “The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey” home page (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life). This is under Modules in Canvas.
   ___ Read “Summary of Key Findings,” Reports 1 (Religious Affiliation) and 2 (Religious Beliefs and Practices/Social and Political Views) (http://religions.pewforum.org/reports)
   ___ Spend min. 30 minutes looking through “Comparisons” tab, especially “Social and Political Views” under that (http://religions.pewforum.org/comparisons) to get a sense of how different religious groups orient toward different political issues in American politics
   ___ Answer questions under Discussion and respond to one other classmate’s post.
We will discuss the work you did and your observations in class.

(M) September 15: The “religious minimalism” position.
☐ Wall of Separation, pp. 3-43 (Ted Jelen)
☐ Readings 1-3 and 5-6 in Part Two (Framing documents).

(W) September 17: The “religious freedom” position.
☐ Wall of Separation, pp. 53-109. (Mary Segers)
☐ Readings 7-8 (Kennedy and Cuomo)
Co-Facilitation calendar sign up.

Week 2 Debating the “Wall of Separation” Issue
(M) September 22:
☐ Reading 9 (Selected Supreme Court Cases) in Part Two of Wall of Separation: Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township; Lemon v. Kurtzman; Employment Division v. Smith.
☐ Online discussion.
(W) September 24: Public Theology as a Solution?

Week 4 A “Godless Constitution” and/or a “Christian Nation”?
(M) September 29: A religious populace with a “godless” constitution?
  □ Waldman, chs. 1-4
  • Christian America, Franklin, Evangelical Revolution, Adams

(W) October 1: Founding legacies.
  □ Waldman, chs. 5-7.
  • American Revolution, Washington, Holy War
  • Co-Facilitation

Week 5 Founding Faith at Independence
(M) October 6: Jefferson, Madison, and “Nature’s God”
  □ Waldman, chs. 8-11 (and 12 if you can)
  • Jefferson, God Compromise, Madison
  • Co-Facilitation

(W) October 8: Getting to Compromise, After All
  □ Waldman, chs. 12-14
  • After Independence, First Amendment Compromise
  • Co-Facilitation
  PAPER DUE October 10th, by noon via Canvas upload.

PART 2: Contemporary Issues
Week 6 Politics in the American Religious Mosaic
(M) October 13: Understanding Political and Religious Mobilization in the U.S.
  □ Chapters 1 (pp 1-25 only) and 2 in Wilson (From Pews to Polling Places)
  Possible video: With God on Our Side

(W) October 15: What about the Religious Left?
  □ Chs 3 and 10 in Wilson
  □ (C) Excerpts from Robert P. Jones, Progressive & Religious (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008)
  • Co-Facilitation

Week 7 Religious Minorities in Political Life
(M) October 20: American Catholics
  □ Ch 4 in Wilson
  □ (C) Fact Sheet on American Catholics in 2013; and “Pope Francis and Hispanic American Catholics”
  • Co-Facilitation
(W) October 22: Mormons
- Ch 5 in Wilson
- (C) Wadsworth on Mormon racial patterns: Black People and Mormon Doctrine Wikipedia; Romney’s 2007 “Faith in America” address

Co-Facilitation

Week 8 Religious Racial Minorities in Political Life
(M): October 27: African Americans, Theology, and Moral Values Debates
- Ch 6 in Wilson
- Co-Facilitation on Ch. 6
- (C) Wadsworth, “Intersectionality in California’s Same-Sex Battles: A Complex Proposition” and Data Supplement

(W) October 29: American Latinos
- (C) Martinez, Hernández, and Peña, “Latino Religion and Its Political Consequences”
- (C) “2013 Hispanic Values Survey,” Pew Forum on Religion

Co-Facilitation

Week 9 Jews, Muslims, and South Asians
(M) November 3: American Jews and Politics
- Ch 8 in Wilson
- (C) Robert Jones on Progressive Jewish activism (from earlier Jones .pdf on Bb)
- (C) Pew Forum Jewish Americans 2013

Co-Facilitation

(W) November 5: American Muslims and Buddhists
- (C) “Muslim Americans,” Pew Report
- (C) Sangay Mishra, “Religion and Race: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States”

Co-Facilitation

Week 10 Religion and Politics in Colorado
(M) November 10
- TBA Class Guests

(W) November 12
- TBA Class Guests

Final Exam November 17, during regular class time slot and room.