



American Religious Traditions

REL 320 – 87831; 87832

Fall 2023B

iCourse & ASU Online

COURSE OVERVIEW

Welcome to American Religious Traditions!

In this course, we will look at some of the major traditions that have shaped the U.S. religious landscape—as well as some movements you may not yet have heard of. We will approach religion as a social phenomenon that is intertwined with all aspects of human cultural life. Questions we will ponder include: Is there anything unique about the way people in the United States tend to think and talk about religion? What lasting impact has colonialism had on the American religious landscape? How have immigrants adapted their religious practices within the America context and how have they, in turn, transformed the fabric of American religious life? How can a deeper historical perspective enrich our understanding of debates about religious freedom in the United States?

This course does not advocate for or against any religion. Rather, the class is intended to help you better understand the role of religion in American public life, past and present. The course will help you strengthen your “religious literacy,” that is, your knowledge of some of the key practices, beliefs, and historical figures within the religious history of the United States. The course will also challenge you to think critically about where our historical narratives begin, through whose eyes they are told, and whose interests they serve.

This course will help you master the following Career Skills:

- Critical thinking/ problem solving
- Global/ intercultural fluency
- Oral/ written communication

In addition, this course will help you achieve the following Learning Outcomes:

- Hone the ability to analyze historical documents and secondary sources
- Formulate an original argument about the role of religion in American culture and society
- Cultivate a basic awareness of key concepts and historical movements within U.S. religious history and apply this awareness to current debates about religion in the public sphere

credits: 3

prerequisites: ENG 102, 105, or 108 with C or better; minimum 24 hours

General Studies: HU & C & H

Instructor: Dr. Leah Sarat

Office Hours: I am available for phone or Zoom conversations, by appointment. Please email first at: leah.sarat@asu.edu

Teaching Assistant: TBA

Catalog Description: Examines the formation, development, and interaction of major American religious traditions (indigenous, African American, Asian American, and Euro-American)

REQUIRED READINGS:

-Neusner, J. *World Religions in America* (4th edition), 2009.

Available through the campus bookstore; used copies and digital copies also available online.

-Clark and Stoddard, *Race and New Religious Movements in the USA: A Documentary Reader*, 2019.

Available through the campus bookstore; used copies and digital copies also available online

-Additional required articles and book chapters will be posted as PDFs and Word documents.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Three discussion assignments (15 pts each; 45 pts total)

Guidelines for discussion assignments vary; see the course modules for specific instructions on each discussion. Discussion assignments each have two due dates: a due date for an initial post, and due date for a reply to a classmate's post. Be sure to watch the introduction videos for each module to make sure you don't miss any discussion assignment guidelines.

Two reading analysis assignments (15 pts each; 30 pts total)

Reading analysis assignments are 350-450 word mini essays exploring a single theme within the readings and/ or films for a given week in response to a prompt. Additional instructions will be provided in the modules where reading analyses are assigned.

Final paper or podcast proposal (5 pts)

A brief (200-300 word) proposal outlining which two religious movements you plan to compare for the final project, which documents you plan to use, and your initial findings.

Final paper or podcast (20 pts)

In the final assignment, you will produce a short paper or podcast which compares approaches toward race within two of the religious movements featured within the book *Race and New Religious Movements in the USA* (paper length: 3-4 double-spaced pages, or about 900-1200 words; podcast length: approx. 3-4 minutes long).

GRADING SCALE:

A+	100 %	to 97.0%
A	< 97.0 %	to 94.0%
A-	< 94.0 %	to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 %	to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 %	to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 %	to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 %	to 76.0%
C	< 76.0 %	to 70.0%
D	< 70.0 %	to 60.0%
E	< 60.0 %	to 0.0%

GETTING STARTED ON CANVAS: *To access readings, lectures, videos, and assignments, visit the Module page of this course's Canvas site. Take a look at the "Links & Tools," begin with Module 0, then proceed through the modules in the order presented. Refer to the "Assignment Schedule" linked at the top of this course's Home/Module page to make sure you are staying up to pace with the work.*

*Be sure to **check the "overview" page of each module for welcome videos.** In these welcome videos, I share announcements, talk you through the materials in that module, and provide tips on upcoming assignments.*

COURSE SCHEDULE: (subject to change)

MODULE 0: LET'S GET STARTED

Visit this module for a basic overview of the course. You must complete the Academic Integrity Agreement before moving on to Module 1. It is worth zero points but must be completed for the other modules to open.

MODULE 1 (10/11-10/18): SELECT NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITIONS: WESTERN APACHE (NDEE) COSMOLOGIES

Underlying questions for this module: What roles have landscape and storytelling played in Western Apache (Ndee) cosmologies? Is "religion" a universal category? Who gets to define what is "sacred," and what are some of the legal consequences of the ways we define religion?

Read:

Basso, "Stalking with Stories"

Martin, "Of Telescopes, Squirrels, and Prayers: The Mt. Graham Controversy"

Hedgpeth, "This land is sacred to the Apache, and they are fighting to save it"

+additional web resources based on your chosen discussion prompt

Watch: lecture videos

Assignment:

1st discussion

This assignment has two parts. The first part (your post) is due **Tuesday, 10/17** by the end of the night. The second part (your response to a classmate) is due **Wednesday, 10/18** by the end of the night.

MODULE 2 (10/19-10/25): ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Underlying questions for this module: What role did religion play in early Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas, including within the borderlands of what is now the United States? Why is it important to understand the larger cultural "icebergs" that underlie processes of religious change? Are "good" and "evil" universal concepts?

Read:

Neusner ch. 4, "Catholics in the World and in America"

"Inter Caetera" and "Sublimus Dei"

Burkhart, "The Missionary Missionized"

Watch: lecture videos

Assignment:

2nd discussion

This assignment has two parts. The first part (your initial 2 posts) is due **Tuesday, 10/24** by the end of the night. The second part (your responses to classmates) is due **Wednesday, 10/25** by the end of the night.

MODULE 3 (10/26-11/1): PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

Underlying questions for this module: What key ideas emerged during the Protestant Reformation? How did Protestant Christianity shape how early settlers from England understand their experiences in the colonies? How did Evangelical Protestantism emerge, and what are some practices through which contemporary evangelical Protestants in the United States render their notions of God tangible?

Read:

Neusner ch. 2, "Protestant Christianity in the World and in America"

Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Luhrmann, "Is that You, God?"

Fletcher, "Hell and Judgment: Houses of Distinction"

Watch:

Lecture videos

Assignment:

1st Reading Analysis

due **Wednesday, 11/1** by the end of the night

MODULE 4 (11/2-11/8): JUDAISM

Underlying questions for this module: Which varieties of Judaism have played a prominent role in U.S. religious history? What strategies have practitioners of various types of Judaism employed to preserve tradition and cultural continuity within the North American landscape? How do contemporary expressions of antisemitism compare to those in the early 20th century?

Read:

Neusner ch. 7, "Judaism in the World and in America"

Wertheimer, "Diversity Among the Orthodox"

Goldstein, "Race and the 'Jewish Problem' in Interwar America"

Selected news articles, based on which prompt you choose for the assignment

Watch:

lecture videos

The Jewish Americans: The Best of Times, the Worst of Times (excerpt)

Assignment:

3rd discussion assignment

This assignment has two parts. The first part (your post) is due **Tuesday, 11/7** by the end of the night. The second part (your response to a classmate) is due **Wednesday, 11/8** by the end of the night.

MODULE 5 (11/9-11/15): MADE IN AMERICA: THE LDS CHURCH AND THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

Underlying questions for this module: What are some new religions that emerged out of North American Christianity in the 19th century? How did these movements reinterpret ideas about family, gender, and collective life amidst the broader changes that were occurring within North American society?

Read:

Neusner ch. 18, "The Latter-day Saint (Mormon) Religion in America and the World"

Park, "Early Mormon Patriarchy and the Paradoxes of Democratic Religiosity in Jacksonian America"

Wayland-Smith, "Electric Sex; or, How to Live Forever"

Watch:

lecture videos

Assignment:

2nd reading analysis, due **Wednesday, 11/15** by the end of the night

MODULE 6 (11/16-12/1): RACE AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

How have various new religious movements blended racial and religious identities as they grapple with social realities in the United States? How have the categories of "religion" and "race" been constructed and transformed over time?

Read:

"Introduction" of Clark and Stoddard, *Race and New Religious Movements in the USA*

Roediger, "[Historical Foundations of Race](#)"

Watch: lecture video(s)

Assignments:

*Final project proposal due **Wednesday, 11/22** by the end of the night*

*Final paper or podcast due **Friday, 12/1** by the end of the night *

COURSE POLICIES

Grades reflect your performance on assignments and adherence to deadlines. In general, graded assignments will be available within one week of the due date via the Gradebook.

Late assignment submissions:

Each student may **submit one assignment (other than the final paper), up to six days late**, with no need to notify me ahead of time and with no deduction in points. The six days late limit is to ensure we receive your assignment within the standard grading turnaround time.

Beyond this, if you are facing exceptional circumstances, please reach out to me via email or through Canvas messenger to make arrangements. Notify me **BEFORE** an assignment is due if an urgent situation arises and the assignment will not be submitted on time.

Please follow the appropriate University policies to request an [accommodation for religious practices](#) or to accommodate a missed assignment [due to University-sanctioned activities](#).

Communicating With the Instructor

This course uses a discussion board called "[Community Forum](#)" for general questions about the course. Prior to posting a question, please check the syllabus, announcements, and existing posts. If you do not find an answer, post your question. You are encouraged to respond to the questions of your classmates. Email questions of a personal nature to Dr. Sarat. You can expect a response within 48 hours, although usually much sooner.

Syllabus Credit

For one point of extra credit added to your grade in the course, email me a picture of a nudibranch at any point during the semester :)

Online Course

This is an online course. There are no face-to-face meetings. You can log into your course via MyASU or <https://my.asu.edu>.

Email and Internet

ASU email is an [official means of communication](#) among students, faculty, and staff. Students are expected to read and act upon email in a timely fashion. Students bear the responsibility of missed messages and should check their ASU-assigned email regularly. ***All instructor correspondence will be sent to your ASU email account.***

Course Time Commitment

This three-credit course requires approximately 135 hours of work. Please expect to spend around 18 hours each week preparing for and actively participating in this course.

Submitting Assignments

All assignments, unless otherwise announced, MUST be submitted to the designated area of Canvas. Do not submit an assignment via email.

Drop and Add Dates/Withdrawals

This course adheres to a compressed schedule and may be part of a sequenced program, therefore, there is a limited timeline to [drop or add the course](#). Consult with your advisor and notify your instructor to add or drop this course. If you are considering a withdrawal, review the following ASU policies: [Withdrawal from Classes](#), [Medical/Compassionate Withdrawal](#), and a [Grade of Incomplete](#).

Grade Appeals

Grade disputes must first be addressed by discussing the situation with the instructor. If the dispute is not resolved with the instructor, the student may appeal to the department chair per the [University Policy for Student Appeal Procedures on Grades](#).

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

Additionally, required behavior standards are listed in the [Student Code of Conduct and Student Disciplinary Procedures](#), [Computer, Internet, and Electronic Communications policy](#), and outlined by the [Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#). Anyone in violation of these policies is subject to sanctions.

[Students are entitled to receive instruction free from interference](#) by other members of the class. An instructor may withdraw a student from the course when the student's behavior disrupts the educational process per [Instructor Withdrawal of a Student for Disruptive Classroom Behavior](#).

Appropriate online behavior is defined by the instructor and includes keeping course discussion posts focused on the assigned topics. Students must maintain a cordial atmosphere and use tact in expressing differences of opinion. Inappropriate discussion board posts may be deleted by the instructor.

The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities accepts [incident reports](#) from students, faculty, staff, or other persons who believe that a student or a student organization may have violated the Student Code of Conduct.

Prohibition of Commercial Note Taking Services

In accordance with [ACD 304-06 Commercial Note Taking Services](#), written permission must be secured from the official instructor of the class in order to sell the instructor's oral communication in the form of notes. Notes must have the notetaker's name as well as the instructor's name, the course number, and the date.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to complete the course evaluation. The feedback provides valuable information to the instructor and the college and is used to improve student learning. Students are notified when the online evaluation form is available.

Syllabus Disclaimer

The syllabus is a statement of intent and serves as an implicit agreement between the instructor and the student. Every effort will be made to avoid changing the course schedule, but the possibility exists that unforeseen events will make syllabus changes necessary. Please remember to check your ASU email and the course site often.

Accessibility Statement

In compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended (ADAAA) of 2008, professional disability specialists and support staff at the Disability Resource Center (DRC) facilitate a comprehensive range of academic support services and accommodations for qualified students with disabilities.

[Qualified students with disabilities may be eligible to receive academic support services and accommodations](#). Eligibility is based on qualifying disability documentation and assessment of individual need. Students who believe they have a current and essential need for disability accommodations are [responsible for requesting accommodations and providing qualifying documentation](#) to the DRC. Every effort is made to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities.

Qualified students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability should contact the DRC by going to <https://eoss.asu.edu/drc>, calling (480) 965-1234 or emailing DRC@asu.edu. To speak with a specific office, please use the following information:

ASU Online and Downtown Phoenix Campus

University Center Building, Suite 160
602-496-4321 (Voice)

West Campus

University Center Building (UCB), Room 130
602-543-8145 (Voice)

Polytechnic Campus

480-727-1165 (Voice)

Tempe Campus

480-965-1234 (Voice)

Computer Requirements

This course requires a computer with Internet access and the following:

- Web browsers ([Chrome](#), [Internet Explorer](#), [Mozilla Firefox](#), or [Safari](#))
- [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#)(free)
- [Adobe Flash Player](#)(free)
- Microphone (optional) and speaker

Help

For technical support, use the Help icon in the black global navigation menu in your Canvas course or call the ASU Help Desk at +1-(855) 278-5080. Representatives are available to assist you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Technical Support

This course uses Canvas to deliver content. It can be accessed through MyASU at <http://my.asu.edu> or the Canvas home page at <https://myasucourses.asu.edu>

To monitor the status of campus networks and services, visit the System Health Portal at <http://syshealth.asu.edu/>.

To contact the help desk call toll-free at 1-855-278-5080.

Student Success

This is an online course. To be successful:

- check the course daily
- read announcements
- read and respond to course email messages as needed
- complete assignments by the due dates specified
- communicate regularly with your instructor and peers
- create a study and/or assignment schedule to stay on track

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

As per ASU definition, plagiarism entails “using another's words, ideas, materials or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source.” Keep in mind that any direct quotation of four words or longer that is not properly cited can qualify as plagiarism. Consult the “handout on avoiding plagiarism” from the “Links & Tools” section on the Module page to learn more.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Accommodation Policy: I am happy to make all accommodations mandated by Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services. I do not make any

accommodation decisions on my own. Please bring all necessary paperwork to me within the first two weeks of class.

ASU Writing Centers offer in-person and online feedback at any stage of the writing process. Trained tutors work with students to improve and hone their writing skills. You can access location information and schedule appointments at tutoring.asu.edu or call (480) 965-4272.

Title IX Compliance: [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972](https://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oeip/oeip/2001/01-02-03/01-02-03-01.html) protects individuals from discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity operated by recipients of federal financial assistance. Title IX makes it clear that **violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses** subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. ASU strongly encourages victims of sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking and relationship violence to seek support and report the incident. Please visit sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu for more information and assistance. To file a complaint, contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion at: <https://cfo.asu.edu/hr-titleIX?destination=node%2F3075#complaint>