

Religion and Politics in the U.S.
Graduate Liberal Studies
LSHV 504-01

Draft Course Syllabus

Dr. Lauve H. Steenhuisen
Office Hours: before and after class, & by appt.
steenhul@georgetown.edu

Spring, 2017
Thurs. 6:30-9:30 pm
Classroom_____

Course Description:

In an age in which the volatility of politics and religion is making headlines, the study of religion in America achieves increased relevance. This course will examine contemporary political issues using historical and sociological perspectives, and will include such topics as civil religion, separation of church and state, the politics of presidential elections and of lobbying Congress. We will explore the question: What conceptions of “America” underlie these issues? The human values of religious freedom, tolerance of difference, and freedom of conscience will be highlighted in this course.

Required Texts:

God on Trial: Dispatches from American’s Religious Battlefields, Peter Irons, ISBN-13: 978-0143113751; \$16

Some of the materials on BlackBoard:

“*Civil Religion in America*”, Robert Bellah
John F. Kennedy and Mitt Romney “Faith in America” speeches
“*Did Catholic Bishops Go Too Far In Lobbying Against Abortion?*”

Course Requirements:

1. Graded material:

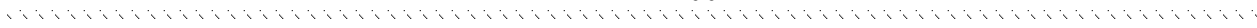
1. Civil religion ballot
2. Graded ‘discussion contribution’ *Hobby Lobby* decision
3. 3-page Presidential speeches on religion paper
4. Religious freedom cases ballot
5. Graded discussion contribution God on Trial
6. One 5- page “*Are You a High-Wall or Low-Wall American?*” paper

There will be no extensions to papers; print work early and often to avoid technological problems.

2. Participation Grade: Class attendance and active participation is required. At the graduate level, students can learn as much from peers as from texts, so contributions which raise the intellectual level of the discussion are critical to the success of class.

3. Evaluation: Students will be graded on their ability to grasp and demonstrate mastery of course material. Original thought and cogent argumentation raise grades. Assigned work will count toward the final grade in the following percentages:

Civil Religious Ballot.....	10%
Graded Discussion <i>Hobby Lobby</i> contribution....	20%
Pres. Speeches paper.....	20%
God on Trial graded discussion contribution.....	10%
Final paper ‘High-wall/Low-wall’	20%
Class participation.....	20%
Total.....	100%



4. Intellectual property law. Plagiarism is often a confusing topic for researchers and scholars. In short, plagiarism is presenting the ideas of others as one's own. Intellectual property law requires that you credit the work of others through specific citation or risk committing plagiarism. Ideas on citation and attribution will be discussed in class. Be aware that plagiarism will be monitored in this course, and work which is suspected of plagiarism will be turned over to Georgetown's Honor Board.

5. Meet with the Professor. One of the goals of liberal studies at Georgetown is to enable the student to create a personal philosophy through which life's decisions and ways of being in the world are processed and enacted. And one of the rewards of college life for professors is dialogue with students in which such life philosophy is deepened and enhanced.

If you would like to have coffee, lunch, or just a get-together with the professor please feel free to schedule a time and a place. The issues this course addresses often necessitate further conversations outside the classroom, and these conversations can result in interesting dialogues.

6. Disability Notice: Please note: if you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

7. Grading Policy for this course:

An "A" grade means "truly exceptional work which exceeds the expectations of the task and peer submissions"

A "B" grade means "very good quality work, above peer submissions"

A "C" grade means "average work, equal to the average of peers"

A "D" grade means "below expectations, needs significant improvement"

An "F" grade means "submission failed to meet all expectations and did not fulfill the requirements"

8. Learning Goals and Outcomes: Liberal Studies investigates 'human values' and as such, we will challenge how gender and religion has evolved the values which makes someone a gendered human. This is an interdisciplinary course, its approach is through the sociology of religion. As such, the course requires strong academic research and writing, a critical component of all graduate work.

9. Honor Code: MALS and DLS students are responsible for upholding the Georgetown University Honor System and adhering to the academic standards included in the Honor Code Pledge stated below:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Class 1- Jan. 12: Course Introduction

This class will introduce the course and the general issues in religion and politics. Due to the controversial nature of the topics, each class member will be asked to sign a ‘Class Member Covenant’ indicating their willingness to be civil, to be active, and to be respectful of others opinions while developing and sharing their own.

We will view a PowerPoint presentation on the term ‘wall of separation’, and introduce material on the Constitution’s First Amendment Clause. We will analyze some of the cases which have helped to define “establishment”. We will discuss: “*Are we a ‘Christian nation?’*”

Task: None.

Class 2-Jan. 19: Civil Religion and Inaugural Prayers

This class will explore Robert Bellah’s concept of ‘civil religion’---“The use of religious symbols or language by or on behalf of the state.” What is civil religion used for? When is it appropriate or inappropriate? We will examine civil religion in the light of presidential inaugurations and the ‘Church of Washington DC’.

Task: Read Bellah article on BB, and bring in your voting sheets for ‘Civil Religious Symbols’ you would dis/allow. Your rationales will be graded, not your ‘votes’.

Class 3-Jan. 26: Religion in Supreme Court Politics: The “*Hobby Lobby*” Decision

The recent ‘*Hobby Lobby*’ decision Supreme Court decision was controversial, and based on RFRA. There will be a graded discussion on the HL decision today, so study such questions as:

- The Affordable Care Act context of the ruling
- Faith positions of owners of the two businesses which allowed them to be granted an exemption
- These business owners were specifically averse to paying for what?
- What Congressional legislation was the basis for the SCrt. Ruling?
- Decide before class: *How would YOU have ruled in this case and why.*

Task: Prepare for the “*Hobby Lobby*” graded discussion tonight by studying the HL document on BB and the questions above. Decide before class: 1. How would YOU have ruled in this case and 2. Why.

Class 4-Feb. 2: Discussion: Religion in presidential politics: Historical.

How have presidential candidates used religion in their campaigns?—and how was religion used against them? We will examine the speeches of John F. Kennedy and Mitt Romney as they struggled to overcome opposition to their respective faiths, and discuss what ‘religion’ means in elections.

In the light of the U.S. Constitutions Article 6 Paragraph 3 “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States” should presidential candidates have to provide faith statements?’ at all. Why do Americans care?

Task: Read JFK’s and Romney’s speeches on BlackBoard and submit 3-page paper on the questions below.

Part 1: What are the contexts of these two speeches?

Part 2. How are they A. Similar? and B. different

Part 3. Which was the more ‘successful’ as a speech in your opinion?

Class 5-Feb. 9: Religion in American Presidential Politics: Contemporary.

This evening we will discuss religion in modern American politics:

- How was religion used for or against a candidate in the last 20 years?
- What are the voting patterns of Evangelicals, Catholics, or Mormons?
- Has religion in presidential politics lost its saliency? (E.g. Trump v. Clinton)
- Will America ever elect an atheist, or a Muslim? Why or why not?

Task: Using the issues listed above, or one that is directly related of your own choosing, bring in printed out article or two to class to offer for class discussion. Not graded.

Class 6-Feb. 16: Religion in American Presidential Politics: Contemporary.

This class continues our discussion of contemporary voting patterns, religious saliency, and presidential elections.

Task: None.

Class 7-Feb. 23: Religion in Congress: Lobbying and the Tax Code 501 (c) (3)

This class will examine the historical background of the 501 c (3) addition to the U.S. Tax Code, including then-Senator Lyndon Johnson’s position on the campaigning of religious groups. The “Lobbying for God” Pew Forum research report into religious advocacy groups in Washington DC will be examined.

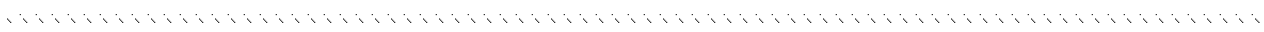
Task: None.

Class 8-Mar. 2: Issue Politics: LDS Mormons and Prop 8 Against Same-Sex Marriage

Tonight we will view part of a video on the Mormon political activity to ban same-sex marriage in California through their support of Proposition 8. Mormons were essentially lobbying the California citizenry to vote ‘yes’ to ban, when opponents charged that such political activity by a charitable non-profit violated 501 (c) (3). Discussion question: *Is their energized advocacy an exercise of religious freedom or political overreach?*

Task: None.

March 9: No Class, Spring Break



Class 9-Mar. 16: The Politics of Religious Freedom

Tonight we will examine the other side of the First Amendment, “Congress shall...not prohibit the free exercise thereof”. We will view a PowerPoint presentation on free exercise and some famous and infamous Supreme Court cases. We will discuss your “Religious Freedom Cases Self-Test” both the decisions you made and the principles you used.

Task: Complete and bring your ‘Religious Freedom Cases Self-Test’ sheets. Only your rationales, not your ‘vote’ will be graded.

Class 10-Mar. 23: Principle for Determining Free Exercise Cases

Tonight, we will discuss your *over-arching* principles for determining ‘religious freedom’ cases.

Task: Students will determine their “Principle for Determining Free Exercise Cases”. What principle would you use to decide whether to allow or disallow free exercise cases which come up in the future? Use past cases as illustrations of how your principle would work, and what would happen if your principle was not utilized in determinations. No need to submit it, but be thorough in thinking it through.

Class 11-Mar. 30: The Politics of Creationism: “Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial”

“Creationism” has been a deeply divisive political hot button since the 1925 Scopes trial on teaching evolution in America’s public schools. The Discovery Institute has rebranded creationism into “intelligent design”, and tonight we will view a video on the “Kitzmiller v. Dover School District” case and discuss it. Discussion question: *“Isn’t advocating for the inclusion of ‘intelligent design’ in textbooks an exercise in the freedom of their religion?”*

Task: None.

Class 12-Apr. 6: The Politics of Civil Religion—God on Trial

In this class we will discuss some Supreme Court cases on ‘civil religious’ symbols and the cultural stakeholders of the positions.

Task: Read Chaps. 6 and 7 on the ‘Ten Commandments’ and ‘Under God’ cases in God on Trial. Tonight’s ‘Graded Discussion’ on these chapters will ask:

1. Who are the stakeholders of the opposing positions?
2. Is what is at stake—to them---definitions of what ‘America’ is?—How does each side define America?

Class 13: Apr. 13: The Politics of Civil Religion—God on Trial, Last Class

This class we will discuss the ‘Mount Soledad Cross’ case and ‘praying before football games’ case in Chaps. 4 & 5. Each student will submit their final paper and we will discuss “Religion and Politics in the U.S.” as a whole. *After taking this course, are you a ‘high wall’ or ‘low wall’ American?*

Task: Write and submit your 5-page “High-Wall or Low-Wall?” final paper as per the paper guidelines.

**Guideline Sheet for “Presidential Speech Comparison” Paper
Religion in American Political Life**

~**Length:** 3 pages

~**Purpose:** Condensed, focused comparative analysis of two speeches in their political context.

~**Format of paper in three sections:**

1. Context of speeches historically
2. A. Similarities and B. differences between them
3. Your intelligent insights, astute reflections

**Guideline Sheet for
“Are you a High-Wall or Low-Wall American?” Paper**

Format:

-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, cited in body of text and Works cited page at end

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Purpose:

-To have students think throughout the course about their own positions on political issues and the role of religion.

--“High-Wall” means that you believe controlling religion’s role in politics is best; ‘low-wall’ means that you believe religion and politics should interact freely.

-You are free to choose any metaphor which illustrates your position, but it must also address the ‘wall-height’ issue.

-Articulate your *principles* and *rationales* for why you’ve chosen your wall-height.

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