"Each of us is meant to have a character all our own, to be what no other can exactly be, and do what no other can exactly do."

—William Ellery Channing
Course Readings:


Course Description:

Religion in American Life will examine the intellectual and social history of religion in America. Beliefs and practices of major religions are also examined.

There are many religions in America, some large and some small, but all of them have a unique history and various ways of thinking about the Absolute, the human condition, and life after death. Over the next eight weeks, we’ll study the major beliefs and practices of various religions that have found their way to American soil as well as those religions that are indigenous to it.

Learning Outcomes:

1) students will learn the major beliefs of various religions in America

2) students will become aware of how religious ideas have given shape to American popular culture
3) students will better understand the prejudices and stereotypes people often have about religious groups in America

4) students will develop a tolerance for doubt and uncertainty

Learning Strategies:

In order to fulfill the learning outcomes of PRE 323, various learning strategies will be used. Strategies include but are not limited to the following: lectures by the instructor, small group discussions, music and movie clips on You Tube and guest speakers (ministers, religion scholars, social workers, scientists, poets and musicians, etc).

Learning Assessment:

Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA): Attendance is mandatory. The material we’ll cover in class may not be found in the readings. Participation is expected. Learning to express your ideas orally is a huge part of a college education; it also makes discussion more interesting. Attentiveness is also expected. You may use a laptop computer for class notes only. If you use a laptop for the Internet, email or video games, you will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the rest of the semester. Finally, if you are disruptive in class (talking while the instructor is talking, texting, sleeping, flirting, etc.), you will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class. APA will account for 40% your grade.

Religion Journal: You will write a journal entry for each week of class. How are the readings challenging your current viewpoints about religion and/or religious history in America? What insights have you gained while on your quest for what it means to be a human being? The journal should help you to develop your own viewpoint on the nature of the Absolute, the human condition, and eschatology as well as other topics, such as the nature of religious texts, other religions, and the meaning of salvation. You
are responsible for seven journal entries. Each journal entry should be at least one typed double-spaced page, though your journal entries may exceed one typed page. The Religion Journal will account for 40% of your grade.

Religion Essay: Your religion essay will be 3-5 pages. Your models for the essay will be the essays in How Can I Find God? If you were to write an essay in this book, what would you say? Looking back on what you’ve learned in the class, how would you answer the question “How Can I Find God?” The essay should demonstrate that you are conversant with the material you’ve learned in the class, and the religious concepts that you use in the essay should be stated clearly and concisely. The final essay is your chance for you to fine-tune your beliefs. The Final Essay will account for 20% or your grade.

Note: The Religion Journal and the Religion Essay should be stapled together and submitted as a whole one week after our last class meeting. Late work will be accepted at the consent of the instructor.

What to Expect in Class:

Expect to be challenged. This class will challenge your most deeply held convictions. Get used to it. You won’t grow as a human being unless you wrestle with points of view—religious, political, and ethical—in opposition to your own.

Expect to read and write. This isn’t a “coasting” course. You must do the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. This will be a boring class if I’m the only one up here talking.

Expect to pay attention in class. Don’t talk while the instructor is talking or while a colleague is talking. Raise your hand if you have a question and wait until you’re called on to speak.

Expect to be in class until at least 10:00AM.

Expect to be on time for class. If you arrive to class late, don’t ask the person next to you what you’ve missed.
Wait until the break or after class to ask this and related questions.

Expect the instructor to teach the class. Don’t think you can teach the class by dominating the class discussions. Many students enroll in the courses offered at Doane College. Expect to hear from all of those students.

Expect to keep all books, notebooks and pencils on your desk until class is over. Don’t put them away early. Don’t do anything that suggests class is over when it isn’t; doing so will trigger the “off” switch and students will stop paying attention.

Expect to turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.

**Grading Scale**

100-95 = A  
94-90 = A-  
89-87 = B+  
86-84 = B  
83-80 = B-  
79-77 = C+  
76-74 = C  
73-70 = C-  
69-67 = D+  
66-64 = D  
63-60 = D-  
59 & below F

**A Note on Plagiarism**

All written work must be in your own words. Borrowing an author’s words, sentences or thoughts without a proper citation is a crime. If I find you guilty of plagiarism, not only will you earn a free trip to the Dean’s Office, you may also fail the course. Play it safe—don’t steal.
A Note on Courtesy

We live in the twenty-first century. Everybody should act civilized. When the instructor is talking, nobody talks. When you’re talking, nobody else talks (including the instructor). And finally, if you disagree with someone, attack the person’s argument, not the person.

Tentative Class Schedule

Session I Introduction: Religion in American Life

Session II Jews and Christians in America

One World, Many Religions: vii-22
How Can I Find God?: Introduction + 1-100
You Tube: Metallica “Creeping Death”

Session III American Islam

One World, Many Religions: 25-34
How Can I Find God?: 101-191

Session IV Church of Satan (LaVeyan Satanism)

The Long Hard Road Out of Hell: Entire
You Tube: “The Church of Satan on the History” Channel
Session V East Meets West: Hinduism & Buddhism

One World, Many Religions: 37-60
Slouching Toward Nirvana: Entire
You Tube: Warren Zevon “Bad Karma”

Session VI The Rise of Secular America

Big Domino in the Sky: 21-165
You Tube: “Secularism: A Short Film”
You Tube: Van Halen “Right Now”

Session VIII Paranormal America

Big Domino in the Sky: 169-244
You Tube: “The Amityville Horror” (Documentary)
You Tube: Ray Parker, Jr. “Ghostbusters”

Session VII Native American Traditions and Unitarian Universalism

You Tube: “Unitarian Universalism: Voices of a Liberal Faith”
Religion Journal (one typed double-spaced page for each entry)

#1 Judaism and Christianity

#2 Islam

#3 Church of Satan/The Long Hard Road Out of Hell

#4 Buddhism/Slouching Toward Nirvana

#5 Secular Humanism/Big Domino in the Sky

#6 Paranormal America/”The Amityville Horror” Documentary

#7 Native American Traditions/Unitarian Universalism

Religion Essay (3-5 typed double-spaced pages)

Your original essay should be modeled off of the essays in How Can I Find God?

Note: The Religion Journal + The Religion Essay are due one week after the last class meeting. Submit all assignments to Mr. Tasey’s third floor mailbox (bottom/left-hand side).