"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 Description:

Religion in American Life will examine the intellectual and social history of religion in America. The beliefs and practices of major religions will also be 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.
Course Readings:


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 one-page 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 religion journal should help you to develop your own viewpoint on the nature of the Absolute, the human condition, and life after death as well as other topics, such as the nature of religious texts, other religions, and the meaning of salvation. You are responsible for eight journal entries. Each journal entry should be at least one typed double-spaced page, though your journal entries may exceed one page. The Religion Journal will account for 40% of your grade.

Religion Essay: Your essay will be 3-5 pages. If you were to contribute an essay to a book called Finding Faith, Losing Faith, what would you say? How would you express to the world what you believe about God and other divine matters? 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 about God and divine matters (or lack thereof). The Religion Essay will account for 20% of 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 hear points of view with which you disagree or even find offensive. America is a free republic. If your colleagues say something you disagree with, use reason and logic to prove them wrong. Don’t pout. This is college, not daycare for crybabies.

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 8:00PM.

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 One: Introduction: Religion in American Life

Session Two: Buddhism in America

You Tube: “Basic Buddhist Teaching”

Slouching Toward Nirvana

Session Three: Church of Satan (LaVeyan Satanism)

You Tube: “The Church of Satan” (History Channel)

The Long Hard Road Out of Hell

Session Four: Paranormal America

The Amityville Horror

Session Five: Judaism in America

Night
Session Six: American Christianity

*Jesus’ Son*

Session Seven: The Rise of Secular America

You Tube: “Secularism: A Short Film”

*Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*

Session Eight: Religion, Politics and America

*Still the Best Hope*
The Religion Journal (at least one typed double-spaced page for each journal entry):

Your journal entries should include a summary of each book. Imagine you are writing for those coming to these books for the first time. How would you summarize each book so that your reader has a basic understanding of them?

#1 Slouching Toward Nirvana

#2 The Long Hard Road Out of Hell

#3 The Amityville Horror

#4 Night

#5 Jesus’ Son

#6 Atheism: A Short Introduction

#7 Still the Best Hope

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

Your original essay should tell the world what you believe about God and divine matters (or lack thereof). Imagine you and other students in the class will be submitting your essays to a book called Finding Faith, Losing Faith. What would your essay say? Make it personal. Make it real. Tell the truth.

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).