

REL 215, Religion in the United States

McKendree University

Texts:

- 9780205645206, **Religion in America**, 6e, Corberth Hemeyer, Taylor & Francis, paperback
- 9780195166873, **Proclaim Liberty throughout All the Land**, Gaustad, oxford University, paperback

Course Summary (from McKendree Catalogue):

An overview of the history, character, and variety of religion in the United States. Elements of the course include summarizing historical developments in religion, analyzing constitutional issues regarding the separation of church and state, and examining the distinctive characteristics of denominational and religious groups, including the way they respond to important contemporary issues.

Objectives:

1. To understand the main patterns of religious belief in US history, including the main developments in the type and character of religious belief from the colonial period to the present.
2. To understand the legal position regarding the relation between religion and the state in the US, and to analyze the various ways in which this position is interpreted historically and at present.
3. To understand the origins, and distinctive beliefs and practices of historically and numerically significant Christian denominations in the US.
4. To understand the differences between evangelical and mainline types of Protestantism in the US.
5. To understand the distinctive beliefs and practices of significant non-Christian and world religions, and to grasp their significance in US religious life historically and in the contemporary period.
6. To improve reading, writing, information literacy, and critical thinking skills.

Requirements:

3 Exams	100 points each	300
1 Paper	100 points	100
2 Paper Responses	10 points each	20
8 Discussion Boards	10 points each	80
5 Quizzes	10 points each	50

Explanation of Requirements:

The exams are objective and essay. There is an exam over each of the major sections of the course. They are taken in sessions 3,6, and 8. The exams are not comprehensive.

During this course, each student will attend the religious services of a Christian denomination or religious group with which they are unfamiliar. Students will write a 5-page paper integrating research on the religious group whose service they attend with their experience. The detailed requirements for this part of the course are at the end of the syllabus.

Upon completing their papers, students will post their papers to the discussion board. Each student will respond to two other students' papers.

There is one discussion board for each of the 8 sessions of the course. They cover a variety of topics, but most specifically they examine questions regarding the relationship of religion and the state. The Gaustad text is the primary text from which discussion board assignments are drawn.

There are brief multiple choice quizzes in sessions 1,2,4,5, and 7.

Grading Scale:

A 513-550	B 458-476	C 403-421	F 329 and below
A- 495-512	B- 440-457	C- 385-402	
B+ 477-494	C+ 422-439	D 330-384	

Instructions for Papers

Attending the Services

Each student will write a 5-page paper on a Christian denomination or a non-Christian religion with which they are unfamiliar. Each student must attend the worship service of the denomination or religious tradition on which they write and incorporate reflections on the experience into the paper. It is not acceptable to incorporate memory from a previous service attended for this assignment. If a student writes a paper on a denomination or religious tradition but does not attend the service of that tradition, the student will receive a "0" on the paper. The best papers effectively integrate what has been learned about the denomination or religious tradition with the experience of attending the service.

It is required that students attend the services of religious groups with which they are unfamiliar. While you may have grown up in a particular denomination or religious tradition, this course covers the entirety of religion in the United States. One of the purposes of this assignment is to give students first-hand familiarity with some of the diversity of religion that exists in the US. If you grew up Protestant and are unfamiliar with Roman Catholicism, it would be good to attend a Roman Catholic Mass, and vice versa. It is acceptable and even desirable for students to use this opportunity to attend a Jewish Synagogue service, a Muslim prayer service, worship at a Hindu Temple, or a Buddhist meditation service. Not all students have access to these sites, however. If you go to a Christian service, feel free simply to watch, or to participate to whatever level you feel comfortable. It is strongly advised, however, that you not take communion (eucharist) at a church you are visiting. Some Christian denominations practice "closed" communion, limiting it only to members. Others simply expect that only members would take communion, and it is best not to risk offending regular attendees if you are a visitor.

While churches and religious groups are welcoming to visitors, one way for students to feel comfortable attending these services is by going to them with relatives or friends who attend them. This is not required, however. Going to a service by yourself is certainly acceptable and need not be intimidating in the least. The best way to find out about churches

in your area is by consulting the yellow pages in a phone book. Before attending, be sure you have the proper time and place of the service.

The papers are due during session six. In session two, students inform the Instructor what denomination or religious group they intend to visit and when. Students explain why they are selecting this denomination or religious group and give evidence that it is unfamiliar to them.

After receiving the information about where students will attend, the Instructor places the students into groups of three. When the paper is due (session six), all students post their papers to the discussion board. Students write comments analyzing the two other papers of students in their group.

The following is a list of most of the denominations and religious traditions covered in the sessions of the course. It is not required that you attend the service of a denomination or religious tradition covered in the course. However, you should be able to connect that denomination or religious tradition with the material of the course. This is true even if you are attending a non-denominational church. The Hemeyer text discusses Protestant groups and their tendencies, and you can make connections between what Hemeyer says and the church you attend.

Sessions 1-3: Baptists, United Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Church of Christ, Quakers.

Sessions 4-6: Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Predominantly African American Churches (including Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, and National Baptist Convention), Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, Holiness Churches (including Church of the Nazarene and Free Methodists), Pentecostal Churches (including Assemblies of God and United Pentecostal Church International), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Christian Science, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Sessions 7-8: Unitarian-Universalist, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism.

The Format of the Papers

The papers should include two main elements. How you put together these elements is up to you. The first element is a summary of the history of the religious group you are covering and its most distinctive beliefs and practices. Because you are covering so much material in such a short space, it is important to include only the most vital information. For this part of your paper, think especially about the history, beliefs, and practices of this religious group that set it apart from other denominations in the US and discuss those elements.

You must use at least two sources for this part of your paper. One of those sources must be a print (non-internet) source. One of our textbooks can be your print source. The following sources also give good overviews of denominations and religious traditions and are found in the reference section of Holman library and many other academic libraries:

Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, ed's., Lippy/Williams; *The Encyclopedia of American Religious History*, ed., Queen et al.; *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed., Mircea Eliade,

Handbook of Denominations in the United States, ed's., Mead, Hill. A good internet source to use is the website of the religious group you are covering. In all cases, you must cite the sources of your information and include a bibliography with your paper. No matter how good the paper, if it does not have citations and a bibliography, the paper will not receive a grade better than "C." Plagiarism or cheating of any kind is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The second element of the paper is a discussion and analysis of your experience visiting the service of this denomination. Incorporate the following elements into your paper:

Tell where and when the service occurred.

Describe the building, both outside and inside, noting especially if it is ornate or plain. What does the building mean or say about this religious group? Note the way things are arranged inside the building. Is the building set up to emphasize the eucharist (if Christian), preaching, discussion, or something else?

Describe the service, noting especially whether it is more formal/liturgical or more informal/spontaneous. Note what is central to the order of service, whether that is preaching, the eucharist, or something else. Note what is emphasized by the liturgy or by the minister in the sermon/homily. Connect what is said and done during the service with what you learned about the religious group from class and from your independent research.

Describe the role women play in the service, noting especially whether they have significant or minor roles. Comment on what that may mean, given this religious group's understanding of the role of women and relationship between the genders.

Again, how you incorporate the two elements of independent research and your experience is up to you. However, both must be present, and the best papers integrate what is learned about the religious tradition with what is experienced in attending the service.