### Sociology 129a. Sociology of Religion

Brandeis University  
Fall Semester 2014

**Instructor:** Margaret Clendenen  
**Office:** Pearlman 109  
**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 11 am – 12:30 pm and by appointment  
**Email:** mclende@brandeis.edu

**Teaching Fellow:** Jaleh Jalili  
**Office:** Pearlman 104  
**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 1 – 2 pm and by appointment  
**Email:** jaleh@brandeis.edu

**Class meetings:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 10 – 10:50 am  
**Location:** Golding 101

### Course Description

How do people practice their religions in their everyday lives? Why do people decide to convert and how do they adopt new religious identities? How do LGBT people understand and relate to religion? How do people with different religious identities, including atheists and agnostics, interact with each other?

This course will encourage you to think through these, and many other, questions, by introducing you to the sociological study of religion. Over the course of the semester, we will think and talk about what religion is, how it is present and important in public and private life, and how and where people from different religious traditions live and experience religion in the contemporary United States.

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:
- Understand what it means to study religion sociologically, and be able to analyze and discuss debates within the field.
- Analyze how religion and spirituality are present in public and private life in the United States.
- Describe how religion and spirituality are experienced by people across the life course, and how these experiences vary based on people’s social locations.

As sociologists, we’ll focus on how people live and experience their religion(s). We’ll pay particular attention to people’s religious communities, their practices, and the religious identities that they develop.
Course Readings

The following books are required for the course:


All books are on reserve at the library. All other required course readings are available through Latte.

Course Requirements and Grading Policies

**Attendance and Participation** – 10 points
You are expected to attend all class sessions, and come to class prepared to participate actively. Asking questions, discussing the readings, sending out relevant current events to the class via email, taking notes, and coming to chat about the class in office hours are all examples of active participation. Absences will only be excused for religious observances or documented illnesses. Each unexcused absence will result in a two-point deduction to your grade. I will reduce your participation grade for texting, using computers for non-class related purposes, etc.

**Reflection Papers** – 10 points
You will submit four, 1-1.5 page, single-spaced reflection papers over the course of the semester. Reflection papers should be written in 12 point, Times New Roman font with one inch margins on all sides. Each reflection paper will be worth 2.5 points. The first half of your reflection paper should summarize *all of the readings* for the week. The second half of your paper should analyze one or more of the readings in light of current events, elements of popular culture, or other readings from the course. In the first couple weeks of the semester, you will be assigned to “Group 1” or “Group 2” – you will submit reflection papers on the weeks that they are due for your group. There are five due dates for each group listed on the syllabus. You may either: (1) skip one week or (2) drop your lowest reflection paper grade.

**Paper Assignments** – Two 4-5 page papers, 15 points each
You will be required to write two papers over the course of the semester. Each paper should be between 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font with one
inch margins on all sides. Questions for papers will be distributed two weeks before they are due. I will deduct two points for every day that papers are late, including weekends. Your first paper will be due on **October 8** and your second paper will be due on **November 20**.

**Site Visit and Reflection Paper** – 20 points

You will attend a service or gathering at a religious center in the greater Boston area (or elsewhere if you are traveling). You are strongly encouraged to attend a religious center outside of the religious tradition(s) in which you were raised and/or currently belong. We will brainstorm potential sites in class. Please come to class on October 23 prepared to discuss your experiences, and with any materials that you may have gathered while there (bulletins, brochures, etc.) (10 points). You will also submit a reflection on your experiences. Your reflection should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and is due on **October 23** (10 points).

**Final** – 30 points

Your final exam will be due on **December 12** by 12pm. The prompt will be distributed on December 1. The exam will consist of two essay questions, worth 15 points each. The total, combined length of the essays should be between 6-8 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font.

Grades are calculated as follows. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for this course.

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**University Policies on Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow Brandeis University’s policies on academic integrity. I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct.

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations**

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
Course Outline

Part 1: How do we study religion sociologically?

Introductions

August 28  Introductions and Overview of the Course

September 1  Labor Day, no class


Please come to class with 1-2 examples of how the Pew Report was covered in the media.

Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religion


September 11  Review Durkheim and Berger and come prepared to discuss both of them – no additional reading!

The United States’ Changing Religious Landscape

Chapter 5


**Part 2: How do people develop religious identities?**

**Becoming Orthodox**

Chapters 1-3

September 23  *Brandeis Thursday*

Chapters 4-5, 7

September 24  *Groups 1 and 2 Reflection Paper Due*

Chapter 8

   *Paper 1 Assignment Distributed in Class*
   *Class will meet in sections.*

September 25  *Rosh Hashanah, no class*

**Evangelical Christian Identities**

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 4-6
October 2  Groups 1 and 2 Reflection Paper Due


*Class will meet in sections.*

**Religion and Sexuality**


In Class Film: *A Jihad for Love*

October 8  *Paper 1 Due*

In Class Film: *A Jihad for Love*

October 9  *Sukkot, no class*

**Part 3: Where do people experience religion?**

**Religion in Congregations**

October 13  *Brandeis Thursday*


October 15  *Group 1 Reflection Paper Due*


October 16  *Shmini Atzeret, no class*
Religion in and Outside of Congregations


October 23  *Site Visit Due*


*Class will meet in sections.*

Religion Outside of Congregations


Guest Speaker: Wendy Cadge, Professor of Sociology and Women’s and Gender Studies, Brandeis University

October 30  *Groups 1 and 2 Reflection Paper Due*


*Class will meet in sections.*

Religion in Public Life


Take a look at the website of the Pew “Religion and Public Life Project” (link on the Latte site). Please come to class with a few things you found interesting from the Pew Forum.

In Class Film: *The Dhamma Brothers*

November 6  *Group 2 Reflection Paper Due*

In Class Film: *The Dhamma Brothers*

*Paper 2 Assignment Distributed in Class*

**Religion and Popular Culture**


Introduction


Introduction, Chapters 1 - 3

November 13  *Group 1 Reflection Paper Due*


**Part 4: How do young adults experience religion?**

**Religion in Young and Emerging Adulthood**
   Chapters 1 and 4

   Chapters 1, 6-7

November 20  Paper 2 Due
   In Class Film: Soul Searching

   Introduction

   In Class Film: Soul Searching

November 26  Thanksgiving, no class

November 27  Thanksgiving, no class

Religion on Campus


   Final Exam distributed in class


December 4  Group 2 Reflection Paper Due

Concluding Thoughts…

   Introduction and Chapter 5

December 12  Final Exam Due by 12pm