Sociology 129a. Sociology of Religion
Brandeis University
Fall Semester 2016

Instructor: Margaret Clendenen
Office: Pearlman 104
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-3pm, Thursdays 2-4pm, and by appointment
Email: mclende@brandeis.edu

Class meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 1 – 1:50 pm
Location: Rabb Graduate Center 236

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 LGBTQ 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 will think and talk a lot about these aspects of different religious traditions; however, unlike many courses in Religious Studies or History, this course will focus on people’s communities and lived experiences, as opposed to providing an in-depth historical or theological/philosophical overview of religious traditions.

I look forward to learning and thinking with you over the course of this semester!
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  
Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of reading and writing time per week in preparation for class.

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. After your first unexcused absence, each additional unexcused absence will result in a two-point deduction to your grade.

Unacceptable laptop use (Facebooking, Tweeting, shopping, chatting, emailing, paper writing, etc.) is distracting to your classmates and me, and greatly affects your own learning in this course. Unacceptable laptop use will result in a reduced participation grade and revocation of laptop privileges. Similarly, usage of phones in this course is not permitted.

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, personal experiences, or other readings from the course. There are five due dates for reflection papers 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. I will deduct two points for every day that papers are late, including weekends. Your first paper will be due on **October 20** and your second paper will be due on **November 21**.

**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 November 3 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 **November 3** (10 points).

**Final** – 30 points
Your final exam will be due on **December 13** by 12pm. The prompt will be distributed on November 28. 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.

Creating an Inclusive Classroom
I am committed to making our classroom and our campus an inclusive and supportive learning environment. We come to this class as people with differing racial and ethnic identities, socioeconomic statuses, abilities, religious upbringings and commitments, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, and so forth. Your presence in this class signifies your commitment to engaging with diversity in mature, respectful ways, remembering above all Brandeis’s commitment to being a “center of open inquiry and teaching.”
Course Outline

Part 1: How do we study religion sociologically?

Introductions

Thursday | 8/25  Introductions and Overview of the Course


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

Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religion

Monday | 9/5  No Class, Labor Day


Thursday | 9/8  Brandeis Monday


Monday | 9/12  Review Durkheim and Berger and come prepared to discuss both of them. No additional reading!
The United States’ Changing Religious Landscape


Guest Lecturer: Becky Barton, PhD Student, Department of Sociology at Brandeis University


In Class Film: The Dhamma Brothers

Thursday | 9/22 In Class Film: The Dhamma Brothers

Paper 1 Assignment Distributed in Class

Part 2: How do people develop religious identities?

Becoming Orthodox


Thursday | 9/29 Reflection Paper Due
Evangelical Christian Identities

Monday | 10/3  
No Class, Rosh Hashanah

Wednesday | 10/5  
Chapters 1-3

Thursday | 10/6  
Chapters 4-6

Monday | 10/10  

Wednesday | 10/12  
No Class, Yom Kippur

Religion and LGBT Experience

Thursday | 10/13  

Monday | 10/17  
No Class, Sukkot

Wednesday | 10/19  
In Class Film: *A Jihad for Love*

Thursday | 10/20  
*Paper 1 Due*  
In Class Film: *A Jihad for Love*

Part 3: Where do people experience religion?

Religion Outside of Congregations

Monday | 10/24  
No Class, Shemini Atzeret
Tuesday | 10/25  

Brandeis Monday

Introduction, Chapters 1, 3-4

Wednesday | 10/26  

Chapters 6-8

Thursday | 10/27  

Reflection Paper Due

Conclusion, Research Methods Appendix

Religion In and Outside of Congregations

Monday | 10/31  

Pages 1 – 81

Wednesday | 11/2  

Pages 82 - 130

Thursday | 11/3  

*Site Visit Due*

Pages 210 – 220

*Paper 2 Assignment Distributed in Class*

Religion in Public Life

Monday | 11/7  


Wednesday | 11/9  

Thursday | 11/10  
*Reflection Paper Due*

Transcripts of election night speeches delivered by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

### Religion in Congregations

**Monday | 11/14**  


**Wednesday | 11/16  
*Reflection Paper Due*

Chapter 7

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

### Religion in Young and Emerging Adulthood

**Thursday | 11/17**  
Chapters 1 and 4

In Class Film: *Soul Searching*

**Monday | 11/21  
*Paper 2 Due*

In Class Film: *Soul Searching*

**Wednesday | 11/23**  
*No Class, Thanksgiving*

**Thursday | 11/24**  
*No Class, Thanksgiving*

**Monday | 11/28**  
Introduction

*Final Exam Assignment Distributed in Class*
Religion on Campus


Monday | 12/5  Reflection Paper Due

Concluding Thoughts…


Tuesday | 12/13  Final Exams due by 12pm