Sociology of Religion – Sociology 129a

Brandeis University
Summer 2015 Session I
June 1 – June 30

Instructor: Margaret Clendenen
Office: Pearlman 104
Office Hours: TBA
Email: mclende@brandeis.edu

Class meetings: TBA
Location: TBA

Course Description

How do people live and experience religion in their day-to-day 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 providing an introduction to the sociological study of religion. Over the course of our summer semester, we will think and talk together about what spirituality and religion are, and how they shape public and private life in the 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 religion(s). We’ll pay particular attention to people’s religious communities, their practices, and the religious identities that they develop. We will think critically about how people develop their religious identities, and the spaces in which they experience religion (both in and outside of formal religious community).
Please note that this is a draft syllabus and may change slightly before the semester begins.

Course Readings

The following books are required for the course:


All other required course readings are available through Latte.

Course Requirements and Grading Policies

**Attendance and Participation** – 15 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. I will reduce your participation grade for texting, using computers for non-class related purposes, etc.

Absences will only be excused for religious observances or documented illnesses. Each unexcused absence will result in a two-point deduction to your grade. *As summer classes cover a lot of material in each class, more than three unexcused absences will result in failure.*

**Papers** – 2 papers, 20 points each
You will be required to write two papers over the course of the semester. Each paper should be between 2 and 2.5 pages, single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font. Questions for papers will be distributed on the Thursday before they are due. I will deduct two points for every day that papers are late, including weekends.

**Site Visit** - 15 points
Before Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, you will attend a service or gathering at a religious center in the greater Boston area. You are highly 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 June 15<sup>th</sup> prepared to discuss your experiences, and with any materials that you may have gathered while there (bulletins, brochures, etc.) (5 points). You will submit a 1.5-2 page, single-spaced reflection on your experiences by Thursday, June 18<sup>th</sup> (10 points).

**Final** – 30 points
Your final exam will be due Friday, July 3<sup>rd</sup> by 12pm. The prompt will be distributed on Thursday, June 25<sup>th</sup>. 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. Late final exams will not be accepted.
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Grades are calculated as follows. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for this course.

98 – 100 A+  
94 – 97 A  
90 – 93 A-  
87 – 89 B+  
84 – 86 B  
80 – 83 B-  
<60 F

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.

Visiting students who have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations should contact Gwenn Smaxwill, Summer School Director (x63424) or smaxwill@brandeis.edu. Current Brandeis students should contact Academic Services (x63470) for assistance.

Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
Course Outline

Week 1: How do sociologists think about religion?

June 1  Introductions and Overview of the Course

June 2  Classics and Neoclassics

Chapter 1, “Religion and World Construction”

Chapter 1, “Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion”

June 4  America’s Changing Religious Landscape

Chapters 2-4


Week 2: How do religious identities change over time?

June 8  The New Paradigm


June 9  Changing Religious Traditions

Chapters 1-3

June 11  Changing Religious Traditions

Paper 1 due
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Week 3: Where do people experience religion?

June 15  Religion in Congregations

Site Visit Due


June 16  Lived Religion and Religion Outside of Congregations


In class film: The Dhamma Brothers

June 18  Religion in Public Life

Site Visit Report Due


Week 4: How are identities shaped by religious traditions?

June 22  Ex-gay Identities

June 23  Ex-gay Identities
Erzen, Tanya. 2006. _Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the ex-gay Movement_. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 4 – 6 and Conclusion

June 25  LGBT identities

_paper 2 due  
_Final Exam Distributed_  


In class film: _A Jihad for Love_ or _Trembling Before G-d_

Week 5: How do young adults experience religion?

June 29  Religion in Emerging Adulthood

In class film: _Soul Searching_

June 30  Religion on Campus

_The final will be due on Friday, July 3 by 12pm._
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