

POLS 4690: Religion and American Politics
University of Georgia
Spring 2017

Instructor:
Dr. Brittany Bramlett
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Office hours:
Before / after class
Or by appointment

Class meets:
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:00am to 9:15am, MLC 214

Course description

The religious landscape has changed over the nation's history and so has religion's role in American politics. We'll explore the nation's religious diversity and how it relates to politics, uniting and dividing us. Ultimately, we will work towards an understanding of how America can be extremely devout, religiously diverse, and for the most part, tolerant of religious differences.

Course objectives

Students will:

- Study the diversity of religious life in American politics
- Understand the participatory and electoral consequences of religious activity in American politics
- Understand the historical role of religion in American politics
- Learn the course material by working independently and with a group
- Improve critical thinking and communication skills by considering various political perspectives and communicating those views effectively

Course texts

You are required to gain access to the books listed below. They are available at the campus bookstore.

- *American Grace* (2010), Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell.
- *Onward Christian Soldiers?* (Fourth Edition), Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson.
- *From Pews to Polling Places* (2007), Edited by J. Matthew Wilson.
- Other assigned readings will be made available to you via E-Learning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>)

¹ Instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus as needed.

Course structure

I'm assuming some level of interest in the subject and the readings because you signed up for this course. Readings will be provocative, and I look forward to your participation in class discussions. This means that I expect you to do the reading. If you don't read, discussion will be tiresome, and we all know what that means for a morning class. In sum, read!

Assignments and grading

Participation & attendance (10%)

You are expected to participate in class and group discussions and activities.

Midterm exam (15%)

Anything from the assigned readings and discussed during class up to the first exam is considered fair game to show up on the exam.

Writing assignment(s) (40%)

You will complete three writing assignments. For the first assignment (10%), you will submit two potential paper topics (making an argument) related to the role of religion in American politics. For the second (15%), you will choose one topic to focus on and submit an outline for your final paper with an annotated bibliography. For the final assignment (15%), you will write a 7 to 10 page paper on your topic citing in-class and out-of-class materials to support your argument. Additional details will be provided during the course of the semester.

Class discussion kickoff (15%)

You will sign up with your discussion group (established during the second week of classes) for a slot to kick off class discussion for the day. This involves leading class discussion for the first 15 minutes of class. Your tasks include 1) Find a recent news article highlighting the role of religion in American politics, 2) Inform the class about the particular news item, why you think it's important and explain consequences for American politics, 3) Establish a connection between the article's content and the material to be discussed in class that day, and 4) Finally, generate 2 to 3 discussion questions based on the news item for the class.

Final exam (20%)

This is a comprehensive final exam given during the final exam period. Anything from the assigned readings and discussed in class during the semester is considered fair game to show up on the exam.

Administrative Items

ELearning

You can find additional reading assignments for our class via the ELearning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>). You should sign into the ELearning Commons using your UGA MyId and password. If you are registered for the class, the course link should show up on your ELearning Commons homepage. I may post additional documents useful for your class, so you will want to check in throughout the semester.

Attendance policy

Class attendance is expected, but obviously, things come up. Open communication is always appreciated and considered. However, I note when you are not in class, and this factors into your participation grade. In addition, excessive absences may lead to withdrawal from the course. The instructor may withdraw a student from the class if he or she exceeds 6 unexcused absences.

Missed deadlines

If you have a conflict with a due date or will miss class repeatedly, please come talk to me about it as soon as you know about it. This way we can work something out and your grade will not suffer.

If you have an emergency conflict (i.e. personal, family or medical emergencies), you should e-mail me within the week of the missed due date to discuss the timely completion of the assignment. Documentation is required for make-up exams.

If you miss a deadline for a non-emergency, most assignments can still be completed and will be accepted for up to a week—but they will be penalized a letter grade for every additional day late. Missed exams may be completed on the day of the final exam.

Disability Resource Center

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center.

Additional information can be found here: <http://drc.uga.edu/>

Withdrawal policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal-passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences (see course attendance policy).

Please carefully review the policy in its entirety here: <http://www.reg.uga.edu/policies/withdrawals>

UGA Culture of Honesty policy

The policy is in place to encourage academic honesty among students, faculty and other members of the university community. You and I are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating and much more. It's in your best interest to understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University.

Please carefully review the policy in its entirety here: <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy>

Tentative Course Outline

Week 1

Thursday, January 5

Tuesday, January 10

Thursday, January 12

Week 2

Tuesday, January 17

Thursday, January 19

Week 3

Tuesday, January 24

Thursday, January 26

Week 4

Tuesday, January 31

Thursday, February 2

Week 5

Tuesday, February 7

Thursday, February 9

Readings Schedule

Course syllabus

American Grace 1 & 2

“If the U.S. had 100 people: Charting Americans’ religious affiliations”

(http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/14/if-the-u-s-had-100-people-charting-americans-religious-affiliations/?utm_content=buffer0209a&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

Selections from *The Oxford handbook of church and state in the United States* edited by Derek Davis

“How Americans Feel about Religious Groups”

(<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>)

Film: *Meet the Press* episode

American Grace 5 & 6

American Grace 3 & 4

Onward 1 & 2
From Pews to Polling Places 2

From Pews to Polling Places 10

“‘Nones’ on the Rise”

(<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>)

Onward 3
American Grace 11

Onward 4 & 5

From Pews to Polling Places 3

Week 6

Tuesday, February 14

With God on Our Side film

Thursday, February 16

With God on Our Side film continued**Week 7**

Tuesday, February 21

American Grace 10 &12

Thursday, February 23

Midterm exam

Week 8

Tuesday, February 28

American Grace 7

Thursday, March 2

American Grace 8**Spring Break March 6 – 10****Week 9**

Tuesday, March 14

American Grace 9

Thursday, March 16

From Pews to Polling Places 6
Writing assignment 1 due**Week 10**

Tuesday, March 21

From Pews to Polling Places 4
"U.S. Catholics View Pope Francis as a Change for the Better"
(<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/03/06/catholics-view-pope-francis-as-a-change-for-the-better/>)

Thursday, March 23

From Pews to Polling Places 9**Week 11**

Tuesday, March 28

From Pews to Polling Places 8"The painful, divisive, American Jewish debate over the Iran deal, explained"
(<http://www.vox.com/2015/9/2/9247713/iran-american-jews>)

Thursday, March 30

From Pews to Polling Places 5
Writing assignment 2 due

Week 12

Tuesday, April 4

From Pews to Polling Places 7

Thursday, April 6

American Grace 13

Week 13

Tuesday, April 11

From Pews to Polling Places 1

“How the Faithful Voted: 2014 Preliminary Analysis” (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/05/how-the-faithful-voted-2014-preliminary-analysis/#>)

Thursday, April 13

Speeches by John F. Kennedy, Mario Cuomo, Barack Obama, and Mitt Romney

“A Religious Test All Our Political Candidates Should Take” by Damon Linker in the *Washington Post*, September 19, 2010

Week 14

Tuesday, April 18

Selections from *The End of White Christian America* by Robert P. Jones

Writing assignment 3 due

Thursday, April 20

2016 Election & Religion Roundtable

Week 15

Tuesday, April 25

American Grace 14

Thursday, April 27

American Grace 15

Thursday, May 4
8:00am to 11:00am

FINAL EXAM

List of Due Dates

Midterm exam – Thursday, February 23

Final exam – Thursday, May 4, 8:00am to 11:00am

Writing assignment 1 – Thursday, March 16

Writing assignment 2 – Thursday, March 30

Writing assignment 3 – Tuesday, April 18

Class discussion kickoff dates:

- Tuesday, January 17
- Tuesday, January 24
- Tuesday, January 31
- Thursday, February 9
- Tuesday, February 28
- Thursday, March 2
- Thursday, March 23
- Tuesday, April 4
- Thursday, April 6