

POLS 4690: Religion and American Politics
University of Georgia
Fall 2019

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

Class meets:
Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 11:15am to 12:05pm, Baldwin Hall, 0102

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.
- *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/>)

Course structure

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

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

Assignments and grading

Participation & attendance (10%)

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

Exams (20% each, 40% total)

There will be two exams. Anything from the assigned readings and discussed during class 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 (10%)

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 20 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.

Administrative Items

ELearning

You will submit writing assignments and locate 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.

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 may 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.

Classroom safety

If the fire alarm sounds, we will exit the building and reassemble across the street (Jackson) to make sure everyone exited the building. If there is a tornado warning, we will move downstairs to shelter and account for everyone. If you have concerns about other emergencies or if you have special circumstances that I need to know about in case of an emergency, please speak to me after class. If you have questions about evacuation locations or shelter locations, contact OEP (Office of Emergency Preparedness).

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. 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. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an F for the course, and their names will be forwarded to 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.

Wednesday, August 14

- Review course syllabus

Friday, August 16

- “How Americans Feel about Religious Groups”
(<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>)
- “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)

Week 2.

Monday, August 19

- *American Grace* 1

Wednesday, August, 21

- *American Grace* 2

Friday, August 23

- “Measurement error is sin”
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/03/22/measurement-error-is-sin/>)
- “When You Ask People to Describe their Religion, Bad Things Happen”
(https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/10/11/when-you-ask-people-to-describe-their-religion-bad-things-happen/amp/?twitter_impression=true)
- “Do we have any idea who evangelicals are?”
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/12/14/do-we-have-any-idea-who-evangelicals-are/>)

Week 3.

Monday, August 26

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

Wednesday, August 28

- Film: *Meet the Press* episode

Friday, August 30 – Digital work day

- “In Berra, Conservative Christians Win With Liberal Legal Arguments”
(https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/opinion/becerra-trump-hawaii-christians.html?ref=collection%252Fsectioncollection%252Fopinion&action=click&contentCollection=opinion®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=sectionfront)

Week 4.

Monday, September 2 – Labor Day, No class

Wednesday, September 4

- *American Grace* 5
- Class discussion kick off 1

Friday, September 6

- *American Grace* 6

Week 5.

Monday, September 9

- *American Grace* 3
- Class discussion kick off 2

Wednesday, September 11

- *American Grace* 4

Friday, September 13

- Selections from *Onward Christian Soldiers* 1

Week 6.

Monday, September 16

- Selections from *Onward Christian Soldiers*

Wednesday, September 18

- “Is the Christian Right Driving Americans Away from Religion?”
(https://psmag.com/.amp/news/is-the-christian-right-driving-americans-away-from-religion?_twitter_impression=true)
- Class discussion kick off 3

Friday, September 20

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 3

Week 7.

Monday, September 23

- *With God on Our Side* film

Wednesday, September 25

- *With God on Our Side* film continued

Friday, September 27

- Exam 1 part 1

Week 8.

Monday, September 30

- Exam 1 part 2

Wednesday, October 2

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 10

Friday, October 4

- "'Nones' on the Rise"
(<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>)
Class discussion kick off 4

Week 9.

Monday, October 7

- "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs"
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html>)
- Class discussion kick off 5
- Writing assignment 1 due

Wednesday, October 9

- *American Grace* 10 & 11

Friday, October 11

- *American Grace* 12

Week 10.

Monday, October 14

- *American Grace* 7
- Class discussion kick off 6

Wednesday, October 16

- *American Grace* 8

Friday, October 18

- *American Grace* 9

Week 11.

Monday, October 21

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 6

Wednesday, October 23

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 4

Friday, October 25

- “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/>)
- Why are Catholics overrepresented in Congress? (<https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/03/21/why-are-catholics-overrepresented-in-congress/>)
- “Has Donald Trump pushed Catholics to the left?” (<https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/02/12/has-donald-trump-pushed-catholics-to-the-left/>)
- Class discussion kick off 7

Week 12.

Monday, October 28

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 9

Wednesday, October 30

- “Muslims are the least popular religious group in the U.S. They’re disliked even more than atheists” (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/muslims-are-the-least-popular-religious-group-in-the-u-s-theyre-disliked-even-more-than-atheists/?utm_term=.8a50150c59e8)
- “100 years ago, American talked about Catholics the way they talk about Muslims today” (<https://www.vox.com/2017/1/18/14312104/islamophobia-catholics>)
- Class discussion kick off 8

Friday, November 1 – Fall break, No class

Week 13.

Monday, November 4

- Writing assignment 2 due

Wednesday, November 6

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 8

Friday, November 8

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 5

Week 14.

Monday, November 11

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 7

Wednesday, November 13

- “Civil Religion in America” by Robert N. Bellah (<https://www-jstor-org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/stable/pdf/20028013.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A21c90a9b5464ed8f036e5c36615c9207>)
- Class discussion kick off 9

Friday, November 15

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

Week 15.

Monday, November 18

- “How religious groups voted in the midterm elections” (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/07/how-religious-groups-voted-in-the-midterm-elections/>)
- “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis” (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>)
- “How the Faithful Voted: 2014 Preliminary Analysis” (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/05/how-the-faithful-voted-2014-preliminary-analysis/#>)
- Class discussion kick off 10

Wednesday, November 20

- *American Grace* 13
- Class discussion kick off 11

Friday, November 22

- *American Grace* 14 & 15

Week 16.

Monday, November 25

- Writing assignment 3 due

Wednesday, November 27 to Friday, November 29 – Thanksgiving break, No class

Week 17.

Monday, December 2

- Exam 2 part 1

Wednesday, December 4 – Last day of classes

- Exam 2 part 2

Final exam period is Friday, December 6 through Thursday, December 12
List of Due Dates

Exam 1 – Friday, September 27 and Monday, September 30

Exam 2 – Monday, December 2 and Wednesday, December 4

Writing assignment 1 – Monday, October 7

Writing assignment 2 – Monday, November 4

Writing assignment 3 – Monday, November 25

Class discussion kickoff dates:

- Wednesday, September 4
- Monday, September 9
- Wednesday, September 18
- Friday, October 4
- Monday, October 7
- Monday, October 14
- Friday, October 25
- Wednesday, October 30
- Wednesday, November 13
- Monday, November 18
- Wednesday, November 20