

**POLS 4690E: Religion and American Politics**  
University of Georgia  
Summer 2020, Thru Session

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Virtual office hours

Email me at any time Monday – Friday. I will respond no later than 24 hours after the first contact and probably much sooner than that. It may take longer for a response if the student emails through eLC. If you email after 8pm, I probably won't respond until morning. We can also meet via limited Zoom appointments.

Course description

Through online learning, students explore the religious landscape and how its role in American politics has changed over the nation's history. 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.

Technical requirements for the course

Having regular access to the Internet is necessary for completing course assignments. Reliable Internet service is also important because quizzes will be time sensitive. You will also need access to a computer where you can engage with course content like videos or podcasts.

Course objectives

Students will:

- Participate in online learning throughout the course.
- 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 through online group discussion
- Improve critical thinking and communication skills by considering various political perspectives and communicating those views effectively

Course structure

**Mondays:** You will receive an email from me with information about what should be completed during the upcoming week. This is when I'll post materials for you to view, an outline to guide your reading, online discussion questions, etc.

**Thursdays:** When there is a week with a quiz, it will take place on a Thursday.

**Fridays:** You will submit discussion posts and assignments, usually by 5pm (unless otherwise stated).

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<sup>1</sup> Instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus as needed.

## Course texts

You are required to gain access to the book listed below.

- *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/>)

All other assigned readings will be made available to you via eLearning Commons.

## Learning Activities

Throughout the course, students should participate in the following learning activities: reading the text, viewing and interacting with the weekly outline, responding to discussion posts by professor and peers, completing weekly assignments, taking exams, and engaging with and responding to the scholarship of religion and American politics.

These activities will be graded and should be completed by the due date listed on the syllabus and on the eLC calendar.

## Assignments and grading

### **Weekly assignments (15%)**

The instructor will post an assignment every week, which pairs with a specific reading listed on the syllabus for each week. Students will not receive a letter grade for these, just a participation grade, noting that the student completed good, quality work. Students have the chance to redo the assignment if needed. Working through the assignments should supplement and help integrate the main outline work by the student—ultimately preparing students for the exams, which are open book/notes.

### **Weekly discussions (15%)**

The instructor will post a discussion prompt (or two) every week. These pair with specific readings listed on the syllabus for each week. As with the assignments, students will receive participation grades for these. They can be redone in the event that the response is incomplete/unsatisfactory. Pay close attention to instructions. Responding to the discussion posts will help students better understand the readings, prepare for the exams, and most importantly, provide an opportunity for interaction with their classmates.

### **Exams (15% each, 30% total)**

There will be two exams during the semester, taken through eLC. The exams will be timed and include a mix of different questions formats. The exams will take place:

- Exam 1, Thursday, June 25
- Exam 2, Thursday, July 30

The exams are open book/notes. This means, students can reference the assigned books/readings for our class and their personal notes and outlines.

This does not mean: communicating with a friend about their notes, using notes through shared documents, and/or Googling (which doesn't usually work out well).

### **Writing assignments (40%)**

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

### Administrative Items

#### **Missed deadlines**

Assignments are due by 5pm on the date noted on the syllabus, unless otherwise stated. If you have a conflict with a due date, 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 two days 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.

#### **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>

#### **Online Learning Environment**

UGA eLC will host this course. You will need to check eLC at least a few times per week to be successful in the course. If you run into any problems with eLC, please contact the EITS Help Desk:

- 706-542-3106 (8am to 10pm M-Th, 8am to 6pm F, 1pm to 7pm Sat & Sun)
- [helpdesk@uga.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uga.edu)
- Submit a request for support at <http://www.eits.uga.edu/request>
- Chat with a representative from the Help Desk (8am to 5pm M-F), <https://confluence.eits.uga.edu/display/HDSH/Help+Desk+Support+%28HDS%29+Home>

## Agreement

As an enrolled student in this course, you are agreeing to the policies listed above and to doing good, honest work. You are also agreeing to work with Dr. Bramlett to have a positive course outcome and learn about civic engagement through course assignments and experiences.

Students agree to not collaborate on exams. Any student caught cheating will fail the course, and academic dishonesty will be reported to the University. Exams will be open book but they will be timed. Students should be prepared to complete the exam in the time allotted.

Please stay in touch throughout the course. We will move quickly, so you should stay up to date on your assignments and communicate with Dr. Bramlett if a conflict arises.

Please indicate that you agree with these statements during the first week of class.

## Course Outline and Schedule

### **Introduction & the Religious Landscape**

Week 1. Friday, June 5 – Friday, June 12

- Outline material
  - *American Grace 1*
  - *American Grace 2*
- Assignment material:
  - “How Americans Feel about Religious Groups”  
(<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>)
- Discussion material
  - “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](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))
- Due Friday, June 12
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week
  - Email instructor, indicating agreement to terms in syllabus

Week 2. Monday, June 15 – Friday, June 19

- Outline material
  - Selections from *The Oxford handbook of church and state in the United States* edited by Derek Davis
  - Film: *Meet the Press* episode
  - “Measurement error is sin”  
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/03/22/measurement-error-is-sin/>)
- Assignment material
  - “In Becerra, Conservative Christians Win With Liberal Legal Arguments”  
([https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/opinion/becerra-trump-hawaii-christians.html?rref=collection%252Fsectioncollection%252Fopinion&action=click&contentCollection=opinion&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=sectionfront](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/opinion/becerra-trump-hawaii-christians.html?rref=collection%252Fsectioncollection%252Fopinion&action=click&contentCollection=opinion&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=sectionfront))
- Discussion material
  - “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](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/>)
- Due Friday, June 19
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week
  - Writing assignment 1

## History of Religion in America & the Christian Right

Week 3. Monday, June 22 – Friday, June 26

- Outline material
  - *American Grace* 5
  - *American Grace* 6
- Assignment material
  - Selection from *Onward Christian Soldiers*
- Discussion material
  - Selection from *Onward Christian Soldiers*
- Exam 1, Thursday, June 25
- Due, Friday, June 26
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week

Week 4. Monday, June 29 – Thursday, July 2 (holiday: Friday, July 3)

- Outline material
  - *American Grace 3*
  - *American Grace 4*
  - *From Pews to Polling Places 3*
- Assignment material
  - *With God on Our Side* film
- Discussion material
  - *With God on Our Side* film
- Midterm and Withdrawal deadline Wednesday, July 1
- Due Thursday, July 2
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week

## **The Intertwining of Religion and American Politics**

Week 5. Monday, July 6 – Friday, July 10

- Outline material
  - *American Grace 10*
  - *American Grace 11*
  - *American Grace 12*
- Assignment material
  - *From Pews to Polling Places 10*
  - “‘Nones’ on the Rise” (<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>)
- Discussion material
  - “When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html>)
- Due Friday, July 10
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week
  - Writing assignment 2

## Religion Identity, Affiliation, and Tradition

Week 6. Monday, July 13 – Friday, July 17

- Outline material
  - *American Grace* 8
  - *American Grace* 9
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 6
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 4
- Assignment material
  - *American Grace* 7
- Discussion material
  - “Why are Catholics overrepresented in Congress?”  
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/03/21/why-are-catholics-overrepresented-in-congress/>)
  - “The religious composition of the two major parties”  
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/04/25/the-religious-composition-of-the-two-major-parties/>)
- Due Friday, July 17
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week

Week 7. Monday, July 20 – Friday, July 24

- Outline material
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 9
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 8
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 5
- Assignment material
  - *From Pews to Polling Places* 7
- Discussion material
  - “100 years ago, American talked about Catholics the way they talk about Muslims today”  
(<https://www.vox.com/2017/1/18/14312104/islamophobia-catholics>)
  - “The 2016 Jewish Vote and the Culture Wars”  
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/10/31/the-2016-jewish-vote-fragmenting-or-consolidating/>)
  - “The two kinds of American Latter-day Saints: a Mormon typology”(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2018/09/26/the-two-kinds-of-american-latter-day-saints-a-mormon-typology>)
- Due Friday, July 24
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week
  - Writing assignment 3

## Elections, Speeches, & Wrapping Up

Week 8. Monday, July 27 – Wednesday, July 29 (last day of class)

- Outline material
  - “Civil Religion in America” by Robert N. Bellah (<https://www-jstor-org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/stable/pdf/20028013.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A21c90a9b5464ed8f036e5c36615c9207>)
  - *American Grace* 13
  - *American Grace* 14/15
- Assignment material
  - Speeches by John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Mitt Romney
- Discussion material
  - Based on final chapters of *American Grace*
- Exam 2, Thursday, July 30
- Due Wednesday, July 29
  - Submit your assignment for the week
  - Submit your discussion post for the week

**Final Exam period: Thursday, July 30 & Friday, July 31**

### List of Important Dates

- Email instructor, indicating agreement to terms in syllabus, Friday, June 12
- Writing assignment 1, Friday, June 19
- Exam 1, Thursday, June 25
- Writing assignment 2, Friday, July 10
- Exam 2, Thursday, July 30
- Writing assignment 3, Friday, July 24

\*\*\*Submit your weekly assignments and discussion responses – typically by 5pm on Friday, but not always!\*\*\*