

POLS 4690E: Religion and American Politics

University of Georgia
Summer 2026, Maymester

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Email policy

Please email me at bbram@uga.edu and NOT through eLC.

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

First class day of the week: 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.

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

Wednesdays & last class day of the week: You will submit discussion posts and take exams, usually by 11:59pm (unless otherwise stated).

Course texts

You are required to gain access to the books 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/>)

Learning Activities

Throughout the course, students should participate in the following learning activities:

- Reading the text
- Viewing and interacting with the weekly outlines
- Responding to discussion posts by professor and peers
- Taking exams
- Engaging with and responding to the scholarship of religion and American politics through writing

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

Discussion posts (30%)

The instructor will post a discussion prompt (or two) every week. These pair with specific readings listed on the syllabus for each week. Students will receive participation grades for these. Please follow instructions carefully for full credit. 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.

Do not use AI tools for these posts. When students do this, the content lacks originality, and students' post sound the same. Full credit requires a thoughtful post that answers the questions, where your personal voice comes through.

Exams (25% each, 50% total)

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

- Exam 1, Wednesday, May 20
- Exam 2, Wednesday, June 3

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.

Final written reflection (20%)

Students will complete a final writing assignment where they will reflect on the relationship between American politics and religion. Students will cite sources from inside and outside of the class. Additional details will be provided via eLC.

Administrative Items

Missed deadlines

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date noted on the syllabus, unless otherwise stated. If you have a conflict with a due date, please 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
- 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 religion and American politics through course assignments.

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

Week 1. Tuesday, May 12 – Friday, May 15

- Outline material
 - *American Grace* 1
 - *American Grace* 2
 - Selections from *The Oxford handbook of church and state in the United States* edited by Derek Davis
 - *American Grace* 5
 - *American Grace* 6

- 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/>
 - "Do we have any idea who evangelicals are?" <https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/12/14/do-we-have-any-idea-who-evangelicals-are/>
 - "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

- Due Friday, May 15
 - Submit discussion 1
 - Submit discussion 2
 - Email instructor, indicating agreement to terms in syllabus

Week 2. Monday, May 18 – Friday, May 22

- Outline material
 - *American Grace* 3
 - *American Grace* 4
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 3
 - *American Grace* 10
 - *American Grace* 11
 - *American Grace* 12

- Discussion 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

- Speeches by John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Mitt Romney
- Selection from *Onward Christian Soldiers*
- *With God on Our Side* film
- "'Nones' on the Rise" <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>

- Due Wednesday, May 20
 - Submit discussion 3
 - Exam 1

- Due, Friday, May 22
 - Submit discussion 4

Week 3. Monday, May 25 (Holiday: Memorial Day) – Friday, May 29

- Outline material
 - *American Grace* 8
 - *American Grace* 9
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 6
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 4
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 9
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 8
 - *From Pews to Polling Places* 5

- Discussion material
 - *American Grace* 7
 - "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/>
 - "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>

- Withdrawal deadline – Tuesday, May 26
- Due Wednesday, May 27
 - Submit discussion 5
- Due Friday, May 29
 - Submit discussion 6

Week 4. Monday, June 1 – Wednesday, June 3

- Outline material
 - *American Grace* 13
 - *American Grace* 14/15
- Discussion material
 - Covers material from last week's discussion material!
- Due Tuesday, June 2 – Last Day of Class
 - Submit discussion 7
 - Submit discussion 8
 - Submit final reflection paper
- Due Wednesday, June 3 – Final exam period
 - Exam 2

List of Important Dates

Submit discussions, assignments, exams by 11:59pm

- Friday, May 15
 - Submit discussion 1
 - Submit discussion 2
 - Email instructor, indicating agreement to terms in syllabus
- Due Wednesday, May 20
 - Submit discussion 3
 - Exam 1

- Due, Friday, May 22
 - Submit discussion 4

- Tuesday, May 26 – withdrawal deadline

- Due Wednesday, May 27
 - Submit discussion 5

- Due Friday, May 29
 - Submit discussion 6

- Due Tuesday, June 2 – Last Day of Class
 - Submit discussion 7
 - Submit discussion 8
 - Submit final reflection paper

- Due Wednesday, June 3 – Final exam period
 - Exam 2