DRAFT SYLLABUS
(UPDATING NOT YET COMPLETED FOR FALL 2018)
SOC 385 SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Fall, 2018
Instructor: Lester Kurtz
Office Hours (G742); Monday-Wednesday 10:30am-12noon and by appointment
Email: lkurtz@gmu.edu

Providing an important study for understanding today’s headlines, "Sociology of Religion" surveys the world’s major religious traditions and introduces scholarly methods for the study of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective, with a sociological bent. It explores the nature of religious beliefs and practices, both historically and in the contemporary context. Of particular interest will be the way in which religious traditions form and change over time as they become increasingly cosmopolitan, and the relationship between those traditions and daily life, political and social conflicts, and the current globalization of culture and society.

TEXTS
Readings not in this book are available on Blackboard.

CALENDAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27-29 Aug</td>
<td>i. Global Religious Life</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 Sept.</strong></td>
<td>ii. A Sociological Tour</td>
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<td>5 Sept.</td>
<td>Types of Religious Traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10 Sept.</td>
<td>South Asian Religions</td>
<td>9/10 Rosh Hashanah</td>
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<td>12-19 Sept.</td>
<td>East Asian Religions</td>
<td>9/23-26 Harvest Moon Festival</td>
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<td>1 Oct.</td>
<td>Greek Religious Traditions</td>
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<td>8 Oct.</td>
<td>West Asia: Judaism</td>
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<td>15-17 Oct.</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td><strong>10/10 Quiz 1</strong></td>
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<td>22 Oct.</td>
<td>Indigenous Religions</td>
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<td><strong>24 Oct.</strong></td>
<td><strong>III. Religion in Everyday Life</strong></td>
<td>Extra credit 1 due</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Oct.</td>
<td>Identity &amp; Social Structure</td>
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<td>29 Oct.</td>
<td>Taboo Lines &amp; the Ethical Life</td>
<td>Proposals Due</td>
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<td><strong>31 Oct.</strong></td>
<td>iv. Modernism, Multiculturalism</td>
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<td>31 Oct.-5 Nov.</td>
<td>Crisis of Modernism</td>
<td>10/7 Diwali</td>
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<td>7 Nov.</td>
<td>Culture Wars</td>
<td><strong>11/7 Quiz 2</strong></td>
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<td>12-14 Nov.</td>
<td>Alternative Religious Movements</td>
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<td><strong>19 Nov.</strong></td>
<td><strong>v. Gods and Bombs</strong></td>
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<td>19-26 Nov.</td>
<td>Religious Conflict &amp; Dialogue</td>
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<td>28 Nov.</td>
<td>Gods and Bombs</td>
<td><strong>12/5 Ritual Analysis Due</strong></td>
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<td>3-5 Dec.</td>
<td>Aesthetics of Peace</td>
<td>12/3 Hanukkah</td>
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<td>12 Dec.</td>
<td>Last class</td>
<td>Extra credit 2 due</td>
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<td><strong>TBA Quiz 3</strong></td>
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I. RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

8/27
A. Social Scientific Perspectives on Religion
Gods in the Global Village, 1-23

8/29
B. Metaphors and Methods
Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (selection)
Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols"

9/3
C. The Three Pillars

II. THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS: A SOCIOLOGICAL TOUR

9/5
A. Types of Religious Traditions
Gods in the Global Village, 45-53

9/5
B. Hinduism and Jainism
Gods in the Global Village, 53-69

9/10

9/12
C. East Asian Religions: Buddhism
*Gods in the Global Village*, 69-76
"To Each Generation the Tathagata Announces His Name and Declares that He Has Entered Nirvana." Saddharmapundarika, XV, 268-72
"The Bodhisattva's Infinite Compassion," Shikshasamuiccaya, 280-2 ["Vajradhvaha-sutra"]

9/19
D. Taoism and Confucianism
*Gods in the Global Village*, 76-83
The Sayings of Lao Zi, ed. by Tsai Chih Chung; tr. by Koh Kok Kiang and Wong Lit Khiong. (Singapore: Asiapac, 1989), 36-52.

10/1
E. Ancient Greek Religion
*Gods in the Global Village*, 87-93

10/8
F. Judaism
*Gods in the Global Village*, 93-101

10/8-10
G. Christianity
*Gods in the Global Village*, 87-93

10/15-20
H. Islam
Readings
Gods in the Global Village, 110-128 (finish the rest of chapter 3)
Selections from the Qur’an in *The Essential Koran,* translated and presented by Thomas Cleary (Edison, NY: Castle Books), 44-49, 82-93


10/22

I. Indigenous Religions

*Gods in the Global Village,* Chapter 4


10/24

III. RELIGION & EVERYDAY LIFE

A. Identity and Social Structure

Readings

Gods in the Global Village, 151-171

"Muhammad as Model and Guide" (from Islam, ed. by John Alden Williams [NY: George Braziller, 1962], pp. 84-87).


Colossians 4

10/29

IV. MODERNISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

A. The Crisis of Modernism

Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 6.


11/7

B. Culture Wars


11/12-14

C. Religious Syncretism and Alternative Religious Movements

Gods in the Global Village, Ch. 7


V. GODS AND BOMBS

11/19
A. Religion Conflict & Dialogue
Gods in the Global Village, Ch. 8

11/26
C. Gods and Bombs

11/28

7 June
RITUAL ANALYSIS DUE

12/3-5
B. Aesthetics of Peace


12/12 Last Class - Extra credit #2 Due
Chuang Tzu, "The Useless"

21 June
QUIZ 3 (or Research Papers) Due

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Learning objectives
By the end of the course, participants should have a basic knowledge of the central beliefs, rituals, and institutions of the world’s major faith traditions and an ability to use sociological tools to study and analyze them.

Each participant will (1) observe a religious ritual or event and write an analysis of it and (2) either take three quizzes or write a major research paper (ca. 5000 words in length). They will write a series of 10 short reflection papers related to their ritual analysis paper, some of which can be included directly in the final paper, and participate in a 30-minute group class presentation introducing one of the world’s major religious traditions.

More information will be made available early in the course. In calculating the course grade, each assignment will be weighted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz #1</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz #2</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Quiz #3</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class presentation</td>
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QUIZZES

The quizzes for the class will have an option of a multiple choice or an essay format (you may decide at the time of the quiz) and the second is not comprehensive. They will be taken online, posted on Blackboard. The first quiz will include material from readings and class presentations from the beginning of the semester until the class day before the exam; the second exam will include material from after first quiz until the date of the second, and so on until the last class day for the third quiz. Exams will be taken Blackboard and students will have 48 hours to complete each one.

REFLECTION PAPERS

Reflection papers are due almost weekly for a minimum of 10 (during the 15 weeks of the semester). Although you will get feedback, your grade for this assignment will be based on the following scale:

- 10+ papers: A
- 8-9 papers: B
- 6-7 papers: C
- 4-5 papers: D

These reflections should provide analysis of class readings and discussions, as well as scholarly sources related to your ritual analysis paper. Some of them may therefore be incorporated into that paper at the end of the term, especially those related to the faith tradition you are studying and the sources for your background research.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Groups from the class will make 30-minute presentations in class that introduce basic beliefs, rituals, and institutions each of the major religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). We will organize these groups during the second class session based on your preferences.

RITUAL ANALYSIS

The ritual analysis for the course project or for extra credit should analyze a worship celebration in a tradition other than the author's own - please see the guide posted on Blackboard. The paper has two components – a literature review and an ethnographic element. Look for ways in which the religious group's worldview and key myths are acted out in the community's ethos. Examine the ritual in terms of the characteristics of rituals discussed in class: What problem(s) do(es) the ritual solve? How is it rooted in the experience of the community performing it? What social and doctrinal boundaries are marked out, and what evil is denounced? How are social structures reinforced by the ritual? Note how the ritual addresses the major themes of the course. If possible, analyze the effects of the participants' social status, ethnicity, gender, etc., on the content and form of the ritual. The assignment will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of the description of the ritual (the tradition, what was done, who participated, the setting and its symbolic props, etc.) and the analysis of it (discussion of its sociological significance, identification of the problem the ritual addresses, the beliefs, institutions, ethical implications, etc. embedded in the ritual). Some arrangements will be made for members of the class to attend a religious ritual together, if interest warrants our doing so.

MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER OPTION

Course participants who wish to write a paper instead of taking quizzes may do so, and should speak with either the instructor or the assistant as soon as possible. The topic may be anything appropriate for the course, although it needs to be approved by one of us. We will be glad to help you focus on a topic and find relevant source materials at any stage of the research process.

This option is intended for people who wish to undertake a major research paper and is not for the faint of heart. Some prior knowledge is desirable, but not required, although it may require extra work. The paper should be 5,000-7,000 words in length, typewritten, and meet the following deadlines:

- Meet with Instructor: ASAP
- Initial Topic proposal: (2-3pp.)
- Outline and preliminary bibliography
- Paper Due: Final exam schedule

Note: People writing the paper are still expected to attend class, do the readings, and submit an analysis of a religious ritual. Relevant information from course materials must be included in the paper to receive a good grade for the paper, especially A’s. The research paper cannot be a substitute for engaging with the material of the course, in terms of both readings and class presentations.
EXTRA CREDIT OPTIONS

Participants are encouraged to do a maximum of two extra credit projects which give you a chance to explore sources and experiences we do not have time to cover formally in the course -- and to improve your grade. Most projects should take the form of a short paper that analyzes (rather than simply summarizes) speeches, films, books, articles, or other events appropriate to the course. You may also use a major essay topic for an exam in which you do not write the essay, or to analyze a ritual that you do not use for your course project. You are especially encouraged to undertake interviews or attend worship celebrations of religious traditions other than your own. Papers should provide a critique and application of issues and ideas discussed in the course. Readings, films, etc. that are an assigned part of the course are not, of course, acceptable for extra credit.

You may, of course, turn them in prior to the due dates. They will be submitted on Blackboard in the Assignments folder.

LENGTH: 1,000-1,500 words

GRADING:
You will be given 3-5 points on a 100-point scale for each paper that meets the requirements of the assignment. The points will be added to a quiz score.

OFFICIAL MASON NATION

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
GMUK is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification. Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.
Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS
Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at http://ods.gmu.edu

OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES

WRITING CENTER: The GMUK Academic Resource Center can look at your papers and problems to improve your academic achievement in the area of Writing, Mathematics, Accounting, Statistics, and Economics. You are invited to utilize the faculty and student tutor services at a variety of stages in your academic activities, checking to see that your project specifically meets the directions specified by your instructor. While tutors are ‘fixing’ your writing or projects, they do help you become conscious of particular error patterns that emerge in your work. For more information, please contact Professor Eunmee Lee, director of Academic Resource Center (elee45@gmu.edu, office #521)

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
Access the George Mason University library resources at http://library.gmu.edu/ and the IGC library at http://lib.igc.or.kr/.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
See information online at https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/wellness/counseling/

UNIVERSITY POLICIES
The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.