



Special Topics: Religion and Politics

Spring 2017
POLS 399-01

Instructor: Robert W. Velez **Email:** RVelez@winona.edu
Office: Minne' Hall room 327 **Office phone:** (507) 457-2856
Office hours: Tue, Thu 9am – 12pm M, W, F 10am – 11:30am

Class time: Tue, Thu 12:30pm – 1:50pm
Class location: Minne' Hall room 235

“There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people . . . Religion, Politics, and the Great Pumpkin.” – Charles M. Schultz

Course Overview

Religion and politics are two topics that have the potential to unite or divide a family, community, or nation. They are topics that many individuals hold close to the vest and are reticent to discuss in public. Such topics differ from the hard sciences, to be sure, but play a central role in the social sciences. Sociology, anthropology, and political science have all asked questions about the manifestations of religion and its relationship to other traits. Of our American freedoms, the right to hold individual political and religious beliefs – including and especially beliefs outside of the mainstream – within a pluralist nation have been staunchly protected.

However, in our current political environment, controversies abound when it comes to certain beliefs. Subsequent to the election of Donald Trump, there is at least anecdotal evidence that hostility towards practitioners of one of the world's largest religions, Islam, is on the rise. President Obama has been accused of waging a “war” on religion and a significant percentage of voters who affiliate with the Republican party are convinced that he is a “secret Muslim”. Some conservative thinkers have gone so far as to suggest that the beliefs they hold dear are under attack by an advancing secular movement that displays intolerance toward people of faith.

Is Christianity under attack? How do the topics of religion and politics intersect and what are the possible outcomes of such a conflict? How has faith played a role in American society? These questions, while not necessarily appropriate for discussion over the Thanksgiving dinner with family, are tailor-made for discussion in the university classroom. We will examine these questions and many others this semester.

Student Learning Objectives

At the end of the course, it is anticipated that students will be able to 1) identify and explain the “*secularization thesis*” and provide insight to its applicability in the

United States today, 2) identify and explain the various intersections of religion and politics and modern day conflicts between the two, 3) identify and contribute to the debate over the relationship between religion and political issues, and 4) analyze and provide insight regarding the tension between the topics.

Required Materials

The course requires one (1) book¹ and selected readings which will be made available on the **D2L Brightspace** course homepage. The book is available at the university bookstore:

Wald, Kenneth D. and Allison Calhoun-Brown. 2014. *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 7th ed. Lanham, MD. Rowman & Littlefield.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students will be graded on three (3) take-home exams, one (1) paper, short reading responses, and informed participation/attendance. There are a total of five hundred (500) points that can be earned in this course.

EXAM #1 (20% of grade or 100 points): EXAM #1 will be distributed during the fifth (5th) week of the semester. It will cover all material from the lectures, class discussions, and reading up to the day of the exam.

EXAM #2 (20% of grade or 100 points): EXAM #2 will be distributed during the tenth (10th) week of the semester. It will cover all the material from the lectures, class discussions, and reading *since* the first exam.

FINAL EXAM (20% of grade or 100 points): The final examination will be distributed on April 27th (the last day of classes) and will be due May 1st (during finals week). It will cover all the material covered in lectures, class discussions, and reading *since* the second exam.

Short Reading Responses (10% of grade or 50 points): Writing regularly will improve your writing skills and benefit you beyond your formal academic career. As such, you will be expected to write a short response to each reading assignment. These responses should be one or (at the most) two paragraphs and are designed for you to intellectually engage with the reading material. These are not necessarily summaries of the content of the entire chapter(s), but your reaction to one or more aspects of the material. For example, you may find an example or vignette in the text particularly interesting or relevant to your own experience. You could write a paragraph or two on that particular topic and discuss how it speaks to you directly. The same may be the case with a particular chart, graph, or figure and you could discuss that in your response.

I will collect these responses from each student at random intervals throughout the semester at the beginning of the class session. If you are absent on the day that the responses are collected, you will NOT have the opportunity to make up

¹ In the "Course Schedule and Reading Assignments" section, the textbook is referred to as "Wald & C-B"

the missed assignment. This assignment is designed to encourage regular attendance and is in lieu of regular quizzes.

The reading responses must be typed, single-spaced, 12-point font. Please include your FULL name, the date of the assignment, and the chapter (author and number) of the reading that your response is for. A standard paragraph should be no less than four sentences. These will be graded on a “+” or “-” scale with “+” meaning full credit and “-” meaning half-credit. Full credit will be given to those students who use proper grammar and punctuation and express critical and/or insightful thinking skills in their writing.

Term Paper (20% of grade or 100 points): There are myriad potential topics worthy of academic investigation in the political science subfield of religion and politics. The term paper is the student’s opportunity to use their own creativity and direct their intellectual attention and curiosity toward a topic presently being debated in American (or world) politics.

Each student will select a topic from the following list and complete a 7-10 page paper due in the last month of the course. This exercise, while designed for the student to employ their creativity, is intended to be an intellectual examination of the selected topic. It is not a statement of personal religious or political philosophy. It is expected that the student will utilize multiple sources – both academic and otherwise – to develop an argument regarding their chosen topic. It is also expected that the student will include references to course material where appropriate to display a grasp of the concepts and terms used in class.

Potential topics:

Separation of church and state
Religious freedom
Political activism of clergy
The “two-party system” as it related to religion and politics
Abortion
Same-sex marriage
The “secularization thesis” and how it is manifest in the U.S.

The instructor MAY consider a topic not on this list. It is the student's responsibility to discuss alternative options directly with the instructor and receive prior approval NO LATER THAN week 4 of the semester. In order to ensure an appropriate amount of time and effort is put into the project, there are several “benchmarks” throughout the semester. Each benchmark has a due date and an associated point value. More information will be provided in class as well as on a separate assignment prompt.

Informed participation/Attendance (10% of grade or 50 points): Each student is expected to attend all lectures and participate regularly. Of course, as adults, there will be times and situations that we have little control over and missing a class session may be unavoidable. As such, no grading penalty will be assessed against those students who miss three (3) or fewer class sessions. For each absence beyond three (3), your participation grade will be reduced by 5 points.

Attendance and participation points aside, it is simply not possible to do well in the course without attending lecture.

Another consideration regarding attending lectures is that the reading responses will be collected at random and if you miss a lecture during which I collect those assignments, you will miss out on the points for that assignment.

Informed participation is NOT the same as attendance. Those who participate regularly will not only maximize their points in this area, but they tend to get more out of the course. You are PAYING MONEY for this course; get your money's worth!

This class will be administered in the seminar format. This means that you should not expect the instructor to lecture for the entire class period. Students are expected to contribute to class discussion regularly.

Grading scale:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
500 to 450	A
449 to 400	B
399 to 350	C
349 to 300	D
Below 300	F

Class Policies

Course Webpage: We will make use of the course webpage², D2L Brightspace, for posting selected readings, the syllabus, and for making announcements. It is good practice to visit the course homepage at least 2-3 times per week.

Technology in the classroom: **LIDS DOWN!** Using laptops during class is prohibited unless you have a documented accessibility accommodation (if you don't know what this is, you probably don't have one. See me for further explanation.). The same goes for cell phones, tablets, and any other personal technology³. Failure to adhere to this policy will result in point deductions from your participation grade. Please set cell phones to silent BEFORE class.

Contacting Your Instructor: Your instructor is readily available to answer questions during office hours. Email is best for clarification purposes. All written communication, including emails, should be properly addressed and written. Your emails should a.) identify the course in the email's subject heading, b.) respectfully address your instructor, c.) use appropriate grammar and punctuation, and d.) include your first AND last name.

² <https://winona.ims.mnscu.edu/d2l/home/3466787>

³ At times, I may designate a short "technology break" in class to prevent individuals from going through tech "withdrawal".

Tardiness, Leaving Class Early & Appropriate Behavior: This course is designed to reward students who attend class, put forth a high level of effort, and accept responsibility for their education. Attendance will be taken daily. The class times have been established by the university and are non-negotiable. Your instructor believes strongly in respecting your time and will do so by starting class at 12:30pm and ending no later than 1:50pm. Please reciprocate by arriving on time and remaining in class until the instructor ends the class session.

A few words on class discussion: Your instructor is an advocate for public debate and conversation; deep-democracy requires citizens to discuss issues of the day regularly and share opinions and insights. As this is a political science course, it stands to reason that we will be discussing topics which can be, and often are, controversial. Opinions abound regarding differing public policies, elected officials, and ideologies. All opinions are welcomed and encouraged in our class discussion with one basic rule: mutual respect among participants. Some strongly held opinions may not be popular, but in discussing them, we all have an opportunity to learn and grow. As such, your instructor will not be stifling debate on any particular topic broached in class. However, in the spirit of mutual respect, it is expected that you refrain from offensive or derogatory language directed at any one individual or group of individuals. Free speech, as protected by our constitution, is a right that we all enjoy, but along with it comes the responsibility we have to each treat each other with respect.

Makeup Exams: There will be no makeup exams, except in case of emergency as specified below or where university policy applies. If you miss an exam, you will receive a zero (0). If you are eligible to take a makeup exam, the format will be entirely essay.

Grading Policies and Standards: Graded exams and assignments will be returned as promptly as possible. If you have questions about your grade(s), you should come and talk with me during office hours. If you believe you received a grade that is inaccurate and wish to contest it, the instructor reserves the right to re-grade the entire work. In essence, this means that the grade will be completely re-evaluated and may go up or down as the instructor sees fit.

Academic Misconduct: Any student engaging in academic misconduct/dishonesty will face severe sanctions, up to and including receiving an **F** in the course and being reported to the Dean of the College for further disciplinary action, as outlined in the university student conduct code. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, you should examine the university policy and/or ask the instructor prior to turning in any assignment. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with university policy. The student conduct code is available here:

<http://www.winona.edu/sld/studentconductcode.asp>

Access policy: It is the policy of this university and of your instructor to help individuals succeed in the classroom. The student is responsible for notifying the professor and the university of any special problems or needs as soon as possible. The instructor and university are responsible for doing whatever they can within university policy to accommodate the student. For more information, visit the Access Services webpage: <http://www.winona.edu/accessservices/>

Personal Problems & Emergencies: There are at least three categories of problems and emergencies that could arise:

Problems the Due Date of an Assignment: If a problem arises the day an assignment is due, you are still required to submit the assignment on time. All late work on assignments⁴ will be penalized at the rate of 5 points per day, including weekends. Note that all late work for assignments will face such a deduction, regardless of whether the lateness was due to illness, poor weather, computer problems, traffic violations, etc.

Note, however, that in the case of ongoing illness or issue (i.e. “General Problems”), arrangements can be made to restructure the due dates of assignments.

Problems the Day of an Exam: If a problem or emergency arises that will prevent you from completing an exam, you should contact me as soon as possible. If you are ill, I expect to be contacted by the day the exam is distributed. I may require documentation depending on the issue. Contacts can be either by email (preferred) or in person, or by calling my office (voicemail messages can be left at any time). Note that the format for a makeup exam under any circumstance will be entirely essay.

General Problems: If a problem arises that impedes your ability to perform well in the course, you must communicate with me in some fashion at the onset of the crisis. I understand that family situations, personal problems, or other circumstances can and do arise, and arrangements can be made to deal with these issues that avoid the late penalties described above, and may allow for concessions regarding the scheduling of exams. Some of these issues, such as problems arising related to a death in the family, will require documentation, while others can be simply addressed in person during office hours, or if necessary, over the phone or by email. In all situations where general problems arise, I will make arrangements with you regarding how to deal with the situation provided you alert me to the problem early. Note that the later you wait to alert me to the problem, the more limited accommodation options may be.

Course Schedule & Reading Assignments

Please note that the schedule below is a guideline. Actual material covered in class may deviate from the schedule according to the progress of the class and discussion. Unless otherwise indicated orally during class and/or discussion, we will follow the order of the topics as listed in the schedule. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of where we are in the progress of the course and where we deviate from this schedule.

Week 1

Tue, 1/10 Introduction to the course / Syllabus review
 Reading 1: Steensland, et al., 2000 (pp 291 – 296) (on **D2L**)

⁴ This policy does NOT apply to reading responses. If you are not present in class when they are collected, you may NOT make up the assignment.

Thu, 1/12 Setting the Stage
Reading 1: Toft, et al., pp. 1-15 (on **D2L**)

Week 2

Tue, 1/17 “Secularization” thesis
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.1

Thu, 1/19 Politics of Religion
Reading 1: Toft, et al., ch.2 (on **D2L**)

Week 3

Tue, 1/24 Religion in the American Context
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.2

Thu, 1/26 Religion & political philosophy
Reading 1: Rousseau, The Social Contract, ch.8 (on **D2L**)

Week 4

Tue, 1/31 The Christian “Right”
Reading 1: Wilcox & Robinson, ch.1 (on **D2L**)

Thu, 2/2 The Christian “Left”?
Reading 1: [Huffington Post article](#)
Reading 2: [The Atlantic article](#)
[**Assignment due**: topic selection for paper]

Week 5

Tue, 2/7 Religion and American Political Culture
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.3
EXAM #1 (distributed)

Thu, 2/9 Religion and American Political Culture (cont’d)
EXAM #1 (due)

Week 6

Tue, 2/14 Religion and the State
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.4

Thu, 2/16 Religion and the State (cont’d)

Week 7

Tue, 2/21 NO CLASS – University Assessment Day

Thu, 2/23 Church & State conflicts
Reading 1: [Gay marriage and religious freedom cannot coexist](#)
Reading 2: [Not about gay rights – Same-sex marriage . . .](#)

Week 8

Tue, 2/28 **NO CLASS – Academic conference**

Thu, 3/2 Politically assertive religion
Reading 1: Toft, et al., ch.3 (on **D2L**)
[**Assignment due:** list of sources for paper]

SPRING BREAK MARCH 6 – 10 – NO CLASSES

Week 9

Tue, 3/14 Mobilizing religious interests
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.5

Thu, 3/16 Mobilizing religious interests (cont'd)
Reading 1: Religious Market Interest Groups (on **D2L**)

Week 10

Tue, 3/21 Religion and political action
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.6

Thu, 3/23 Religion and political action (cont'd)
EXAM #2 (distributed)

Week 11

Tue, 3/28 Religion & public opinion
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.7
EXAM #2 (due)

Thu, 3/30 The “None”s
Reading 1: [The World’s Newest Major Religion: No Religion](#)
Reading 2: [The factors driving the growth of religious ‘nones’](#)
Reading 3: [Religious ‘nones’ . . . growing . . . becoming more secular](#)

Week 12

Tue, 4/4 Christianity under attack?
Reading 1: [Has Obama waged a war on religion?](#)
Reading 2: [Liberals are the true aggressors in culture wars](#)

Thu, 4/6 Continuity and Change
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.9

Week 13

Tue, 4/11 Religion and the politics of ethnic and religious minorities
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.10

Thu, 4/13 Religion and the politics of ethnic and religious minorities (cont'd)
[**Assignment due:** (not) rough draft of paper]

Week 14

Tue, 4/18 The “others”
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.11

Thu, 4/20 The “others” (cont’d)

Week 15

Tue, 4/25 Religion & American political life
Reading 1: Wald & C-B, ch.12

Thu, 4/27 Religion & American political life (cont’d)
[**Assignment due:** religion & politics term paper]
[**FINAL EXAM: distributed**]

FINAL EXAM DUE: Monday, May 1st by 11:59pm