

# Religion and American Politics

## POSC 275 A

Tu/Th 9:40am

Professor Kedron Bardwell  
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*"I believe you can separate church from state, because those are tangible political institutions you can define. I defy you to separate religion from politics, because politics is about people."*  
- author John Meacham, in American Gospel

### Course Description

From Ted Cruz's Iowa caucus campaign and the "War on Christmas" to Islamic fundamentalists, the world confronts us daily with chances to understand (and misunderstand) religion and its role in public life. This class analyzes the interaction of politics and religion in the United States. If elections and debates over public policy are any guide, religion still matters for many individuals and groups. Bucking predictions that the United States (like Europe) was on an inevitable path to *secularization*, religion is a vibrant force in the public square. This class will help you appreciate why.

We will study personal and even controversial questions in this class. How do religious beliefs and experiences shape U.S. politics? What does constitutional law have to say about public or private religion? Where do major religious groups stand on the key issues in politics today? As we wrestle authentically with these ideas, we will explore how *your* views on faith and religion influence your philosophies about politics. Because some issues we debate are contentious, we will live by *the golden rule*: I trust you will listen, keep an open mind, and respect those with different beliefs.

### Required Texts

Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* Revised ed. [Westminster John Knox Press, 2016]  
Fowler, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, & Strategic Choices*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. [Westview, 2013]  
Wexler, *Holy Hullabaloo: Road Trip to Battlegrounds of the Church/State Wars* [Beacon, 2009]  
Online readings () and documentaries ()

**Course Page:** Lecture outlines and reading links are on Scholar. I post study guides one week before exams.

**Participation:** We are a *learning community*. I expect you to read, bring a highlighted text or reading notes to class, and actively contribute to discussions. Your views will enrich our shared learning experience. I will call you out if you start slacking on your duties.

- (1) **Everyday Critical Thinking:** For each daily reading set write up a **brief paragraph** of critical thinking questions or reflections. The knack for asking the right questions is one of the important skills you will learn in college. Here are prompts to help you come up with great questions: (a) *What did you learn that was new, interesting, or surprising*, (b) *what issues were unresolved*, and (c) *how did the work change your views on this issue?* Write reflections in the Bluebook; I collect them periodically.
- (2) **Newsday Thursday:** On highlighted **Thursdays**, bring in a news article related to that day's religion and politics topic. You can do a Google News search, or simply "follow" the *Pew Forum for Religion* (@PewReligion) or *Religion News Service* (@RNS). Pew has a great daily news rundown and weekly newsletter you can sign up for on their web page. To show me you are reading carefully, mark up the article (write editorial comments and questions in the margins) and hand it in after discussion.

Faithful attendance is part of your participation grade. After one grace absence, each unexcused absence reduces your participation grade by ½ letter (from A- to a B+, for example). To ask for an excused absence, please contact me *before* class. You are responsible for all notes, assignments, and class changes you miss.

**“Spiritual-Political Autobiography”** and **Research Paper**: See attached instructions for more information. As a writing-intensive (WC) class, I meet with you on each paper to give feedback to improve your writing.

**Exams**: There will be 3 midterms, consisting of short answer and essay questions. I allow make-up exams only in emergency cases and with prior approval.

<b>Grading:</b>	Daily Participation & Discussion	30 pts. [15%]
	Spiritual-Political Autobiography	20 pts. [10%]
	Research Paper	60 pts. [30%]
	Midterm Exam 1	40 pts. [20%]
	Midterm Exam 2	30 pts. [15%]
	Midterm Exam 3	20 pts. [10%]

### Course Outline / Readings

Aug. 29 [Tu] **Religious Literacy?**  
🔗 [Pew](#), “Religious Knowledge Quiz” & [Pew](#), “Executive Summary”

### **RELIGION in U.S. POLITICAL HISTORY**

Aug. 31 [Th] **Religion in the “Colonial” Period**  
Fea, Chapter 5  
Fowler, Chapter 1  
📖 *God in America: City upon a Hill*

Sep. 5 [Tu] **Religion in the American Revolution** **Discussion of first paper**  
Fea, Chapters 6-8  
📖 *God in America: Religious Freedom*

Sep. 7 [Th] **Religion & the Founding Documents**  
Fea, Chapters 9-10  
🔗 [Madison](#), “Memorial and Remonstrance” (bring to class)

Sep. 12 [Tu] **Religion & the Founders I**  
Fea, Chapters 11-13: Washington, J. Adams, T. Jefferson

Sep. 14 [Th] **Religion & the Founders II**  
Fea, Chapters 14-15: Franklin, Witherspoon, Jay, S. Adams

Sep. 19 [Tu] **The Idea of Christian America, 1789-1925**  
Fea, Chapters 1-2  
📖 *God in America: Fundamentalist-Modernist Divide*

Sep. 21 [Th] **The Idea of Christian America, 1925-2017**  
Fea, Chapter 3-4  
👤 *God in America: Of Gods and Caesar*

Office Meeting (w/ draft)

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & THE LAW

Sep. 26 [Tu] **Establishment Clause I**  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Religion in the Public Schools"  
Wexler, Chapters 6-8 (pick two of your favorites)

Spiritual-Political Bio DUE

Sep. 28 [Th] **Establishment Clause II**  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Religious Displays and the Courts"  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Conflicts Continue over Nativity Scenes"  
Wexler, Chapters 4-5

Oct. 3 [Tu] **Free Exercise Clause**  
🔗 [Pew](#), "A Delicate Balance: The Free Exercise Clause"  
Wexler, Chapter 2

→ **MIDTERM EXAM 1: THUR, Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>** ←

## POLITICS of U.S. RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Oct. 10 [Tu] **Religion & Politics Today**  
Fowler, Chapter 2: Christianity and Its Major Branches  
Fowler, Chapter 3: Judaism, Islam, and Religious Pluralism  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Americans in Middle on Importance of Religion"

Brainstorm paper ideas

Oct. 12 [Th] **The Rise of the Evangelicals**  
Fowler, Chapter 4: Voting and Religion  
🔗 [Pew](#), "U.S. Religious Groups and their Political Leanings"  
👤 *Jesus Factor: Faith and GW Bush*

Oct. 17 [Tu] **Mainline Protestants & Religious Left**  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Faith on the Hill" / [Pew](#), "U.S. Presidents"  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos"  
Fowler, Chapter 10 (pp.257-265)

Topic Statement is DUE

Oct. 19 **NO CLASS – Fall Break!**

Oct. 24 [Tu] **Catholics in American Politics**  
🔗 [Royal](#), "JFK's Houston Speech at 50"  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Key Findings about American Catholics"  
🔗 [USCCB](#), "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship"

Oct. 26 [Th] **Islam in U.S. Politics and Beyond**  
Fowler, Chapter 3: Islam section  
🔗 [Pew](#), "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings"

[Pew](#), "The World's Muslims"  
 *Inside Islam*

Oct. 31 [Tu] **Mormons, Seculars, & Spiritual but Not Religious** **First 5+ Pages DUE**

[Pew](#), "Mormons in America"  
[Pew](#), "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious"

<https://onbeing.org/programs/steven-waldman-beyond-the-god-gap/>

**Nov. 2** [Th] **The Religion of Donald Trump**

[Burke](#), "The Guilt-Free Gospel of Donald Trump"  
[Green](#), "The Evangelical Reckoning over Trump"

→ **MIDTERM EXAM 2: TUES, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>** ←

Nov. 9 [Th] Individual paper meeting (my office, TBA) **Bring in an outline**

### RELIGIOUS VIEWS on CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Nov. 14 [Tu] **Clergy, Churches, and Politics**

Religious Leaders Panel/Q&A  
[Pew](#), "Preaching Politics from the Pulpit"

**Nov. 16** [Th] **Gay Marriage & Religious Liberty**

[Pew](#), "Religious Groups' Positions on Same-Sex Marriage"  
[Pew](#), "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage"  
[Pew](#), "How the Court's Decision Could Affect Religious Groups"

Nov. 21 [Tu] **Religion and Abortion**

[Pew](#), "History of Key Abortion Rulings"  
[Pew](#), "Religious Groups' Positions on Abortion"

Nov. 23 [Th] **NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break!**

**Nov. 28** [Tu] **The Ethics of Abortion**

[Pew](#), "Abortion Laws Around the World"  
[Pew](#), "Roe v. Wade at 40"  
 *Lake of Fire*

Nov. 30 [Th] **Wrap up & Reflection**

Fowler, Chapter 6: Religion and Political Elites  
Fowler, Chapter 12: Theories of Religion, Culture, and Politics

**Rough Draft DUE today!**

→ **MIDTERM EXAM 3: TUES, Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>** ←

Dec. 7 [Th] **Research Presentations (normal time)**

Dec. 13 [W] **Research Presentations (8-10am)**

**Research Final Draft DUE**

# Spiritual-Political Autobiography

DUE: Tuesday, Sep. 26<sup>th</sup>

This essay (4-5 pages, double spaced) reflects on the interaction of religion and politics in your life. The goal is to help you think about your religious tradition (or “worldview,” religious or not), where your ideas about church and state originate, and how you apply this worldview to politics. See below for writing prompts.

Start with: 🌐 Green, “12 Tribes of American Politics” and 🌐 Pew, “Religion among the Millennials”

## Religious Socialization

- What is your family’s religious affiliation, if any? Think back to your family history and religious socialization as you grew up. How was religiosity taught, discussed, or practiced in the family? If your family wasn’t religious, where did your views about religion/religious people originate?

## Religion and Politics

- Define some theological, social, and political views that set your family’s religious affiliation apart from others. *I’ll give you an article on the social and political views of your “tradition.”* Does your family mostly mirror the views of this religious tradition, or deviate from them?
- Young adults can own, modify, or reject their parents’ views on religion, politics, and issues. Where are you on this spectrum (give examples), and why?

## Personal Reflection

- To what extent do your religious beliefs (or beliefs about religion) influence your activism and views on various issues? When religion enters *the public square*, what is the ideal relationship between churches and the state, religion and politics? Can they be separated, or is interaction inevitable in a pluralist society? If they could be separated, would that be helpful or harmful?

## Religion & Politics Research Paper

*Topic Statement: Oct. 17*

*First 5+ pages: Oct. 31*

*Meeting: Nov. 9*

*Rough Draft: Nov. 30*

*Final Paper DUE: Dec. 13*

You will conduct research and then write a 12-15 page research paper on an issue or controversy in religion and politics. The project is designed to give you the choice to focus on any “religion and politics” topic that interests you. See the syllabus for examples. This class (and my academic training) is in the area of religion *in America*, but feel free to choose a global topic.

Select a “method” or approach that is interesting to you and appropriate to your topic. Examples include:

- An empirical, quantitative analysis (using survey or election data)
- A historical analysis (with a thesis, including primary and secondary sources)
- A study of religion and public policy (research the policy, then advocate a position)
- A legal analysis of a church-state controversy or case in the U.S. courts, past or present

You will see below the four stages of research and writing, as well as time set aside for individual meetings with me to discuss progress. Failure to complete either of the first two steps in a timely fashion will *reduce your final paper grade by 5 points*. See more details below.

- **Topic Statement** – This is a 2-page assignment. The first page will describe the research project (a question, why it is important, and how you plan to go about the research). On page two, give brief paragraph summaries for 5 sources you will use.
- **First 5+ Pages** – move beyond the intro and start to compose a body with sources and research.
- **Meet with me in late March**
- **Rough Draft** [10 points] – Please have a full draft of the paper ready for me to see at this time; *work on the paper with a Writing Center assistant first*, then bring the revision to our meeting.
- **Research Paper** – The 12-15 page paper will include:
  - an introduction (discuss the **question** and the controversies surrounding it)
  - a “literature review” (a short description of previous research on this topic)
  - a short section laying out your “method” of study or analysis, if appropriate
  - an in-depth discussion of **arguments/findings** (this is the heart of the paper)
  - a conclusion (discuss the implications of your work; where to go from here)
  - a **PRESENTATION and Q&A** on your findings [10 points]

*FYI: Your research should draw from 10-12 sources, with at least ½ of them from scholarly books/journals.*

*To standardize format, use 12-point Times New Roman with 1” margins (double-spaced).*

*Use whatever citation style you know best from your major field, and use it consistently.*

*You are responsible for following Simpson’s plagiarism policy ([2016-17 Catalog p.34](#)).*

*\*\*\*Please discuss potential topics with me ASAP. Don’t procrastinate!*