

**Summer 2016 Session 1 Online RSOC 54: Comparative Religion and Social Theory  
"Religion, Culture and Society in Theory and Film"**

**Professor: Wendy M. Arce; Email: [warce@scu.edu](mailto:warce@scu.edu); Office/Hours: Zoom Appointment**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS**

Even though we live in a pluralistic and rather secular society, religion still plays an active role in U.S. culture, politics and mainstream society. Classical theorists in the study of religion have pondered the function of religion in the social world - not necessarily on particular beliefs or meaning, but generally on what religion DOES for society. What is religion, how does it function in people's lives and does it remain significant in a secular age? In this class, we will discuss different theories about religion and analyze the role, implicit or explicit, religion has played in U.S. society, politics, and culture.

This course will begin with a survey of classic and modern social theory whose work has significantly informed the study of religion and culture. We will establish a sense of where the field has been and where the field is going, questioning the role of religion among other social institutions present in our social world. Even though the early social theorists argued that religion is on its way out, the course will show how religion and politics interacted in 2008 as well as how religion affects notions of sexuality. Our first case study involves the careful viewing of two films made prior to the 2008 election, showcasing the rise of political awareness in the Evangelical faith in the United States. Our second case study will evaluate the position of Bible Belt Christianity and Islam on the question of sexual minorities. We will discuss the role religion plays in condemning non-heterosexual partnerships, but read and watch the stories of people reconcile their sexual identity with their religious faith. Finally, time permitting, we will look critically at a progressive point of view on religion, questioning if that view goes too far or not far enough. We will use the social theories to guide us through the case studies, but will also read about the groups we are studying and engaging in comparative religion work. We will also learn to "read" films by acquiring basic tools with which to critically analyze visual media. By the end of the course, you, as active participants in this course, will be able to:

- a. Engage theories in the study of religion.
- b. Identify the role religion plays (though implicit) in seemingly pluralistic and secular societies.
- c. Critically analyze case studies where religion interacts with and influences culture, politics and society in the United States.

**This course fulfills Santa Clara University's Core Requirement for RTC 2.**

## RTC2 Learning Objectives in RSOC 54

By the end of course, you, as students registered in this course, will be able to:

- 1) "Analyze complex and diverse religious phenomena" in the context of social structures, including race/ethnicity, the separation of church and state and the presence of religion in politics, culture and society.
- 2) "Integrate and compare several different disciplinary methods to a coherent set of religious phenomena;" through the analysis of different social theorists who work form a variety of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and of course, methods in the study and analysis of film.
- 3) "Clarify and express beliefs in light of [your] critical inquiry into the socio-religious dimensions of human existence."<sup>1</sup> By connecting theory to case studies, you will see the role of religion in U.S. culture, society and politics; you will develop a clearer sense of your own religious beliefs and the interplay between those beliefs and secular society; you will also be expected to engage the material critically and develop his or her own opinions on the topics we discuss.

## REQUIRED BOOKS

1. Pals, Daniel L. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. Oxford University Press, 2009. (Required)
2. Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. The University of Chicago Press, 1998. (Required)
3. Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing about Film, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Pearson, 2011. (Required)
4. Barton, Bernadette. *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays*. New York University Press, 2012. (Required)
5. Habib, Samar. *Islam and Homosexuality*. Praeger, 2010. (Required)

## REQUIRED FILMS (available through Netflix DVD or SCU Kanopy)

1. *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple* (2006)
2. *Hunger Games* (2012)
3. *Kumare* (2011)
4. *Friends of God: A Road Trip with Alexandra Pelosi* (2007)
5. *The Trials of Ted Haggard* (2009)
6. *For the Bible Tells Me So* (2007)
7. *A Jihad for Love* (2007)
8. *Religulous* (2008)

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<sup>1</sup> The RTC Learning Objectives are taken from "What to do to get your course approved for RTC2" information sheet, page 1. Website address: Website: <http://www.scu.edu/provost/ugst/core2009/Learning-Objectives.cfm>.

## **POLICIES:**

- You are expected to attend have an active online presence throughout the duration of the course, completing assignments and engaging in discussion with your classmates. You must also demonstrate respect to your peers and the professor.
- If you lapse in your active online presence, you will lose your participation points. You must communicate with your professor if something happens that will take your attention away from the course.
- **I do not take late assignments. Contact me with any emergencies.**
- The dates and material in this syllabus are subject to change. Pay attention to date changes from the professor.
- Santa Clara University strongly believes in academic integrity and honesty; therefore, cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course and the student may receive a failing grade.<sup>2</sup>
- Students requiring accommodations for disabilities must let the professor know on the first week of class. To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must be registered with Disabilities Resources, located in Benson 216 or call at 408-554-4109.<sup>3</sup>

## **STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT & GRADING**

**This is a fast paced course with several reading, watching and writing assignments and varying due dates. I highly recommend you take the first day of the session to complete the readings, watch the films and write your journals. Then, make sure to check into the discussion boards before they close and post your opinions. If you are struggling with the material, please check in with me. I am here to work with you. Pay close attention to the following grading description to earn points for your work.**

### **ACTIVE ONLINE PARTICIPATION IS WORTH 30 POINTS:**

As a registered student, you must actively participate in each and every module, completing readings, film screenings and journal assignments within the specific week.

Active online participation is measured in three ways.

1. On time completion of all assignments during the specific session and module times - reading and film journals, participation in online discussion boards, etc. (10 pts)
2. **For Module 2:** Presenting well thought out and deliberate responses to the discussion questions posed by the group as a comment on the group-lead discussion board and participating in any film based discussion boards (10 pts).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scu.edu/academics/bulletins/undergraduate/Academic-Integrity.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scu.edu/advising/learning/disabilities/>

3. **For Module 3:** Posting and engaging in conversations on the film-based discussion boards online. Post your thoughts and engage with what other students have written about the film. You can use material from your film journal in your discussion board post, but also make sure to engage the thoughts of your classmates (10 pts).

### **COURSE JOURNAL IS WORTH 30 POINTS:**

You will keep a reading and film journal that must be uploaded by the end of the session. I expect you to record what you are capturing from the readings and powerpoint lectures. Make sure to follow the reading and film journal guide closely and apply my feedback as we go through the course. When we start the films, make sure to draw connections between what we have read with the films.

### **GROUP-LEAD DISCUSSION IS WORTH 10 POINTS:**

During module two, students will sign up into groups of three and lead a discussion board based on the readings. The group will discuss the readings among themselves, decide on a media source that reflects something in the readings to share on the discussion board along with three to five discussion questions. **Make sure to post this by noon the day before the session ends so that your classmates can respond by the end of the session.** The media source may prove challenging, but it is designed for you to reflect on the reading and find an example that illustrates something the group found significant. The discussion questions are designed to promote a deeper engagement with the text, so it can either focus on something particular or a more general question that the reading inspires. I am happy to discuss questions or examples from the real world. Students will be required to watch/engage the media source and then post responses to the questions on the discussion board. The importance of this is to start connecting theory to elements in our contemporary social world. This will bring some added relevance to it and help us think in these terms for when we watch our films. It is also intended to bring collaboration between you and your classmates and deeper discussion on the readings within the larger group. (RTC2 *Learning Objective 1*)

### **FINDING RELIGION IN THE REAL WORLD IS WORTH 10 POINTS:**

During module 3, you are tasked with looking for the presence of religion in your everyday lives (secular contexts, not religious ones). The examples are limitless - you are required to post an outside media source (picture, video clip, news article - any outside media source) and a reflection on how religion is operating in that particular example utilizing the tools we have used during the course (social theory and media analysis). Submissions are due by the end of the course.

## **FINAL EXAM IS WORTH 20 POINTS:**

The final exam will be composed of short answer questions on the theories and films discussed throughout the course of the term. The final exam provides us with a space to draw overall conclusions from this intensive course. You will be able to engage in a final analysis of the complex and diverse religious phenomena that we have seen in the course; you will be able to integrate and compare the different disciplines (film analysis, social theory, sociology of religion and culture) we have used in our study of religion; and you will have an opportunity to take a bird's eye view of the course and draw any final conclusions into their own inquiry of religion as part of the human condition.

### **Grading Scale:**

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|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| • 94+ = A    | • 80-83 = B- | • 67-69 = D+   |
| • 90-93 = A- | • 77-79 = C+ | • 64-66 = D    |
| • 87-89 = B+ | • 74-76 = C  | • 61-63 = D-   |
| • 84-86 = B  | • 70-73 = C- | • Below 60 = F |

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## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **MODULE 1: June 16-18 Getting to know you, the course and How to Read a Film**

Take the first couple of days to look through the syllabus, read through the required readings on film studies and post a brief introductory video or written text about yourself using the following questions as your guide (skip any that you are not comfortable with). Make sure to do this by June 18<sup>th</sup>.

1. full name, year in school, major/minor.
2. reasons for taking RSOC 54 this summer
3. where are you from?
4. what is your ethnic/racial make up?
5. were you raised in a specific religious tradition? do you still practice? would you like to share any particular spiritual or religious practice you have?
6. other than taking this class, what are you up to this summer?
7. what is your favorite TV show, movie or the last movie you saw?

**READING: Corrigan Chs 1-3 (Reading Journal due at 11:59pm on June 18th)**

**MODULE 2 Session 1: June 19-22**

**Religion as Psychology, Religion as Society: Freud, Durkheim**

READING Pals pg 71-97; 99-142

FILM *Jonestown* (Available on Netflix DVD or comparable DVD service)

**Group One post questions and media by noon June 21<sup>st</sup>. Board comments, reading and film journal due June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 11:59pm**

**Session 2: June 23-26**

**Religion as Social Control and Social Construction: Marx, Berger**

READING Pals pgs 143-170; Berger "Religion and World-Construction" pgs 2-28

FILM *Hunger Games* (Available on Netflix DVD and Amazon Prime)

**Group Two post questions and media by noon June 25<sup>th</sup>. Board comments, reading and film journal due June 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm.**

**Session 3: June 27-June 29**

**Religion as Religion in Society: James, Weber**

READING Pals pgs 171-203; 237-270

FILM *Kumare* (Available on Netflix streaming, Kanopy or comparable service)

**Group Three post questions and media by noon June 28<sup>th</sup>. Board comments, reading and film journal due June 29<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm.**

**Session 4: June 29-July 4**

**Religion as Culture: Eliade, Geertz, Swidler**

READING Pals pgs 271-305; 341-372; Swidler pgs 273-284; Swidler pgs 273-284;

**Group Four post questions and media by noon July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Board comments, reading journal due July 4<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm.**

**MODULE 3 Session 1: July 4th-8th**

**Religion as Subculture: Smith; Case Study: U.S. Evangelicals**

READING Smith Ch 1, 3-4

FILM *Friends of God: A Road Trip with Alexandra Pelosi* and *The Trials of Ted Haggard* (Film 1 available on Netflix DVD, Film 2 available on Ted Haggard's website).

**Group Five post questions and media by noon, July 7<sup>th</sup>. Board comments, reading and film journal due July 8<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm.**

**Session 2: July 9th-13th**

**Case Study: Bible Belt Gays**

READING Barton, Introduction, Chs 1, 8 and 9.

FILM *For the Bible Tells Me So* (SCU Kanopy Streaming)

**Film journal due July 11th at 11:59pm**

**Session 2 July 14th-18th**

**Case Study: Islam and Homosexuality**

READING Habib, Vol 1, pgs 23-36, Vol 2, pgs 223-245, 247-268.

FILM *A Jihad for Love*

**Film journal due July 17th at 11:59pm**

**Session 3 July 19th-20th**

**Case Study: Is the Study of Religion Relevant?**

READING Orsi, "Lived Religion."

FILM *Religulous* (available on Netflix DVD or comparable service)

**Film journal due July 20th at 11:59pm**

**Final Exam and Religion in the Real World Assignments Due on Friday, July 22nd, 5pm on Camino. Have a great summer!!!**