COURSE DESCRIPTION

Issues in Contemporary American Religion is a course that crosses departmental boundaries. It will deal with the basic ideas that constitute the American republic and its ethos, theology, constitutional law and sociology. As such, it might be thought of as a course in American intellectual history, but “history” is a somewhat misleading term because the focus will be on issues that are contemporary and the historical dimension will serve mainly to clarify the modern situation.

ICAR will deal with a number of major issues faced by religious groups and individuals in twenty-first century American society. These include:

- Philosophical and theological issues, such as: secularism, agnosticism and atheism versus traditional theism; the demography of the generation that confronts these issues and how that relates to their responses; the problem of evil; and the problem of religious knowledge and truth (absolute versus tentative/relativistic answers, the authority of received tradition, rational versus non-rational forms of spirituality, and fundamentalism versus more liberal approaches to religious authority and knowledge).
- The role of women in modern American religion and how various groups have come to their positions.
- The role of religion in the public arena, involving issues of the separation of church and state and specific issues, such as school prayer and Bible reading, tax exemption, military chaplaincy, lobbying, political discourse from the pulpit and scientific creationism/intelligent design versus evolution.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through quizzes, exams, formal essays, and class discussions, students who successfully complete this course will:
1. Understand, using correct terminology and appropriate language, the major issues confronting American religion dealt with in this course.
2. Identify the chief personalities, institutions and organizations and cite correctly the major Supreme Court’s (and other courts’) cases associated with each challenge.
3. Understand that each of the issues to be discussed has proponents of conscience on at least two opposed sides of the issue.
4. Acquire and demonstrate depth knowledge of two of the issues through close reading and written reports.
5. Place these persons, organizations, and issues in historical perspective, showing how they change over time, how they are products of the dynamic interface between historic religious traditions and modern societal conditions, how this change is inevitable and continual, and how different traditions respond to these conditions and challenges in unique ways.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION**

The following texts are required and can be purchased in the university bookstore:

- Robert Bellah: *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*
- Robert Wuthnow: *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*
- Edwin Gaustad: *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: History of Church and State in America*

**The graded components of the course are as follows:**

Students will be expected to write two papers as described elsewhere in this syllabus. Each of these written assignments will count as twenty-five percent (25%) of the final course grade.

There will be two short quizzes during the semester. The quizzes will each count as ten percent (10%) of the course grade;

There will also be a final exam or paper which will count as the remaining thirty percent (30%) of the course grade.
WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT#1 – A BOOK REPORT

Below is list of books that might be used for this report. There are certainly others. If you find another title that you would like to read, please propose it to me, and I shall either approve or discuss the choice with you.

What is the purpose of this report? As you read your book, look for examples of how religion in America and American culture interacted and how this confluence changed either religion or culture or both. As you write your paper, be as specific as you can about the influences that were involved and their consequences.

Does the author have a particular point of view? In this regard, it may be helpful to look up the biography of the author to see if he/she has affiliations and commitments that might affect what he/she writes in the book.

The paper should have your name at the top and the name an author of the book and its date of publication. The paper should be between five and ten papers (double-spaced, 1” margins). Good grammar, style and accurate spelling are expected.

Some books you might consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thoreau</td>
<td>Walden Pond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hulsether</td>
<td>Religious Culture and Politics in the 20th C. U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sutcliffe &amp; Bowman</td>
<td>Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vattimo, et. al.</td>
<td>After The Death of God</td>
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<td>Hamer</td>
<td>The God Gene</td>
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<td>Krislevé</td>
<td>The Incredible Need to Believe</td>
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<td>Gendan</td>
<td>Evangelical Feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goldstein &amp; Diamant</td>
<td>The New Jewish Feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marabel Morgan</td>
<td>The Total Woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zabala, ed.</td>
<td>The Future of Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cox</td>
<td>The Future of Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jelen</td>
<td>To Serve God and Mammon: Church-State Relations in American Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox</td>
<td>The Secular City</td>
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WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT #2 – A CASE STUDY

This paper focuses on the role of religion in the public arena and conflicts that may ensue from different interpretations of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

In this case, you are to select one of the central Supreme Court cases on religious issues, read the entire case, briefs that were filed by various parties (often on different sides of the issue) and any background analyses that you can find. Then, write a paper (same description as in Written Assignment #1) in three parts

1. Summarize the case. The list of cases from which you may choose is:
   - Abingdon Township School District v. Schempp (prohibited Bible reading in public school classrooms)
   - Bob Jones University v. U.S. (revoked tax exempt status based on racial discrimination)
   - Engel v. Vitale (prohibited public prayer in public school classrooms)
   - Griswold v. Connecticut (established right of privacy)
   - Wallace v. Jaffree (discussed permissibility of a moment of silent prayer)
   - Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District (ruled that creationism/intelligent design may not be taught in science classes)
   - Lee v. Weisman (prohibited prayer at graduation exercises)
   - Lemon v. Kurtzman (established test for what religious activities may be funded with public money)
   - Sherbert v Verner (established rights of worker discharged because he refused to work on his Sabbath)

2. Tell why the judges came to their conclusion. To what extra-legal influences might they have been reacting?

3. If you were the official in charge of an institution that was directly impacted by the decision [i.e., principal of a school, government official like a mayor, clergy person at a church, synagogue or mosque], especially where the current practice was opposite the Court’s mandate, how would you respond to the decision? Would you make any behavioral changes and, if so or if not, why? What social pressures might influence your decision?
## CLASS SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Religious authority and the question of knowledge</td>
<td>Barry Holtz, ed. <em>Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts</em>, pp. 31-101 (Biblical law and narrative) [R]</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Fundamentalism, Literalism and Modern Understandings</td>
<td>G. Marsden, <em>Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism</em>, pp. 9-82 (Historical overview from 19th c. to present) [R]</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>God and “the will of God” Problem of evil (theodicy)</td>
<td>First written assignment due second class day of the week Bellah, <em>The Broken Covenant</em></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The existence of God – atheism, agnosticism and theism</td>
<td>Finish reading Bellah First Quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Secularism challenges faith</td>
<td>Wuthnow, <em>Beyond the Baby Boomers</em>, chapters 1-5</td>
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<td>7-8</td>
<td>The impact of theological change on religious institutions and politics</td>
<td>Finish reading Wuthnow, chs. 6-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The changing roles of women in modern religion in America</td>
<td>M. Lusted, <em>Women’s Roles in Religion</em>, Introduction and chapters on Christianity and Judaism [R] Second Quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>Religion in the Public Arena Basic American documents Church-state relations Science education/creationism School prayer, Bible reading Moment of silence Political discourse in religious settings Tax policy</td>
<td>E. Gaustad, <em>Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land</em> Second written assignment due at end of week 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Review session and final exam as posted on exam schedule</td>
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[R] indicates that relevant material will be placed on electronic reserve before semester begins

**ATTENDANCE**

Especially early in the semester, until I know you by name and by sight, I shall take attendance at the beginning of the class period, which means that you will want to be on time. Regular class attendance is vital to your success in this course. The lectures and discussions during class periods are one of two indispensable foundations of this course, the other being the readings. You should expect to attend all class sessions, especially since the material presented in class will generally not be a rehash of the reading materials. You will not be able to do well in the class without attending on a regular basis, taking good notes, participating actively in discussions and paying attention.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

1. Be on time. Late entry into the room disturbs everyone else and diminishes the opportunity for learning by your classmates. If you know that you will have to leave early, try to sit near the door and please inform me in advance.

2. Stay on topic. It is sometimes fun to digress and stray from the subject, but we shall try not to do so. We have a very limited time to cover a large subject, so we need to use our time efficiently to get the maximum benefit from the class experience. Side conversations are not acceptable.

3. Make as little extraneous noise as possible. Everyone sneezes and coughs occasionally; that can’t be avoided. But do not snap your gum, crumble paper or otherwise disturb your neighbors. You may use your laptop computer to take notes but if the number of laptops clicking and clacking becomes too intrusive, we may have to limit their use. Surfing the web or using cell phones or other electronic devices (even if you are listening through ear buds) during class time is not allowed. I know there are important events to watch on your screens and that your friends desperately need to hear from you. Hold off. I can always spot someone using a laptop for other-than-classroom purposes, usually very quickly. I’ll pay attention to you; please respect me by according me the same courtesy. During quizzes and exams, desk tops will be clear of all electronic devices.

4. Stay focused on the course and its material. During class time, do not read material that is not related to the class, write letters, watch Dr. Phil or SportsCenter on your laptop or otherwise lose focus on what this class is about. If your head is somewhere else and I notice that you are distracted, you can expect that I shall call on you very soon!
5. Center comments on issues and ideas, not on people. It is one thing to make a critical comment about an idea (“I don’t think the idea of an established religion makes sense, for the following reasons....” and a very different thing to direct comments toward the person who expressed an opinion (“Established religion? You’re really dumb to say something like that.”) The society we shall try to create in our classroom will be characterized by mutual respect and personal dignity.

6. Absence from quizzes, exam or late written assignments: I expect you to turn in all your work at the announced time and to take the quizzes and exam at the right time. Only in extreme, emergency cases will a make-up or a delay be allowed. “The dog ate my homework” won’t work; control your pets.

7. There will be no provision for extra-credit work. You’ll have enough to do with the regular assignments.

8. Assistance: Because I am an adjunct (part-time) member of the faculty, I am not on campus except around the time of the class sessions. If you need to consult me, we can try to find time before or after class, and I shall certainly make myself available at my office which is located at 4402 Saratoga Blvd.

9. Freedom of Speech: Feel free to raise your hand with a question or comment. I shall acknowledge you, but I shall also try to finish the point that I am making. Once it is clear that I know you want to say something, you do not need to keep your hand up. As soon as possible, I shall give you the floor. There are no “dumb questions or comments.” Usually questions and comments point to my own failure to make something clear and what you say may help many others in the class understand a subject better. Active participation is welcome and encouraged.

10. Dropping the class: I hope you won’t have to do this, but sometimes it is necessary or wise. The University has established the following policy for dropping a class.

   “The grade of W will be assigned to any student dropping a course by the date stated in the class schedule (end of the tenth week of classes in the fall). No student is eligible to receive a W without completing the official drop process by this deadline. After the W date listed in the class schedule, a student will not be allowed to drop a course. During the refund period, the Change of Registration Form must be processed by the Business Office before submitting it to the Office of Admissions and Records. A change of section or a change to or from audit is a change of registration and requires that the add/drop process be followed.”

11. Academic Integrity: Cheating or plagiarism on an assignment or test or failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in a zero grade for the assignment in question. Plagiarism, even when unintentional, is a form of stealing, so it is better to err on the side of a more complete acknowledgement of sources. Particularly severe
cases will be reported to University officials for further action. You should know that there are web sites on which a paper can be scanned to see if it repeats materials that were already submitted by others and have been put in a bank of papers; it’s almost always obvious when this occurs. Bad idea.

THREE STATEMENTS OF UNIVERSITY POLICY

Academic Advising

The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty member and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203F and can be reached at 825-3466.

Notice to Students with Disabilities

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodation for qualified students with disabilities. If you suspect you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in Driftwood 101, at 825-5816. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

Grade Appeal Process

As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged first to discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeals Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.