

Advanced Seminar in Religion and Politics
PMGT 265.12
Spring Semester 2007
Course Syllabus

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Office Hours by Appointment

Scope of the Course:

This course is designed to further your understanding of the depth, breadth, diversity, and implications of the nexus between religion and politics in the United States. It is intended to serve as a means to consider how, when, why, and to what effect religious entities, leaders, or spokespersons (self-declared or otherwise) seek to impact the political process and public square. We will explore this phenomenon from the angle of American politics and political management. That is, our discussions, while they may appropriately explore the historical, philosophical, or theological, will center on religion as a component of our understanding of applied politics in 21st century American politics.

This is a seminar. That means we will DISCUSS. That means you have to READ the reading and THINK ABOUT THEM in the context of our discussion. Students will lead the discussion each week. You will produce a paper that focuses on one religious entity functioning in the political realm and analyze that organization's level of success in terms of input its measurable impact on either the electoral or legislative process. The organization is to be drawn primarily from national organizations.

Because of the nature of our area of study, I will on occasion invite guests to join us for our discussions. These guests will be drawn from the wide range of political and religious organizations in greater Washington and will reflect the breadth of political opinion, religious belief, and practical expertise available in the nation's capital.

Class Meeting Times:

Our regular meeting time is Mondays, 3:30-6:00 p.m. We may experiment with some sessions held on-line. This will depend in part on the subject matter and in part on your schedules. We will discuss this more fully during the first class.

Grading:

- Mid-semester presentation of research into a national political/religious organization: 30%
- Final Exam/Paper(due at the end of the semester): 35%
- Class Participation (attendance and contribution to discussion): 35%
Part of this grade will be based on your leadership of discussions in class. Each week, I will assign one of you to prepare a brief synopsis of that week's readings along with questions for class discussion that the readings raised.

Organization Research and Assessment:

Each student will identify and get my approval for a religious/political organization currently functioning on the national political scene. Once I have approved the topic of your analysis, you will be responsible researching and writing an in-depth assessment of the organization's:

- Stated mission of the organization;
- History, including major accomplishments or failures;
- Current agenda;
- Means by which the organization incorporates its religious core into its political activities;
- Assessment of the success/failure of that effort as measured by success or failure of those efforts;
- Recommendations for improvement.

Attendance and Participation:

This is designed as a seminar. That means it is NOT a lecture class. Do not expect to come to class and sit for 2 ½ hours and listen to me talk. I expect those who take this course to come to class with the assigned readings not only read, but considered. You should come with questions and observations based on the readings as well as your own experiences, assessments, and theories. Participation means contributing to class discussion. There is a difference between just talking and contributing to the discussion, after almost twenty years of teaching, and I know the difference. Contributing to the discussion assumes that my points about reading and thinking at the beginning of this paragraph have been digested and implemented.

Required Reading:

Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 5th Edition. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2003.

Andrew Kohut et. al. *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

Ralph Reed, *Active Faith*. New York, NY: Free Press, 1996.

Jon Meacham, *American Gospel*. New York, NY: Random House, 2006.

Gary Hart, *God and Caesar in America: An Essay on Religion and Politics*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Books, 2005.

Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics, 2nd Edition*. University of Chicago, 2002.

In addition to these traditional texts, we will draw on material in professional and academic writing as well as popular journalism, including some web-based materials, which will be provided at the appropriate time in our discussions. The front end of the class will be heavier on text readings. Once we get our bearings, more of the readings will be drawn from current literature and will be in the form of hand-outs, web-based, and Blackboard-based materials.

This course is a journey that we will take together. This area of study is new and developing as we look at it. I believe in being flexible. While there are core components that we must consider, there are areas of exploration and discussion that I am unaware of or unequipped to adequately address. I urge you to consider this a partnership where we all share responsibility for learning, all of which will not necessarily flow solely from me to you. While I hope that you will learn from me, I expect that you will also learn from each other. And I have never taught a course in which you, my students failed to teach me a few things. Please do not deny any of us this opportunity by failing to engage. While grades are obviously the “coin of the realm,” I hope that we can approach this with an appreciation for the value of learning, exchanging ideas, and evaluating and, where called for, incorporating each others’ insights into our thinking as a premiere benefit and goal.

Related Reading:

Robert Booth Fowler et. al., *Religion and Politics in America, Second Edition*. Westview Press, 1999.

Ray Suarez, *Holy Vote*. New York, NY; Harper Collins, 2006.

Michael Corbett & Julia Mitchell Corbet, *Politics and Religion in the United States*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Edith L. Blumhoffer, *Religion, Politics, and the American Experience*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002.

Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. New York: Orbis Book, 2002.

Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America Since 1945: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Mark J. Rozell & Clyde Wilcox, Eds., *God at the Grassroots 1996*. New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.

Ted G. Jelen, *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States*. New York: Praeger, 1989.

Allen D. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988.

Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics, 2nd Edition*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.

Glenn H. Utter & John W. Storey, *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 2001.

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Topics for Discussion

SESSION ONE:

Jan. 22nd: Introduction to the course and general discussion.

SESSION TWO,

Jan. 29th: **An Historical Perspective I:**

A Historical, Cultural, and Global Overview Historical and cultural core of the relationship between religion and politics; secular religion; religion in politics of other countries (video); religion, politics and the law (501(c)(3) implications.

Required Readings: Wald Chapters 1, 2; Meacham, Chapters 1, 2, 3.

SESSION THREE,

Feb. 5th: **A Sociological Perspective II:**

Assessment of sociological and political studies that consider the trends and implications of religion as a factor in individuals' approaches to understanding and addressing social/political questions in the public square.

Required Readings: Wald, Chapter 3, 4; Meacham, Chapters 4, 5, 6; Kohut, Chapters 2, 3.

SESSION FOUR:

Feb. 12th: **Conservative Theology/Conservative Politics I**

Consideration of the development and current state of the link between conservative Christianity & Republican politics.

Required Readings: Reed, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4; Wald, Chapters 5, 8.

February 19th is Presidents Day; no class.

SESSION FIVE:

Feb. 26th: **Conservative Theology/Conservative Politics II**

A continuation of our discussion.

Required Readings: Reed, Chapters 5, 6, 7; Wald, Chapters 6, 7.

SESSION SIX:

March 5th: Liberal Theology/Liberal Politics I

What have the liberal religious entities been up to? Why have we not heard from them? Is it intentional or are they clueless? What factors affect the relationship between the politically liberal and the theologically liberal?

Required Readings: Lakoff, Parts 1, 2, 3.

March 12th: First day of Spring Break; no classes.

SESSION SEVEN

Mar. 19th: Liberal Theology/Liberal Politics II.

A continuation of our earlier discussion.

Required Readings: Lakoff, Parts 4, 5, 6.

SESSION EIGHT

Mar. 26th: Student reports and discussion, first round.

SESSION NINE:

Apr. 2nd: Student reports and discussion, second round.

SESSION TEN:

Apr. 9th: Student reports and discussion, third round.

SESSION ELEVEN:

Apr. 16th: Is there a Center?

Like most organizations, religion-based groups tend over time to move to their outer edges. Political entities have recently done the same thing. Are there people who are left out of the debate as a result? Should the purveyors of religio-political messages care?

Required Readings: Wald, Chapters 9, 10, 11; Handouts.

SESSION TWELVE::

Apr. 23rd: Politics, Religion & the Media: Messages from the Left and the Right

The mass media plays a significant role in how we see the world. As gatekeepers, they create the frames through which we see ourselves and each other. How have they performed in presenting these complex and often nuanced viewpoints to the American people – especially American voters?

Required Readings: Kohut, Chapters 4, 5; Handouts.

SESSION THIRTEEN:

Apr. 30th: Religion and Politics in the Context of American Elections and Legislative Process

The electoral and legislative calendars, while different, are almost wholly dependent upon each other in the conduct of their business. How significantly do they affect the agendas of religious groups? Do religious groups have an impact on our legislative and/or electoral fortunes? Should they?

Required Readings: Wald, Chapter 12; Kohut Chapters 6, 7; Handouts.

SESSION FOURTEEN:

May 2nd: Wrap-Up, Discussion, Evaluation.