Course Description

Religion and politics seem deeply intertwined in the current political environment, both in a domestic (American) context as well as globally. In diverse and disconnected policy areas, including—among others—education, health care, family policy, environmental conservation, human rights, and conflict resolution, religious actors and institutions have become increasingly prominent participants in public debates and discourse.

In this class, we will explore some of these connections between the religious and the political and how the porous boundaries between the sacred and the secular make it possible for beliefs and practices in one area to affect the other. This is not a class on comparative theology. Instead, we will take a look at how we understand the role of religion in politics, both at home and abroad. In so doing, we will look at a range of cases where religion and politics intersect in the contemporary world and consider how institutional structures, political culture, religious beliefs, and religious practices interact with each other.

Course Materials

The following texts are required for this class and are available through the Carleton bookstore:


All other course readings will be available on Moodle. You are expected to do all the assigned readings before coming to class.
Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following elements, which will be weighted as follows:

- Participation: 20%
- Current events paper: 10%
- Content analysis coding: 10%
- Content analysis paper: 25%
- Final paper: 35%

Participation
Your grade for this component is based on your active engagement with the course material and, as such, is a measure of the quality of your contribution and not simply how much you talk in class. As with all seminars, which tend to involve more discussion than lecture, the success of this course will depend a great deal on the members of the class working together to examine concepts in a critical and rigorous manner. There will be a number of different ways in which you will be asked to show your involvement in the class, including large- and small-group discussions, serving as an occasional discussion leader, and making in-class presentations.

Your participation grade also captures your overall “citizenship” in the classroom; behaviors that will substantially lower your participation score include: repeated tardiness, unexplained absences, not paying attention during class (texting, using the internet, etc.), and engaging in disruptive or disrespectful behavior.

Current events paper
Throughout the term, you will each take a turn selecting a current events news article involving religion and politics and sending it to the members of the class to read by 8pm the night before class. We will set aside 10-15 minutes at the beginning of class to discuss this article and you will act as the discussion leader. One week after the in-class discussion you will turn in a short paper (4-5 pages, double-spaced) in which you comment/reflect on the current event in question while drawing on relevant in-class discussions/readings to support your analysis.

Content analysis coding
This is an exercise that will involve the entire class working together to compile and examine data on the rhetorical role of religion in the campaigns for and against same-sex marriage—a topical issue that is important at the international, national, and state levels. As a class, we will code some of the public campaign ads and appeals made by both supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage to investigate the role that religion plays in this public policy debate. We will focus on three past and one future campaigns: California’s Proposition 22 in 2000, which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman; California’s Proposition 8 in 2008, which overturned a 2005 law legalizing same-sex marriage; the New York legislature’s 2011 vote to legalize same-sex marriage; and the campaign materials that are starting to emerge around the proposed Minnesota Marriage Amendment, which will be on the 2012 ballot.

After a training session on how to do content coding of TV ads, speeches, and campaign literature, we will divide up the coding responsibilities among members of the class. Each individual will be responsible for completing his/her coding in a timely and accurate manner, and uploading the results to the common course dataset by Friday, October 7th.
Content analysis paper
Each person will write a medium-length (6-8 pages, double-spaced) paper analyzing some dimension of the information that the class has collected. This is not meant to be a research paper, nor is it meant to be a sophisticated data analysis exercise. Instead, you will focus on using the data to answer a question of your choosing (examples: do proponents and opponents of the MN Marriage Amendment mention religious arguments in their arguments/rebuttals to the same extent? Does the use of religious arguments in the California referenda seem to increase or decrease as election day draws closer? Is there a difference between the prominence/nature of religious arguments in California’s referenda and New York’s legislative vote? How does California’s Prop 8 campaign compare to the MN campaign thus far in terms of religious content?) I will provide a partial list of questions such as these that you can select, or you are free to propose your own question, so long as it can be answered using the collected class dataset. We will also set aside time in class for you to present the results of your analysis to your colleagues; this presentation will be worth 5% of your grade while the paper itself will be worth 20%. The paper will be due on Tuesday, October 18th.

Final paper
You will propose a topic for an independent research paper of 18-20 pages (double-spaced) that will be due on the last day of the exam period. There is no restriction on the paper topic so long as it involves religion and politics. For those students who plan to write their comp project during this class, this seminar paper will serve as the basis for your comp project. You are welcome to propose a more sophisticated and in-depth version of your short content analysis paper for your research paper.

To make the task of writing this paper less daunting, we will use the following schedule to break the process into more manageable pieces, which also allows me to help you with any difficulties you may have before they become overwhelming.

- First four weeks of the term
  - Meet with me to discuss possible paper topics
- Tuesday, October 11
  - Submit topic in writing for final approval
- Tuesday, October 25
  - Turn in literature review
- November 1-4
  - Meet to discuss literature review and research design
- Saturday, November 12
  - Turn in complete rough draft for peer review
- Tuesday, November 15
  - Turn in peer review comments
- Monday, November 21
  - Turn in complete final draft

Course Policies

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to come to class regularly and on time. If you are unable to attend due to illness or some other emergency, you should notify me by email, preferably in advance. A pattern of unexcused absences or tardiness may significantly lower your participation grade. If you need to miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to get notes from a classmate and then come see me in office hours to get up to speed on any material that you find
confusing. Please do not email me asking “did I miss anything important?” This does not please me because the answer to the question is always: yes.

**Late work**
Late work will incur a penalty of 1/3 grade for every 24 hours past the specified deadline unless you have been granted an extension based on some extenuating circumstances (ill health, family emergency). Technology failures, unless system-wide, will not excuse late work. Please try not to ask for extensions because you happen to be heavily scheduled during a particular week. The due dates for the entire term’s work are given on the first day specifically so you can plan your schedule out and manage your time accordingly.

**Internet/cell phones**
You are not to text, surf the internet, check email, Facebook, etc. during class. There is a zero tolerance policy in effect; if you are caught violating this expectation, your participation grade will be seriously affected.

**Plagiarism and academic dishonesty**
You are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity in this class, submitting only your own work and not taking credit for work done by anyone else. Anyone caught plagiarizing, cheating, or otherwise violating the rules of academic honesty at Carleton will automatically receive a zero for the assignment and will have the case referred to the Dean’s office for further investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Because academic dishonesty comes in many forms, we will discuss and clarify some of these standards (especially with respect to citations) prior to your writing assignments. You are also strongly encouraged to familiarize yourself with the College’s website on academic honesty, which is available at http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/.

**Special needs**
If you require special accommodation due to a documented physical or learning disability, please come see me during the first week of class to discuss how I might best assist you in meeting the objectives and requirements of this course.

**A note on classroom climate**
This class deals with sensitive and emotionally laden subjects. In order to have discussions that are productive, challenging, and thought-provoking, we must respect the diversity of views that people might have on issues of religion and politics and make the classroom a safe space in which to share and critique others’ ideas. At no time will derogatory, insulting, or rude comments about others in the class and/or about different faiths/belief systems be tolerated. I will try to enforce this rule, but ask you to assist me by choosing your own words thoughtfully and being willing to call others (in a respectful and non-confrontational way) on inadvertent violations.

Making the classroom a safe and supportive place for discussion does not mean, however, that you are free to share your beliefs uncritically and unchallenged. We will push people to explain their reasoning, examine their assumptions and think about topics in ways that might be, in some cases, quite difficult—especially for those among us who may have very strong personal beliefs or opinions on some of these matters. The goal here is not to stifle debate and analysis,
but to set the ground rules for how to debate and analyze sensitive topics in a fair, civil, and constructive way.

If, at any point in time, you feel as if the classroom climate is not welcoming or supportive, I strongly encourage you to come speak with me in private so that we can address problems as they arise so that they do not interfere with your learning. If you feel more comfortable raising your concerns anonymously, you can also approach a member of the faculty or staff that you trust who can pass along your comments to me while keeping your identity confidential.

Schedule of Readings

Please be advised: as a 300-level seminar, this class has a moderately heavy reading load, mostly in the first half of the term. I will post reading guides on Moodle to help you navigate the material more easily. Readings available on Moodle are marked (M).

Tuesday, September 13  
Introduction to religion and politics

Thursday, September 15  
Theorizing the sacred and the profane
  •  Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God’s Century*, ch. 1-2
  •  Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book IV, ch. 8 (M)

Tuesday, September 20  
Modernity, secularism, and religion
  •  Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God’s Century*, ch. 3

Religion and Politics in the US

Thursday, September 22  
Religion in American public life

Tuesday, September 27  
Religion and US elections
[visit from Danya Leebaw, social sciences reference librarian]
  •  Folwer, et. al, *Religion and Politics in America*, ch. 4-6
Thursday, September 29  Case study: same-sex marriage

Tuesday, October 4  Religion and US foreign policy

Religion in Non-Western Societies

Thursday, October 6  Religion and state atheism

Tuesday, October 11  Secular vs. religious nationalism
  • “Will the Arab Spring Bring US-Style “Culture Wars” to the Middle East?” *Reuters*, June 21, 2011. (M)

Religious Fundamentalism

Thursday, October 13  Fundamentalism and modernity

Tuesday, October 18  In-class film: “Jesus Camp”

Thursday, October 20  Religious terrorism
  • Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God’s Century*, ch. 5
Tuesday, October 25  In-class presentations

Thursday, October 27  In-class presentations

Tuesday, November 1  The clash of civilizations debate

**Religion and Political Activism**

Thursday, November 3  Religion, war, and peace
  • Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God's Century*, ch. 6-7

Tuesday, November 8  Religion and peace
  • Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God’s Century*, ch. 7

Thursday, November 10  Religion and rights

Tuesday, November 15  Wrap-up and concluding thoughts