POSC 332: Religion and Politics
Carleton College, Spring 2008

Professor: Devashree Gupta
Office: Willis 404
Telephone: x4681
Email: dgupta@carleton.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-3:00
Thursday 3:30-5:00

COURSE OVERVIEW:

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

In this class, we will try to come to a deeper understanding of some of these patterns and interactions 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 theology or belief systems; I am no theologian and do not pretend to be an expert on any of the faiths that we consider in this class. Instead, we will take a careful look at how we theorize about the role of religion in politics and how theory can, in turn, help us better understand a range of concrete cases and challenges in contemporary politics, both at home and abroad.

TEXTS:

There are three required texts for this class, all of which have been ordered through the Carleton bookstore:


Additional readings, mostly journal articles or excerpts from other books, will be made available on Moodle and/or the library’s e-reserve page.
**Course Requirements:**

Your performance in this class will be evaluated based on written work and class participation. The specific graded elements and their weights are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Element</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current events analysis &amp; presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-review of paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation**

This is a seminar, and as such, your regular, active participation and involvement is not only expected, but required for the success of the course. As a result, you should come to class having read the assigned material carefully and critically and ready to engage in discussion with me and with your peers. Please note that simple attentiveness in class will not be enough to earn a good participation grade! If you are someone who finds it difficult to speak in class, PLEASE come see me early in the term so we can discuss strategies to put you at ease. Unexcused absences, habitual lateness to class, and disruptive or discourteous behavior during discussions will all count against you.

As part of your participation grade, you will all take a turn serving as a discussion leader for one class session. As discussion leader, it is your responsibility to (a) briefly present the core ideas from the reading to the class, (b) develop a list of questions based on these ideas to generate discussion and a closer examination of the material, and (c) assist me in moderating and developing the subsequent discussion. You are expected to post your discussion questions on the course Moodle page no later than 10pm the night before your designated discussion day. Everyone else is expected to take a look at those questions before coming to class.

**Reaction papers**

Response papers are short (1-2 page, double-spaced) critiques of one of the assigned readings from the syllabus. They are not article or chapter summaries, though the very first paragraph should briefly review the main ideas that the authors advance. The remainder of the response paper should involve your critical reactions and reflections on the piece, its strengths and its weaknesses. You might want to consider the following kinds of questions as you write these response papers: what evidence is presented to support the argument and is it compelling? Are the assumptions or logical arguments that are made defensible? How do the arguments fit in with other theories or arguments we have encountered in class? Are there conflicting points of view or claims, and if so, which have more merit? Is there a way to reconcile such conflicts? Has the argument changed the way you think about the issue?

*Please note: there is no possible way you can entertain all of these questions in such a short paper! Use the above prompts to guide your thinking about the piece, even if you don’t address all of them in your writing.*

Readings that are eligible for response are indicated with an asterisk. You may choose any two readings that are of interest to you; however, you are not permitted to choose readings that are from your assigned discussion leader day. Papers are due in class on the day when that reading is assigned. Late papers will not be accepted; if you are unable to turn in a response paper on a given day, you will have to choose another reading later in the course.
**Current events analysis & presentation**
For the current events journal, you will be asked to select a topic or contemporary controversy involving religion and politics, either in the United States or another part of the world. You will follow the news coverage of this topic by gathering information about the different sides of the controversy, the issues at stake, the actors and organizations involved, and any developments that have recently taken place. You will then write a 3-5 page, double-spaced analysis of the topic. In addition, during the 7th week of the term, we will set aside class time to discuss the different current events that you have been researching. Each individual will be responsible for (a) posting on Moodle a news article that provides some basic background information about his/her topic on the day before the scheduled presentation, (b) giving a brief (less than 10 minute) overview of the topic, and (c) helping lead a brief discussion about the topic.

**Final paper**
The culmination of the seminar is the final research paper, which should be tied to one of the themes or ideas from this class. The final paper topic and format can vary based on student interests and whether this seminar will be the basis for a future comps project, but in all cases should be between 15-20 pages in length. Students should plan to consult with me early in the course to devise a suitable research topic and plan. Given the length of the term and how quickly it goes by, you are advised to start thinking about this paper as soon as possible. To pace your work, the following timetable indicates when you should plan to have intermediary steps completed. You are expected to complete all of these steps by the specified dates. Failure to do so will affect your final paper grade.

**Timetable**

- **By Thursday, April 17**: Have your topic approved by me (verbally or in writing). Please note: you should not proceed with your research without having your topic approved!
- **By Tuesday, April 29**: Submit an initial research bibliography of at least one single-spaced page containing scholarly sources AND a one-page (double-spaced) appraisal of the sources you have consulted thus far (e.g., what sources seem to be most/least helpful or relevant, areas where you are confident in the depth of material, and topics where you are having difficulty finding sufficient research or data).
- **By Thursday, May 15**: Submit a draft of your thesis/argument along with an overall paper outline (between 2-3 pages, single-spaced)
- **By Thursday, May 29**: Submit a complete working draft to your peer reviewer
- **By Tuesday, June 3**: Submit your peer review comments in writing to the original author with a copy to me
- **By Monday, June 9***: Submit your final draft electronically (to Moodle) **BY NOON**.

*** Seniors should turn in their final papers by midnight on Saturday, June 7th in order to allow sufficient time to evaluate your work and submit grades before graduation.

**Peer Review**
Part of the research process is giving and getting feedback from your peers. You will each be assigned to serve as a reviewer for someone else in the class. On May 29th, you will be given a complete draft of your partner’s paper. You are expected to read it carefully and provide critical, constructive feedback on all aspects of the draft—argument, evidence, organization, writing style. You will type up your comments and submit one copy to me and return one copy to the original author on June 3rd. Your score for the peer review will be based on how thoughtfully, conscientiously, and thoroughly you comment on your partner’s draft.
Course Policies:

Policy on Late Work
Late work will only be accepted in cases of a documented medical or personal emergency. Response papers that are not turned in on the day a reading was assigned will not be accepted; you will simply have to turn in another response paper in the future. Late mid-term exams and final papers will be penalized by 1/3 letter grade per day (e.g., from a B+ to a B).

Policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty
You are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty, which means attributing work that is not your own using correct/appropriate citations. If you have any questions about how to do so, please check with me. You may also want to consult Carleton’s policy on academic honesty:

(http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/dos/handbook/academic_regs/?policy_id=21359)

Anyone caught cheating or passing off work that is not their own will receive a zero for the assignment and be subject to additional penalties from the Academic Standing Committee.

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

A note on classroom climate
This class deals with subjects that are sensitive and emotionally charged. In order to have discussions that are productive, challenging, and thoughtful, 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 the same time, this is not simply a space to share beliefs uncritically. We will push people to explain their reasoning, examine their assumptions, and think about topics in ways that might be, in some cases, difficult – especially for those of us who may have very strong personal beliefs or opinions on these matters. Above all, classroom discussions should be constructive and never dismissive, derogatory, or involve personal or ad hominem attacks. 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.
Topics and Readings:

E= reading is available on e-reserve through the library (password=posc)
M=reading is available on Moodle
* = reading is eligible for a reaction paper

I. Introduction

Tuesday, April 1: Course overview and foundational concepts

Thursday, April 3: Theorizing the sacred and the profane

- Fowler, et. al, Religion and Politics in America, ch. 12
- Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, Book IV, ch. 8 (M)

II. Religion in a domestic context

Tuesday, April 8: Religion in American public life

- Fowler, et. al, Religion and Politics in America, ch. 1-3, 10 *

Thursday, April 10: Elections and voting

- Fowler, et. al, Religion and Politics in America, ch. 4-6 *

Tuesday, April 15: Religion and the courts

- Fowler, et. al, Religion and Politics in America, ch. 8-9 *

Thursday, April 17: Policymaking, lobbying, and social movements


Tuesday, April 22: No class!

Thursday, April 24: No class!
III. Religion and politics in a comparative context

Tuesday, April 29: Secularization

- Norris and Inglehart, Sacred and Secular, entire *

Thursday, May 1: State control and suppression


Tuesday, May 6: Fundamentalism, pt. I


Thursday, May 8: Fundamentalism, pt. II

- Fair, The Madrassah Challenge, entire *

Tuesday, May 13: Discussion/presentations of current events

Thursday, May 15: Discussion/presentations of current events

IV. Topics at the intersection of religion and politics

Tuesday, May 20: Religion and conflict


Thursday, May 22: Religion and human rights

Tuesday, May 27: Religion, gender, and sexuality

- Fowler, et. al, Religion and Politics in America, ch. 11

Thursday, May 29: Religion and democracy


Tuesday, June 3: Wrap-up discussion