

Bellevue College

SOC 246 Religion & Our Social World

Fully Online Course

Dr. Sara Sutler-Cohen

2016 Winter Quarter

January 4 - March 23

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Office Hours: Online Only. Email for appointment.

[Email](#)

[Website](#)

****Please always email me through the Canvas site first.
If you don't hear from me within 24 hours, then email at the above address.****

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course acquaints you with sociological concepts and perspectives around the broad definition and concepts of the idea of Religion. We are, in this class, ever-mindful that Religion in America is a political, cultural, and social institution and to that end, attempting a critical understanding of it through the lens of sociology makes it both intimately familiar and understandable. Through lecture, film and other media, and assigned readings, this course takes you on an exploration of the many dimensions of contemporary cultural and sociological perspectives on the idea of Religion and religious topics, including but not limited to religious dominance, music and religion, death and dying, sexuality/race/class/gender and religion, as well as cults in America. We will also be making broad use of popular culture to understand the many complexities of the ideas around Religion in the United States, including its ever-questioning relationship with education, family and politics.

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A NOTE ABOUT COURSE CONTENT: Since sociologists examine just about every aspect of the social world, we talk about provocative material. Please be advised that when we explore controversial topics, they will always be framed within an academic context. Keeping in mind that when we find ourselves in a space outside of our comfort zone, it's an opportunity for learning, and you may be confronted with subject matter that is difficult to watch, see, discuss, or listen to. Please note, however, that you will be responsible for any course material you miss if you choose not to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about content or climate, feel free to speak with me about it right away.

READING REQUIREMENTS:

- Furseth, Inger and Pål Repstad. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*. 2007. Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Handouts and articles. All handouts (syllabus included) are available on Canvas. It is your responsibility to download all required material.

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED:

- Any current Dictionary of the English Language
- Any current Sociology Dictionary
- *A Writer's Reference, 6th Ed.* By Diana Hacker. See the [companion website](#).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you have medical information to share with me in the event of an emergency, please contact me via email or come to see me during office hours. Emergency preparedness is important! If you need course modifications, adaptations, or accommodations because of a disability, I can refer you to our Disability Resource Center (DRC). If you prefer, you may contact them directly by going to B132 or by calling 425.564.2498 or TTY 425.564.4110. Information is also available on their [website](#).

EXPLORE THE LMC! The Library Media Center is at your fingertips! I *strongly* encourage you to visit the LMC at least once a week, but you can also access it via the web. Talk to a Reference Librarian at the Library (D-126), by calling (425) 564-6161, or by [email](#).

- [Main Library Media Center](#)
- [For article databases](#)

LEARNING AND COURSE OUTCOMES: Upon your dedicated participation and subsequent completion of this course, you will demonstrate:

- 1) A general understanding of basic concepts and ideas around the Sociology of Religion.
- 2) A general understanding of and the ability to critically recognize basic concepts and ideas around Religion, including the use of religious symbols, icons, and popular conceptions of things like worship or death around the world.
- 3) An awareness of the way in which popular culture has shaped the beliefs, structures and practices of religious groups (and vice versa), particularly in the United States.
- 4) A critical idea of U.S. and global society and social, political and cultural rules about Religion.
- 5) The ability to think critically about the various ways in which we construct ideas of our Selves as against the landscape of Religion (whether we think it defines us or not). How do we define ourselves as a member or nonmember of an organized religion, and why is that important in developing a sense of Self?
- 6) A general understanding of popular culture and religion, and religious popular culture.
- 7) A general understanding of the relationship between American religious ideologies and the political, social, and cultural climate in the United States today.

**GENERAL RULES & EXPECTATIONS:**

- Check in to our online classroom no less than *four times per week* (yes – I do keep track!). This means you log on and surf around the site. No need to check in with me. Make this work for you on your own time.
- Complete readings and homework assignments *on time*. I do not check whether you complete your readings; this is on the honor system! You do need to read your required



material in order to complete homework assignments. Skimming is not an option.

- Except for your New Religion assignments, late homework *is accepted*, but *late exams are not*. Do not email me asking for special treatment or favors. You're responsible for your own work. Again, no late New Religion assignments. There are no exceptions for this, unless there is a medical emergency. I require proof.
 - Late homework is docked 10% for every day the work is late, including Saturdays and Sundays.
 - Late Discussion Boards that do not include responses to colleagues are eligible only for half credit. Responses to your colleagues are due three days after the Initial Posts are due (see schedule for details). A large part of these assignments is your communication with other students. Late points are assessed separately. So, if you turn in your Initial Post and Responses on Saturday, your Initial Post is two days late, but your responses are on time. Think of them as separate assignments in the way they're graded.
- I expect that your behavior in our virtual classroom be respectful. Continued disrespectful behavior in my class will result in your grade lowering. Please keep your postings to discussion boards (DBs) thoughtful and polite. One-on-one conversations should be taken off-board and onto email so our DBs don't get clogged. If you find at any point that you are uncomfortable with anything posted to a DB, please email me right away. Be wary of soap boxing in this class; you may be tempted to present your opinion and editorialize, but refrain from doing this.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: In this course you will be completing assigned readings, participating in discussion board assignments, working on a Team Project, and completing short homework assignments. The work you do for this class will keep you critically engaged with the world around you from a sociological perspective. There are scheduled exams for this course; be sure to prepare. Expect to be writing every week. The key to this course is your thoughtful reflection on course material.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (DETAILS):

Attendance and Participation*:	150 points <i>collected via 6 – 25 point assignments</i>
Critical Reflections (5):	125 points <i>25 points each</i>
Main Discussion Boards (3):	150 points <i>50 points each, note description below</i>
Key Terms Assignments (3):	75 points <i>25 points each</i>
Midterm Examination (I):	150 points
Final Examination (I):	200 points
New Religion Project (Team assignments):	75 points <i>25 points each</i>
New Religion Individual Assignment:	75 points
TOTAL:	925 points possible

Remember: Falling behind can be hazardous to your health!
The Fine Print (or, what I really mean by that table above):

Participation points accrue with various short assignments in the Discussion Area, such as your Introductory DB. These are labeled PARTICPATION DBs. The Main DB assignments are labeled MAIN DBs.

Attendance & Participation: Check in no less than four times per week, be engaged with all of your discussion board assignments, provoke energetic and polite discussion, listen/read/comprehend actively, work respectfully with your colleagues in class, take loads of notes from your readings, look up words you don't understand, ask questions, think critically about the world around you, etc. Make use of the Q&A Board as well as our Internet Café. These are not scored, but even if you don't have questions, you might be able to answer somebody's query – so have some presence there.

Critical Reflections: You are reading comic books, novels, watching films, and reviewing scholarly essays in your main textbook. *Keep up with the reading.* Your Critical Reflections are either 1-2 paragraph answers to a series of questions I pose to you, or short free-form essays. If you're writing essays for the Crits, they will be 2-3 pages in length (writing guidelines are listed below).

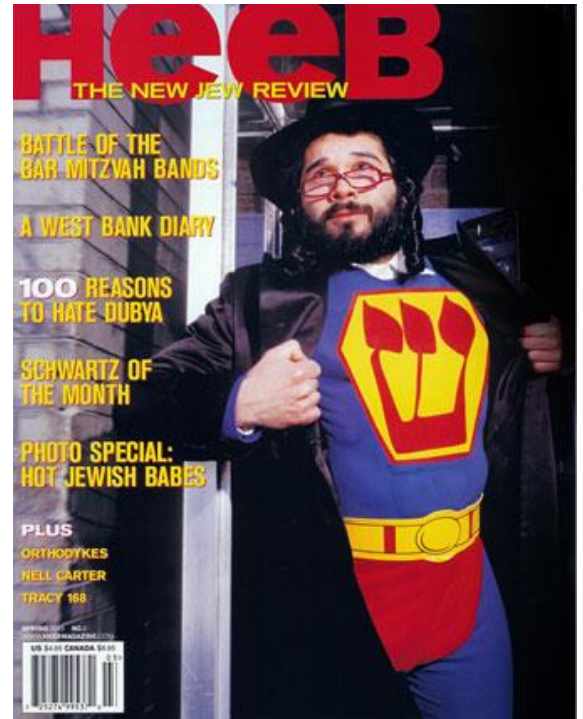
Main Discussion Board Assignments: The work done in the Discussion Board area will have you engage course material and work closely together. You are expected to participate in these assignments in order to generate critical discussion amongst one another. Be aware that some of these require a few days, or even a week, of preparatory work. Make sure you look ahead at your homework! This method of learning gets you going socially and is in place to mimic live and in-person discussions in the classroom. These assignments are always due on Thursdays and Sundays (your initial posts go up Thursdays and your responses to one another are due by Sundays). Your DBs are graded on two things: your original post and your responses (usually two of them) to your colleagues' Initial Posts. You must do both to earn full credit. A submission with no responses posted earns ½ credit at most, and responses without an original submission receive zero credit. Important note: Responding to people in your own thread is great, you should do it. But you won't get those Response Points for them. You must respond to others' initial posts. In addition, when I pop in and engage in the dialogue (I don't always do this, but I will on occasion), it's great to respond to me, but you also do not get points for this. Keep an eye out for my responses; I may be trying to help you improve your grade.

Participation Discussion Board Assignments: These are meant to support you throughout the course. They are required and the grades get folded into your overall Participation Grade.

Key Terms Assignments: You will be expected to understand certain terms used in the field of the Sociology of Religion. For these assignments, you will need to demonstrate your understanding by viewing the accompanying Prezis and following the instructions therein.

Exams: Your Exams cover everything up through the week they're given, and are short-answer questions. Your responses should be clear and concise. Your responses will range from no less than **one full paragraph**, to two **full paragraphs**. Your syllabus and modules should fill in as your study guides.

New Religion: You will have one large quarter-long assignment with two other students this term, where you'll create a New Religion and turn in the final project at the end of class. There are three assignments



worth 25 points each that you'll do with your team members throughout the quarter. At the end of the second week of class, I will team up people who need partners, but feel free to group up how you would like. **If by the end of Week Three you have not been active in your team, your team will be reassigned. All Teams need to be active by Week Four. Be active with your team. Late work is *never accepted* for New Religion Assignments. No exceptions, not ever.**

For all of your written work: Submit proofread work **only**. Work not proofread will be returned **once** for a rewrite, expected to be handed in within 48 hours. If you need help with your writing, please make use of the following student support services:

- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [TRiO Student Support Services](#)

Required Writing Guidelines:

- Twelve-point sized Times font, double-spaced
- 1" margins all around
- APA Citations where appropriate - credit must be given even where any *ideas* presented in the paper are not your own (see notes below about avoiding plagiarism)
- Title pages and bibliographies are not counted as pages due
- Student information is at the top left of the page, single spaced
- There are no extra spaces between paragraphs.
- Paragraphs contain no less than four sentences.
- Magazines, newspapers, journals, and books are *italicized*. Movie titles, article titles, song titles, etc. are "in quotation marks." Quotes inside of a quotation use 'single quotation marks.'
- Avoid the universal "we", "our", "us" - ask yourself: Can I speak for everyone? If you cannot, do not write it. Also avoid phrasing such as "nowadays..." and "since the beginning of time." Be accurate. Know what you're writing and why.
- Do not ever use Wikipedia, CliffNotes, or other such encyclopedic references. Wikipedia is not peer-reviewed and therefore unreliable. Do your own research. If you're going to research online (which is absolutely encouraged and totally legit), make sure you understand what you're looking for. Do a deep dive into the internet to find your stuff.
- Be sure that no more than 20% of your papers are outside sources. You must be providing your own analysis while you draw from material presented to you in class.



Your work is evaluated on:

- 1) Content
 - a. Fulfilling the entire assignment. Doing the minimum amount of work expected will likely get you a passing grade, but not an outstanding one. You're expected to go the extra mile.

- b. Fully developing your argument(s) and making use of examples and evidence to support your argument(s).
 - c. Flow of thought throughout the paper, with strong analyses and conclusions.
 - d. Assignments eligible for high marks must present evidence that all material has been reviewed.
- 2) Writing Style
- a. Reasonable command of the written English language. **If you struggle with grammar and spelling, *please take advantage of the college's resources.* You are responsible for your own writing and my expectation is that you submit readable, thoughtful work.**
 - b. Clarity of thought.
 - c. Good organization and attention to detail.
 - d. Persuasiveness of your argument/s.
 - e. Creativity. Make it an interesting read!
 - f. **PROOFREAD** your work. Please do a spell/grammar check before you hand it in. Read it out loud to yourself, too! It really helps.
 - g. Dude, like totally don't write **colloquially**. A conversation is a conversation. A paper is an entirely different way of presenting your research and ideas. ☺

Preventing Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty occurring when students use information or material from outside sources and do not properly cite those sources. This is grounds for disciplinary action. It is your responsibility to understand plagiarism and its consequences. Plagiarism occurs if:

- a. You do not cite quotations and/or attribute borrowed ideas.
- b. You fail to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks.
- c. You do not write summaries and paraphrases in his/her own words and/or doesn't document his/her source.
- d. You turn in work created by another person.
- e. You submit or use your own prior work for a current or past course, or work from one current course in another course *without express permission* from your professors. This may also be considered academic dishonesty.
- f. Consequences: If it is determined that you have plagiarized or engaged in other forms of academic dishonesty, you will likely fail the assignment and possibly the course, despite points earned through other work. Acts of academic dishonesty are reviewed for disciplinary action.

Grading:

Please use the following rubric to help explain the grade you're given for a given assignment. Please do not hesitate to come to me with any questions you ever have on a grade you receive. There is no limit to how many times you email me! My email door is *always* open and I'm always happy to go over grades with you. I'm also on campus Monday through Friday and am available to meet in person during my office hours or by appointment.

A: 94-100
A-: 90-93
B+: 87-89
B: 84-86
B-: 80-83

C+: 77-79
C: 74-76
C-: 70-73
D+: 67-69
D: 64-66
D-: 60-63
F: 59 and below

90-100 = A. “A” work shows me you’re engaged with all course material by utilizing quotes and ideas. It is writing *completely free* from grammar and spelling errors, demonstrating your command not only of the English language, but of the form and flow of a solid piece of written work. I also like to see/read/hear your “writing voice.” That is, I want your style to come through! Your arguments should be solid and backed up with intellectual ammunition. You should demonstrate a strong understanding of our readings and the in-class media and how they intersect with one another. Your ideas should be “fleshed out” and not just a series of statements, in other words.

80-89 = B. The “B” tells me you’re doing very good work. You may have a couple of grammar issues, but your work is still tidy and the writing is still strong. You have a firm grasp on the themes in the course but you may not be as well-versed in the readings and/or media and/or lecture material as you could be. I should see that you’re being challenged and that you’re struggling with the course issues and themes, and what they represent to you in an interconnected way. Your understandings of some of the course materials are stronger than others.

70-79 = C. “C” work means that you’re not as invested in the material as I would like to see. Your writing is relatively weaker than it could be and you’re not thinking as critically as I would like you to. You write the bare minimum of the length requirement. Some of what you point out I may not follow logically, and your use of the course materials may not be as solid as it could be. You omit some of the important points raised in class.

60-69 = D. Ah, the “D.” “D” is for “Don’t be Discouraged.” I will work closely with each of you as much as time allows, getting you up to speed in class. Your struggles should not be with writing so much at this point but if they are please see me immediately. “D” work is not proofread, nor does it deal critically with the themes in the course. It responds, perhaps, to one part of one of the readings but there is little-to-no integration of material and you’re not responding to the questions raised in the assignment. Demonstrated understanding of the course materials is not presented clearly, or at all. (NOTE: A “D” and below may be rewritten **once** if you choose to do so. It must be turned in within 72 hours, and I enter the better grade.)



COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

**ASSIGNMENTS ARE ALWAYS DUE BY MIDNIGHT
DO NOT WORK AHEAD MORE THAN ONE WEEK
THE SYLLABUS SCHEDULE IS MIRRORED IN THE MODULES SECTION OF THE COURSE.**

Week One: January 4th

Thematic Overview:

- Introduction to this course
- The sociological imagination
- The religious imagination
- The sociology of religion

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Ch. I, “Sociological perspectives on religion”
- Sociological Imagination Power Point presentation

Assignments:

- Participation DB I: Introductions & Goals Setting. Due Sunday, 1/10
- Participation DB II: What is The Sociology of Religion? Due Sunday, 1/10

Quote of the Week:

“I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.” -- Susan B. Anthony

Week Two: January 11th

New Religion Teams assigned (feel free to group up on your own, just let me know you’re doing this)

Thematic Overview:

- Classical theorists
- The phenomenology of religion

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Chs. 2 & 3, “Religion as a phenomenon – definitions and dimensions” & “Classical sociologists and their theories of religion”

Assignments:

- Key Terms Assignment I Due Sunday, 1/17
- Main DB I Due Thursday, 1/14, responses by Sunday, 1/17

Quote of the Week:

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” -- Marcus Garvey

Week Three: January 19th

Campus Holiday on Monday, January 18th

Thematic Overview:

- Culture and the sociological shaping of contemporary religiosity
- Is it Real? Is it Imagined? Can it be both?

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Ch. 4, “Religion in contemporary sociology and cultural analysis”
- New Religion Handout

Assignments:

- Main DB 2: First Submission Due Thursday, 1/21; Responses Due Sunday, 1/24

- New Religion Teams Activation Assignment due by Sunday, 1/24
 - Note: If you do not fully participate in this assignment, you will be moved to another group immediately.

Quote of the Week:

“We created god in our own image and likeness!” - George Carlin

Week Four: January 25th

Thematic Overview:

- The “great” narratives
- Who the Hell... *What* the Hell? Anti-Religion and Church Burning
- Black Metal Philosophy: Is there a *there*, there?

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*: Ch. 5, “The great narratives: Modernity, postmodernity, globalization, and secularization”
- Readings from [Black Metal Theory Symposium](#)
 - This text is available as an [ebook](#).
 - Click on “Read the book online for free” or “Read the book on mobile devices”. Then you can search for these chapters.
 - “BASileus philosoPHOrum METaloricum” by Scott Wilson
 - “Transcendental Black Metal” by Hunter Hunt-Hendrix
 - “Anti-Cosmosis: Black Mahapralaya” by Nicola Masciandaro

Film:

- [Until The Light Takes Us](#)

Assignments:

- Key Terms II Due Sunday, January 31st
- Critical Thinking Paper I Due Sunday, January 31st
- Participation III: Mid-Term Preparation. Due Sunday, January 31st

Quote of the Week:

“Lay down your soul to the gods rock n’ roll” -- Venom – *Black Metal* (1982)

Week Five: February 1st

Midterm Week

- You have from February 1st (midnight) until Sunday, February 7th (11:59pm) to complete your exam. It is not timed, so you will not be locked out of it. However, you *may not save and return to it*. Once you begin your exam, you must finish it. This exam is open note and open book. You are held to the standards in this syllabus for writing guidelines and plagiarism. Your exams will be compared to your colleagues in class to scan for academic dishonesty. Good luck!

Quote of the Week:

“Difference of opinion is helpful in religion.” -- Thomas Jefferson

Week Six: February 8th

Thematic Overview:

- Where does religion lie?

- The politics of religion, the religion of politics
- New ageism and saving the world through religious engagement of the “Other”

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Ch. 6, “Religion in the public sphere”

Assignments:

- Main DB 3: First Submission Due Wednesday, 2/11; Responses Due Saturday, 2/14

Quote of the Week:

“A cult is a religion with no political power.” - Tom Wolfe

Week Seven: February 16th
No Classes on Monday, February 15th

Thematic Overview:

- Religion as personal endeavor
- Religious organizations
- New Religious Movements
- The stuff of cults

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Chs. 7 & 8, “Individual religiosity” & “Religious organizations and movements”

Assignments:

- Critical Thinking Paper 2: Journal on *Introduction to Sociology of Religion* due Sunday, February 21st
- Participation Discussion 4: New Religion Assignment II due Sunday, February 21st

Quote of the Week:

“There is no death. Only a change of worlds.” - Chief Seattle [Seath], (Suquamish)

Week Eight: February 22nd

Thematic Overview:

- “Killing in the name of. . .”
- “Saving in the name of. . .”
- Schedule final presentations

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*. Ch. 9, “Religion, social unity, and conflict”

Assignments:

- Key Terms Assignment III due Sunday, 2/28
- New Religion III due Sunday, 2/28

Quote of the Week:

“All you touch and all you see is all your life will ever be.” -- Roger Waters

Week Nine: February 29th

Thematic Overview:

- Inequality and identity
- Race and ethnicity in religion
- Gender and sexuality in religion

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*: Chs. 10 & 11, “Race, ethnicity, and religion” & “Religion and gender”

Assignments:

- Participation Board 5 – Learning Outcomes. Due Sunday, March 6th

Quote of the Week:

“The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” -- Oscar Wilde

Week Ten: March 7th

Thematic Overview:

- The sociology of faith
- Theological sociology, sociological theology

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*: Ch. 12, “Sociology, theology, and religious faith”

Assignments:

- New Religion Final due Sunday, March 13th

Quote of the Week:

“Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible. -- Frank Zappa

Week Eleven: March 14th

Thematic Overview:

- ...and in the end...
- Final Exam Film – TBD

Assignments:

- Final Participation Discussion Board – Outro. Due Sunday, March 20th

Quote of the Week:

“Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.” - Albert Einstein

Final Exams Week: March 21st - 23rd

Final Exam will be open from 8am 3/21 through midnight 3/23

Exam will time out after four hours. Do not start the exam unless you intend to finish it during your chosen time period.

Thank you for a wonderful term!