

Bellevue Community College

SOC 246 Sociology of Religion
Sara Sutler-Cohen, Ph.D.

Winter Term January 5th – March 23rd
Daily 10:30 – 11:20 C-164
Office Hours Daily 11:30 – 12:30

Phone: (425) 564-5722 Office: A100-D
Email: ssutler@bellevuecollege.edu
Website: <http://sarasutlercohen.com>



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.

Check out BC Sociology's MySpace page and add us as a Friend!
<http://www.myspace.com/bccsoc>

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 MyBCC. It is your responsibility to download all required material. Nothing will be printed out for you.

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 here: <http://www.dianahacker.com/>

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 at <http://bellevuecollege.edu/drc/>

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 bccref@bcc.ctc.edu.

- **Main Library Media Center:** <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/>
- **For the LMC online catalog:** <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/catalogs.html>
- **For article databases:** <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/periodicals.html>

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:



- Come to class every day and ***on time*** (yes - I do keep track!).
- Complete readings and homework assignments ***on time***.
- Emailed assignments ***are not accepted*** without prior arrangement.
- Late homework assignments ***are accepted***, but make-up exams and make-up in-class assignments ***are not***.
 - Late homework is docked 10% for every day the work is late, including Saturdays and Sundays.
 - If you miss an in-class assignment, you

may not make it up. **Please see me if you participate in extracurricular activities at BCC that take you away from campus.**

- I expect that your behavior in our classroom be respectful. Continued disrespectful behavior in my class may result in your being asked to leave and will result in your grade lowering. **Electronic devices are *not allowed* without permission.**
- **There are no extra credit assignments for this class.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: For this course, you will be writing short response papers on readings and discussion from class, which are both meant to engage the process of understanding religion and religious practice from a sociological perspective. There is a Midterm and a Final this quarter. You will also be doing one major project at the end of the term, which you can do in pairs, alone, or in a group. The project will be your brainchild - all you need to do is relate it to course material. What you decide to do is up to you and we'll discuss this during the first couple of weeks into the course.

Remember: Falling behind can be hazardous to your health!

ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND ASSIGNMENT DETAILS:

Attendance and Participation:	150 points
Response Papers (3):	150 points
Final Project (1):	200 points
In-Class Assignments (3):	150 points
Course Midterm (1):	125 points
Course Final (1):	225 points
TOTAL:	1000 points

The Fine Print (or, what I really mean by that table above):

Attendance & Participation: Come to class and on time regularly, provoke energetic and polite discussion, speak out, listen actively, work diligently and respectfully with your colleagues in class, take loads of notes in class and from your readings, look up words you don't understand or know, ask questions, etc. Think critically about the world around you. A lot. There are also many mini-assignments done throughout the quarter that go into your participation grade. Yet another reason to never miss class! ☺

Midterm and Final: Your Exams will cover everything up through the week they're scheduled and will usually include multiple choice and short-answer questions (either or both). Your responses should be clear and concise. Your short-answer responses must range from no less than **one full paragraph**, to three full paragraphs. Study guides will be made available to you, based on group work (my students write their own exams). Questions are expected to be based on readings, in-class discussion, and lecture material. Point distribution info will be on the exams.

Response Papers: You will be writing about your ideas based on course readings. You will be asked to explore your own perspectives on the idea of religion. For example, why do you believe what you do? Who or what helped create your various beliefs? What do you think will (or may) change in the future about how you think about things? Use these assignments as a space to create your own critically sound argument/s, based on your interpretation of various course material.

In-Class Assignments: The work done in class will have you engage course material and have you work closely together. You will be working in pairs or groups for these assignments in order to generate critical discussion to be reflected on in the assignments. Occasionally the assignments will take more than one class period so again, it's imperative that you do not miss class.

Assignments partially completed receive partial credit (if you miss 1/3 of the assignment, you get 1/3 of the grade).



Final Project: This is a free-flowing and creative project for which you come up with the idea(s) on your own. You may work on this independently, or in pairs or groups. You will choose an area of the sociology of religion that we cover this quarter that is of interest to you. Mass Media, Family, Education, Deviance, anything! You could do a collage or a painting. A film analysis, or research on group behavior at sporting events as metaphors for religious engagement. What the project ends up looking like is also up to you (although I will help you stay on track to make certain it remains sociologically relevant). You could do a skit in class, make a film, or start a band. Gain permission to do a public mural or start a club on campus, there really is no limit to applying your sociological imagination to a project and getting something educational out of it! We'll talk about this over the first couple of weeks of class. All projects will have a writing component. If you want to do a straight research paper, that's fine, too. Guidelines for both projects are posted online. Choose one and stick with it.

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: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/academicsuccess/>
- Academic Tutoring Center: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/tutoring/>
- TRiO Student Support Services: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/TRiO/>
- Writing Lab @ BCC: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/writinglab/>

Below is a checklist for you to go over before you hand in each written assignment.

- Twelve-point sized Times font, double-spaced
- 1" margins all around
- MLA Citations where appropriate - credit is given even where any *ideas* presented in the paper are not your own
- Title pages and bibliographies are not counted in final page count
- 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.'

Your written work is evaluated on:

- 1) Content
 - a. Fulfilling the assignment.
 - b. Developing your argument and making use of examples and evidence to support your argument.
 - c. Flow of thought throughout the paper, with strong analyses and conclusions.
- 2) Writing Style
 - a. Excellent command of the written English language. In other words, most excellent grammar. **NOTE: If you struggle with grammar and spelling or are an ESL student, please let me know! I'm happy to work with you and point you in the right direction.**

- 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.
- g. Dude, like totally don't write **colloquially**. A conversation is a conversation. A paper is an entirely different set of discussions. ☺

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. You will receive a Numerical Grade from me, with little-to-no commentary. This is only because I've found that most students do not read written comments from their professors. 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.



90-100 = A. The A paper shows me you're engaged with the readings, the media, and the lectures in class by utilizing quotes and ideas. It's a paper *completely free* from grammar and spelling errors, and demonstrates 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 paper 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. The C paper 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. 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. A D paper 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 no integration of material and you’re not responding to the questions raised in class. 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.)

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY:

We will set the rhythm of the class in the first couple of weeks. I am a firm believer in being a lifelong learner and to that end I often carry away a lot more information from students than I ever expect. I’m most interested, for the purposes of this class, to see how well we can all wrap our minds around the idea of thinking critically about the various issues and themes presented about the social world in which we live and you should expect to be exposed to new and various ways of thinking and knowing. As a learning community, we’ll be helping one another think through all of the ideas that connect back to course themes.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

READINGS TO BE COMPLETED ON MONDAYS EXCEPTING THE FIRST WEEK

ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES ARE LISTED IN THE SYLLABUS

Week One: January 5th – 9th

Thematic Overview:

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

Readings (please have your reading done by Wednesday this week only):

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion:* Ch. 1, “Sociological perspectives on religion”

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 12th – 16th

Thematic Overview:

- Classical theorists
- The phenomenology of religion
- Beginning Discussions of Final Project

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:

- In-Class Assignment Friday.

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 20th – 23rd

****NO CLASS Monday, January 19th – Campus Closed. Happy MLK Day!****

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”

Assignments:

- Response Paper #1 on Chapter Two OR Three Due Friday
- Final Project Topic Idea Due Friday

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Four: January 26th – 30th

Thematic Overview:

- The “great” narratives
- Who the Hell... *What* the Hell? Anti-Religion and Church Burning
- Death Metal & Black Metal: Blood, Guts & Corpse Paint

Readings:

- *An Introduction to The Sociology of Religion*: Ch. 5, “The great narratives: Modernity, postmodernity, globalization, and secularization”

Assignments:

- In-Class assignment this week
- Outline due for Research Projects (use directions for **either** Creative Research or Research Paper Projects) Due Friday

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Five: February 2nd – 6th

MIDTERM FRIDAY!

Covers Chapters. 1 – 6, Weeks 1 – 5

MIDTERM QUESTIONS DUE MONDAY!

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”
- Midterm Study Guide Available Tuesday

Readings:

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

Assignments:

- Two Questions for Midterm due Monday (25 Participation Points)
- Working Bibliography due for All Research Projects Due Friday

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Six: February 9th – 13th

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:

- Response Paper #2 on **Chapter 4, 5, OR 6** Due Friday

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Seven: February 17th – 20th

****NO CLASS Monday, February 16th – Campus Closed. Happy Prez Day!****

Thematic Overview:

- “Killing in the name of...”
- “Saving in the name of...”

Readings:

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

Assignments:

- Creative Research Projects Detailed Plan Due Friday (see handout)
- Research Paper Projects First Draft Due Friday (see handout)
- In-class assignment this week.

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Eight: February 23rd – 27th

****NO CLASS This week.****

Assignments

- Create a new religion (see handout)
- Class meeting replacement assignment options (see handout)

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Nine: March 2nd – 6th

Thematic Overview:

- Inequality and identity
- Race and ethnicity in religion
- Gender and sexuality in religion
- Schedule final presentations

Readings:

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

Assignments:

- Response Paper #3 on **Creating your new religion** Due Friday
- Meetings with Dr. Sara (25 points participation credit, see directions)
- Short group presentations, New Religions (25 points participation credit), **Th, Fr**

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Ten: March 9th – 13th

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:

- Meetings with Dr. Sara, con’t (25 points participation credit, see directions)

Quote of the Week:

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

Week Eleven: March 16th – 18th

FINAL EXAM QUESTIONS DUE MONDAY!

Final Exam will cover Chapters 7 – 12, Weeks 6 – 10

Thematic Overview:

- ...and in the end...
- Final Exam Study Guide Available Wednesday

Assignments:

- Final Presentations and Discussion
- 2 Final Exam Questions **Due Monday** (25 Participation Points)

Quote of the Week:

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

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, 3/19, 9:30-11:20 am

EMAILING ME:

When you email me using my BCC EMAIL, ALWAYS put in the SUBJECT LINE the following, in this order: SOC 246 - YOUR NAME - SUBJECT

For example: **SOC 246- Jane Doe - Question about Black Metal.**

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR:

When I’m not teaching, I’m usually whipping up some sort of baked goodness in my kitchen, doing collage art, taking photos of the world around me, hanging out with my kid, watching horror movies, or going out to listen to live music. Mostly, I go to hear metal, bluegrass, punk, or local hip-hop shows. I received my Ph.D. in Sociology (with an emphasis in American Studies) from UC Santa Cruz. I received my first MA in Sociology from Humboldt State University and my second MA in Sociology from UCSC, my BA in Sociology and Journalism from Mills College, and my AA in English and Creative Writing from Vista Community College. This is my third year as Instructor of Sociology at BCC, and my first year as Chair of the Sociology Department. I am the Programmer for BCC’s Annual American Indian Film Festival. I love to write and am currently working on a memoir & a collection of poetry. More at: <http://sara.sutlercohen.com>

Thank you for a wonderful term!