

**RELG 491: Faith, Values and the Mass Media  
(Meets with JOUR 571)**

Professor, Cecile S. Holmes

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*Office Hours: 2-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays, 10 a.m.-11:45 a.m. Wednesdays or by appointment.*

**Fall 2018 class schedule: MW – 2:20-3:35**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION (BULLETIN):**

Faith and values influence the media. An examination of the influence, why it happens, and of religious diversity and the increased public presence of religions, including Hinduism and Islam.

**COURSE SUMMARY:**

Faith and values influence the media. The media shapes how we understand that influence on American politics, religion and culture. This course examines those influences and explores America's growing religious diversity including the increased public presence of such religions as Islam.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Students who complete this course should be able to:

- \*Achieve a deeper understanding of the relationship of media and religion in American society
- \*Learn to think critically about the intersection of faith, values and media in our common life
- \* Gain a deeper understanding of religions other than Christianity and Judaism
- \*Observe and study how religious and spiritual values are reflected in American media including the internet, television, films, music, books and printed products
- \*Learn how to effectively discuss religious differences without that discussion degenerating into a fight
- \* Get a deeper understanding of American religious history and how that history has shaped media
- \* Learn to reflect on about faith, values and the media
- \* Learn how to write and to speak clearly and effectively about faith, values and the media

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

**Religion in American Life** (Oxford University Press)

Jon Butler, Grant Wacker and Randall Balmer

**Supplementary, but required when assigned**

**"Bridging the Gap: Religion and the News Media"** A pdf of this publication will be emailed to you.

"Readings on Religion As News," on reserve at Thomas Cooper Library

Occasional articles from books, recent periodicals or the internet. (The professor will pass out or email these articles).

DVDs/Streamed video from public and private sectors: The professor will supply these or they usually will be available online.

*DESCRIPTION: A survey of how faith and values shape the media and of media coverage of faith and values. This course may include guest speakers, a field trip or two, DVDs, library or online research and class discussion in addition to papers and projects. It will offer an introduction to how the American media -- in areas from public relations to politics to news stories to advertising --reflect and are covering the growing religious changes in the United States. Students will discuss common misconceptions and stereotypes related to different faith groups.*

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Grades will be based on class participation and on completion of: required readings, written assignments, a midterm and final in-class presentations, papers and/or projects. When we have a guest speaker, ask questions. When we see a film or DVD, express your opinion during class discussion. Knowledge of the English language, and attention to spelling and grammar will be included in the evaluation and grading of assignments.

Grades are based on a numerical scale.

A=93-100

B+ =88-92

B= 85-87

C+ =79-84

C =74-78

D+ =69-73

D =65-68

F =below 65

**\*\*\*\*IMPORTANT DETAILS**

**1) Some of your research and writing may be based on guest speakers or field trips. All written assignments must be typewritten, double-spaced with your name, the course number and the number or name of the assignment in the upper right-hand corner. List the word count in the same place The pages MUST be stapled together.**

**2)Every paper must conform to word count. You are allowed only 50 words plus/minus the assigned word count. If you write over the assigned count, I will deduct points from your grade.**

**3) assignments will count for percent of final grade:**

Paper #1                      10%

Paper #2                      10%

Paper #3                      20%  
Midterm                      20% (may be a take-home assignment)  
Class participation        10% (includes asking questions of speakers, participating in discussions)  
In-class presentation    30% (counted as final exam) Each presentation must be accompanied by a printed outline, "tip sheet" or summary.

**\*\*\*\*\*We will begin those presentations before classes end. We will complete them during our scheduled exam period. You must attend the exam period – even if you have already done your presentation – to pass this class.**

**Graduate students will be graded differently.** The first three papers will each count only 10 percent of their grades. Graduate students will be required to complete one additional 8-page critical paper analyzing how two national newspapers/websites cover American religion. That paper will count 20 percent of their final grade. They also must turn in a five-page paper to accompany the final project/in-class presentation. The presentation will count 20 percent of their final grade. Their presentations will count 30 percent toward the student's final presentation grade.

\*\*\*Graduate students also will be encouraged to teach part of a class session and may earn extra credit for doing so. That session would be based on a selection from "Readings on Religion as News."

**ATTENDANCE:** Since we only meet twice a week, attendance is very important. You may miss no more than 10 percent of any class, according to university regulations. So you have only three absences in this course. Two of those will be excused. If you miss more than three classes, you may not pass. Deadlines for papers, projects, readings and presentations are not flexible. All written papers must be turned in, printed out, as Microsoft Word documents. I will not accept papers by email or written with a different software. You must use Word. You must turn in your work on time or receive a lower grade or an "F."

***All cell phones should be put away in backpacks, purses or briefcases. I do not want to see them in this class. If I do, I will ask you to hand the device to me and I will return it to you at the end of class. If you must take a call or a text (as in a family emergency), please leave the classroom and complete such activity in the hall.***

### **Statement of Academic Integrity/Diversity**

Academic ethical behavior is essential for an institution dedicated to the promotion of knowledge and learning. The University of South Carolina is committed to fostering a university environment, which exemplifies the values embodied in the Carolinian Creed. All members of the University Community have a responsibility to uphold and maintain the highest standards of integrity in study, research, instruction, and evaluation; as well as adhering to the Honor Code.

This course fosters understanding of issues and perspectives in the context of domestic concerns about gender, race, ethnicity and gender identity, and mass communications across cultures in a global society.

### **University of South Carolina Honor Code**

It is the responsibility of every student at the University of South Carolina Columbia to adhere steadfastly to truthfulness and to avoid dishonesty, fraud, or deceit of any type in connection with any academic program. Any student who violates this Honor Code or who knowingly assists another to violate this Honor Code shall be subject to discipline.

**\*\*\*This syllabus may be revised in the course of the semester at the instructor's discretion.**

### **Disability Accommodations**

Students who require any form of disability accommodation must be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services. The professor will not provide accommodations to any student who is not registered with Student Disability Services, and that office will contact the professor with the appropriate accommodations for the student. The professor is not qualified to make a determination of what accommodations a student needs or is entitled to and under no circumstances will the professor attempt to make those determinations. The Office of Student Disability Services can be contacted at 803-777-6742 or [sasds@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sasds@mailbox.sc.edu).

**PURPOSE:** My goal is to help you see how the world around you is changing, how the religious landscape is changing and how that influences all forms of media. I urge you to think creatively and "outside of the box." Participation in classes, including field trips is significant. If your papers, exams, or projects fall short of the mark, your class participation might help you achieve a better grade.

## **PART I The intersection of faith, values and the media**

**Aug. 28** Overview of Religion and Media in the U.S.

*Reading for next class:* The introduction and Chapters 1-6 in "Bridging the Gap"

The material you have read gives you an idea of how religion and media intersected in the United States in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In class on Aug. 30, I will ask you to list five major changes in religion in the U.S. and the world today.

**Aug. 30** Religion in America Today

Discussion of "Bridging the Gap" and the backdrop of religion and media in the U.S.

*Reading for next class:* Read the remainder of Bridging the Gap. Read Chapters 18 and 19 in Religion in American Life.

**Sept. 6 NO FORMAL CLASS**

**PAPER NO. 1**

Write a 500-word paper answering the following questions. Write the paper as a narrative with an introduction and conclusion. Spelling and grammar count. Consider these questions:

1. What are the 20<sup>th</sup> century roots of tensions between religion and media in the United States?
2. What were the three most important trends in news coverage of religion from 1980 to 2000?
3. How do the issues in politics, religion and media in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century differ from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? How are those issues alike?
4. Prognosticate just a little. Twenty years down from now, what will the trends in American religion be? How will reporters cover those trends?

**Sept. 11**

Guest speaker: The Rev. Brenda Kneece, head of South Carolina's largest ecumenical group. She will speak on spirituality and service

*\*\*\*\*I expect you to take notes and ask questions. Your second paper will be about spirituality and service.*

**Sept.13** More on the backdrop of Religion and Media in the U.S.

DVD showing, "God in America," from Frontline series for PBS

Read Chapters 1,2 and 3 in "Religion in American Life."

**Sept. 18** "God in America," series, continued

Paper No. 2 Due. Write 450 words explaining your concept of what "spirituality and service" means. Tell me what the Rev. Kneece said in her presentation. Answer three questions:

1. Why did you agree or disagree with what the Rev. Kneece said?
2. How do you think your generation, often called "millennials" by sociologists, understand spirituality and service?
3. How is that understanding different from the understanding of previous generations?

## **Part II Religion & Media: Partners and adversaries**

**Sept. 20** Discussion of "God in America," "Bridging the Gap" and current ideological conflicts in the U.S.

Read Chapter 7 in Religion in American Life

**Sept. 25**

Read Chapters 22 and 23 in Religion in American Life

**Paper No. 3 due**

Write a 450-word, critical paper responding to the issues, beliefs and values explored in the "God in America" series. How do you see faith and values in the context of American history? How are faith and values currently influencing American culture? Did the ideas presented in the series

conflict or resonate with your ideas? How did this media presentation help you understand the current roots of cultural conflicts in American politics? Give me your ideas, not something you find on the internet.

**Oct. 4**

**ADVANCE READINGS:** Read Chapter 4 in Religion in America Life.

Read Chapter 24 in “Readings on Religion As News”

**Visit to Hindu Temple of South Carolina**

**5703 Kiawah Road, Columbia, SC 29212**

**Presentation by Arunima Sinha, longtime temple member and interfaith lead**

**Temple website: <http://www.hindutemples.org>**

**Be on time, please. We will begin at 2:30 and wrap at 3:25 to give you time to return to campus.**

**Please also dress modestly. No short-shorts or extremely brief tops**

**Oct. 9**

**Minority religions in the United States**

**Advance Reading: read Chapter 24 in Religion in American Life**

**Oct. 11, Wednesday – Visit to Masjid As-Salaam and meeting with Imam Omar Shaheed**

**Oct. 16 “God in America” series. Completion and discussion**

**Oct. 18 Religion and International Affairs**

**\*\*\*\*Paper on “God in America” due**

Write a 450-word, critical paper responding to the issues, beliefs and values explored in the “God in America” series. How do you see faith and values in the context of American history? How are faith and values currently influencing American culture? Did the ideas presented in the series conflict or resonate with your ideas? How did this media presentation help you understand the current roots of cultural conflicts in American politics? Give me your ideas, not something you find on the internet. Follow instructions on handout on how papers must be turned in

ISLAM Selections from “Readings on Religion as News”  
Magazine

The Arab World, New York Times

**Oct. 23 MIDTERM EXAM**

**Exam will cover class lectures, video series, all readings (including selections from “Readings on Religion As News,” and the two field trips.**

The Arab World, N.Y. Times Magazine

**Oct. 30** The Arab World, N.Y. Times Magazine

**Nov. 1** Rise of the “nones” and media

Discussion of student in-class presentations

**Nov. 6** In-class presentation proposals due

**Discussion of proposals with time allowed for individual and small group planning if two or three students decide to do a presentation together**

**Nov. 8 Religion and popular culture**

Media and religion for children, young adults

Press kits, TV shows and books for children, young adults

Including some entertainment media

**Nov. 13 Research Day/No formal class**

**Complete the following assignment to turn in on Nov. 15**

**Religion and Popular Films**

Research Day/No formal class

PAPER NO. 3 Watch one of six films. Then write a 600-word paper, exploring:

1-The faith and values presented in that film

2-How the film challenges/supports American religious values

3-What the film says to you

4-How you would change the film, or why you like it as it is

Paper is due as class begins Nov. 15

- I will provide a list of films from which you may choose later in the semester

**Nov. 15 Discussion of Faith and Values in movies as a mass medium**

*Discussion of student papers*

**Nov. 20 Group work, in class presentations**

**Nov. 27 In-class presentations**

**Nov. 29 In-class presentations**

**Dec. 4 In-class presentations**

**Dec. 6 In-class presentations**

**Dec. 15 –12:30 p.m., Final Exam period  
Presentations**