

**J 343 F – Journalism and Religion (Unique 08065)**

**Graduate: J395 (Unique 08245)**

**Tue/Thur – 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., BMC 5.124**

**FALL 2014**

Professor: Eileen Flynn DeLaO, freelance journalist

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Office Hours: by appointment

**Course Description**

In this course, we will learn about some of the world's belief systems, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha'i, Hinduism, Buddhism and atheism.

Religion plays a major role in our society, influencing political elections, public policy, world affairs, education and culture. All journalists should have a working knowledge of the world's major faiths. In this course, you will develop that knowledge by reading religion scholar Stephen Prothero's book *God Is Not One* and selections from other writers as well visiting with guest speakers. You'll assess mainstream media coverage of these traditions, looking at accuracy and fairness. You will also try your hand at religion writing by visiting houses of worship and interviewing faith leaders and lay people. You should come away from this course with a better grasp of various belief systems, how the media handle faith and what makes religion news.

**Required Texts**

Both books are available at the UT Co-op, online or at booksellers around town. *God Is Not One* by Stephen Prothero; *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi; other readings to be emailed

**Grading (will use plus/minus grades)**

30% - Stories/Field work

25% - Reading response papers

10% - Media coverage examples

25% - Final Project

10% - Attendance/Participation

## **Assignments**

Turn in **hard copies** of assignments on time in class. Late assignments will be docked points. Contact me if you are unable to turn in your work because of illness, family emergency, etc.

**Stories/Field Work** – You will write a timely news or feature story on four of the major religions we study. The readings and class discussions are designed to prepare you to choose a topic and write with a basic understanding of each faith. You must have **two live** sources for each story unless otherwise indicated. Web sources do NOT count, but may be used for background and context. **Family and close friends do NOT count as sources**. If you are unsure about a conflict of interest, ask me.

Each story should be 500 words minimum and must include the information from sources used (name, title, contact info). **AP style** is required, and each story must have a nut graph and follow basic grammar and punctuation rules. **Tip: Read a newspaper daily to see how reporters craft their stories.**

**Reading Response Papers** – The purpose of these readings is to gain a framework for each religion before you report on it. Papers need not be more than two pages but must show serious reflection and cite **2-3 specific examples** from each assigned reading. This is your opportunity to articulate your thoughts on the readings, ask questions and explore your personal reactions. Don't be afraid to say if you disagree with the writer or if you think you might have a bias when reporting on a given faith. We all have biases.

**Media Coverage Examples** – On these days you must each bring in at least one example of mainstream news coverage of the religion we're discussing. Be prepared to defend or attack the piece you choose. Examples will be turned in (or link emailed) for credit.

**Final Project** – There is some flexibility with this assignment, but each student must receive my approval for the topic and medium you will use. Options include but are not limited to a 1,000-word feature story, a short video and a photo slide show. The project is due on the last day of class. You must turn in a formal proposal for your project by Nov. 18. You must have at least **3 live sources**, and you may not use friends or institutions with whom/which you are personally involved. I encourage students to meet with me outside of class to discuss their project ideas.

**Attendance/Participation** – Attendance is mandatory, and habitual tardiness may result in deduction of attendance points. In the case of illness, family emergency, etc., please notify me ASAP to ensure you are not penalized for missing class. Participation is essential. Come to class prepared to contribute. This is especially important when we have guest speakers. You must prepare questions for speakers the way a journalist would for a press conference.

### **Ground Rules**

Please do not use laptops, cell phones, tablets, etc. during class. I want to foster old-fashioned discussion without distractions. If you want to look something up that's relevant to our discussion, please ask. Also, I'm open to bending this rule if, for example, you want to live tweet a guest speaker's presentation. We will discuss this as semester progresses.

Good email etiquette is essential in the professional world. Practice it now. Confirm receipt of one-on-one email messages. Say thank you when someone helps you. If you email me and don't hear back, do not assume I received your message. When in doubt, call or text me.

Be respectful to your fellow classmates. Religion is a delicate topic. I encourage you to be open and honest about your biases, questions, feelings about every faith we cover. But we must also show sensitivity. If you ever feel I have been insensitive to your beliefs, please let me know.

### **Graduate Credit**

Master's students will complete an additional assignment. This can be a news or feature story (500-800 words), an 2-3 page essay or a 1:30 to 2-minute video piece. Assignment may be turned in any time before last class day.

### **University Honor Code**

All students are expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code, which reads: "The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

### **Religious Holy Days**

UT Austin policy states that you must notify me of your pending absence at least 14 days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I

will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Documented Disability Statement**

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Overview**

8/28 – Syllabus and initial questions

9/2 — Discussion of media’s religion coverage (You will have read Prothero pp. 1-24)

#### **JUDAISM**

9/4 — Introduction to Judaism (Prothero’s Judaism chapter; Chotzinoff essay)

9/9 — The role and influence of Judaism today and a look at Zionism and anti-Semitism

9/11 — Guest speaker: Rabbi Neil Blumofe, Congregation Agudas Achim; RESPONSE 1 (Prothero & Chotzinoff) due

9/16 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 1 (Judaism) due

9/18 — NO CLASS. I will be in Atlanta attending the Religion Newswriters Association conference. Please watch part 6 of PBS documentary “God in America: Of God and Caesar” on your own time. Link to be emailed.

#### **CHRISTIANITY**

9/23 — Introduction to Christianity (Prothero Christianity; PBS film) STORY 1 due

9/25 — Guest speaker: Rick Diamond, pastor, Journey Imperfect Faith Community (you will have read “A Path Emerges” and sidebar and prepared questions)

9/30 — Various expressions of Christianity and their influence on public life; RESPONSE 2 (Prothero & "A Path Emerges" articles) due

10/2 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 2 (Christianity) due

10/7 — “Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero” documentary viewing; STORY 2 (Christianity) due

## **ISLAM**

10/9 — Introduction to Islam (Prothero Islam and reading to be emailed)

10/14 — Guest speaker: Islam Mossaad, imam at North Austin Muslim Community Center

10/16 — Challenging stereotypes: country singers, feminists, comedians

10/21 — *Persepolis* with guest speaker Khotan Shahbazi-Harmon of the Baha’i Center of Austin

10/23 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 3 (Islam) due; RESPONSE 3 (Persepolis/Prothero) due.

## **BAHAI**

10/28 — Shahbazi-Harmon returns for discussion of Baha’i faith, which grew out of Islam and sees the world’s religions as progressive revelation

## **HINDUISM**

10/30 — Intro to Hinduism (Prothero Hinduism and reading to be emailed); STORY 3 (Islam) due

11/4 — Guest speaker from Dr. Rajendra Parikh, Austin Hindu community

## **BUDDHISM**

11/6 — Intro to Buddhism (Prothero Buddhism and a reading to be emailed)

11/11 — Guest speaker: Zen priest David Zuniga

11/13 — Discussion of Hinduism & Buddhism; MEDIA EXAMPLES 4 due; RESPONSE PAPER 4 due (both Hinduism and Buddhism readings)

## **ATHEISM**

11/18 — How do we cover skeptics? (Prothero Ch. 9 “A Brief Coda on Atheism” and reading to be emailed); FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS due

11/20 — Guest speaker: Matt Dillahunty, Atheist Community of Austin (you will have read “Preaching his own gospel of atheism” and prepared questions)

11/25 — Wrap-up discussion on trends in religion reporting. RESPONSE 5 (atheism) due; STORY 4 DUE (Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism or Baha'i faith; reporter's choice of Q&A, blog entries, op-ed, feature, etc. \*\*Only one live source required for this story.\*\*)

11/27 — NO CLASS: HAPPY THANKSGIVING

12/2 — NO CLASS: Use this time to edit your final project

12/4 — Last day of class: Instructor evaluations; final projects due in class