

## **J 343 F – Journalism and Religion (Unique 08070)**

**Tue/Thur – 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., CMA 3.120**

**FALL 2016**

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 hearing from guest speakers and watching videos. 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 some of the world's religions, 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

\*\*Because all news stories must adhere to the Associated Press style guidelines, you should either purchase the latest edition of the AP Stylebook or have access to one.

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

30% - Stories/Field work

25% - Reading response papers

10% - Media Examples

25% - Final Project

10% - Attendance/Participation

### Assignments

Assignments are posted on Canvas with due dates and times. 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 three 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. In-person or phone interviews are preferred. Email interviews are OK but not ideal. Web sources do NOT count as live sources 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 at least 500 words 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.

**\*\*Extra Credit Opportunity:** You will have the option to write a fourth news/feature story on one of the following topics: Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i faith or atheism. If you would like to make up for a poor grade on a previous assignment or just want more reporting experience, this is your chance to boost your overall grade. See me individually for more details.

**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. I want you to look critically at the writers' biases (and your own biases). Don't hold back. Just show me that you're learning something.

**Media Coverage Examples** – Find an example of mainstream news coverage of the religion we're discussing. Be prepared to defend or attack the piece you choose in class. Is the story accurate, fair, balanced? Is the headline appropriate? Examples

will be turned in (or link posted on Canvas) for credit. **PLEASE NOTE:** The stories you find should come from traditional, non-religious news outlets such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Religion News Service, CNN, NPR, etc. Online news sites such as Huffington Post are acceptable as long as the piece is written by a journalist and is not an opinion piece. In this exercise, we are looking at how **journalists** cover religion. Check the byline and the tagline. Know your source.

**Final Project** – There is some flexibility with this assignment in terms of the topic and medium. Options include but are not limited to a 1,000-word feature story, a short video, a podcast and a photo slide show. You must turn in a formal proposal for your project by **Nov. 17**. 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 tardiness will 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.

### **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/>

### **\*\*FLAG\*\* Cultural Diversity in the United States**

This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity in the United States. Cultural Diversity courses are designed to increase your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one U.S. cultural group that has experienced persistent marginalization.

**Prerequisite:** Journalism 310F (or 320D) and 311F (or 321C) with a grade of at least B- in each

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Overview**

8/25 – Syllabus and initial questions

8/30 — Discussion of media's religion coverage (You will have read Prothero pp. 1-24 and be prepared to discuss the reading.)

## **JUDAISM**

9/1 — Introduction to Judaism (Prothero's Judaism chapter; Chotzinoff essay)

9/6 — Guest speaker: Rabbi Neil Blumofe, Congregation Agudas Achim

9/8 — The role and influence of Judaism today; a look at Zionism and anti-Semitism in the current political climate; RESPONSE 1 (Prothero & Chotzinoff) due

9/13 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 1 (Judaism) due

9/15 — Watching part 6 of PBS documentary "God in America: Of God and Caesar."

## **CHRISTIANITY**

9/20 — Introduction to Christianity (Prothero Christianity; PBS film) STORY 1 due

9/22 — Various expressions of Christianity and their influence on public life;

9/27 — Guest Speaker (Prothero & PBS film) RESPONSE 2 due

9/29 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 2 (Christianity) due

10/4 — "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero" documentary viewing; STORY 2 (Christianity) due

## **ISLAM**

10/6 — Introduction to Islam (Prothero Islam and Amanullah essay)

10/11 — Guest speaker: Muna Hussaini, UT alumna and community activist

10/13 — Challenging stereotypes and misperceptions about Muslims

10/18 — *Persepolis* with guest speaker Khotan Shahbazi-Harmon of the Baha'i Center of Austin

10/20 — MEDIA EXAMPLES 3 (Islam) due; RESPONSE 3 (Persepolis/Prothero/Amanullah) due.

## **BAHAI**

10/25 — Shahbazi-Harmon returns for discussion of Baha'i faith, which grew out of Islam and sees the world's religions as progressive revelation

### **SANATANA DHARMA (HINDUISM)**

10/27 — Intro to Hinduism (Prothero Hinduism); STORY 3 (Islam) due

11/1 — Guest speaker

### **BUDDHISM**

11/3 — Intro to Buddhism (Prothero Buddhism)

11/8 — Guest speaker

11/10 — Discussion of Hinduism & Buddhism; MEDIA EXAMPLES 4 due; RESPONSE PAPER 4 due (both Hinduism and Buddhism readings)

### **ATHEISM**

11/15 — How do we cover skeptics? (Prothero Ch. 9 “A Brief Coda on Atheism” and reading to be emailed)

11/17 — Guest speaker: Matt Dillahunty, Atheist Community of Austin (you will have read “Preaching his own gospel of atheism” and prepared questions) FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS due

11/22 — Wrap-up discussion on trends in religion reporting. RESPONSE 5 (atheism) due

11/24 — NO CLASS: HAPPY THANKSGIVING

11/29 — LAST CLASS MEETING. Instructor evaluations and annual pilgrimage to Austin's Pizza.

12/1 — NO CLASS: Use this time to work on your final projects or meet with me individually to go over questions/concerns about projects.

12/5 — NO CLASS: Wrap up your final projects.

