

## **POLITICS 314 -- Politics and Religion in United States**

Fall 2008, SML 216, MW 2:30-4:00

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SML 318, X6716

Office Hours: T 2-3:30, F 1-2:00

### **Course Description**

In this course we will be examining some of the most vital and contentious issues in politics: What is the foundation of political society? How should the obligations of citizens be ordered? What is the relationship between politics and morality? What are the “sacred texts” of America? What are the implications of the self-conception of the United States as a “Christian nation” or as a “chosen nation?” What role should religious voices have in shaping public policy in the United States?

To explore these concerns we will read works of literature, political philosophy, political sermons, social science, and keep a close eye on current events. This course is not a lecture class; the primary mode of teaching will be facilitated class discussion.

### **Course Readings**

The following texts must be purchased for this course:

1. Martha Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
2. Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism (DNRP). Ed. Thomas Banchoff. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

There will be *many* readings in addition to these books. Some of these readings will be distributed in class, others will be placed on reserve at the Hatfield Library, and some readings can be attained by following the links found in the “Schedule of Events” below. Finally, be aware that there will be additional reading assignments that are not yet delineated in the syllabus.

### **Course Requirements**

#### **Reading and Participation Assignments:**

This is a seminar class not a lecture course. We are going to be talking and listening to one another, engaging in a collective enterprise of exploration. The realms of politics and religion are the sources of meaning in most of our lives. The issues touched by these realms accordingly get to the very heart of how we understand ourselves and the world we share. Accordingly, we can and should expect that we will not all agree with one another regarding the topics we will be discussing. This course should neither be seen as an opportunity to preach to the choir, nor as a space for proselytizing. Vital to the success of this class is the commitment we make to listening and speaking with one another with respect and thoughtfulness.

The reading assignments for this course are rigorous and challenging. You are required to *thoughtfully* read every assignment. When I say that you are required to read, I do not mean that you should mechanically scan every page, but that you should *grapple with the ideas*. Mark up your text, read with a pen and paper, and write down ideas, questions, quotations, and points of confusion or contention. *Read for comprehension*

*rather than completion, pondering every idea rather than looking at every word.* This means that you may need to read a section, think about it, read it again, write about it, discuss it, and then read it again. So, “do the reading” means “engage yourself with the ideas of the texts.”

The reading load will be quite heavy at times. To stay afloat, plan for a sufficient amount of time to complete the assignment, and read aggressively. Remember to make use of your resources. Come to my office hours and form reading groups with your classmates.

Reading in this way will assist you in the second requirement: Your regular attendance, careful preparation, and active participation are essential. Unexcused absences from class will have serious and significant detrimental effects on your final grade. **Come prepared to participate by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course material, and bringing to class issues, questions, and passages for discussion.** Moreover, class participation does not simply entail speaking, but also listening in an engaged and respectful manner to the thoughts of your classmates.

There is one more crucial facet of class participation. Each student will be responsible for *writing a series of one-page reaction papers* throughout the semester. I will be breaking the class into four groups. Each day the students in one group will be responsible for writing and distributing one-page papers reacting to the assigned texts. These papers should be informal (but by no means sloppy or careless). The aim of these papers is *not* to summarize the material, but to respond to the texts in a manner that will shape our collective analysis of these texts. ***The papers are required to be posted on the WISE course platform by 9:00 PM the night before the given class meeting.***

To be clear, these short essays are a vehicle for participating in class discussions and will be assessed as part of your class participation grade. Submitting thoughtful reaction papers, but rarely speaking in class is not sufficient for receiving high marks for class participation. Likewise, speaking often in class, but submitting careless reaction papers is also not sufficient for high marks for class participation.

One more note about reading and participation: Throughout the semester, I will be distributing additional articles, essays, poems, biblical passages, and other texts for us to read and discuss. I will also be sending out links to websites, screening short videos, playing radio programs and podcasts. These additional readings are not listed on the schedule of events below, but will be designed to complement the major reading assignments, pick up on themes from our class discussions, and keep us in touch with ongoing developments in American political culture. These supplemental texts and resources will contribute to the dynamism of the class, and let me add that *you are each strongly encouraged to suggest texts and resources that we can discuss as a class.*

#### Writing and Service Learning Assignments:

There are three major writing assignments in this class. Each student will be asked to write two 8 page analytic papers, one essay on religion and political theory and one essay on religion in the United States.

In addition each student will complete a final project that will culminate in the composition of a major paper and a presentation of your analysis in class. There are two options for completing this final project and each option will be weighed equally.

Option 1: Choose a contemporary political controversy or issue in the United States that is directly informed by religion. (Topics might include the Death

with Dignity law in Oregon, same-sex marriage, zoning laws and tax regulations for religious institutions, the future of evangelicals in the United States, the voting behavior of American Muslims, etc.) Develop a research question and compose a 20+ page research paper in which you examine and analyze this question.

Option 2: Develop a Service-Learning project. Choose an organization whose work is at this nexus of religion and politics (broadly understood). (Organizations might include local churches, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Planned Parenthood, government agencies or officeholders, the state prison, etc. Many local organizations can be found at <http://www.givebacktoday.org>.) Develop a Service-Learning Agreement with a supervisor at this organization and me. Dedicate 25 hours of service work to this organization over the course of the semester. Keep a journal in which you reflect on the work you are doing and the themes we are exploring in class. Compose an 8+ page “reflective essay” in which you engage in sustained consideration of a particular theme we have addressed in class and how your understanding of this theme was enhanced by your service-learning experience.

\*\* Note: A penalty of 1/3 grade per day will be imposed on assignments submitted late (one day’s lateness would reduce a B+ to a B). I generally do not grant extensions, but if extraordinary circumstances arise, please consult with me as soon as possible -- *and certainly prior to the due date of the paper.*

\*\*\* Another note: I fully appreciate that students like fast and thorough comments on their writing assignments. Unfortunately “fast” and “thorough” do not often go together well. I will strive to return your final papers in a timely fashion. *As a general rule, you should receive your papers back within two weeks of turning them in.*

\*\*\*\* Of Special Note: I take plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism takes many forms, but the common denominator is presenting someone else’s words or ideas as your own. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, I encourage you both to err on the side of caution and to seek advice from me or from the Writing Center. Students found guilty of plagiarism will receive a zero for the assignment AND WILL BE REPORTED TO THE DEAN.

\*\*\*\*\* Statement Concerning Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities who may need accommodations, who have any emergency medical information the instructor should know of, or who need special arrangements in the event of evacuation, should make an appointment with the instructor as early as possible, no later than the first week of the term.

### **Grading**

<i>Essay on Political Theory</i>	20%
<i>Essay on Religion in the United States</i>	20%
<i>Service Learning/Political Controversy Research Presentation/Paper</i>	35%
<i>Class Participation</i>	25%
<hr/> <i>Total</i>	<hr/> 100%

## **Schedule of Events**

### ***I. In the Beginning...***

1. W 9/3: Introduction.  
The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics," (August 24, 2006).  
<http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=153>.
2. M 9/8: Roxanne L. Euben, "The New Manicheans," *Theory & Event*, 5.4 (2002).  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v005/5.4euben.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4euben.html)  
  
Walter Russell Mead, "God's Country," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2006.  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060901faessay85504/walter-russell-mead/god-s-country.html>.

### ***II. Religion and Western Political Theory: A Crucial Sample***

3. W 9/10: St. Augustine, City of God, Book XIX (413-425).  
[http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-02/npnf1-02-25.htm#P3609\\_1958937](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-02/npnf1-02-25.htm#P3609_1958937)
4. M 9/15: St. Augustine, City of God, Book XIX.
5. W 9/17: John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration" (1689).  
<http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm>
6. M 9/22: Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Introduction" (1844).  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>
7. W 9/24: Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (1887), Essay I, Sections 7-10, 14-15.  
  
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (1882/1887), #116, 125, 347.

### ***III. Religion in America: Liberty, Equality, Democracy?***

8. M 9/29: **Special Meeting with E.J. Dionne, Hatfield Room.**  
E.J. Dionne, Souled Out (2008), Ch. 1, "Is God's Work Our Work?"
9. W 10/1: Martha Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality (2008), Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-114.  
  
"Religious Pluralism in the United States," The Boisi Center Papers on Religion in the United States (recommended).
10. M 10/6: Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience, Chs. 4-5, pp. 115-223.
11. W 10/8: Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience, Chs. 6-7, pp. 224-305.
12. M 10/13: Nussbaum, Liberty of Conscience, Chs.8-9, pp. 306-364.

13. W 10/15: James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (1962), "A Letter to My Nephew."  
 Film: *Citizen King* (2006). Produced, Directed and Written by O. Bagwell and W. Noland Walker
14. M 10/20: Albert J. Raboteau, "African Americans, Exodus and the American Israel" (1994).  
 Charles Reagan Wilson, "The Religion of the Lost Cause" (1980).
15. W 10/22: Barack Obama, "Keynote Address, Call to Renewal" (2007).  
 Cornel West, Democracy Matters (2005), "The Crisis of Christian Identity in America," pp. 145-172.
- \*\*\* 10/23: Special class meeting with Professor Dwight Hopkins, "Barack Obama and the Black Church in America."**
16. M 10/27: "An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment." Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee, May 7, 2008.  
 Catherine Keller, "The Dare of Democracy: Fear, Faith, and Freedom." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), 105-116.  
 Bill McKibben, "The Christian Paradox" (2005).
17. W 10/29: John L. Esposito, "America's Muslims: Issues of Identity, Religious Diversity, and Pluralism," (DNRP, 2007), 133-150.  
 Robert Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation': American Identity and American Democracy, (DNRP, 2007), 151-168.
- IV. Secularism and Political Theology**
18. M 11/3: Mark Lilla, "The Politics of God," *New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 2007.  
 Peter Berger, "Pluralism, Protestantization, and the Voluntary Principle," (DNRP, 2007), 19-29.
19. W 11/5: The 2008 Election
20. M 11/10: Diana Eck, "American Religious Pluralism: Civic and Theological Discourse," (DNRP, 2007), 243-270.

Miroslav Volf, "A Voice of One's Own: Public Faith in a Pluralist World," (DNRP, 2007), 271-282.

Stanley Hauerwas, "The End of Religious Pluralism: A Tribute to David Burrell" (DNRP, 2007), 283-300.

21. W 11/12: Martha Nussbaum, "Radical Evil in Liberal Democracies: The Neglect of the Political Emotions, (DNRP, 2007), 171-202.

Daniele Hervieu-Leger, "Islam and the Republic: The French Case," (DNRP, 2007), 203-222.

Grace Davie, "Pluralism, Tolerance, and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe," (DNRP, 2007), 223-242.

22. M 11/17: Amr Khaled, "Between Integration and Introversion."  
[www.amrkhaled.net/articles/articlesprint542.html](http://www.amrkhaled.net/articles/articlesprint542.html)

Tariq Ramadan, "What the West Can Learn from Islam." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. February 14, 2007,  
[www.tariqramadan.com/imprimer.php?id\\_article=963](http://www.tariqramadan.com/imprimer.php?id_article=963).

23. W 11/19: Olivier Roy, "Islam in Europe: Clash of Religions or Convergence of Religiosities?" *Eurozine*, March 5, 2007.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, "Uneven Secularization in the United States and Western Europe," (DNRP, 2007), 31-58.

Jose Casanova, "Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union/United States Comparison," (DNRP, 2007), 59-83.

24. M 11/24: Individual Meetings.

25. W 11/26: Thanksgiving -- No Class

26. M 12/1: Presentations, Day 1

27. W 12/3: Presentations, Day 2

28. M 12/8: Presentations, Day 3

29. W 12/10: Presentations, Day 4