

## **Sociology of Religion (Soc 455)**

**Instructor: Kiran Sagoo**

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### **Course description**

The course is designed to provide an overview on the sociological study of religion – how religion impacts society and vice versa. This class will begin with an understanding on how to study religions from a sociological perspective and provide an understanding on the basic theories.

Applying a theoretical approach, the first half of the course will focus on understanding major religions such as Christianity and Islam, and also on smaller ones such as Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. The second part of the course will focus on the role of religion in today's globalized world. This includes topics on religion in multicultural societies and religion as a source of conflict, both between and within societies. Lectures will be supplemented with video presentations, and is hoped to spark lively discussions in class. This course intends to provide students with an analytical tool for studying religions and an understanding of the major issues relating to religions in present day society.

### **Grading:**

The grading for this class is as follows:

Class attendance and participation:	20% (1 full grade point)
Student presentation:	20% (1 full grade point)
Research paper:	60% (3 full grade points)

Students are expected to come to class, have knowledge of assigned readings and participate in class discussions. ***Students are expected to be respectful in presenting their views during class discussions.*** Students will also be required to select and study a religion based on the tools learnt in class.

### **Requirements for Research Paper**

Select a religion and study it from a sociological perspective based on the tools learnt in class.

Length: 8 –10 pages (maximum 12 pages), double spaced, 12 font size.

Approach: Please adopt a self-reflective approach in writing this paper. Begin the paper by explaining why you are interested in this topic, your particular views on religions / spirituality and how it may affect your position in writing this paper. (½ grade point)

Clearly state your research statement in the first paragraph - What exactly you will be focusing on in the paper, example: (½ grade point)

- This paper focuses on the changing role of women in Sikhism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Malaysia.

- This paper focuses on the development of the Bahai religion in Iran and tensions faced.
- This paper focuses on the impact of the Holocaust on Judaism and how it has shaped modern-day Jewish identity.

Provide a brief (note I said brief, not more than 2 paragraphs) overview on the religion:

- What are its main beliefs and practices? (½ grade point)
- Are there any particular rituals that stand out, or challenges faced by this religion in keeping its beliefs or traditions alive? (½ grade point)

Address your research question coherently and **utilize at least three books** in preparing this paper. Wikipedia is not an academic credible source and should not be referenced to in this paper.

### **Student Presentation:**

Prepare a 20 minute presentation based on your paper. You may use power point or any videos / DVDs to support your presentation. Do check in advance whether everything is compatible with the audio-visual equipment available in the room.

### **Required readings:**

Lester R. Kurtz (2006), Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Pine Forge Press.

### **Week 1: Understanding Religion**

Introduction to studying religion from a sociological perspective.

Overview of theories on religion.

Readings: Chapter 1 and Handouts

### **Week 2: Understanding Eastern Religious Traditions**

Introduction and comparative study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shinto & Taoism, and indigenous religions.

Readings: Chapter 2

### **Week 3: Understanding Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism**

Introduction and comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism.

Readings: Chapter 3

### **Week 4: Religion and Social Stratification**

Understanding social stratification within religion such as race, class and gender (the position of women and attitudes towards homosexuality).

Readings: Chapters 4 and 6

### **Week 5: Religion and Globalization**

Focus on contemporary issues affecting religion today, this includes religion and multiculturalism and religion as a source of social conflict.

**Week 6: Student presentation of case-studies**