

Sociology of Religion (Soc 455)

Instructor: Kiran Sagoo

Office hours: By appointment

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Course description

The course is designed to provide an overview on the sociological study of religion. This class will begin with an understanding on how to study religions from a sociological perspective and provide an understanding on the basic theories. The first half of the course will focus on 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. 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 also an understanding of the major issues relating to religions in present day society.

Grading:

The grading for this class is as follows:

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|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Class attendance and participation: | 20% |
| Student presentation: | 30% |
| Research paper: | 50% |

Students are expected to come to class, have knowledge of assigned readings and participate in 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.

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

- This paper focuses on the changing role of women in Sikhism in 20th 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?
- Are there any particular rituals that stand out, or challenges faced by this religion in keeping its beliefs or traditions alive?

References:

Students should use at least three published sources – books from at the library or academic journal articles in writing the research paper. Papers written based solely on materials obtained from the internet will be marked down. Wikipedia is not an acceptable source of information in an academic setting and should not be quoted in your papers.

Student Presentation:

Prepare a 20 minute presentation based on your paper. You may use powerpoint 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, 2nd 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, Stratification and Social Movements

Understanding religion as a social movement, and social stratification within religions.

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