Course overview:

This course examines a controversial but surprisingly unfamiliar topic: religion(s) in American public schools. I have three main objectives for the semester:

1. To understand the long and complex role that religion has played in the development of American public schools and the political and educational philosophy that undergirds them;

2. To examine the principled philosophical and theological issues behind contemporary legal cases about religion and public education;

3. To understand how constitutionally sound approaches to religion in schools can help to modulate or resolve the pedagogical and administrative issues that arise across the curriculum and within school culture.

As a theology class, this course also strives to enable students to reflect theologically on contemporary social, cultural and ethical issues and to mount cogent, constructive theological arguments in dialogue with other disciplines (including education, law, political philosophy and public policy)—skills encompassed in learning goals 2 and 3 of the undergraduate theology major.
Course requirements:

1. **Participation (20% total):** Active and informed participation is crucial to understanding this material, so you will be graded on a balance of quality and quantity of participation. Students are expected to attend each class, complete all the required reading (in advance of the class for which it is assigned), contribute to class discussions, and submit assignments on time. In addition, students must write 5 discussion posts and comment on 10 others during the semester, and submit (via Canvas, any time before class starts) one or more questions they have about the reading assignment each week. *Please note:* Diverse points of view will be presented in the course readings, and they are likewise welcomed in the ensuing discussion. In the interest of maintaining an ongoing, constructive dialogue about topics that can be rather contentious, you are expected to demonstrate mutual respect and civility in the classroom and the class blog.

2. **Short papers (30% total):** Two reflection papers, each 4-5 pages in length and worth 15% of your grade, will be due on the Friday afternoon following classes 6 and 11 (i.e., on Feb. 21 and Apr. 4). You will be asked to draw upon the readings in that section of the course to reflect upon a topic provided by the instructor. Late papers are penalized a half letter grade per day.

3. **Student presentations (15%):** Groups of two or three students will lead the discussion in classes 7-12. Early in the semester you will submit your preferences and receive guidelines, grading criteria and topic/class assignment.

4. **Final paper (35%):** Students must submit a sustained, well-written scholarly argument (12-15 double-spaced pages for undergrads, 15-20 pages for grad students) about an aspect of religion and public education that you find challenging, compelling, or curious. Topics must be approved by the professor; one-page paper proposals are to be submitted in class on March 25. The final paper must be submitted by email by 4pm on Thursday May 8. *Please note the dates of your other final exams/papers and plan accordingly.* Early submissions are encouraged; late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day. Your paper must draw upon course readings, but additional research is expected.

Course Readings:

**Required books** (available at the BC Bookstore and online):


**Suggested books:**

The grading scale:
I will use the following scale to evaluate students’ work:
A = excellent work   (A= 95-100; A- = 90-94);
B = good work   (B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82);
C = adequate work   (C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72);
D = poor work   (D = 60-69);
F = inadequate or insufficient work   (59 & below).

Please note that graduate students are expected to produce more rigorous and advanced work than undergraduates in this course, and will be graded accordingly.

Academic integrity:
As an ethics professor I take academic integrity seriously. You should, too. It is your responsibility to understand the university’s policy at www.bc.edu/integrity. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the appropriate dean and judged by the academic integrity committee in your school. If you are found responsible for violating the policy, penalties may include a failing grade, probation, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the seriousness and circumstances. Please talk to me about any questions you may have.

Disability services:
If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan (617.552.8093 or dugganka@bc.edu) at Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD; or Paulette Durrett (617.552.3470 or paulette.durrett@bc.edu) in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.
Course Schedule

PART ONE: THE AIMS OF AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION

1. Tues 1/14 Introduction: religion & the aims of public education
   What are we arguing about?
2. Tues 1/21 Historical overview: American education and the new republic
   How did the common school model develop?
3. Tues 1/28 Historical overview: religion, secularism and the rise of the market in education
   Is the common school model dead?
4. Feb 2/4 Religion, citizenship and civic education
   What political philosophy should underlie our educational system?
5. Tues 2/11 Educational pluralism and the myth of the common school
   Is religious freedom the paramount value in our society?
   Are non-public schools a threat to democracy or a manifestation of it?
6. Tues 2/18 Religious literacy
   What’s the point of teaching about religions? What’s at stake in the literacy metaphor?
   ** Fri 2/21 Reflection paper 1 due by 5pm

PART TWO: CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND CONTEMPORARY TENSIONS

7. Tues 2/25 Religious establishment, part I: devotional practices
   Was God kicked out of our schools in the 1960s?
   ** Tues 3/4 No class: Spring Break
8. Tues 3/11 Religious establishment, part II: holidays, evolution and other sensitive subjects
   Who is “the state,” and must it (they) always take sides?
9. Tues 3/18 Free exercise of religion, part I: outside the classroom
   Do religious people have special rights?
10. Tues 3/25 Free exercise of religion, part II: inside the classroom
    Is there anything all students must learn?
    ** Research paper proposals due **
11. Tues 4/1 Free speech
    Who has it and who doesn’t?
    ** Wed 4/2 Russell Moore lecture, “The Prophetic Minority” [Gasson 100, 5:30-7:00pm]
    ** Fri 4/4 Reflection paper 2 due by 5pm

PART THREE: CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

12. Tues 4/8 Religion education around the world
    What can we learn from the experience of other countries?
13. Tues 4/15 Religion education in social studies: Best practices and current standards
    [Guest speaker: Nicholas Kain, Medford High School]
    Where do religions fit into the curriculum?
14. Tues 4/22 Teaching world religions in public schools
    [Guest speaker: Jonathan Rabinowitz, Wellesley Middle School]
    What could possibly go wrong?
15. Tues 4/29 Part 1: Shaping minds and morals in the classroom
    What would it look like to teach about religion and ethics in a public school classroom?
    Part 2: Conclusion
    ** Thurs 5/8: Final paper due (in print or via PDF/email, before 4:00pm)