

Political Science 351
Seminar: Religion and Politics
Spring 2012
Professor Wolfe

This course is meant to introduce students to some of the major ways in which religion and politics influence each other in contemporary American life. We will be especially concerned with these developments: (1) the increasing influence of conservative Protestantism on issues of major national importance, which will include an examination of who conservative Protestants are and what they actually believe; (2) the role that religion plays in America's two party system and whether contemporary issues such as faith-based initiatives or school choice can be understood as a product of partisan differences shaped by different religious outlooks; (3) the transformation of American Catholicism since the 1950s and its implications for American politics; and (4) the importance of Islam in the United States in the aftermath of September 11.

The course will meet once a week and will function as a seminar. This means that students are expected to attend each and every class, to read the assignment for each class before coming, and to participate actively in class discussions. The final grade will be based upon performance in a mid-term exam, a final exam, class participation, and a short oral presentation to be described during the term.

The following books have been ordered for this course:

1. Steve Bruce, Politics and Religion (Polity Press).
2. Kenneth Wald and Alison Calhoun-Brown, Religion and Politics in the United States (Rowman and Littlefield)
3. Clyde Wilcox and Carin Larson, Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Christian Right in American Politics (Westview Press).
4. Alan Wolfe, The Transformation of American Religion (Free Press).
5. Peter Steinfels, A People Adrift (Simon and Schuster).
6. Geneive Abdo, Mecca on Main Street (Oxford University Press).

Here are the reading assignments and topics for the semester.

January 23, 2012

Topic: Introduction: Religion and Politics in General I

Reading: Steve Bruce, Chaps 1-4

January 30, 2012

Topic: Religion and Politics in General II

Reading: Bruce, Chaps 5-7

February 6, 2012

Topic: Religion and Politics in America, I

Reading: Wald and Calhoun Brown, Chaps 1-6

February 13, 2012

Topic: Religion and Politics in America, II

Reading: Wald and Calhoun Brown, Chaps 7-12

February 20, 2012

Topic: The Christian Right

Reading: Wilcox and Larson, whole book

February 27, 2012

Midterm exam

March 12, 2012

Topic: Catholics

Reading: Steinfels, whole book

March 19, 2012

Topic: Islam

Reading: Abdo, whole book

March 26, 2012

Trends in American Religion

Wolfe, whole book

April 2, 2012

Student Reports

April 9, 2012

NOTE: CLASS WILL BE HELD AT 4 PM

Student Reports

April 23, 2012

Student Reports

April 30, 2012

Conclusion and summary

May 12, 2012 @ 9AM - Final Exam