Sociology of Religion  
5577 - Grad seminar  
Fall 2016

Tues 12-2 30  
415 McGuinn

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Office hours by appointment

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Description
This is a grad seminar designed for students in Sociology or related fields (like Theology, Social Work, Political Sciences, and History). Students will gain knowledge on the classics of the Sociology of religion, the main theoretical discussions, and the contemporary trends in the field. It will cover some theoretical and methodological perspectives as well as research literature, and will include three geographical areas: U.S., Europe and Latin America.
We will start exploring the current discussions in the field. Then we will devote time to read the classics; What have the ‘Founding Fathers’ of sociology (Marx, Durkheim, and Weber) said about religion? After that we proceed to study the main theoretical frameworks to understand religion from a sociological perspective: Secularization and Rational Choice theories. We will also look at other alternative analyzes, like cultural theories, popular religiosity and lived religion.
The course is designed to be a complement and be enriched by a research project about the transformation of Latin America religious experience. We will work as a group on a collective project on ‘The lived religious experience of Latinos and Latin Americans immigrants’.

Finally, the course is designed to include many (but not all!) core readings in the field that you will need if you are preparing a ‘specialty area exam’ on Sociology of Religion.

Goals
By the end of the semester you will be able to:
1. Recognize the central discussions of the Sociology of Religion  
2. Describe the main theoretical concepts of the field  
3. Recognize the current debates in the sub-discipline, and take a position.
4. Participate in a collaborative research project on the lived experience of religion among Latinos and immigrants from Latin America.

**Requirements**

1. *Discussion papers*
   a. For 10 of the classes, students will be required to read materials and discuss them in class. Each student will read the material (approximately 150 pages per class) and come prepared to discuss it in class. The student will come prepared to intervene in each session.
   b. The student will submit 8 critical reading summaries and discussion questions to the course website. (No paper will be graded if the student isn’t in class) Read well, think hard and creatively, and show all of that in your response. Pose discussion questions.
      
      For some readings I will provide some questions that might guide you in the process of writing the response.
   c. For each of these 10 discussion-based classes, one student will present a summary of the responses, and present to the class the main points, problems and questions.

2. *Final paper/collaborative research project*
   a. A major paper will be required. The remaining 4 classes will be devoted to work on it.
   b. The paper will be a collaborative research project that will explore Latinos/Latin American migrants’ religiosity.
   c. The paper must be based on three in-depth interviews with Latino or immigrants from Latin America on the person’s religious practices.
   d. The students will pursue the IRB certification (if they haven’t do so before), set the interviews, transcribe and analyze them using appropriate software for qualitative research, applying the theoretical categories we have discussed in class.
   e. Finally, the paper will be presented to the rest of the class.

**Grading**

1. *Discussion papers*
   a. Interventions in class 5%
   b. Reading summaries 40 % (5 points each)
   c. Summary of responses 5%

2. *Final paper*
   a. IRB on time (5%)
   b. Interviews and transcriptions on time (5%)
   c. Coding and analyze on time (5%)
   d. Presentation (5%)
Syllabus

1. Presentation
Explanation on the syllabus and the dynamics of the class. The collaborative research project, the IRB process, and the final product. Conversation about students’ expectations.

2. The current situation


What are some of the core debates within the modern sociology of religion?
What are some of the core agreements within the sociology of religion?
Which approaches are most appealing to you as a junior scholar?
How might you utilize some of this material in your own work?

3. Classical theories
Durkheim, Emile *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* --“Introduction” (note, before Book 1); Book 1, Chapter 1 (“Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion”); “Conclusion” (note, after Book 3)

Weber, Max *The protestant ethics and the spirit of Capitalism*, Ch. 1, 2, 5. (55p)


"Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," (pp. 170-181)
"Theses on Feurbach," (pp. 182-184) "German Ideology" (pp. 93-101)

How do Marx, Weber and Durkheim differ in their approaches to religion?
What is each of them “responding to” in their approach of religion?
Who do you personally agree with more and why?
How would you see each being useful in your own approach to scholarship?

4. **The interview on religious practices**

*I will present the project “The Transformation of Lived Religion in Urban Latin America: a study of contemporary Latin Americans’ experience of the transcendent”, explain the aim of the research, and the research protocols. We will work on in-depth interviews on religious practices and object elicitation meetings.*

*Students have to schedule and start to do the interviews in the next 15 days*

*Readings:*


5. **Secularization**


The IRB process. Students have to submit their certificate before the next class.

6. Secularization

Casanova, J (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World.* Chicago, Il: The University of Chicago Press. Ch. 1, 2, 8 (pp. 11-66; 211-234)


7. Rational choice


Chestnut, A (2003) *Competitive spirits. Latin America’s new religious economy;* New York, Oxford University Press. Intro + Ch. 5 (pp. 3-16; 102-127)


How do sociologists of religion engage with economistic approaches to understanding religion in society and individual lives? What kind of methodological and theoretical leverage does this approach provide?

8. Cultural
Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures* Ch. 4: ‘Religion as a Cultural System.’ Pp. 87-125. [http://quod.lib.umich.edu.proxy.bc.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-](http://quod.lib.umich.edu.proxy.bc.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-


What is a cultural approach to studying sociology of religion?
What kinds of factors does a cultural approach deal with?
How does studying religion contribute to sociology of culture?

9. **Popular religiosity**


*Interviews should be done*

10. **Lived Religion**


**Sent at least one transcribed interview**

**11. Analysis**

*We are all going to work with one transcript and do the coding using the software (Nvivo, Dedoose, or Hyper-research).*

*Before the class, do a light coding in advance. Look for categories that emerge, topics that keep appearing.*


**12. Embodiment and materiality**


**13. Migration**


**14. Presentations**