

Ava Chamberlain Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Deborah Dash Moore of Vassar College. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

Wright State University is the branch of the Ohio state university system in Dayton, Ohio. Dayton is located in southwestern Ohio, about 50 miles north of Cincinnati. Settled in the late 18th century primarily by German and central European immigrants, Dayton's greater metropolitan area today has a population of around 1 million people. The area is religiously diverse. Its immigrant base created strong Catholic and Jewish communities, both of which are today supported by religiously affiliated academic institutions located in the surrounding area, the University of Dayton and Hebrew Union College respectively. Not far from Cain Ridge, Dayton's Protestant community has its roots in frontier revivalism. This evangelical legacy locates the city on the outskirts of the Bible Belt, and gives its Protestant churches a generally conservative tone. In the area there are also mounds constructed by Miami Indians, remnants of Shaker villages, Mennonite and Brethren communities, and the Methodist-affiliated United Theological Seminary. More recent immigration has created a significant Muslim community.

Wright State University is very much an urban campus, surrounded not by grassy lawns but by parking lots. It has an enrollment of approximately 16,000 students, 75% of which are undergraduates. The majority of these students come from southwestern Ohio, live in the surrounding area, and commute to school. Many are first-generation college students from modest socioeconomic backgrounds. They are also older than the traditional college student (the mean age is 26) and have a variety of nonacademic demands on their time such as family and employment responsibilities that frequently prevent them from adequately preparing their course work.

WSU students differ widely in their academic abilities and preparation for college work. All Ohio residents who have graduated from state certified high schools and have successfully completed the college preparatory curriculum may apply for unconditional admission. This policy of open enrollment means that, although some students are quite talented, many do not have the skills necessary for rigorous academic work. Freshman requirements cannot compensate for years of deficient training in English comprehension and composition.

The Religion Department at Wright State is small but vibrant. It currently has three fulltime faculty members, and several parttime and adjunct professors. It offers both a major and a minor in religion, and

has approximately 2530 student majors. Hosting three lecture series each year, the department is one of the most active in the College of Liberal Arts. However, it has in the last five years been unable to hire replacements for two departing fulltime faculty members.

Course Rationale

REL 230 is an introductory survey course in American religion. It is taught once a year and usually draws around 2025 students. It fulfills the American religion requirement for majors, so a majority of the students in the class will be religion majors having some familiarity with the academic study of religion. Because WSU operates on a quarter system, I must design this course to fit within the allotted 10 week time span. It is a 3 credit hour course that meets for three 50 minute sessions each week. I therefore have a maximum of 30 class sessions, but in actuality I have only about 27, when such things as examination days and conference attendance are taken into account.

The following syllabus represents my third attempt at teaching the introductory course in American religion. The first two times I used a generally historical approach, which is my own predilection and preference. However, I was not fully satisfied with the results of such an approach. To fit the entire history of religion in America into a 10 week time frame is frustrating at best. To even begin to cover the material I must lecture almost every class, and, although WSU students like passive learning, I prefer more active student participation. This time I will try a topical/phenomenological approach that emphasizes current beliefs and practices more than historical development.

This new approach feels to me much "thinner" than a strictly historical approach. However, I suspect that the students will respond to it better. They bring to religion classes primarily a desire to learn more about themselves and about the religious beliefs of their classmates and neighbors. Studying the history of religion in America does not fully address their interests. This change of approach is but one example of how I have adapted my own teaching methods to meet the needs and limitations of WSU students.

The use of textbooks is another example of adaptation. I would prefer to teach this course using monographs and primary sources. However, WSU students generally have poor reading skills, and little motivation to complete assigned reading. Coercive measures seem only to alienate them. Boring textbooks perhaps exacerbate these problems, but to use monographs at an introductory level is fruitless. I once spent two weeks discussing Carol Karlsen's *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* chapter by chapter with an upperlevel class on women and religion in America only to find out at exam time that they failed to comprehend its thesis even in a rudimentary form.

The choice of a textbook is also problematic. Most textbooks are written for use on a semester system, so they all cover more material than is possible in a 10 week period. And despite the variety of texts available to teach religion in America, I find none of them wholly satisfactory in terms of content. The first year I taught this course I used Edwin S. Gaustad's *A Religious History of America*. But because it maintains the traditional "Puritan origins" narrative, and devotes relatively little time to alternative religious traditions, I had to supplement the text quite heavily with other materials. The second year I taught this course I used Peter Williams's *America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures*. This text is much more satisfactory, especially since it is designed to be flexible. Chapters are discrete units that can be read in virtually any order. I found it necessary to supplement this text only with brief primary source documents.

When I next teach this course I will be using a new approach, so I have had once again to change textbooks. I considered using Catherine Albanese's *America: Religion and Religions*, but decided that it was altogether too long and difficult for my purposes. Julia Corbett's *Religion in America* is too short and simplistic, but it appears to be the "best" alternative. I will try to give the course some historical depth by using brief primary source documents nearly every class. I have had success with such documents in other courses. Although students often do not read them ahead of time, and generally have difficulty with the

unfamiliar writing styles and vocabularies, I can virtually read the documents to them in class, thereby teaching them not only about American religious history but also about how to read primary texts.

Because Corbett includes absolutely no discussion of Native American religions, I have decided to require as an additional reading assignment *Black Elk Speaks*. I wanted to include within the course one additional fiction or nonfiction text to introduce the students to a different approach and to serve as the foundation for a longer writing assignment. Had Corbett treated Native Americans, I would not have chosen *Black Elk* because the text has well-documented problems of its own. Nevertheless, it has a compelling narrative well within the abilities of my students. I will use it primarily as a vehicle to discuss various aspects of Native American traditions.

I have tried to include within the course a combination of both "hard" and "soft" assignments. The three examinations encourage students to learn factual details; without them many will grow complacent and inattentive. The writing assignments are designed both as opportunities to improve writing skills and as learning exercises. The "family genogram" and the "religion on the web" assignments are departures for me. I have included them as means to spark student interest and increase classroom involvement. The paper on *Black Elk Speaks* is the most extensive writing assignment of the course. At Wright State courses with heavy writing requirements are designated "writing intensive." Introductory survey classes are generally not so designated. Furthermore, given the constraints of a 10 week quarter it is problematic for the students to complete and the professor to direct a successful research paper. Even a brief analysis with assigned topics will provoke many complaints about having to "fillup" five pages.

Because I have not yet taught this course, I cannot comment on the success or failure of its various aspects. For its inspiration I have to thank my comrades in the Young Scholars Program, especially our seminar leader Prof. Deborah Dash Moore of Vassar College.

II. Course Syllabus

REL 230: RELIGION IN AMERICA *Winter Quarter 1998*

Time: MWF 10:00-10:50
Room: 221 Millett

Prof. Ava Chamberlain
Office: 407 Millett
Phone: 775-2844
email: achamber@wright.edu

Office hours: MWF 11:30-1:00 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Among western industrialized nations, the United States is unique both in the rate of religious belief and in the diversity of religious expression. Many early European colonists came to North America in order to freely practice their strongly held religious beliefs, and the right to free exercise of religion is guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. This course will explore the multiplicity of religious groups that compete in the modern religious marketplace. It will consider, first, the variety of faiths that constitute the religious consensus, and second, the even greater diversity of faiths that are found outside the consensus. It will consider such issues as: the effect of church/state separation, the difference between institutional and

popular religion, the distinctive beliefs and practices of religious groups, and the historical development of the major religious traditions in America.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Corbett, J. M. Religion in America, Third Edition. PrenticeHall, 1997.
- John G. Niehardt, ed., Black Elk Speaks. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979.
- Coursepack entitled "Documents for Religion in America"

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Classroom Responsibilities

Assignment: This requirement includes class attendance, preparation of reading assignments, and participation in class discussion.

Percentage of total grade: 5%

Examinations

Dates: Exam #1: Jan. 30

Exam #2: Feb. 20

Exam #3: March 20, 9:00-10:00 am

Format :Combination of objective, short answer and short essay questions.

Percentage of total grade: 20% each

Family Religion Genogram

Length: 2 pages

Due: Jan. 14, 1998

Percentage of total grade: 10%

Assignment: A family religion genogram is a family tree that traces the religious affiliations of your ancestors and more immediate family members. The aim of this assignment is to introduce you to the variety of religious expression in America, including Dayton, Ohio.

Instructions: See attached sheet.

Book Review

Length: 45 pages

Due : March 2, 1998

Topic: Black Elk Speaks

Percentage of total grade: 15%

Assignment: The aim of this assignment is to introduce you to the religious expression of Native American people. Although there is a great variety of religious beliefs and practices among American Indians, this

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fictionalized account of the life of Oglala Sioux holy man Black Elk brings together a number of important features of Native American spirituality in a single powerful narrative.

Instructions: See attached sheet.

Religion on the Web

Length: 2 pages

Due : March 11, 1998

Percentage of total grade: 10%

Assignment: The aim of this assignment is to introduce you to the variety of popular religious expression in America. It will also allow you to explore one of the fastestgrowing new mediums for religious expressionthe web.

Instructions: See attached sheet.

COURSE OUTLINE

Jan. 5 Introduction to course

Read: Corbett, pp. 1-9, 14-25

Jan. 7 Religion and the Constitution

Read: Corbett, pp. 11-14

CP1

Jan. 9 Religion and the Constitution

Read: CP 2-4

Jan. 12 The Religious Consensus

Read: Corbett, pp. 29-45

Jan. 14 The Religious Consensus

FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Family Religion Genogram

Jan. 16 The Puritan Legacy: Presbyterians/Congregationalists

Read: Corbett, pp. 54-56, 71-76, 80-81

CP 5-6

Jan. 19 NO CLASS! Martin Luther King Day

Jan. 21 Revival Protestantism: Baptists/Methodists

Read: Corbett, pp. 56-66

CP 7-8

Jan. 23 Liturgical Protestantism: Episcopalians/Lutherans

Read: Corbett, pp. 66-71, 76-80

CP 9-10

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Jan. 26 Liberal Protestantism: Quakers/Unitarians
Read: Corbett, pp. 83-84, 146-52
CP 11-12

Jan. 28 FIRST EXAMINATION

Jan. 30 NO CLASS! Professor at conference.

Feb. 2 Catholicism in America
Read: Corbett, pp. 88-93
CP 13-16

Feb. 4 Catholicism in America
Read: Corbett, pp. 93-110
CP 17

Feb. 6 Judaism in America
Read: Corbett, pp. 112-121
CP 18

Feb. 9 Judaism in America
Read: Corbett, pp. 121-136

Feb. 11 Women in the Religious Consensus
Read: Corbett, pp. 45-52, 84-87
CP 19-21

Feb. 13 Evangelicals/Fundamentalists
Read: Corbett, pp. 173-182
CP 22-23

Feb. 16 The Religious Right
Read: Corbett, pp. 182-196
CP 24

Feb. 18 Holiness/Pentecostals
Read: Corbett, pp. 196-203
CP 25-26

Feb. 20 SECOND EXAMINATION

Feb. 23 Native American Religion
Read: Black Elk Speaks, especially chs. 14, 89

Feb. 25 Native American Religion

Read: Black Elk Speaks, especially chs. 13-18, 21-25

Feb. 27 African-American Religion
Read: Corbett, pp. 205-207, 216-222
CP 27-29

Mar. 2 African-American Religion
Read: Corbett, pp. 223-228
CP 30-31

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Paper on Black Elk Speaks

Mar.4 Islam in America
Read: Corbett, pp. 230-242
CP32

Mar. 6 New Religious Movements: Mormons
Read: Corbett, pp. 154-166
CP 33-34

Mar. 9 New Religious Movements: New Age/Wicca
Read: Corbett, pp. 292-299, 303-309
CP 36-37

Mar. 11 Controversial Religions
Read: Corbett, pp. 266-291

THIRD WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Religion on the Web

Mar. 13 Concluding discussion

Family Religion Genogram

(1) Interview your family members about their current and past religious affiliations, and those of family members no longer living. Extend your genogram to include at least your grandparents and as many aunts, uncles and cousins as you can.

(2) Record as much of the following information as you can:

- *Name
- *Dates of birth and death (approximate if necessary)
- *Place of birth and residence.
- *The person's own characterization of his or her religious commitment.
- *Changes in religious commitment, with approximate dates.
- *Note any positions of religious authority held by family members.

(3) Organize the information in a way that shows relationships among family members.

(4) Record on a separate sheet of paper any interesting facts about such things as,

- *religious conflicts in your family
- *why a person changed religious affiliation
- *why a person chose to discontinue a religious commitment

(5) Be prepared to give a brief presentation of your genogram in class.

Book Review

Instructions: You are to read the entirety of *Black Elk Speaks*, but you should focus your paper on one of the following topics:

- (1) The means of acquiring spiritual power.
- (2) The relation between the natural and the supernatural worlds.
- (3) The nature and function of ritual.
- (4) The impact of white culture upon Native American religion and culture.

Style: Typed, doublespaced, standard margins and font size. Your paper should include a bibliography, and you should use a standard format for documenting all direct and indirect quotations (Turabian, MLA, Chicago).

Format: This is not a research paper. You will make better use of your time if you spend it analyzing the text. If you choose to use secondary sources, list all of them in your bibliography.

Religion on the Web

Instructions: You are to search the Internet for the site of a new religious group that you have never encountered before. On the basis of the information available on the site, write up a description of the group. Include such data as the group's history, its leadership, its distinctive beliefs and practices, the composition of its membership, and its expectations for the future. Print out some of the information available on the site and attach it to your paper. If you need some leads, check out the following site:

Yahoo! Society and Culture: Religion
http://www.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Religion

Be prepared to give a brief presentation of your findings in class.

NOTE : If use of a computer with access to the Internet is absolutely impossible, please consult with the class instructor.

Contents of the Course Pack

- CP1: T. Jefferson. Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom (Gaustad 1:259-61)
- CP2: "Cantwell v. Connecticut" (Eastland 15-23)
- CP3: "Abington School District v. Schempp" (Eastland 147-53)
- CP4: Pres. Clinton's Guidelines for Religion in the Public Schools.
- CP5: Reasons for Removal: Pilgrims (Gaustad 1: 101-103)
- CP6: Plan of Union (Gaustad 1: 382-83)
- CP7: Baptist Conversion (Gaustad 1: 386-87)
- CP8: Methodist Circuit (Gaustad 1: 388-89)
- CP9: Virginia's Cure (Gaustad 1: 98-101)
- CP10: Muhlenberg as Ecumenical Churchman (Gaustad 1: 174-75)

- CP11: Quaker Abolition (Gaustad 1:187-88)
- CP12: William Ellery Channing (Gaustad 1:283-90)
- CP13: Dominicans in Florida (Gaustad 1: 65-66)
- CP14: Franciscans in New Mexico (Gaustad 1: 70-72)
- CP15: Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk (Gaustad 1: 462-63)
- CP16: Constitution of the Know-Nothing Party (Gaustad 1: 464-66)
- CP17: Thomas Merton on Liturgical Renewal (Gaustad 2: 472-75)
- CP18: Pittsburg Platform (Gaustad 2: 400-401)
- CP19: Jarena Lee excerpt (Ruether & Keller 333-336)
- CP20: Woman's Bible excerpt (Ruether & Keller 274-76)
- CP21: The Danver's Statement (Ruether & Keller 241-44)
- CP22: Nathan Cole's account of George Whitefield (Heimert & Miller: 183-186)
- CP23: Scopes Trial (Gaustad 2: 350-351)
- CP24: Pat Buchannan's Address to the 1992 Republican National Convention
- CP25: Phoebe Palmer. Lay Your All upon the Altar (Ruether & Keller 230-31)
- CP26: Church of God in Christ defense of tongues-speech (Gaustad 2: 300-303)
- CP27: Slave Religion (Gaustad 1: 467-70)
- CP28: Richard Allen (Gaustad 1:300-303)
- CP29: Excerpt from speech by Frederick Douglas (Gaustad 1: 472-75)
- CP30: M.L. King, Jr. Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Gaustad 2:494-96)
- CP31: James Cone. A Black Theology of Liberation (Gaustad 2: 555-56)
- CP32: Excerpt from Autobiography of Malcolm X (Gaustad 2: 557-59)
- CP33: Joseph Smith's First Vision (Gaustad 1: 350-52)
- CP34: Smith's Revelation on Plural Marriage (Gaustad 1: 355-57)
- CP35: Conversion Narrative of Hiram Edson (Numbers & Butler 213-216)
- CP36: Neo-Pagans and the New Age (Gaustad 2: 546-550)
- CP37: Starhawk. The Spiral Dance (Ruether & Keller 463-67)

References :

1. Gaustad, Edwin S., ed. *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
2. Eastland, Terry, ed. *Religious Liberty in the Supreme Court*. Washington, DC.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993.
3. Ruether, Rosemary Radford and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995.
4. Heimert, Alan and Perry Miller, eds. *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences*. Indianapolis: BobbsMerrill, 1967.
5. Numbers, Ronald L. and Jonathan M. Butler. *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1993.