

## Course description

Variable Topics: Sociology of Religion  
Sociology V93.0970  
Professor Gerald Marwell

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**An appeal to the religious student:** Sociology is a product of the Enlightenment, and to some students seems to question religion at every turn. It therefore has an easy appeal to students who are skeptical of religion. But the most valuable members of the class are actually students who have strong religious convictions (like me – I am a committed atheist). They have much to say to the tepid, clueless or hostile, and make for a much better learning experience for everyone, including the professor. Also, Hindus, Muslims, Taoists, Wicca members, etc. add much to the discussion.

**Who should not take this course:** I do not recommend this course for first-semester Freshmen. They will find the assignments and the readings very demanding. Any experience at all in dealing with the oddities of professor's views of the world and of intellectual effort would be a big help.

**Objectives:** To examine the relationship between religion and society, not to assess the ultimate truth of any particular religion or religion in general. What is religion? How is it related to other institutions in society, like science and politics? Is terrorism a natural result of some religions? What do people get from being religious? How do religions change over time?

**Readings:** Five books available in the bookstore. None are textbooks. One is outrageously priced, but it really serves well to frame the course. You can get many of these books more cheaply on line, particularly if you buy them used. They are listed below in the order we will read them.

Irving Zeitlin, **The Religious Experience**, Prentice Hall, 2003. Paper. (to be read the first 2 or 3 weeks – start it now if you wish.)

Rodney Stark, **The Rise of Christianity**, Harper 1997. Paper.

N.J. Demerath III, **Crossing the Gods**, Rutgers University Press, 2003. Paper,

Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout, **The Truth About Conservative Christians**, University of Chicago Press, 2006. Paper.

Mark Chaves, **Congregations in America**, Harvard University Press 2004. Hardcover.

***PLUS: Occasional newspaper and other articles/readings to be assigned !!!.***

**Grading on next page:  
PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE END-OF-SEMESTER  
CONFERENCE THAT IS SCHEDULED**

## Grading:

1. Weekly quizzes on the readings. Usually, I hand out 3 essay questions the week before and then select one for you to answer as the quiz. It generally takes 10 minutes, and I expect a high level of performance since you have the question in advance.
2. Class attendance and participation. Since there will be a lot of discussion, attendance is essential and will be checked daily. I often call on people to speak, and lack of preparation is cause for a poor grade.
3. A 4-8 page term paper on a topic to be individually negotiated with me based on a list of topics that I provide.
4. **A subset of papers will be selected by me for presentation at a special 4-5 hour conference we will have at the end of the semester, which I have scheduled for Saturday, December 12 (see schedule). Attendance at this conference is strongly required. One, perhaps two classes will be called off during the semester, which will be made up for by the conference.**
5. At the time assigned for our last class, Tuesday, December 15, there will be a brief quiz of about 20 fill-in, matching and multiple choice questions devoted entirely to the papers presented at the conference.
6. There will be **no** comprehensive final exam, and no midterm exam.