

IST 1010: First Year Interdisciplinary Course
Reading American Protestantism: Religious Bestsellers
Fall 2015, Wednesday 1:00-4:30 PM

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Course Description:

A first year introductory course is required in the MTS, MDiv, MASC, and MAPSC programs. The purpose of these courses is to:

- Expose incoming students to the relevance of the academic, interdisciplinary study of religion and theology so they recognize from the first year of study that theological/religious studies disciplines work together to generate significant knowledge that matters to the world.
- Expose students in a collaborative way to the critical questions and issues that focus the research of the faculty.
- Provide a core first year experience and orientation to academic skills necessary for success at the graduate level.

Reading American Protestantism uses bestselling religious books as a lens through which to think about theological similarities and differences in American Protestantism, the ways in which religious ideas are packaged for popular consumption, and the ways in which different academic disciplines (sociology, history, religious studies, theology, ethics, etc.) can be used to study religious phenomena. The course is designed to build core skills necessary to be a successful student at Iliff, such as basic thesis writing using graduate-level research skills.

Learning Goals:

The course introduces theories and methods in the study of religion and theology, and provides learning experiences able to support the following learning outcomes for students: Students identify and describe characteristic approaches to the academic study of religion related to at least four of the six curricular areas identified in the core curriculum.

1. Students demonstrate critical reading skills, such as the capacity to identify the thesis of a text, its methodology, the contextual situation of the author's argument in a larger discourse, the contours of its argument, and the implications of its constructive work.
2. Students demonstrate the capacity to write a brief, thesis-driven paper drawing on textual resources with appropriate academic citation and a writing style appropriate to the genre.
3. Students are able to identify appropriate academic resources through library research in order to address a research question of significance to them.
4. Students engage in critical, respectful, and constructive academic dialogue and reflection in a diverse cultural setting (the classroom).
5. Student motivation, curiosity, and commitment to the engaged academic study of religion and theology increases.

Course Expectations:

Students are expected to attend every class, except for cases of illness or family emergency. It is not possible to pass the class if you miss more than two classes. Assigned readings should be completed before class meetings.

Schedule:

September 16: Course Introduction

Viewing: *Left Behind* movie (in class)

September 23: Evangelical and Liberal Protestant Traditions; Religion as Cultural Object

Reading: Wellman—*Evangelical vs. Liberal*, Chapters 1-2 (Canvas)

Balmer—*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Chapter 2 (Canvas)

Marti and Ganiel—*The Deconstructed Church*, Introduction (Canvas)

Griswold—*Culture and Societies in a Changing World*, Chapter 4 (Canvas)

Academic Literacy Skills: Getting to Know the Writing Lab, Assess the Writing Situation, Write a Solid Thesis. 1.5 hours

September 30: Popular Liberal Protestantism

Reading: Tinker—"Why I Do Not Believe in a Creator" (Canvas)

Borg—*The Heart of Christianity*, Preface-Chapter 5

Academic Literacy Skills: Library Research. Micah Saxton, Taylor Library, 1 hour (Students look for resources relevant to their final paper.)

October 7: Popular Liberal Protestantism

Reading: Borg—*The Heart of Christianity*, Chapters 6-11

Assignment Due: Submit Short Paper #1 on Canvas.

Academic Literacy Skills: Read for your Peers. 1 hour

October 14: Popular Evangelicalism

Reading: Warren—*The Purpose Driven Life*

October 21: Emerging Church Movement

Reading: Bolz-Weber—*Pastrix*

Assignment Due: Bring Short Paper #2 draft to class for peer reviewing.

October 28: Emerging Church Movement

Reading: McLaren—*A New Kind of Christianity*

Find a website related to the emerging church movement. We will discuss them in small groups.

Assignment Due: Submit Short Paper #2 on Canvas

November 4: Prosperity/Positive Thinking Gospel

Reading: Jakes—*Let It Go*

November 11: Compare and Contrast the Books

No reading

November 18: Conclusion

No reading

Further Thoughts: *The Action Bible* and the Bible as Bestseller

Assignment Due: Submit Final Paper on Canvas.

Written Assignments:

The written assignments fulfill the goals of the class by providing you an opportunity to engage in a more detailed critical theological and religious analysis of one of the books for the course. The assignments build on each other, providing you with the opportunity to engage in a layered approach to your analysis.

1. Short Paper #1: This paper consists of two sections. In the first section is a brief overview of the book you plan to use for your final paper. At a minimum it should address the questions: What is the central argument/thesis of the book? What is the theological/theoretical framework used by the author? For the second section, you will need to find two theological sources related to the book you plan to use for your final paper. The first source should be generally supportive of the author and/or the larger religious group they represent. The second source should be generally critical. Discuss the theological perspective of the source authors, including any obvious assumptions or biases. The paper should be approximately 4 pages.
2. Short Paper #2: Write a short paper that puts the book you chose in historical context. How does the author of the book continue previous theological perspectives? Is the author introducing any new perspectives? The paper should be approximately 4 pages.
3. Final Paper: Discuss one of the books in the course in relation to its historical and theological context. Then give your own theological or normative evaluation of the book. For example, does the book promote social justice or social oppression? Are the book's arguments intellectually sound or intellectually deficient? Of course, we expect you to incorporate material from the short papers. The paper should be approximately 10 pages.

All written assignments must use an accepted method of citation. (Hint: Go to http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/socrel/for_authors/instructions.html to see the citation method commonly used by sociologists. This is one of the easiest methods.)

There are lots of resources for citation and writing at the Iliff Writing Lab (<http://writing.iliff.edu>). We encourage you to make an appointment with our consultants to discuss your writing.

Grading:

Participation: 20%
Short Paper #1: 15%
Short Paper #2: 15%
Final Paper: 50%

Our working assumption is that students in a masters program can be expected to produce academic work that is above average (in comparison to undergraduates). Therefore, the modal grade we assign is B+. A paper will earn a B+ if it fulfills all of the requirements of the assignment. A paper will earn a grade higher than a B+ for exceptional quality. A paper will earn a grade of B or B- if there are minor to moderate shortcomings. Grades below B- are reserved for papers with major shortcomings.

This course may be taken pass/fail, but you must request this during the first two weeks by emailing the instructors. You do *not* need to provide a justification for your request.

ADA Policy:

Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to accommodate reasonably student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at 303-765-1146.

Course Readings Detailed Citations:

Balmer, Randall. 1993. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bolz-Weber, Nadia. 2013. *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*. New York: Jericho Books.

Borg, Marcus J. 2003. *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Griswold, Wendy. 2013. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. Fourth Edition. Los Angeles: Sage.

Jakes, T. D. 2012. *Let It Go: Forgive So You Can Be Forgiven*. New York: Atria Books.

Marti, Gerardo and Gladys Ganiel. 2014. *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McLaren, Brian D. 2010. *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that Are Transforming the Faith*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

Tinker, Tink. 2013. "Why I Do not Believe in a Creator." Pp. 167-179 in *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, edited by Steve Heinrichs. Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press.

Warren, Rick. 2002. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Wellman, James K. 2008. *Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.