353 Sociology of Religion

Kandi Stinson
stinson@xavier.edu
Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, Mormonism, and Scientology, to name just a few of the world’s many religions, vary widely in many significant ways. Growing up in one rather than another is likely to result in very different beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, ranging from one’s understanding of God, to one’s attitudes toward sexuality, capital punishment, abortion, and war, as well as one’s lifestyle, including political participation and social class. In addition to affecting individuals, religion also has significant consequences for groups, communities, societies, and even global processes. An important sociological question concerns the ways in which religion creates, reinforces, and/or challenges stratification, inequality, discrimination, and conflict. One of our concerns throughout the course will be to explore the factors that contribute to and the consequences of religious diversity among individuals and between groups and societies.

Religions vary in many significant ways but sociologists emphasize that all religions share some important components to varying degrees. First, each is a meaning system, comprising the beliefs, myths, symbols, and rituals that make up the substance of any religion. Second, each is a belonging system that unites followers in a community, whether face-to-face or not. Finally, each is a structural system, that is, each is an organization, whether simple or highly complex, that may involve leadership, roles, policies, and processes that sustain it over time. Sociologists are particularly interested in the ways in which these systems interact in specific social, cultural, and historic contexts.

Throughout the course we will apply a sociological perspective to the study of religion. In simplest terms, this means that we will examine religion at multiple levels of analysis. At the individual or micro-level, we will consider how individuals become religious, how they participate in religion, and how they contribute to the formation and maintenance of religious organizations. At the organization/community or meso-level, we will examine the ways in which religions organize, how they interact with the communities of which they are a part, and the ways in which religion contributes to and works against structures of inequality in society. At the national/global or macro-level, we will explore interactions between religion and other societal institutions, including family, economy, politics, and education, as well as the role of religion in global processes and interactions.

Course Goals and Objectives

Course readings, discussions, activities, and assignments have been chosen to help you achieve the goals and objectives listed below. After completing this course you should be able to do the following:

GOAL 1: Apply a sociological perspective to religion.

1. Apply fundamental sociological concepts to religion, including culture, roles, socialization, institution, bureaucracy, inequality, social control, and deviance.
2. Use major sociological theories, including structural-functional, conflict, feminist, symbolic interaction, rational choice, and systems theory, to analyze the role of religion in society.
3. Identify the steps of the scientific method in a sociological research journal article on religion.

GOAL 2: Critically examine the factors that contribute to and the outcomes of religion at multiple levels of analysis.
1. At the micro-level, identify factors that contribute to and outcomes of becoming religious, being religious, and religious conversion and switching.
2. At the meso-level, compare and contrast the strengths and challenges of different forms of religious organizations, including churches, sects, denominations, and new religious movements.
3. At the macro-level, construct an evidence-based argument on the ways in which religion contributes to inequality and social activism.

GOAL 3: Apply sociological perspectives and theories to contemporary societal issues related to religion.
1. Evaluate arguments concerning factors that contribute to and consequences of increasing denominationalism as well as challenges to denominationalism.
2. Critique, from an evidence-based perspective, the relative strengths and weaknesses of theories of secularization, non-secularization, and civil religion.
3. Explain and provide examples of the relationship between religion, globalization, and international politics.

GOAL 4: Apply a sociological imagination to one’s own understanding of the complex relationships between individuals and religion as organization and institution.
1. Use sociological concepts and tools to critically examine your own engagement with religion.
2. Identify multiple reliable and valid sources of sociologically relevant information and data on religion.

This course has been approved to meet the Ethics/Religion Society (E/RS) Focus elective course requirement for the Core Curriculum. As such, this course focuses on the complex interrelationships between religion and society.

Academic Honesty

The Xavier University Catalog states:

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.

All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.
If you have any questions about what is considered a violation of the Academic Honesty Code in the context of this class, I strongly encourage you to discuss this with me, either individually or in class. Any assignments, papers, exams, projects, or other coursework that I find to be in violation of the Academic Honesty Code will be assigned a grade of 0 points, i.e. an “F.” Repeated violations may result in a grade of “F” for the course.

I reserve the right to submit any assignments, papers, projects, or other written work to Turnitin.com.

**Required Reading**


Additional readings will be available online through Canvas.

**Class Format**

Most of our in-class time will be spent on activities that will allow you to understand, apply, and analyze the concepts that are introduced in the assigned readings. Some limited amount of time will be used for lectures, but the vast majority of time will be spent actively engaging with the concepts through a variety of group discussions and exercises. Ultimately, the discussions and exercises will contribute to your success in achieving course learning outcomes.

In order for you to get the most from our in-class time, it is necessary for you to spend time between class sessions preparing for class. It is very important that you keep up with the readings and assignments. Doing so will lead to more active and engaging class time and will contribute to your achievement of course goals and objectives. Being prepared for class entails two things.

First, you must complete the assigned readings and come to class familiar with the major ideas contained in the readings and ready to ask questions about those ideas that need further explanation.

Second, for many class meetings you will either submit a short homework assignment or prepare for a quiz. Homework assignments and quizzes are designed to help you identify and begin to apply important concepts and theories so that class time can be spent analyzing these ideas more deeply.

You should bring assigned readings to class with you as you may need them for in-class activities.

**Attendance Policy**

I expect you to attend every class. Some in-class activities will be graded and count for anywhere from 5-15 participation points. *Note that many graded in-class activities will not be announced before class.* If you are absent for a graded activity, whether excused or unexcused, you will not receive the points for your group’s work. If you have an excused absence (documentation required) for a quiz or exam, you will be able to make it up at a time determined by the instructor.

**Personal Technology in the Classroom**

Many of our in-class activities require the use of a computer, or occasionally, a cell-phone. A reminder will be included in the Canvas Module notifying you of when it will be necessary to bring a computer or
cell phone to class. If you do not have a computer that you can bring with you, be sure to check one out at the Connection Center Desk on the 3rd floor of the CLC on your way to class.

While I firmly believe that technology can contribute positively to learning, the unauthorized use of personal technology in the classroom can be distracting and disruptive.

1. Except when we are using them for a class activity, cell phones should be turned off or silenced before the start of class.
2. You may bring a tablet or laptop to class but it should only be used for class-related work.
3. Your first unauthorized use of personal technology in class will result in a warning. Subsequent unauthorized uses will each result in 5 points being subtracted from your participation grade.

Course Requirements

Course requirements are designed to help you achieve the course learning objectives:

- **Participation: Homework Assignments and In-Class Activities**

Active participation is an important course requirement for your own learning and the learning of other students in the class. Participation has two components: first, coming to class prepared, and second, actively engaging in class discussions and activities. For many class meetings there will be a short homework assignment due that will help you identify and assess your understanding of the concepts and topics we will examine in class. Instructions are posted within the Modules and you will submit assignments electronically through Canvas. Assignments will vary in point value from 5-15 points, depending on length and complexity and will be evaluated on the basis of completeness and accuracy.

The majority of our class time will be spent in discussions and activities designed to promote in-depth, creative, and critical analysis of course topics. Many discussions and activities will involve working in small groups. Some of your group activities will be graded, ranging in value from 5-15 points, depending on length and complexity. Activities will be evaluated on the basis of accuracy, completeness, and depth of analysis. Everyone in the group will receive the same score unless it appears that someone has not actively participated, based on the instructor’s observations and/or feedback from other group members. If you are absent for a graded activity, excused or unexcused, you will not receive the points for your group’s work and will not be able to make up the missed work.

_Your participation grade will consist of the percentage of potential homework and activity points that you earn._

- **Quizzes**

There will be 6 quizzes, each worth 20 points. The quizzes will use a “scratch-off” format that will be demonstrated on the first day of class. You will take the quiz individually on paper, and then in a group you will use a scratch-off to retake the quiz. If your individual score is higher than the group score, you will receive your individual score. Otherwise, you will receive the average of your score and your group’s score. Quizzes will focus on the reading assigned for that day and will consist of multiple choice questions. **Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped in calculating your final course grade. Your final quiz grade is the sum of your five highest quiz scores. If you miss a quiz for an unexcused absence, that is the score that will be dropped.**
• **Exams**

The three in-class exams are cumulative and will cover all readings, discussions, films, etc. covered in the course. Exams will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

If you need extended test-taking time or other accommodations due to a documented disability, you are expected to take the exam in the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) on the day the exam is scheduled as close to the class meeting time as possible.

• **Papers**

You will write two short (3-4 typed, double-spaced pages) papers in which you will apply a sociological perspective to religion. The first paper will involve analyzing a research journal article on religion. The second paper will provide you with an opportunity to apply a sociological perspective to your own experiences with religion. More detailed instructions for each paper will be provided on Canvas.

• **Group Project**

During the second half of the semester we will examine some of the most important ways in which religious organizations are changing in contemporary societies. Recent decades in the U.S. have seen the rapid and dramatic growth of what sociologists refer to as mega-churches and new paradigm churches. These new types of religious organizations reflect and respond to social changes in the larger society and have important implications for the future of religion. You will work in a small group to closely examine and critically analyze the website of a mega- and/or new paradigm church. More detailed instructions will be provided later in the course.

**Grades**

The point distribution for all course requirements is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments and in-class activities</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (highest 5 of 6 scores)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers (25 points each)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Project</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>600</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your final grade will be based on the percentage of points that you earn according to the scale below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B  83-86
B-  80-82
C+  77-79
C   73-76
C-  70-72
D+  67-69
D   63-66
F   0-62

**Accommodations**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) at 513-745-3280 on the 5th floor of the Conaton Learning Commons, Room 514, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

**Contacting Me Outside of Class**

My contact information is at the top of the syllabus. During the indicated office hours, I will be available to answer questions, discuss course materials, continue in-class discussions, or chat with you about anything you find interesting. Feel free to drop in during my office hours – no appointment is necessary. If you find that my office hours are not convenient for you, I will be happy to make an appointment to meet with you at an alternative time. You are more than welcome to drop by my office at any time, but I can’t guarantee that I will be there.

Email is likely to be the easiest and fastest way to contact me for quick questions but do note that I am unlikely to check my email during the evenings or on weekends.

**Canvas**

Canvas is the primary means of communicating class news and information, and disseminating the syllabus, reading schedule, due dates, instructions, resources, and additional readings. You should check Canvas regularly. If you have questions about due dates, instructions, exam format, policies, or other routine class matters, you should first consult the materials on Canvas, especially the syllabus. If you do not find the answer to your question there, please consult with me.

The course is organized as a series of six modules within Canvas (click on “Modules” on the left-hand side of the course page). Each module contains learning objectives and a complete list and description of readings, assignments, discussion topics, due dates, and related materials. Check the appropriate module regularly – material is subject to changes and updates. Modules will be available on Canvas about one week before they begin. The six modules are listed below:

**Module 1 – Sociology and Religion** (Tuesday, January 12 – Tuesday, January 26)

**Module 2 – Religious Meaning Systems** (Thursday, January 29 – Thursday, February 11)

**Module 3 – Religious Belonging Systems** (Tuesday, February 16 – Thursday, February 25)
Module 4 – Religious Structural Systems (Tuesday, March 1 – Thursday, March 24)

Module 5 – Religion, Inequality, and Activism (Tuesday March 29 – Thursday, April 7)

Module 6 – Religion and Social Change (Tuesday, April 12 – Thursday, May 5)

Schedule of Class Activities

A detailed schedule of class meetings and topics, required readings and assignments, due dates, and quizzes and exams is included in the Modules. Due dates for papers and exams are listed below:

T 2/2   Paper 1 due

R 2/11  Exam 1

R 3/3   Paper 2 due

R 3/22  Exam 2

T 4/19   Group Project

R 5/5   Final Exam