Course Description

This course is intended as an advanced introduction to the subject of religion and conflict. The subject matter is by nature controversial and is likely to produce strong reactions from students, so it is wise for us to bear that in mind from the outset. We will discuss these matters in a positive and constructive way throughout the semester. The basic learning objective is to understand further how religion, which had been written off as irrelevant not so long ago, has emerged as a powerful force in world politics.

Part I of the course consists of an overview and video presentation of ‘Luther’. This film tells the story of the beginning of the end of hegemony in Europe for the Catholic Church. It shows us how Martin Luther rebelled against the church establishment and played a key role in setting the stage for the states system that crystallized with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Part II focuses on religion, sociology and politics. Some of the most important theoretical ideas in the study of religion come from sociology. We will discuss the sociology of religion, along with concepts such as civilization, modernity and secularism. Various dimensions of how religion is connected to international relations are explored as well.

In Part III we explore religion and international conflict. This will include a discussion of the role of ethnicity in conflict. Conflict resolution and religion also are addressed in relation to each other.

Part IV moves on to a more direct focus on foreign policy and decision-making. Faith-based diplomacy, religion and American foreign policy, and religion and global civil society are among the subjects covered.

Fundamentalism, terrorism, war and global governance are the subjects of Part V. The rise of fundamentalism and religious violence are central topics. We also will explore the more positive side that religion can play in global governance.

Part VI is a summary of what we have learned. We will take a final look together at religion and conflict.
Course Requirements

Take-Home Mid-term Examination (Oct. 21 – due Oct. 26 at 9 a.m.) 15%

Take-Home Final Examination (Dec. 2 – due Dec. 7 at 9 a.m.) 30%

Term Essay (due Dec. 2, two-page outline due Nov. 4) 30%

Seminar Leadership 15%

Class Participation 10%

Review sheets (i.e., study guides) will be provided on Blackboard so you can prepare effectively for the take-home mid-term and final exams. All of the material from the assigned readings, class discussions and video presentation will be tested on the exams. The mid-term will appear on Blackboard on October 21 and a ten-page, double spaced answer is due by 9 a.m. on October 26. The respective dates for the final exam are December 2 and 5. The final exam will be 15 double spaced pages.

The term essay, limited to 25 double spaced pages, is due in class on December 2. The format is straightforward. I expect you to focus in greater depth on any one of the major subjects we cover on a weekly basis. A two-page outline and bibliography for your paper is due on November 4 or there will be a 20% penalty. This should be sent to me for review and approval via email. Please do visit with me as you begin to put together your outline. I expect to see a proposal for a paper that offers constructive criticism and some ideas for synthesis in a significant area of the literature on religion and conflict. The paper may take the form of a review essay, case study or aggregate data analysis; choice of method will depend upon the problem under study.

Each student will take a turn as seminar leader at one point during the semester. The date at which you will serve as seminar leader will be determined by a lottery held in the first class session. (Trades between students are permitted but must be approved in advance by the instructor.) The seminar leader is expected to (a) prepare a set of discussion points about the material that will go up on Blackboard on the Thursday preceding class; and (b) take primary responsibility for leading the discussion throughout the seminar session. For example, if you are seminar leader for October 14, your material is due on October 7.

A successful seminar will involve a mixture of discussion including both theory and its application to the real world. Thus the seminar leader should try to provide a series of provocative questions and issues that bring together the reading material for the week under more encompassing themes.

Your participation is very important to the success of this seminar. Thus a grade for participation in sessions other than those for which you are seminar leader also is included.
The material in the video presentation will be included on the exams.

All assignments are subject to change as noted in class, although none is expected at this time.

Be sure to back up all of your computer files. Do not turn in your only copy of any requirement.

The grading scale is as follows: A (90-100); B (80-89); C (70-79); D (60-69); F (< 60).

Americans with Disabilities Act

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and need assistance, please notify me immediately. Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your special needs.

Make-up Requirements

There will be no make-up assignments or tests for unexcused absences. Acceptable excuses, meaning medical or family emergencies and official university-related business, must be provided either to me in person, in writing, or by phone before an absence and in writing afterwards in order to be considered. Students who are unable to complete a requirement for legitimate reasons that do not qualify as excused under university guidelines, and who notify me ahead of time may, at my discretion, complete a requirement belatedly. Any requirement turned in on the day that it is due but after the time specified will face a 20% penalty. Each additional late day will mean a further 20% deduction.

Policy on Academic Ethics and Honesty

The academic work of all students must comply with all policies in force at USC. Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person’s work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, consult the course instructor.
Required Textbooks

Please buy these books. The third book is not as yet in print. Arrangements will be made so it can be purchased in a binder format.


Other Required Readings

All other reading will be made available in e-format.

Class Schedule

Part I: Overview

August 26 Overview of Course

Video Presentation: ‘Luther’

There will be a class discussion on Blackboard.

Part II: Religion, Politics and International Relations

September 2 Religion, Sociology and Politics


Politics and Religion Around the World


Religion in International Relations, I


Religion in International Relations, II


Part III: Religion and International Conflict

30 Religion, Ethnicity and International Conflict


October 7 Conflict Resolution & Religion: Opportunities and Constraints


Part IV: Religion in Foreign Policy and Decision-making


21 Midterm Take-Home Examination (class cancelled)

Due at 9 a.m. on October 26

Part V: Fundamentalism, Terrorism, War and Global Governance

28 The Rise of Fundamentalism


November 4 Religious Violence


Note: Two-page outline of term essay is due

11 Terrorism


18 Religion, Identity and Global Governance


25 Thanksgiving Break

Part VI: Summary

December 2 A Final Look at Religion and Conflict


Note: Term essay is due in class

Final take-home examination is due at 9 a.m. on December 7