

Department .: Sociology

Course number : Soci 253W

Title : Sociology of Religion

Credits : 3

Contact Person : Brad Wright

Catalog Copy :

Soci 253. Sociology of Religion. Either Semester. Three credits . *Eisenhandler*. Religion in social context: differences of church, denomination, sect, and cult; religious culture, organization, and ideology.

Soci 253W. Sociology of Religion . Prerequisite: Engl 110 or 111 or 250.

W Criteria:

Two review essays and one research paper are part of the formal requirements for the W students.

The review essays (film and book) emphasize critical thinking, focused response, and effective presentation of ideas to an audience that has not viewed or read the material that is under review by the student. The reviews ask students to present central features of the organization of religious groups or their interactions with other social groups (such as the unique features of belief and practice or the similarities religious groups have with secular organizations) and to evaluate the film-maker's or writer's effectiveness in conveying this to an audience. The reviews range from 3-5 pages exclusive of title page and reference section and are 15-20% of the W grade.

The research essay is based on a traditional review of literature on an aspect of religious institutions or on the interaction of their members with one another or with other groups in society. Many students use the assignment to learn more about a particular religious group (e.g., Tibetan Buddhists, Seventh Day Adventists, Raelians) and relate this comparative case study material to larger theoretical issues in the sociology of religion. The literature review, explication of two theoretical concepts from the sociological study of religion, and the exposure to previously unfamiliar religions results in a deeper appreciation for different conceptions of the sacred and the profane. The comparative perspective encourages students to learn more about the vocabularies of faith that influence social behavior and introduces them to the more difficult aspects of writing about religion in an accurate and objective way. In its final form (the third step in a semester-long process) this research paper ranges from 10-16 pages exclusive of title page and reference section and is (40-50%) of the final W grade. In each of the earlier steps the students complete a 2-4 page proposal and a 4-7 page preliminary paper or partial draft (this version includes a summary of material found on the specific religion).

All of the modes mentioned above are used as needed and with respect to the individual student's preference and responsiveness to suggestions about writing. Individual conferences and comments on papers are the primary ways used to address the substantive and technical aspects of writing. In

addition, “micro-mini” segments of 10-15 minutes (class-time) are periodically used to address issues such as the purpose of research papers, intellectual honesty, the idea of audience, organization, topic sentences, paragraph development, documentation, and basic grammar.

For the two essays (film and book reviews), W students receive additional instruction in the purpose of writing reviews with emphasis on the idea of writing for an audience (i.e., sociologists). Students are strongly encouraged to discuss drafts with the instructor before final versions are submitted. These two assignments are intended to illustrate the value of seeking input as a paper develops and to acquaint students with some of the issues that emerge when one writes about religion.

For the research paper, W students follow a three step progression with opportunities in the first two steps to receive thorough comments from the instructor about the religious group studied, the organization of papers, clarity of expression, and the substantive content (quality) of their sociological perspective on the specific group. Students are given ample opportunity to work with the instructor outside the classroom in order to discuss issues related to writing about material derived from their independent reading and study, overall organization of ideas, and the most effective ways of integrating the comparative or case study material with the other scholarly evidence (studies, findings, and the like) they have gathered.

Students can only pass the class if they pass the writing portion of the class, and they will be apprised of this in the course syllabus.

Role of Grad Students : None