REL 290: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN IOWA

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Course Description

Though stereotypes might suggest otherwise, Iowa abounds with religious diversity. Cedar Rapids' Mother Mosque is often claimed as the oldest mosque in the U.S., Maharishi Vedic City and Fairfield serve as headquarters for the Transcendental Meditation movement, Baha’i communities permeate the state, and Des Moines is home to thriving Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, and Muslim populations, among others. The metro area boasts at least two gurdwaras, three synagogues, four mosques, and four Buddhist temples, thanks in part to Governor Robert Ray’s work to establish Iowa as a refugee resettlement center in the 1970s. This course explores the varieties of faith that make their home in Iowa and enables students to research a particular sect and its impact on Iowa. After about a month of preparatory readings and discussion of religious diversity in America, students will be placed into one of five, four-student groups to begin their in-depth exploration of their sect, which will include witnessing religious services and entering into dialogue with members. Each student group will share the knowledge they have gained about their respective communities, including consideration of the challenges these groups have encountered in Iowa and suggestions for addressing those challenges.

1 In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author’s context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.
Course Texts

- Additional readings online

Requirements and Grading

- Interview a friend/family member and write their religious biography (2–3 pages; 5% of grade)
- Attend a religious service of your focal religious community, reflect on the experience in a paper (3–5 pages; 10% of final grade)
- Interview at least two members of that community, write a paper summarizing each interview (2–3 pages; 5% of final grade each, 10% of final grade total)
- Class leadership about your focal religious community (2 classes; 10% of final grade)
- Write a paper on your focal religious community (7–9 pages; 20% of grade)
- 5–7 page paper on selected aspect of religious diversity and American diversity outside of Iowa (15% of final grade)
- Summarize assigned readings (1–2 pages; 5% of final grade)
- Class participation and daily breads (25% of final grade)

Participation

**Attendance, participation, and daily breads:** Each student is an invaluable resource for this course. Your insights, questions, and active engagement with the material greatly enhance the amount each of us learns from this course. Thus attendance and thoughtful participation are required. Participation includes brief written responses to the reading and discussion as well as consultations outside of class. Random quizzes may be given over the material and may contribute to your class participation grade. N.B.: Participation is not simply attendance; each student’s grade will be based on the extent of his or her demonstrated engagement with the material, both orally and in writing.

By 9 a.m. before each class when we have class readings, except when you are leading the discussion or have written a summary, you are to upload to Scholar (our course website) a question that addresses an issue raised by the reading and will encourage lively discussion in class. You are also to write some of your own thoughts on this question (two paragraphs, maximum). These “daily breads” are informal but mandatory; if you will be absent from class, you still must submit your question and thoughts on it to Scholar by 9 a.m. Together with your participation in each class, these assignments count for 25% of your overall grade. Participation will be the first factor considered if a student’s grade is on the cusp; failure to participate regularly and productively precludes the possibility of an A.
First Paper
To better understand the particularities of Iowa, the course begins with an overview of religious diversity in the U.S. and how this diversity and American democracy have mutually enriched and challenged each other. When students meet with Professor Callan prior to January 30 to discuss the various Iowa communities, we will also discuss potential questions for you to explore in this paper. Students are free to consider virtually any aspect of the intersection of religious diversity and American democracy outside of Iowa, but you must have your topic approved by the professor.

Reading Summaries
Each student will write one summary of an assigned reading for either the third, fourth, or fifth weeks of the semester, to be distributed via Scholar by 10 p.m. the night before that class. These should state succinctly but clearly the main points or themes of the readings. The order for the student summaries will be selected on the first class. The summary counts for 5% of your grade, but order of submission, length of reading, and other factors will be taken into account.

Research Project
This course requires you to become an active scholar in the field of religious diversity as you work with other students to research a particular religious community in Iowa. You will consider the perspectives of members of the community as well as outsiders’ responses to that community. Each student must meet with me by the fourth week of class to discuss options. Prior to spring break, and after being approved for research by the IRB, students will begin their research, establishing a considerate and respectful relationship with the community, attending at least one religious service at a convenient time for the community, conducting interviews of two or more members, and reading at least three distinct scholarly sources relating to your community (to be approved by the professor).

Class Leadership
In the last few weeks of the semester, each group will lead the class in learning about their community over two class periods. Your group will assign the readings for those days (approximately 30-40 pages/day, notifying the class at least a week in advance). I will send you a selection of daily breads by 10 pm the night before the class to assist in your preparation. As daily breads can help prepare for class discussion, other students are encouraged to submit them by 9 pm the night before groups lead class (identifying information will be removed before being sent to the groups). These classes should be beneficial both for the group as they conduct their research and for the class as a whole, as we learn about the topic.

Religious Service
You must attend at least one service of your religious community of focus. You will write a 3- to 5-page paper that summarizes, analyzes, and engages with this service, with special consideration of how the service helps you understand the tradition, the community, and their experiences in Iowa. The paper will be worth 10% of your final grade.
Interviews
Each student will interview at least two distinct members of your focal religious community and write a 2-to 3-page summary of each interview, to then use as a basis for your paper (5% each, 10% of final grade). To help students become familiar and comfortable with the interview process, you will first interview a friend or family member and write their religious biography (2-3 pages, 5% of final grade).

Final Paper
Each student will write a 7- to 9-page (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times font) paper on your focal religious community. While you should clearly explain the basics of your given community, its services and members, these papers are not simply summaries but require your engagement with the subject matter, demonstrating your personal insight and analysis. Each group member should focus on a particular aspect of your collective community. For example, one student could examine gender issues, another could emphasize concerns about assimilation, et cetera. Basic paper guidelines will be provided.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Monday
► Course introduction
► In-class reading; discussion of First Amendment, Treaty of Tripoli, and the evolution of the U.S. national motto and pledge of allegiance

Wednesday
► Eck in McGraw and Formicola, pp. ix-xv
► Patel, pp. xi -22

Friday
► Patel, pp. 23-62

WEEK 2

Monday
► Patel, pp. 65-103

Wednesday
► Patel, pp. 107-69

Friday
► McGraw and Formicola, Ch 1
WEEK 3
Monday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 2
Wednesday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 3 and 5
Friday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 4 and 10

WEEK 4
Monday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 6
▶ Meet with Professor Callan by this date to discuss possible communities
Wednesday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 8
▶ Friend/family member religious biography due
Friday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 7

WEEK 5
Monday
▶ Singh, Numrich, and Williams, Ch 4-6
▶ Groups will be announced
Wednesday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 9
Friday
▶ Singh, Numrich, and Williams, Ch 1-3

WEEK 6
Monday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 11
Wednesday
▶ Singh, Numrich, and Williams, Ch 7-9
Friday
▶ McGraw and Formicola, Ch 12
**WEEK 7**
- **Monday**
  - First paper due
- **Wednesday**
  - Abner Kneeland select readings
- **Friday**
  - Amana select readings

**WEEK 8**
- **Monday**
  - Discussion of project plans
- **Wednesday**
  - Meet in groups
- **Friday**
  - Group progress reports

**WEEK 9**
- Spring Recess – No Class

**WEEK 10**
- **Monday**
  - Guest lecture
- **Wednesday**
  - Meet in groups
- **Friday**
  - Group progress reports
  - Interview summary 1 due

**WEEK 11**
- **Monday**
  - Group 1 leadership (includes assigned readings)
- **Wednesday**
  - Group 1 leadership (includes assigned readings)
- **Friday**
  - Group 2 leadership (includes assigned readings)
WEEK 12
Monday
► Group 2 leadership (includes assigned readings)
► Interview summary 2 due

Wednesday
► Group 3 leadership (includes assigned readings)

Friday
► Group 3 leadership (includes assigned readings)

WEEK 13
Monday
► Group 4 leadership (includes assigned readings)

Wednesday
► Group 4 leadership (includes assigned readings)

Friday
► Group 5 leadership (includes assigned readings)
► Religious service paper due

WEEK 14
Monday
► Group 5 leadership (includes assigned readings)

Wednesday
► Current/recent public policy case relating to religious diversity in Iowa

Friday – No Class

WEEK 15
Monday
► Current/recent public policy case relating to religious diversity in Iowa

Wednesday
► Course Conclusion

Friday
► Final papers due