

# Syllabus

## The American Religious Experience (REL 2102-01)

St. Francis College  
Brooklyn, New York

Fall 2012

Tuesday, Thursday:  
8:00 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.

**Instructor:** Professor Alexandria M. Egler  
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**\*\*\*This is only a preliminary version of the course syllabus. Its contents may and likely will be subject to some change at the beginning of the semester. \*\*\***

**Credits:** 3 credits. This course fulfills the Core Curriculum requirements in Religious Studies. It may also be selected as a Liberal Arts elective.

### **Catalogue Description:**

An inquiry into the mutual interaction of religion and culture in American society, including aspects of Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism. Attention will also be given to distinctively American forms of religion, including the Black churches, sectarian movements and American religious pluralism.

### **Course Objectives:**

The purpose of the course is to study the different religious traditions that together make up the total picture of "religion in America" (that is, the United States). The course is taught in historical perspective, but also focuses on living religious communities. We will look at the ways in which different religions have affected one another in their often complex relationships, and we will learn about distinctively "American" religious forms and movements. Throughout our study we will use Brooklyn as our lens through which we will examine the American Religious Experience. There is no better place in the United States to study the rich diversity of people, culture, languages and spiritual practices. Brooklyn and its 71 square miles will be our laboratory this semester.

Throughout the semester we will try to acquire a sense of how religious life is experienced by members of different religious communities through site visits, films, and the reading of

primary and secondary sources along with biographies, fiction as well as our textbook. An essential and important component of our experience this term will be our work at the Brooklyn Historical Society and with members of the staff from the Historical Society, whose doors will be open for our religious family tree project. Students will be encouraged to share their own history and experiences and to reflect on them. At the end of the course the student should have acquired an integrated knowledge of the history of religions in the United States, and a deeper understanding of different religious cultures and beliefs in a religiously pluralistic America and Brooklyn.

**Some points to keep in mind throughout our work together this semester:**

1) All religions are true to their believers. All religious rituals, acts, beliefs, and doctrines make sense in context. If something doesn't make sense to you, then you need more context. Don't think "how could they believe that?" but instead seek understanding: "Why was this believable to them?" Take statements of religious belief or disbelief at face value (but not necessarily as historical fact).

2) No religious concept should be dismissed as weird, crazy or abnormal. There is no "normal." You can certainly have your own opinions and personal beliefs about religion, but those don't belong in our classroom discussion.

3) As much as is possible, approach your scholarship as a historian, rather than as a believer or a skeptic. While religious doctrines will be discussed, it is never with the intent to prove a religion right or wrong. Please do not use our class as a platform for either proselytizing your faith to convert others, or debunking the faith of others to lessen their commitment. Our class is going to be made up of a variety of faiths and degrees of religious involvement which we should all respect.

**Textbook:** Lippy, Charles H. *Introducing American Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Professor Egler will provide a copy of the text to each student enrolled in the class.

In addition to this text there will be required readings which will either be posted on Angel or distributed in class.

**Requirements:** The accepted standard for college education is at least two hours of preparation outside of class for each one hour of class meeting. Since this class meets for three hours a week, *you should be spending an average of about six hours of work a week outside the classroom*. Assignments for this class have been designed accordingly.

Students are expected to read and to be able to discuss material designated for a particular class or cluster of classes, as well as to complete on time all other assignments that may be given. The content of the course for which you are responsible includes not only readings in the text and class lecture and discussion, but also all assignments that are posted on Angel or handed out in class, films, guest speakers or class site visits, of which there will be a few. You

are responsible for all readings whether or not they are discussed in class, so prepare thoroughly and ask questions in class on the readings. This will help your grade.

*It is the student's responsibility to learn from the instructor or other students about any assignments, handouts or class presentations he or she may have missed when absent for any reason and to know that material.*

### **What I expect from you:**

I assume all class members are adults and able to manage time in such a way as to be in class and in ones seat with telephones, blackberries, blueberries, pagers and iPods, etc. turned off when class begins. There are a few consequences to missing/being tardy for class:

1. You miss the material covered in that class, including any announcements about films, guest speakers, etc.
2. Material discussed in class is not always found in sufficient detail in the textbook, so it will be up to YOU to borrow notes or find out about any announcements that may have been made.
3. You cannot pass the course unless you take all exams (on their scheduled dates) and hand in the assignments.
4. Regular class attendance is required, and attendance will be taken (absences, tardiness and early departures will be noted).
5. If you are absent for more than 10% of our class meetings (this also includes tardiness, which, if occurs consistently, adds up to absences) you are subject to an "F" for the course.
6. To be marked "Excused" instead of "Absent" please submit a written message concerning the reason for an absence and I will make the determination. Submitting a written excuse or a doctor's note DOES NOT guarantee an EXCUSED ABSENCE. Please note that absence **during** class (after attendance has been taken) counts as absence. Attendance for the full class period is required. A final grade will be affected if a student does not come to class, is late and/or is ill prepared for the discussion.

**Take the exams on the scheduled dates!** The exams will cover the readings assignments, class lectures and discussions and any other relevant material assigned. Should it become necessary to postpone a scheduled exam because of unforeseen events (professor's absence, severe weather, etc.) the exam will take place during the next regularly scheduled class meeting. Make-up exams: will be allowed only in truly exceptional circumstances, in the case of unforeseeable events beyond the student's control. With that said if you miss an exam, you **MAY NOT** make it up and it will be counted as "0" towards your grade.

### **Grading:**

Class Participation [Attendance, Verbal Participation, Class Visits to BHS] and Written Work – Blogging, Online Discussions: **25%**

Introductory Reflection, Family Religious History Reflection and Religious Site Visit Reflection:  
50%

Exams: 25%

**Discussion in Class:** Positive contribution to class discussion (other factors also considered) may raise your grade for the entire course.

**Turn in assignments.** Since all assignments are noted in advance, details are available on Angel and are to be submitted via the Angel drop box created for each specific assignment. There is no excuse for handing in assignments late. "Late" is defined as "not received by the close of the drop box (usually 11:55 p.m.) of the due date."

Late papers and Angel discussion postings: Unless an extension has been arranged in advance, late papers will be marked down one full letter grade for each day after the due date. Late papers will not be accepted more than three days after the due date. A "0" will be recorded for any work not turned in. No work of ANY kind will be accepted after the last day of final exams. Exceptions to this policy will be granted only to victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.

**To avoid further penalties for late submissions,** it is recommended that you **e-mail your work to me**, after the close of the drop box so it gets into my hands ASAP. Ideally, of course, submit your work on time.

**Attendance:** "Generally, when a student is absent for more than 10 percent of the total class meetings of a course, he or she is subject to a grade of F for excessive absences" (St. Francis College Catalogue). This means that if the class meets about 45 times, more than 5 absences will subject you to a failing grade, or more than 3 absences if the class meets about 30 times. To be marked "Excused" instead of "Absent" please submit a written message about the reason for your absence.

If you expect to miss class due to the observance of religious holy days, or other extenuating circumstances, please notify me in advance prior to your absence class or at by email at [aegler@sfc.edu](mailto:aegler@sfc.edu) Again, notifying me DOES NOT necessarily mean your absence will be marked as EXCUSED. I will make that determination.

- If you are legitimately sick, DO NOT come to school and spread your germs to others. Contact me via e-mail and be prepared to present a dr.'s note.
- **If I am late** - students are to *wait at least 15 minutes* before leaving. If I do not show up, please sign an attendance sheet which should be brought to the Academic Dean's Office (8<sup>th</sup> floor).

**Lateness:** I will lower your overall grade due to excessive lateness, leaving class, etc.

**Absence During Class:** Absence *during* class (after attendance has been taken) counts as absence. Attendance for the full class period is required.

**Classroom Behavior:** Disruptive behavior in the classroom that detracts from the teaching-learning process will not be tolerated, and disruptive students will be asked to leave the class.

- Please turn off or mute all cell phones and pagers prior to entering the classroom.
- Please avoid side chats with your classmates - they are distracting and annoying to other students who are trying to pay attention.
- If you arrive to class late or leave early, please do so quietly so as to not be a distraction. (If you do come to class late make sure I have checked off your name so you get credit for being present.)
- ***Absolutely no cell phones or other personal devices permitted on your person while taking exams!***

**Eating and Drinking in Class:** It is a St. Francis College regulation that eating and drinking are not allowed in the classrooms (not just this class, but any class). Sorry!

**Cell Phones:** ALL communication devices must be turned off and put away during every class. Texting and other forms of communication will not be tolerated and I will lower your grade if you are seen texting in class.

**Delayed Exams:** If any exam cannot be given on the designated day because of unforeseen events such as the professor's absence, weather, etc., the exam will be given on the next scheduled class day.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Trust between teacher and student is essential to a successful learning environment. Cheating and plagiarism represent not only a serious violation of academic ethics; they also represent a breach of that essential trust.

Cheating and plagiarism damage both the purpose of the college education and the experience students derive from being at St. Francis College. They are offenses that harm both the deceiver and the students who do not cheat. Cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of "F" for the entire course with a report to the Academic Dean. Cheating is not just "cheating on an exam." Cheating is also handing in work that someone else has done for you or work you (or someone else) have already used in another course, unless you have written permission from BOTH instructors.

### **Plagiarism will not be tolerated!**

- Plagiarism includes the use of paraphrased as well as quoted material without [citing sources](#).

- If you are caught plagiarizing from the Web or elsewhere, you will receive a failing grade on that assignment with no opportunity to re-do the assignment.

Sometimes students don't realize that through "loosely borrowing" words or working with a classmate they may be engaging in plagiarism. Since ignorance is no excuse, please follow this link to read and understand what constitutes plagiarism.

[http://www.wadsworth.com/english\\_d/special\\_features/plagiarism/definition.html](http://www.wadsworth.com/english_d/special_features/plagiarism/definition.html)

We will spend a good bit of time discussing how to correctly cite and credit sources for the materials that we will be using with permission from the Brooklyn Historical Society. It is imperative that we do this correctly and I, as well as staff members of BHS will assist you throughout the course of the semester.

If you are still uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism (or other forms of academic dishonesty), please speak with me or consult *The Cord*.

#### **Some of my expectations of my students:**

- attend class regularly, on time and remain for entire class session.
- complete all assignments in a timely manner and to the best of your ability (part of which means you do not wait until the day before an assignment is due to begin working on it).
- complete all reading assignments attentively and on time, ready for discussion.
- be attentive in class (no sleeping, side chats, cell phone use, etc.) and contribute to class discussions.
- do your own work rather than cheat or plagiarize.
- **care more about learning than about grades!**

## **There is **NO** Extra Credit offered in the class!!!!**

Please feel free to speak with me if you have *any* questions, concerns or problems with the class.

### **SCORING RUBRICS FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING/RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS**

Writing/research assignments are scholarly activities and will be evaluated carefully using the scoring rubrics below. **Quality** of content not **quantity** determines the grades earned. Assignments posted late will automatically drop a full letter grade each day starting with the due date. Except where noted Scholarly Writing/ Research Assignments are worth the letter grade based on the following rubrics.

Assessment Continuum	< Mastery>		<Developing>	<Emerging>		No Points Achieved
	<b>A</b>	<b>B+ B</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Development</b>	Development of topic is outstanding, very focused and well-articulated	Development of topic is very good, clearly focused and articulated	Development of topic is good, focused, and articulated	Development of topic is adequate but not always focused	Development of topic is too general and loses focus	Topic is not developed
<b>Analysis</b>	Unusual insights and/or flashes of brilliance with creative and original analyses	Very good reasoning, explanations and analysis	Decent reasoning, explanations, and analysis	Some inaccuracies or flaws in reasoning and/or analysis	Unclear reasoning, explanations, or analysis	Explanation, reasoning or analysis is missing
<b>Support</b>	Ideas are supported with more than one scholarly source and cited correctly in both text and reference list	Ideas are supported by one scholarly source which is cited correctly in both text and reference list	Ideas are primarily supported by non-scholarly sources though cited correctly in both text and reference list	Sources supporting ideas are not consistent or are not correctly cited in text and reference	Ideas consist primarily of personal opinions	Ideas are cursory
<b>Thesis &amp; Conclusion</b>	Excellent thesis and concluding statements	Very good thesis and concluding statements	Adequate thesis and concluding statements	Thesis or concluding statements lack clarity	Thesis and concluding statements are unrelated	Lacks a thesis or concluding statement
<b>Style</b>	Writing has a real sense of style, with excellent organization, and strictly follows MLA guidelines	Writing has very good organization, few grammatical or spelling errors, and follows MLA guidelines	Writing has, serviceable prose but errors in spelling and/or grammar, and MLA guidelines not always used	Writing is disorganized with poor grammar or spelling, and MLA guidelines not always used	Writing is difficult to read, poor grammar or spelling, and MLA guidelines are not followed	Writing does not meet graduate level standards

### THREADED SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE

Quality participation in Threaded Scholarly Discourse distinguishes the virtual classroom from other methods of learning and course participation. The definition of a good Threaded Scholarly Discourse is one that is; organized, uses correct grammar and spelling. It includes your own ideas and experiences

with support from sources through citation(s) to expand upon, support, or exemplify the development of your ideas, opinions, and theme. Simply stating your opinion with little or no evidence of the use of readings or research does not constitute scholarship. You are responsible for answering questions posted to you by the professor or learning colleagues until the close of the assignment. You are also responsible for keeping up with the discussion and posting your thoughts/comments on the posts of your colleagues. I expect that each comment posted should have at least three supporting (or contrasting) comments by colleagues. Therefore, you should post your insights/reflections/concerns as well as commenting on at least three of your colleagues. Your posts should move far beyond “I agree” or “I disagree”. Always state **WHY** you agree or disagree in an intelligent and respectful manner. What this means is while I don’t expect everyone to agree, you need to explain your position concisely and intelligently either in favor of or against the issue or topic at hand. A Threaded Scholarly Discourse is worth the letter grade based on the following rubrics.

	A	B+ B	C+	C	D	F
<b>Intro-duction</b>	Initial posting is excellent and promotes further exploration and discursion	Initial posting is very good and promotes engagement	Initial posting is good and promotes engagement	Initial posting is adequate	Initial posting is cursory	Initial posting lacks focus or does not meet assignment directives
<b>Analysis</b>	Excellent reasoning and analysis throughout the TSD	Very good reasoning, and analysis throughout the TSD	Decent reasoning, and analysis throughout the TSD	Some inaccuracies or flaws in analysis or reasoning during the STD	Unclear reasoning and analysis	Lacks analysis
<b>Support</b>	Ideas are supported by scholarly sources	Ideas are supported by non-scholarly sources	Ideas are supported by undocumented sources	Ideas are supported using only anecdotal sources	Ideas consist primarily of personal opinions	Ideas are cursory and unsupported
<b>Interaction</b>	Quality of responses to others is excellent, meaningful, and respectful	Quality of response to others is very good, meaningful, and respectful	Quality of response to others is adequate and respectful	Quality of response to others is simplistic but respectful	Quality of responses to others is irrelevant and/or curt	Does not respond to others in meaningful or respectful ways
<b>Style</b>	Postings are expertly	Postings are very well	Postings are adequately	Postings are written with	Postings are haphazardly	



	written yet concise and focused.	written and focused	written though wordy	errors in spelling grammar and/or focus	written with little focus.
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**Assessment:**

Grading Scale

92-100 – A

89-91 – B+

82-88 – B

79-81 – C+

72-78 – C

65-71 – D

Below 65 – F