During these ten weeks we observe and reflect on personal and collective experiences in the encounter with “the sacred.” With active sociological imaginations, with careful reading, and with small group as well as large group discussion, we explore some of the roles played by religions in this era of unprecedented globalization. Our course draws on readings in the sociology of religion, thought-provoking documentaries, life experiences in the encounter between religion and society, and cases of specific religious communities and their roles in public life.

Our central goal: to gain awareness of how sociological understanding can shed light on the relationship between religion and society in our world. We do this as a community of learning. In a constructive spirit of dialogue each point of view can be respected and each argument can be thoughtfully examined.

Required: *Religion in Today's World: Global Issues, Sociological Perspectives*, by Melissa M. Wilcox (Routledge 2013) Please bring this book to each class session—for small group and large group discussion—and please read the specific pages (as indicated) in preparation for each day.

**Week I** Tuesday, Sept. 26 and Thursday, Sept. 28  **What is Religion?**
We open with discussion about our own backgrounds in relation to religion. We then begin to explore different ways of defining religion. For discussion on Thursday of this first week: What are some of the most noteworthy things we learn about religion—and about the study of religion and society—from Melissa Wilcox in her “Tilting at Windmills” essay (1-16)? What is Talal Asad’s core argument and what do you think of it (17-34)? What are the major points made by Meredith McGuire (35-55)?

**Week II** Tuesday, Oct. 3 and Thursday, Oct. 5  **Secularization and Sacralization**
For discussion on Tuesday of this second week: What are, according to Peter Berger, some of the key features of secularization (56-60)? What does Stephen Warner discover in his study of religion in the United States (61-67)? Why does Berger claim that the whole “secularization theory” (to which he contributed) is mistaken (68-78)? For discussion on Thursday of this week: How does Steve Bruce define secularization and why does he argue that it is not a mistaken thesis (79-89)? What do you think of the “subjectivization thesis” in light of points made by Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (90-110)?
Week III  Tuesday, Oct. 10 and Thursday, Oct. 12  Religion and State
For discussion on Tuesday of this third week: What do you think about the main points made by Melissa Wilcox in “Religion, State, and Nation” (111-124)? What do we learn about the relationship between religion and the nation-state in modern China (125-145)? For Thursday of this week: We will watch selections from the National Geographic series “The Story of God, with Morgan Freeman” (raises great questions to think about).

Week IV  Tuesday, Oct. 17 and Thursday, Oct. 19  Religion and Nation
For discussion on Tuesday of this fourth week: What are the key features of civil religion in America, according to Robert Bellah (165-178)? How does Charles Long critique the civil religion thesis (179-184)? For discussion on Thursday of this week: What do we learn about “the militant Christian Right” in the US (185-193)? Due on Thursday of this week: A one-paragraph statement indicating where you are in the process for your field study/research paper project (see assignment later in this course outline).

Week V  Tuesday, Oct. 24 and Thursday, Oct. 26  Religion and Social Power
For discussion on Tuesday of this fifth week: What does the Wilcox essay “Religion, Oppression, and Resistance” get you to thinking (213-230)? For Tuesday please also read the brief selection from Karl Marx (231-232). For discussion on Thursday of this week: What do we learn about the complex relationship between religion and social power from W.E.B. Du Bois and Lara Medina (233-255)?

Week VI  Tuesday, Oct. 31 and Thursday, Nov. 2  Liberation Theology
This week we will watch a film about a religious leader and social justice struggles in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s. The story raises many of the issues which come up in the sociological and social ethics study of liberation theologies. Film on Tuesday, with discussion on both days.

Week VII  Tuesday, Nov. 7 and Thursday, Nov. 9  Religion and Social Movements
For discussion on Tuesday of this seventh week: What do we discover about the connections between religions and social movements in the Wilcox essay “Changing Religions, Changing Worlds” (319-332)? How is religion involved in the story of multi-ethnic tenant organizing (333-344)? For discussion on Thursday of this week: How have religious coalitions been engaged for and against gay marriage (345-359)? How have religions been involved in the peace movement and the practice of nonviolent direct action (360-373)?

Week VIII  Tuesday, Nov. 14 and Thursday, Nov. 16  Religion and Violence
For discussion on Tuesday of this eighth week: How do we understand the links between religion and violence (409-420)? What does Nancy Nason-Clark tell us about the relationship between Christianity and domestic violence (462-469)? What do you think of Richard King’s argument (495-517)? For Thursday of this week we will watch more selections from the series “The Story of God, with Morgan Freeman” (again, raises good questions to think about).
Week IX  Tuesday, Nov. 21  (Thursday of this week is Thanksgiving Day)  **Oral Reports**

Begin your brief (seven minutes) informal oral reports on some highlights of what you have learned from your field work and related research for the course paper (see below).

Week X  Tuesday, Nov. 28 and Thursday, Nov. 30  **Oral Reports continue**

Continue the brief oral reports (seven minutes) on Tuesday, Nov. 28.  **Paper is due (print version) at beginning of our final session, Thursday.**  We will complete the term on Nov. 30 with a final discussion, self-evaluation, and course evaluation process.

Assignments:

Explore a religion about which you have had—until this assignment—very little experience or knowledge.  Find a local faith community which is part of this religious tradition.  Make contact with people in this local community.  Let them know that you wish to attend one of their religious services as part of this assignment for our sociology of religion course this term.  Arrange to have interviews with two or more people who are participants in this religious community (this should include an official religious minister but should also include an active member of the faith community who is not in an official role).  Here are just a few questions you might explore with them (but by all means think of other questions as you develop your research):  What are the core beliefs?  What are some of the key ritual practices which are part of a given religious service and what do these rituals mean?  What symbols are important and what do they mean?  What sort of authority structure informs this community of faith?  How is the faith community involved in the wider society (e.g. social services, social justice actions)?  Does the community take a public stand on any issues, and if so, what stand and what moral arguments to support the stand?  Please do background research to help you better understand the historical and current social context of the larger religious tradition of which this local community is a member.  Develop a 15 page (double-space) paper (use a standard citation guide for citing your sources; ten sources—including books, articles, and the interviews, will suffice).  This paper should address the following:  From this field research and background study what are the most significant things you have learned about this religious tradition and this specific community?  Prepare a brief (seven minutes) informal report to share in class (see as scheduled, in syllabus) and complete your paper, ready to submit as print version, at beginning of our final session (see as scheduled in syllabus).  This project is worth one-half of total course grade.

Regular attendance and participation (small group and full group) are essential in this discussion-based course.  This aspect of the course is worth one-half of total grade.

I will ask you to write a self-evaluation regarding your work in the course, covering all aspects of your efforts:  a) your attendance record,  b) careful reading of the assigned pages before each class session,  c) small group and large group participation,  d) the steps you have taken in the field research and background research and study for the oral report and term paper,  e) any other self-evaluation aspects you wish to note.
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12 Noon – 1 PM at The Energy Bar, 1431 SW Park Ave., (just north of campus on the Park Blocks, corner of Park and Clay). Just let me know (at class break or after class) any time during the term if you would like to meet; we can work out a different time on Tuesday or Thursday if the “office hour” does not work for your schedule.

The C.A.R.E. Team, hosted by the Dean of Student Life, is available to consult with you regarding any issues of students in distress, including sexual misconduct. For more information about the C.A.R.E. Team, visit the C.A.R.E. Team website or call 503–725–4422 to contact the C.A.R.E. Team Coordinator.

The Office of Equity & Compliance is responsible for monitoring Portland State University’s Title IX compliance.

You may make a report to PSU’s Title IX Coordinator, Julie Caron by contacting her at jucaron@pdx.edu or 503–725–4410. PSU’s Deputy Coordinator is Lisa Miller. Lisa can be contacted at lkm4@pdx.edu.

PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503–725–4150, drc@pdx.edu, https://www.pdx.edu/drc.

- If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.
- Please be aware that the accessible tables or chairs in the room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not useable.