We approach the sociological study of religion by exploring perspectives from various religious traditions across the globe. 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 classics in the sociology of religion, life experiences in the encounter between religion and society, and cases of specific religious communities and their role 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. Let’s try to shed some light on what is going on when ultimate concerns intersect with the mundane. 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.


Week I Tuesday, Sept. 27 and Thursday, Sept. 29
We open with discussion about our own cross-generational backgrounds in relation to religion. We then begin to explore different ways of defining religion. For Thursday of this first week, please read *Gods In the Global Village*, pages 1-13, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 3-17.

Week II Tuesday, Oct. 4 and Thursday, Oct. 6
This week we begin to consider, among other notions: beliefs, rituals, religious organizations, sacred canopy (and other metaphors), cosmogonies, and theodicies. Please read ahead in preparation for our discussion on both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 14-44, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 18-47.

Week III Tuesday, Oct. 11 and Thursday, Oct. 13
We begin to explore Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, among other traditions of “the East” – here we are looking for some of the ways these religious traditions influence
societies and how societies in turn have an impact on these religions. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 45-86, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 140-157.

**Week IV**
Tuesday, Oct. 18 and Thursday, Oct. 20
Now we turn our attention to “the West” (or so-called western religions), to explore Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, among other traditions – once again to help us think about the mutual influences of religion and society. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 87-128, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 48-61 and pages 81-101.

**Week V**
Tuesday, Oct. 25 and Thursday, Oct. 27
Here we begin to think about indigenous religious traditions. We also explore the global reach of Christian evangelism in relation to tribal cultures and other cultural contexts in regions such as Latin America and beyond. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 129-150, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 119-139.

**Week VI**
Tuesday, Nov. 1 and Thursday, Nov. 3
This week we examine several key themes involving religion in relation to aspects of society and individual religiosity: religious ethos, identity construction, stratification, gender, ethics, and politics. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 151-210, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 176-192.

**Week VII**
Tuesday, Nov. 8 and Thursday, Nov. 10
Now we consider modernism and reactions to it. We look also at liberation theology, But our central focus this week is the whole question of religion and violence, religion and nonviolence. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 211-250 and pages 290-332, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 158-175.

**Week VIII**
Tuesday, Nov. 15 and Thursday, Nov. 17
A central focus this week is the notion of civil religion, yet the readings this week also include themes such as Goddess worship, cults, pluralism, and the relation between religion and ecology, among other ideas. Please read ahead for both Tuesday and Thursday, *Gods in the Global Village*, pages 251-289, and *Religion, Culture, and Society*, pages 102-118.

**Week IX**
Tuesday, Nov. 22 (Thursday of this week is Thanksgiving Day)

**Week X**
Tuesday, Nov. 29 and Thursday, Dec. 1
This week we share what we have learned from the research and writing of the ten-page paper (fifteen pages if you are taking the course for Soc 580 credit). Self-evaluations and course evaluation also, on Thursday, our final session. No final exam.

Assignments and Grading Criteria:

1. Begin to explore a religious tradition about which you have had no prior (or very little) knowledge and personal experience. Find a local organization (faith community gathering place) of that tradition. Take steps, including: a) make contact with people (officials) to let them know that would like to attend a religious service as an assignment for your PSU sociology of religion course this term, b) arrange to have interviews with two or three people who are part of this religious community (this may include a minister but should also include a member of the faith community who is not in an official role), c) approach your field research (your attendance at the religious service and your interviews) with an effort to understand the community’s core beliefs, ritual processes, organizational structure, and role in relation to wider society. Do some background contextual research to help you to better understand this religious tradition (i.e. read two or three well-researched articles). Prepare a five-page (double-space, with page six as your citation page) report, highlighting what you have learned in this field study. **This report is due on Tuesday, November 15 at the beginning of class. Bring print copy to class.**

2. Develop a research paper based on one question that is of keen interest to you (any topic involving religion and society). Guidelines include: a) come up with the research question, then meet with me to discuss your approach to researching and writing this paper (be sure that we meet before the middle of November), b) ten-page (double-space, with page eleven as your citation page), c) nine to ten quality citation sources will suffice, d) explain why this question is significant to you and then explore the question—and what you have learned—in depth. Edit your work so that when it is ready you have a polished piece. Bring print copy to class. **Due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, November 29. This assignment is worth one-third of total course grade.**

3. Regular attendance and participation in our class discussions (small group and full group). Be prepared to discuss the readings, as assigned. This aspect of the course is worth one-third of total grade. I will ask you to write a self-evaluation at the end of the term, covering all aspects of your efforts in our course together. Thank you for being conscientious throughout our ten weeks together.

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 – 11:45 AM and 2:00 – 2:45 PM, at The Energy Bar, 1431 SW Park Ave., (just north of campus on the Park Blocks, corner of Park and Clay).