

TCORE 124: The American Religious Imagination

University of Washington Tacoma
Spring 2016

Meeting Times: MW 1:30-3:35

Meeting Place: JOY 105

Instructor: Eric Bugyis, Ph.D.

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Office: GWP 304

Office Hours: I can be found in my office from 11:00-1:00 on Mondays and Wednesdays. Other times can be arranged by email.

About this Course

As a TCORE class, this course is meant to give you an introduction to the various disciplines that make up the “humanities” as organized around a central theme. The “humanities” is a field of inquiry aimed at studying those things that are thought to be distinctive of the “human,” which include literature, religion, philosophy, history, culture, and the arts. This focus on the uniquely “human” aspect of our lives together is what distinguishes the humanities from the social and natural sciences, which tend to focus on those aspects of our lives that we share with other animals, which include the mechanics of our embodied lives and the dynamics of our relational lives.

Among the many things that seem to be unique to us as humans is our capacity to represent ourselves to ourselves by means of symbolic expressions that serve to articulate personal and group identities. No other animal seems quite so concerned with setting itself apart from other members of its species for the purpose of defining a community and geographic region that claims significance beyond the bounds of biological kinship. This course takes as its theme the coincidence of two symbolic schemes for articulating such an identity: “nationalism” and “religion.” We will be considering American identity, in particular, and the ways in which “American-ness” not only seems to intersect with specific religious symbol systems, like Christianity, but also often presents itself, at least formally, as a religious symbol system in its own right.

Following the themes that we identified on the first day of class, we will explore the “religious” nature of American identity by first looking at how Christianity functions in American society as the specific religion with which people of any and no faith have often had to negotiate in the process of articulating their own way of being “American.” Here, we will consider the particular case of Native Americans, who have an especially complex relationship (to say the least) with the idea of America as a “Christian” nation. We will then take up a number of ideas that seem to serve a “religious” function in American society to the extent that they set the horizon of possibility against which people live their lives. This includes defining what it means to live a “successful” life, what it looks and sounds like to live this life, the program of self-improvement one must undertake to enter this life, and the stories that we tell of variously trying and failing to live this life. By undertaking this study, it is hoped that we will come to understand “American”

and “religious” forms of life as ongoing projects that are as indeterminate, interminable, and unavoidable as the “humanities” itself.

Course Learning Objectives

- Gain familiarity with the various academic disciplines and subject matter that make up the “humanities.”
- Consider the “religious” nature of “American” identity as it is articulated in cultural studies, literature, the arts, philosophy, and history.
- Develop skills in written, oral, and visual communication by completing appropriate assignments related to the course material and receiving feedback from instructor and peers.
- Demonstrate in and outside of class increasing proficiency in writing, speaking, and perceiving aimed at a deeper understanding of the things that one shares with one’s fellows as well as those things that make one unique.
- Appreciate the diversity and commonality present in the human experience as reflected in the course material and one’s fellow course participants.
- Aspire to become a more attentive, thoughtful, and fully realized human being.

Learning Exercises

Participation (20%): Since the humanities as a discipline and humanity as a state of being in the world depends on conversation, dialogue, discussion, and debate, it is absolutely essential that we commit to being present to one another in class at the designated meeting times. To facilitate this presence, every Monday we will engage in community building before getting into the material for that day, and each time we begin a new “text,” we will each take some time to prepare our thoughts by doing some in-class writing. You can miss up to three of these in-class writings, and these will be graded on a credit/no credit basis.

Reading Responses (30%): For every class, you will be asked to email a 250-300 word response to the reading for that day by the end of class. The reading responses will guide our discussion for that day. These will be graded for how well they respond to a clearly identified question or theme in the reading within the word-limit given. Your response should include at least one specific citation to a passage in the reading. No Skips!

Synthesis (50%): You may choose to:

- 1) Write three essays (3-5 pages, double-spaced with standard typeface, font size, and margins). Each of these essays will attempt to synthesize the theme of the unit you choose

to write about and will be due by the Monday following the last day of that unit. For example: You might write an essay on the different approaches to the relationship between American Indian Religion and the idea of America as a “Christian” nation as presented by Vine Deloria’s *God is Red* and the film *Black Robe*.

OR

- 2) Meet with me by the end of week 5 to discuss a group or individual project that will be due at the end of the quarter.

Late Assignments: The only assignments that I will accept late are the papers, which will be accepted until the last day of class. Late papers will, however, only be eligible for a maximum grade of C. Resubmissions will be accepted until the last day of class for full credit. Late work is not eligible for resubmission.

Grading: All work for this course will be graded on the university’s 4-point scale.

I do not round up, and I do not change grades. However, I do want you to understand why you received the grade that you did, and I invite (indeed, I *encourage*) you to come see me anytime to discuss my feedback on any assignment. Also, there is an appeal process for final course grades at the university level, the details of which can be found at <http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/uwt/current-students/changing-or-appealing-grades>.

Extra Credit: Extra credit points are available throughout the quarter by starting and/or contributing to Canvas discussion threads inspired by the course content. For starting a discussion thread you and getting three unique respondents, you will receive 1.5 points. For responding to a post or starting a thread that gets no respondents, you will receive .5 points.

University Resources and Policies

Teaching and Learning Center: The TLC provides a wide variety of instructional resources and support for teaching and learning at UW Tacoma. Teaching and learning are ongoing processes that take practice, commitment, and time. We are here to assist you in achieving your goals and provide math/quantitative, writing, science, and other tutoring services. <http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/tlc/>

Academic Standards/Plagiarism: All student work must be free of plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined in the University catalog and in the Student Handbook. Consult your professor if you have any questions.

A major part of your experience in the class will be reading, synthesizing, and using the knowledge and ideas of others. It is the responsibility of the faculty to help you in this process and to be certain you learn to credit the work of others upon which you draw. To plagiarize is to appropriate and to pass off, as one's own ideas, writing or works of another. Plagiarism is no less of a misconduct violation than vandalism or assault. Ignorance of proper documentation procedures is the usual cause of plagiarism. This ignorance does not excuse the act. Students are

responsible for learning how and when to document and attribute resources used in preparing a written or oral presentation.

For more information, please refer to the “Student Academic Responsibility” document prepared by the Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences, UW Seattle: <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/pdf/AcademicResponsibility.pdf>

Library: The UWT Library provides resources and services to support students at all levels of expertise. We guide students through the research process, helping them learn how to develop effective research strategies and find and evaluate appropriate resources. For more information about the Library and its services, see:
<http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/library/>

Electronic Devices: Electronic devices (including, but not limited to, cell phones, pagers, laptops, and personal digital assistants) may only be used in the classroom with the permission of the instructor. Activities that are non-relevant to the course, such as checking/sending email, playing games, and surfing the web, are considered disruptive activities when class is in session.

E-mail Policy: http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/policies_procedures/E-mail_Policy.pdf

Student Health Services: Student Health Services (SHS) is committed to providing compassionate, convenient, and affordable health care for University of Washington Tacoma students, from care for illness and minor injury to women’s health and preventative medicine, including vaccination services. Insurance is not required. Funded by UW Tacoma student fees, office visits are provided free of charge. Treatment plans may incur costs, such as medications, labs, or vaccines, most of which are offered at discounted rates. For more information, please visit www.tacoma.uw.edu/shs or email at uwts@uw.edu. If you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment, please call (253) 692-5811 or stop by SHS at the Laborer’s Hall on Market Street.

Counseling Center (Student Success): The Counseling Center offers short-term, problem-focused counseling to UW Tacoma students who may feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of college, work, family, and relationships. Counselors are available to help students cope with stresses and personal issues that may interfere with their ability to perform in school. The service is provided confidentially and without additional charge to currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. To schedule an appointment, please call 692-4522 or stop by the Student Counseling Center (SCC), located in MAT 354.
http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/scc_about.cfm/

Disability Support Services (Student Success): The University of Washington Tacoma is committed to making physical facilities and instructional programs accessible to students with disabilities. Disability Support Services (DSS) functions as the focal point for coordination of services for students with disabilities. In compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, any enrolled student at UW Tacoma who has an appropriately documented physical, emotional, or mental disability that "substantially limits one or more major life activities [including walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working]," is eligible for services from DSS. If you are wondering if you may be eligible for accommodations on our campus, please contact the

DSS reception desk at 692-4522.

http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/dss_about.cfm/

Campus Safety Information: <http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/administrative-services/campus-safety>

Safety Escort Program: For your safety, UW Tacoma encourages students, faculty, staff and visitors to use the Safety Escort Program. Campus Safety Officers are available to walk you to your car or other campus destinations during the following hours: Monday - Thursday — 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Friday — 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The service is free of charge. During busy periods, the Campus Safety Officer may ask you to meet in a common location as to facilitate escorting multiple people. Dial 253-692-4416 to request a Safety Escort.

In case of a fire alarm: Take your valuables and leave the building. Plan to return to class once the alarm has stopped. Do not return until you have received an all clear from somebody "official," the web or email.

In case of an earthquake: DROP, COVER, and HOLD. Once the shaking stops, take your valuables and leave the building. Do not plan to return for the rest of the day. Do not return to the building until you have received an all clear from somebody "official," the web, or email.

Inclement Weather: Call (253) 383-INFO to determine whether campus operations have been suspended. If not, but driving conditions remain problematic, call the professor's office number. This number should provide information on whether a particular class will be held or not, and/or the status of pending assignments. If the first two numbers have been contacted and the student is still unable to determine whether a class will be held, or the student has a part-time instructor who does not have an office phone or contact number, call the program office number for updated information.

Schedule of Meetings and Readings

****Please Note****

- Many of the readings for this course will be made available electronically on Canvas. You are also asked to purchase the following:
 1. Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
 2. Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013).
 3. Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009).

- The readings listed here are provisional and may be subject to change. I will announce any changes both in class and by email.

Week 1 | American Religion as Christian

Monday, 3/28: Introduction: What does it mean to be “American”? What would a specifically “American” religion look like, and what is “religious” about being American?

Wednesday, 3/30: Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), pp. vii-60.

Week 2 | American Religion as Christian

Monday, 4/4: Deloria, *God is Red*, pp. 219-270.

Wednesday, 4/6: *Black Robe*, directed by Bruce Beresford (1991).

Week 3 | American Religion as a Religion of Success

Monday, 4/11: Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 1-43.

Wednesday, 4/13: Delbanco, *The Real American Dream*, pp. 47-80.

Week 4 | American Religion as a Religion of Success

Monday, 4/18: Delbanco, *The Real American Dream*, pp. 83-118.

Wednesday, 4/20: *There Will Be Blood*, directed by Paul Thomas Anderson (2007).

Week 5 | American Religion as a Cultural Product

Monday, 4/25: Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), pp. 3-16, 87-157.

Wednesday, 4/27: Prothero, *American Jesus*, pp. 161-228, 291-303.

Week 6 | American Religion as a Cultural Product

Monday, 5/2: Jason C. Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3-27, 66-111, 255-75.

Wednesday, 5/4: Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," *The Complete Stories* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), pp. 510-30.

Week 7 | American Religion as Self-Help

Monday, 5/9: Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), pp. ix-168.

Wednesday, 5/11: Wright, *Going Clear*, pp. 169-380.

Week 8 | American Religion as Self-Help

Monday, 5/16: Wright, *Going Clear*, pp. 381-454.

Wednesday, 5/18: *The Apostle*, directed by Robert Duvall (1997).

Week 9 | American Religion as Shared Story

Monday, 5/23: Ludger Viefhues-Bailey, *Between a Man and a Woman? Why Conservatives Oppose Same-Sex Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 1-27, 61-121.

Wednesday, 5/25: Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), pp. xv-110.

Week 10 | American Religion as Shared Story

Monday, 5/30: No Class, Memorial Day

Wednesday, 6/1: Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, pp. 111-249.

Last Class Meeting | Monday, June 6, 1:30-3:35.