

**COLA 1500-042—Signs of the Times: Religion and Politics in 2017**  
University of Virginia, Fall 2017

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**Class Meetings:** T 12:30-1:45PM

**Class Location:** Brooks Hall 103

**Office Hours:** M 12-1, TH 11-12

Appointment by Email

**Course Hashtag:** #ReligionPolitics2017

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

What role does religion play in US political life in 2017? Framing our conversations with commentary and teachings from diverse religious traditions, seminar participants will discuss rhetoric, teaching, and practice as they relate to the United States political context. In addition to a retrospective on the 2016 elections, seminar conversations will respond directly to issues and debates emerging from that event. Class activities include discussion, exchanging articles on religion and politics via social media, and developing rhetorical skills through preparation and delivery of speeches. Beyond the immediate concerns of contemporary political discourse, seminar participants will address the enduring intellectual and political difficulties of engaging diverse religious beliefs and practices in a pluralistic democratic context.

*Note: Participants must be willing to use Twitter for a particular classroom assignment.*

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES:**

- **You are expected to attend every seminar.** You are permitted one (1) absence for any reason (no professor approval necessary). Unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your grade.
- **You are expected to arrive on time for seminar, which begins promptly at 12:45pm.** Tardiness disrupts your professor and classmates. The habit of tardiness reflects poorly on your capacity for reliability and professionalism in any field that you may choose to pursue.
- **You are expected to switch your cell phone to silent or vibrate prior to every seminar.** Please store your device away from your work surface. Sometimes you will be welcomed to use your phone or another device for seminar activities, but unapproved use of cell phones during class will result in a reduction of your participation grade.
- **Please refrain from using laptops in seminar unless required for a particular activity.** While these devices can be a catalyst for engagement and productivity, they can also distract from the communal interaction and conversation that is the foundation of liberal arts education and this college advising seminar.
- **You are expected to complete the assigned readings.** Please come to class prepared to discuss and engage the *primary arguments, salient points, and possible critiques* of each text.
- **You are expected to submit assignments by their designated deadlines.** Late assignments will not be accepted and thus will receive no credit. Extensions may be granted by Prof. Flores in extraordinary situations (possibly during documented medical or family emergency, but never due to conflict with another course's requirements).
- **Students with documented disabilities can expect appropriate accommodations whenever necessary.** All students with special needs requiring accommodations should

present the appropriate paperwork from the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC). It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and follow up with the instructor about the accommodations being offered. Accommodations for examinations (e.g., extended time, low distraction environment) should be arranged at least one week before an exam. The SDAC is located in the Department of Student Health and can be contacted at (434) 243-5180/5181.

- **Student athletes are expected to present official notification of expected absences as soon as this information is available.**

### **HONOR CODE:**

Prof. Flores trusts every student to comply with all of the provisions of the University's Honor Code. By enrolling in this course, the student has agreed to abide by and uphold the Honor System of the University of Virginia, as well as the following policies specific to this course:

- **All graded assignments must be pledged.** Please record your pledge at the end of each written assignment and examination. Please consult your TA if you have any questions about pledging assignments.
- **Collaboration in the form of discussion and peer review (for annotated newsfeeds and speeches) is permitted for this course.** Discussing essay ideas and consulting other students for help refining arguments, revision feedback, and editing is encouraged in this class. Please consult Prof. Flores if you have any questions about acceptable collaboration.
- **Unattributed use of material is prohibited on all assignments in this course.** Please consult Prof. Flores if you have any questions about citation.
- **Suspected violations will be forwarded to the Honor Committee.** Further, Prof. Flores may decide to assign a score of zero on the assignment in question regardless of any action taken by the Honor Committee.

**Please consult Prof. Flores if you have any questions regarding the course honor policy.** If you believe you may have committed an Honor offense, you may wish to file a Conscientious Retraction by calling the Honor Offices at (434) 924-7602. For your retraction to be considered valid, it must be filed with the Honor Committee before you are aware that the act in question has come under suspicion by anyone. More information can be found at <http://www.virginia.edu/honor>. Your Honor representatives can be found at: <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/2016-2017-representatives/>.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

#### **Seminar Participation – 15%**

General verbal contributions, active listening, and submission of occasional credit/no credit assignments. Also includes letting other seminar participants participate in the discussion by offering focused comments and refraining from taking up too much "air time."

#### **Annotated Newsfeed Assignment and Newsfeed Contributions – 20%**

- (1) **Annotated Newsfeed:** Develop a list of news sources that will inform your view of the 2016 Elections, with a brief explanation of the strengths and limitations of these sources. List should include at least 10 different sources.
- (2) **Weekly Newsfeed Contributions:** Tweeting articles to our course hashtag in order to offer material for our conversations. Failure to contribute will result in a reduction of the grade.

#### **Online Reading Quizzes – 25%**

Five (5) quizzes, each worth 5% of the grade. Quizzes measure familiarity with the assigned

readings. In general, the quizzes will emphasize vocabulary and terminology, quotations, and other specific information (i.e. What does X document say about X issue?)

### **Speeches – 40%**

- (1) **Famous Speech:** Select and present a 2-minute speech on a theme in religion, morality, and politics – 10%
- (2) **Issue Speech:** Write and present a 2-minute speech with one issue in religion and politics that is important to you – 10%
- (3) **Final Speech:** Write and present a 5-minute speech offering your vision offering guidance for citizens pursuing the common good in public life. Please make reference to some of the materials, conversations, and themes we have covered in the course. – 20%

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Brian Stiltner, *Toward Thriving Communities: Virtue Ethics as Social Ethics* (Anselm Academic, 2016)

**(CR)** Course Reader (available from N.K. Print and Design on Elliewood Avenue)

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

#### **Week 1—August 22**

#### **Introduction – Religion, Politics and the Signs of the Times (7)**

**(CR)** Nichole M. Flores, “In Jefferson’s Shadow: Can Catholic Theology Thrive at a Public University?” (7)

#### **Week 2—August 29**

#### **The Challenge of Religion in Public Life (59)**

**(CR)** Alan Wolfe, “The Most Appropriate Political Philosophy for Our Times,” pp. 3-27 (25)

**(CR)** Richard John Neuhaus, “Misreading the Signs of the Times” (17)

**(CR)** Cathleen Kaveny, “John Rawls: The State of Public Discourse,” pp. 58-74 (17)

**Assignment:** My Presidential Cabinet

#### **Week 3—September 5**

#### **Virtues for Civil Society (38)**

Stiltner, Chapter 2 (26)

James Keenan, “Virtues for Civil Society” (12)

**Assignment:** Online Reading Quiz

#### **Week 4—September 12**

#### **The Individual and the Community (55)**

Stiltner, Chapter 3 & 4 (29, 26)

**Assignment:** Annotated Newsfeed

#### **Week 5—September 19**

#### **Religion and Public Rhetoric (42)**

**(CR)** Rhetoric Guide (5)

**(CR)** Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address” (2)

**(CR)** Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (2)

**(CR)** John F. Kennedy, “Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association” (4)

**(CR)** Barack Obama, “2006 Speech on Faith and Politics” (14)

(CR) Mitt Romney, “Faith in America” (8)  
(CR) Donald Trump, “Inaugural Address” (7)  
**Assignment:** Online Reading Quiz

### **Week 6—September 26**

#### **Practicing Public Rhetoric (6)**

Review Rhetoric Guide

(CR) “What’s in a Voice? The Debate Over Vocal Fry and What It Means for Women” (6)

<https://news.virginia.edu/content/what-s-voice-debate-over-vocal-fry-and-what-it-means-women>

**Assignment:** Read 2-minute excerpt of a speech on religion and public life

### **Week 7—October 3: Fall Break, No Seminar**

### **Week 8—October 10**

#### **Religious Voter Guides (70)**

(CR) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” (31)

(CR) An Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee, “An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment” (5)

(CR) Council on American-Islamic Relations, “Civic Guide 2008” (4 – read introductory section, browse the rest of the document)

(CR) Episcopal Public Policy Network, “Election Engagement Toolkit” (8)

(CR) Jewish Council for Public Affairs, et. al. “Get Out the Vote Guide 2016” (22)

**Assignment (in-class):** Denominational Endorsement Committee Meeting

### **Week 9—October 17**

#### **Families (31)**

Stiltner, Chapter 5 (31)

**Assignment:** Online Reading Quiz

### **Week 10—October 24**

#### **Schools and Work (65)**

Stiltner, Chapters 6 & 7 (33, 32)

### **Week 11—October 31**

#### **Service (31)**

Stiltner, Chapter 8 (31)

**Assignment:** Online Reading Quiz

### **Week 12—November 7**

#### **Issues Speech**

**Assignment:** 2-minute speech on issue in religion and politics that matters to you

### **Week 13—November 14**

#### **Conflict, Consensus, and Compromise (33)**

(CR) Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (20)

(CR) Danielle S. Allen, “Sacrifice and Citizenship” (13)

(CR) Martha C. Nussbaum, “A Problem in the History of Liberalism” (24)

**Assignment:** Online Reading Quiz

**Week 14—November 21: Thanksgiving Week  
Seminar Cancelled**

**Week 15—November 28  
Envisioning the Common Good**

**Assignment:** Speech on your vision for the common good

**Week 16—December 5  
Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?**

**Appendix: An Open Letter from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia in Response to the Events of August 11 and 12**

The Department of Religious Studies denounces the violence and terror perpetrated by the gathering of white supremacists in Charlottesville, VA on August 11th and 12th, 2017. As a faculty, we are particularly horrified that our University Grounds were used to promote this agenda and that students, who were exercising their constitutionally protected right to protest, were physically attacked a short distance from their dormitories.

The Department of Religious Studies rejects the white supremacist ideology of intolerance and its practice of hateful speech, as well as the violence it engenders. We stand in solidarity with the victims of these events and with those who courageously resisted the hate groups and their virulent messages; we stand with the community of Charlottesville and with all those at whom hate continues to be directed. We cherish the diversity of our student body and commit ourselves to supporting students who are targeted by hate groups. We promise to be available to students who seek support from us, even as we actively develop new initiatives to support them.

As a department, we advocate for no single religious faith or political point of view. Our faculty comprises scholars who practice different religions or no religion at all. Our professors, all of whom serve the Commonwealth of Virginia, hold a range of political views. Those who are American citizens vote their consciences individually in elections, for a wide array of political parties. Amid this political and national diversity, we stand united in our unanimous and unequivocal condemnation of those who promote hate, by way of violent speech and action—the white supremacists, the neo-Nazis, the neo-Fascists, the anti-Semites. And we regard this condemnation as the expression of a simple, moral truth rather than a political statement.

We must not hesitate to name and condemn the intimidation, terror, and violence that convulsed and profaned our city and university this weekend. We consider the groups who organized and participated in the “Unite the Right” rally to be hate groups. We do not take their views to represent a legitimate, alternative political perspective: they are dangerous, and they perpetuate what is universally condemned by all the world’s religions and ethical systems. We feel morally compelled to call out those who afflicted our community with their night-time mob on the University’s Grounds and with their violence on our city’s streets the following day. Burning torches, aggressive chanting, and racist, homophobic, and antisemitic slogans echo the symbolism, and messages, of Nazi-era Germany and of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. This is not a time for equivocation. We stand firmly and explicitly against the views and actions of those espousing hate, terror, and violence in Charlottesville over this past weekend, and any other day.