

Religion and the 2020 Elections

University of Virginia, Fall 2020

Professor: Nichole M. Flores

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(Links for online office hours booking & recommendation requests)

Class Meetings: T 9:30-10:45AM

Class Location: Web-Based Course

Office Location: Gibson S433



Pope Francis addresses a joint session of U.S. Congress on 24 September 2015

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What role will religion play in the elections 2020 elections? This seminar engages commentary from a range of Catholic, Protestant (Mainline and Evangelical), Muslim, and Jewish traditions toward examining religion's role in U.S. civic life today. Seminar participants will discuss religious teaching, practice, and rhetoric as they relate to the U.S. political context. 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.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES:

- You are expected to log on to Zoom for seminar at 9:30AM.
- You are expected to complete the assigned materials (readings, videos, podcasts,

images, etc.) before class. Please come to class prepared the primary arguments, salient points, and possible critiques of our common materials.

- **You are expected to submit assignments by their designated deadlines.** Extensions will be granted by Prof. Flores in medical situations, including personal and familial COVID-19 related illnesses.
- **Students with documented need for accommodations can always expect them to be met.** All students requiring accommodations should present the appropriate paperwork (or an electronic equivalent) 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. The SDAC is located in the Department of Student Health and can be contacted at (434) 243-5180/5181.

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. (For example: Type your pledge at the end of each Collab Discussions post or submitted assignment. When in doubt, please send your assignment pledge to Prof. Flores via email)
- **Collaboration in the form of discussion and peer review (for annotated newsfeeds, speeches, and multimedia presentations) is permitted for this course.** Discussing essay ideas and consulting other students for help with revision and editing is encouraged. 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 acceptable citation.
- **Suspected violations will be forwarded to the Honor Committee.** 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 info can be found at <http://www.virginia.edu/honor>.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Seminar Participation – 30% total

- (1) **Class Discussion:** Includes verbal contributions, active listening, and other occasional participation-based assignments. Also includes letting other seminar participants participate in the discussion by offering focused comments and refraining from taking up too much "airtime." – 10%
- (2) **Commenting on Readings on Collab Discussions:** Post questions, comments, and observations about each assigned reading to Discussions on Collab site. – 10%
- (3) **Twitter Takes:** At least one post per month of the semester (one post each for September, October, and November for a minimum of 3 posts) of relevant news items about the relationship between religion and politics to Twitter. Use #ReligionElections2020 and

@nicholemflores to receive credit. Feel free to post more as you will be asked to draw from your own Twitter posts for your final multimedia presentation project (see details below). – 10%

Annotated Newsfeed Assignment – 10%

Develop a list of news sources that will inform your view of Religion and the 2016 Elections, with a brief explanation of the strengths and limitations of these news sources. List should include at least 10 different sources. Do not neglect religious sources, including those from religious communities and traditions that differ from your own. (Post list to Discussions on Collab by Monday, September 14 at 9:30am)

Small Group Presentation: Religious/Denominational Endorsement Committee – 10%

Imagine that you are a member of an endorsement committee for a religious or denominational advocacy committee. Reflecting on the religious voter guides we read and discuss in seminar, work with your group to develop an endorsement statement to present to the class. Prof. Flores and your fellow students will ask you questions about your decision during seminar.

Speeches – 30%

- (1) **Famous Speech:** Select and present a “famous speech” 2-minute speech on a theme in religion, morality, and politics. Post 2-minute video & text of speech to Discussions on Collab by Monday, September 28 at 9:30am – 10%
- (2) **Issue Speech:** Write and present your own 2-minute speech on one issue in religion and politics that is important to you. Post 2-minute video & text of speech to Discussions on Collab by Monday, September 28 at 9:30am – 10%
- (3) **Final Speech:** Write and present your own 2-minute speech offering your vision for the common good in U.S. public life. Post 2-minute video & text of speech to Discussions on Collab by Monday, September 28 at 9:30am – 10%

Multimedia Portfolio - 20%

What have you learned this semester about the role of religion in politics and elections? Create a multimedia portfolio showcasing your work from the semester. Use the presentation platform of your choice (Sway, Prezi, etc.) as long as you can share a link of your final work. Your portfolio should include:

- (1) Your annotated newsfeed
- (2) Samples of your Tweets on Religion and the 2020 Elections
- (3) Recordings of all three of your speeches
- (4) Samples of your annotations that best demonstrate what you learned from the readings this semester

Present your content in an engaging and imaginative fashion that helps convey a narrative or story of your experience of our seminar this semester. You are encouraged to use images, audio (poetry, prose, music, etc.), video or any other form of media that allows you to convey what you have learned. I encourage you to begin working on your portfolio early in the semester. Please feel free to ask questions about the assignment early and often! **Submit your multimedia portfolio to Prof. Flores via email (nmf5q@virginia.edu) by Monday, December 7 at 5pm.**

READINGS:

All readings available on Collab in the Resources section or via links provided in the syllabus. Each student will sign up for Top Hat educational platform (tophat.com). This platform will be used to facilitate online discussions, answer questions, take polls, and record course attendance. You will receive an invitation to sign up for the software during the first week of class.

COURSE OUTLINE:**Week 1–August 25****Introduction – Religion, Politics and the Signs of the Times****Week 2–September 1****The Challenge of Religion in Public Life I (41 pages)**

Alan Wolfe, “The Most Appropriate Political Philosophy for Our Times,” pp. 6-29 (24 pages)

Richard John Neuhaus, “Misreading the Signs of the Times,” pp. 3-18 (17 pages)

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, August 31 at 9:30am.

Week 3–September 8**The Challenge of Religion in Public Life II (33 pages)**

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

Danielle S. Allen, “Old Myths and New Epiphanies,” pp. 9-24 (16 pages)

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, September 7 at 9:30am.

Week 4–September 15**Virtues for Civil Society (16 pages)**

James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Civil Society*, Commonweal Magazine

Assignments: (1) Post Annotated Newsfeed to Collab Discussions by Monday, September 14 at 9:30am and (2) Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, September 14 at 9:30am.

Week 5–September 22**Religion and Public Rhetoric (25 pages)**

Rhetoric Guide (5)

Abraham Lincoln, [“Gettysburg Address”](#) (2)

John F. Kennedy, [“Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association”](#) (4)

Mitt Romney, [“Faith in America”](#) (8)

Barack Obama, [“Eulogy for Rev. Clementa Pickney”](#) –Watch video and read transcript (6)

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, September 21 at 9:30am.

Week 6–September 29**Practicing Public Rhetoric**

Assignments: (1) Make a 2-minute recording where you read an excerpt from a “famous speech” on religion and public life; post video & text of speech to Collab Discussions by Monday, September 28 at 9:30am and (2) Watch your classmates’ speeches and be prepared to give feedback on them during seminar.

Week 7–October 6**Religious Voter Guides I (43 pages)**

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

[Nathan Schneider, “How to Survive Trump: End the Cult of the Presidency”](#) (7)

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

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, October 5 at 9:30am.

Week 8–October 13**Religious Voter Guides II (23 pages)**

Episcopal Public Policy Network, [“Vote Faithfully Election Engagement Toolkit 2020”](#) (6)

Rachel Held Evans, [“So you’re thinking of voting for a pro-choice candidate...”](#) (12)

Visit the Websites for [the Jewish Council for Public Affairs](#) and [Council for American Islamic Relations](#), taking notes on each organization’s policy and electoral priorities.

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, October 12 at 9:30am.

Week 9–October 20**Endorsement Committee Group Presentations**

Assignments: (1) Come to seminar prepared to briefly present your group’s decision for endorsement, including your rationale based on our course materials and/or other external research. (2) Be prepared to question your classmates on their endorsement decisions. Could they have endorsed the other candidate? What might they have overlooked?

Week 10–October 27**Issues Speech**

Assignments: (1) Record 2-minute speech on issue in religion and politics that matters to you; post video & text of speech to Collab Discussions by Monday, October 26 at 9:30am and (2) Watch your classmates’ speeches and be prepared to give feedback on them during seminar.

Week 11–November 3, ELECTION DAY**Week 12–November 10****Civil Disobedience (27 pages)**

Henry David Thoreau, [Civil Disobedience](#) (20)

Nichole M. Flores, [“Theology in the Streets: What is the role of a public theologian today?”](#) (7)

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, November 9 at 9:30am.

Week 13–November 17***E pluribus unum: Oneness and Wholeness in the Life of Democracy* (37 pages)**

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

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

Assignment: Post questions, comments, and observations about assigned reading to Collab Discussions by Monday, November 16 at 9:30am.

Week 14–November 24**Envisioning the Common Good: Where Do We Go from Here?**

Assignment: (1) Record 2-minute speech on your vision for the common good; post video & text of speech to Collab Discussions by Monday, November 23 at 9:30am and (2) Watch your classmates' speeches and be prepared to give feedback on them during seminar.

Exam Week: Submit Final Presentation File to Prof. Flores by Monday, December 7 by 5pm.