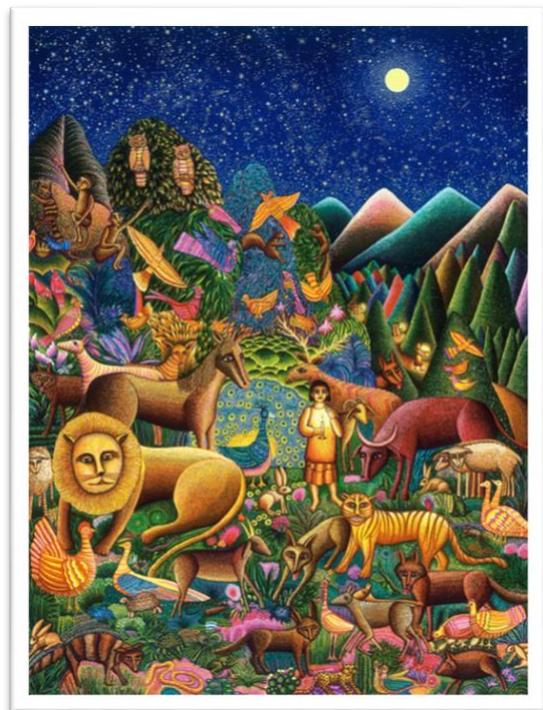


Religion, Media, and Democracy

University of Virginia, Spring 2023

Professor: Dr. Nichole M. Flores
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Office Phone: (434)243-3937
Office Location: Gibson Hall S433

Class Meetings: MWF 11:00-11:50am
Classroom: New Cabell Hall 338
Office Hours Sign-Up: calendly.com/nmf5q
 (Click on “Undergraduate Student Meeting”)



COURSE DESCRIPTION: What role does religion play in the politics of a democratic society? How does the representation of religion in various media influence public perception of and engagement with religion in the life of democracy? This class engages commentary from a range of religious traditions (Catholic Christian, Orthodox Christian, Protestant Christian--both mainline and evangelical, Muslim, Jewish, among others) and media sources (both religious and secular and including local, national, and global outlets) toward examining religion’s role in U.S. democracy today. In addition to religious studies and theology, course readings and discussions will include material from media studies, rhetorical studies, law, political science, philosophy, and even a little bit of cognitive psychology. 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.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will be able to speak in a nuanced way about the meaning of religion, religions, and the religious.
- Students will develop their familiarity with major themes, arguments, and theories in the study of religion, media, and democracy.
- Students will critically examine their “media diet,” or the news sources that inform their understanding of the state of religion, democracy, politics, and the common life.
- Students will practice their skills for public writing especially in the genre of opinion.
- Students will practice having engaged discussions about difficult—even controversial—topics with those with whom they disagree both in person and in writing.
- Students will practice communicating their learning about the relationship between religion, media, and democracy in a multimedia format

HONOR CODE: Dr. Flores trusts every student to comply with all 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 pledge to Dr. Flores via email)
- **Collaboration in the form of discussion and peer review of assignments is permitted for this course.** Discussing essay ideas and consulting other students for help with revision and editing is encouraged. Please consult Dr. Flores if you have any questions about acceptable collaboration.
- **Use of AI tools such as ChatGPT is prohibited in this course.** Students should be prepared to discuss their completed work with Dr. Flores including their arguments, evidence, and writing process.
- **Unattributed use of material is prohibited on all assignments in this course.** Please consult Dr. Flores if you have any questions about acceptable citation.
- **Suspected violations will be forwarded to the Honor Committee.** Dr. Flores may decide to assign a score of zero on the assignment in question regardless of any action taken (or not taken) by the Honor Committee.

Please consult Dr. 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:

CLASS PARTICIPATION – 15%

Includes verbal contributions, active listening, and other occasional in- class assignments. Also includes letting other seminar students participate in the discussion by refraining from taking up too much “airtime.” **In-class participation will count for 10% of your final grade; class attendance will count for 5% of your final grade.**

ANNOTATED NEWSFEED¹– 5%

You will submit a list of ten (10) media sources that inform your understanding of the state of democracy and public life today. These can be sources that you already consult or that you aspire to consult. They can include local, national, or international sources. They can include both traditional and new (social) media. Once you have assembled your list of sources, write a paragraph about each source explaining (1) why you have/want to consult it, (2) its strengths, and (3) its limitations. **This assignment is due on Friday, January 27 via Canvas Assignments.**

WEEKLY DISCUSSION POSTS – 10%

Write a brief entry about each week’s assigned reading and post it on the Canvas Discussions board

¹ If you have taken “Religion and the 2020 Elections,” please feel free to update your previous version of the annotated newsfeed, perhaps assessing how your sources have changed, what you would add/remove from your previous list, and how your general media consumption has changed/stayed the same since you took the COLA.

for the week. What did you understand from the reading? What didn't you understand from the reading? What questions come up for you as you consider the author's arguments? **Discussion posts are due via Canvas Discussions every Wednesday night at 11:59pm; turning them in on time is necessary for Dr. Flores to read and organize them in time for class on Friday morning.** You are expected to complete ten (10) discussion posts, you can drop two (2) posts for any reason (no need to inform Dr. Flores).

MIDTERM EXAMINATION – 25%

The goal of this examination is for the student to demonstrate their grasp of the basic theories, methods, and arguments studied in the first half of the course. It will consist of an objective section and one essay. Good preparation will involve taking thorough notes on the readings, submitting thoughtful weekly discussion posts, and taking good notes during class. Students are encouraged to form study groups and are permitted to use collaborative platforms to study for the test.

OP-ED/LETTER TO THE EDITOR - 25%

Write an op-ed/letter to the editor (no more than 1000 words) about a pertinent issue in local, national, or global common life. **The first draft is due on April 14 at 11:59pm via Canvas Assignments. The final draft of the letter is due on May 8 at 11:59pm via Canvas.**

- While your issue *does not have to be specifically religious*, your letter should *address religious dimensions* of the issue in question.
- Outline the problem/tension, your specific question, and your argument. Your argument should reflect *your personal position* on the matter but must also be *supported with analysis based on facts*.
- There will be in-class workshops focused on learning to write in this genre.
- You will submit a first draft of the letter where it will be read by your instructor with an eye toward clarifying your argument as it would be read by an editor and a public audience. You will submit a final draft of the letter that will be revised based on feedback you received on the first draft.

MULTIMEDIA PORTFOLIO - 20%

What have you learned this semester about the role of religion in democracy? Create a multimedia portfolio showcasing your work from the semester. Use the presentation platform of your choice (Sway, Prezi, Wix, etc.); the only requirement is that you can **share a link of your final work. The multimedia portfolio is due on Friday, April 28 at 11:59pm via Canvas Assignments.** Your portfolio should include:

- Your annotated newsfeed;
- Samples of your Canvas discussion responses that best demonstrate what you learned from the readings this semester; and
- A final version of your op-ed with a brief comment on what you learned in the writing and revising process.

Present your content in an engaging and imaginative fashion that helps convey a narrative or story of your experience of our seminar this semester (note: you do not have to present the material in your portfolio in either a chronological or topical order). 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!

QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSIGNMENT DETAILS OR OTHER COURSE-SPECIFIC MATTERS? SUBMIT VIA CANVAS DISCUSSIONS, “COURSE QUESTIONS.”

REQUIRED TEXTS:

(CA) Readings available on Canvas under Files tab
All other readings are available online via links in this syllabus

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1 – Introduction: Reading the Signs of the Times

Wednesday 1/18:

Course Introduction

Friday 1/20:

[Mark 13 NRSVue](#)

(CA) Pope John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis*

Week 2 – Civil Religion and Democracy

Monday 1/23:

(CA) Robert Bellah, et. al., “The National Society,” *Habits of the Heart*

Wednesday 1/25:

(CA) Danielle S. Allen, “Prologue” and Part I: “Origins,” *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*

Friday 1/27:

(CA) Thomas Wabel, “Leaving the Void Open: Forms of Remembrance in Civil Religion, Politics, and Art,” *Journal of Church and State*

Week 3 – Interrogating the Relationship Between Religion and Democracy

Monday 1/30:

(CA) Cecile Laborde, “Liberal Egalitarianism and the Critique of Religion” in *Liberalism’s Religion*

Wednesday 2/1:

(CA) Seyla Benhabib, “Democratic Iterations: The Local, the National, and the Global” in *Another Cosmopolitanism*

Friday 2/3:

Ezra Klein interviews Patrick Deneen, [“What Does the ‘Post-Liberal Right’ Actually Want?”](#) on *The Ezra Klein Show* (listen to the interview or read the transcript, your choice)

Week 4 – Religion and Liberalism

Monday 2/6:

(CA) Alan Wolfe, “The Most Appropriate Political Philosophy for Our Times,” in *The Future of Liberalism*

Wednesday 2/8:

(CA) Richard John Neuhaus, “Misreading the Signs of the Times,” in *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*

Friday 2/10:

(CA) Cathleen Kavaney, “John Rawls: Contests of Public Reason,” in *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square*

Week 5 – Religion and Democratic Community

Monday 2/13:

(CA) Robert P. Jones, “Seeing” in *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*

Wednesday 2/15:

(CA) Danielle S. Allen, “Old Myths and New Epiphanies,” in *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*

Friday 2/17:

(CA) Molly Farneth, “Democratic Authority through Conflict and Reconciliation” in *Hegel’s Social Ethics: Religion, Conflict, and Rituals of Reconciliation*

Week 6 – Religion and Conscience

Monday 2/20:

(CA) Daniel Maguire, “Conscience and Guilt”

Wednesday 2/22:

Martin Luther King, Jr., [*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*](#)

Friday 2/24:

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

Week 7 – Religious Voting Guides

Monday 2/27:

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

Wednesday 3/1:

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

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

Episcopal Public Policy Network, [“Vote Faithfully Election Engagement Toolkit Midterms 2022”](#)

Friday 3/3:

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.

Post questions for review session to Canvas by Friday, March 3 at 11:59pm

Week 8 – Spring Break**Week 9 – Midterm Exam****Monday 3/13:**

In-class Exam Review Session

Wednesday 3/15:

Midterm Exam

Friday 3/17:

No Class Meeting

Week 10 – Do We Change Our Minds? Religion, Media, and Political Mind-Changing**Monday 3/20:**

(CA) Walter Lippmann, “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads,” in *Public Opinion*

Wednesday 3/22:

Interview with Hugo Mercier, [“How People Change Their Minds,”](#) WBUR Boston (audio recording)

(CA) Hugo Mercier, “Demagogues, Prophets, and Preachers” in *Not Born Yesterday: The Science of Who We Trust and What We Believe*

Friday 3/24:

(CA) Donald Green, et. al., “Partisan Stability and Voter Learning” in *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*

Week 11 – How Do We Change Our Minds? Religion and Public Rhetoric**Monday 3/27:**

(CA) Nichole M. Flores, “Do We Change Our Minds in Public Life?: On Christianity and the Possibility of Political Conversion” in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*

Recommended: Matt Croasmun interviews Nichole Flores, [“Think Again: Changing Your Mind, Political-Religious Conversion, and the Emotional Life”](#) on *For the Life of the World* podcast

Wednesday 3/29:

Barack Obama, [“Eulogy for Rev. Clementa Pickney,”](#) 26 June 2015

Friday 3/31:

Mitt Romney, [“Romney Delivers Remarks on Impeachment Vote,”](#) 5 February 2020

Week 12 – Engaging Religion in Public Writing**Monday 4/3:**

Thomas Edsall, [“The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets,”](#) *The New York Times*, 28 January 2021

Wednesday 4/5:

Elizabeth Bruenig, [“The Man I Saw Them Kill,”](#) *The New York Times*, 17 December 2020

Friday 4/7:

Jamelle Bouie, [“If You Skip the Vaccine, It Is My ‘Damn Business,’”](#) *The New York Times*, 13 August 2021

Week 13 – E pluribus unum?: Oneness and Wholeness in the Life of Democracy**Monday 4/10:**

[Judges 11 NRSVue](#)

(CA) Danielle S. Allen, “Sacrifice and Citizenship” in *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. Board of Education*

Wednesday 4/12:

(CA) Martha C. Nussbaum, “A Problem in the History of Liberalism” in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*

Friday 4/14:

No class meeting

Week 14 – Know Your Enemy? You Might Know Less Than You Think.**Monday 4/17:**

Jennifer Schuessler, [“Two ‘Leftist Bros’ Dive Into Conservatism to ‘Know Your Enemy,’”](#) *The New York Times*, 7 March 2022

Matthew Sitman, [“Leaving Conservatism Behind,”](#) *Dissent*, Summer 2016

Wednesday 4/19:

Class Guest: Matthew Sitman, co-host of “Know Your Enemy” podcast, editorial board of *Dissent* magazine, and columnist for *Gawker*

Friday 4/21:

Discussion of Sitman visit

Week 15 – Religion and the Future of Democracy**Monday 4/24:**

(CA) Nichole M. Flores, “Lifting Up the Lowly,” in *The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy*

Wednesday 4/26:

(CA) David Newheiser, “Atheism and the Future of Faith,” in *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology, and the Future of Faith*

Friday 4/28:

(CA) Willis Jenkins, “Intergenerational Risk and the Future of Love” in *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*

Week 16**Monday 5/1:**

Course Conclusion

This Could Be Your Life!

Are you enjoying this course? There's plenty more where this came from!

Consider a Major or Minor in Religious Studies!

Did you know that the **Religious Studies Department** at UVA is the **largest standalone religion department** in the United States? We have a plethora of fantastic professors and courses in a variety of different traditions—including African religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

The **Religious Studies major and minor** are highly interdisciplinary. You can learn anthropology, sociology, history, comparative literature, theology, contemporary affairs, and philosophy, all while focusing on aspect of human society that **affects us all**.

Graduates with **Religious Studies** majors or minors **have gone on to successful careers** in law, medicine, politics, business, community organizing, education, and many other fields.* The Religious Studies major and minor offer students the opportunity to differentiate themselves from their peers while providing them with unique ways of thinking, stellar writing, communication and analysis skills, and world-class insights into different cultures and worldviews.

*****If you would like to learn more about the Religious Studies major or minor or how the department can help you reach your academic or career goals, please reach out to our peer advisors, Jonathan Rivers (jr3kvw@virginia.edu) and Alana Dickey (acd4uzf@virginia.edu) or the Director of the Undergraduate Program (DUP), Prof. Noah Salomon (nsalomon@virginia.edu). Or visit religiousstudies.as.virginia.edu/undergraduate.*****

(*Please get in touch with the DUP to get linked into our career database to meet alumni advisors who majored in Religious Studies and now work in these fields!)