



SOCL-4733, 102 Sociology of Religion, Fall 2023

Instructor: Dr. Wesley Cohoon

Phone: TBD

Email: wesley.cphoon@msutexas.edu

Course Modality: Face-to-Face

Meeting Times: Mon/Wed 2:00-3:20 p.m. in Prothro-Yeager Building, #100

Office: 0-134

Office Hours:

- Mon, Wed, & Fri from 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
- Mon & Wed from 12:50 p.m. to 1:50 p.m.

“A sociology of knowledge without a sociology of religion is impossible (and vice versa).” – Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

“Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinct place in this enterprise.” – Peter Berger

“In all its manifestations, religion constitutes an immense projection of human meaning into the empty vastness of the universe.” – Peter Berger

(Instructor reserves the right to amend all syllabus information as necessary)

Course Introduction

I am very happy you are taking my course, and I look forward to learning with you this semester! I love sociology because, ultimately, I love people and learning. One of my specialties is the sociology of religion, and I am fascinated with how people find meaning, create values, develop community, and form identity. Even for people who do not identify as religious, the sociology of

religion is essential to understanding how people make sense of their world through world-building and world-maintaining.

Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the sociology of religion. The course views religion as a social institution and focuses on how people construct and maintain their realities. The course approaches religion as a social institution and focuses on the social interactions that occur because of beliefs and practices.

Please note that the sociology of religion is not concerned with what is “true” or “right,” but instead, the focus is understanding the impact religion has on society. Students are welcome to share, and I look forward to learning with students and hearing about their experiences. However, students need to conduct conversations respectfully and realize that some of what we study may contradict their personal beliefs or experiences. This class is not intended to invalidate your experiences or change your beliefs. However, students need to put their biases “on hold” and be open-minded and willing to view religion as an “outsider.”

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Have a workable grasp of the sociology of religion
- Apply sociological theories to the study of religion
- Use reflexivity in research and their sociological imaginations
- Articulate how beliefs and practices impact social interactions and society

Required Text

Book: *The Social Construction of Reality*

Author: Berger & Luckmann

ISBN: 9780385058988

Publisher: Doubleday Books

PDF: Excerpt from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

Author: Durkheim

Access: I will provide students with a PDF version of these fourteen pages.

PDF: Excerpt from *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Author: Weber

Access: I will provide students with a PDF version of these eleven pages.

PDF: Excerpt from *The Spirituality of Imperfection*

Authors: Kurtz and Ketcham

Access: I will provide students with a PDF version of these six pages.

Who is the instructor?

I have taught classes at several universities. In addition to my academic teaching, I have presented on religion as it relates to disability and caring for others at several venues. My education is a mixture of sociology and religion. I have earned a Ph.D. in Sociology, a Doctor of Ministry, an M.S. in Sociology, a Master of Divinity, and a B.S. in Religion.

My experience with sociology and religion is not all academic, and I have several years of practical experience incorporating the two in various settings like businesses, nonprofits, hospitals, and governmental agencies. I am a Certified Clinical Sociologist through the Association of Applied and Clinical Sociology.

I am married with five children. My youngest three are 15, 13, and 11. My two oldest children are married and live with their spouses. My oldest son has a daughter, which makes me a grandpa. We have three dogs—Cupcake, Oreo, and Waffles, and I love spending time with my family.

Teaching Philosophy

I want to come alongside students and help them discover themselves and their social world. In addition to providing information, I want to listen and learn from others and their experiences. While I care about students, I also want them to grow and experience some level of discomfort. While people do not like tension and conflict, people experience growth through it. People need to feel some stress and have their existing knowledge challenged to gain new understanding. I encourage students to engage in an action/reflection model where they can learn, do something with their knowledge, come back and reflect on their experience, and repeat the process. Lastly, learning is difficult, but it is also fun. I welcome playfulness, humor, and student interaction throughout class time.

Course Requirements

Please pay attention to these instructions. Failure to submit assignments as instructed will result in a zero for the assignment.

Submitting and Returning Assignments

Assignment Submission

Submit all your assignments via D2L – upload in Word or PDF format. Students are responsible for ensuring that assignments are submitted on time and in an accessible format.

Assignment Feedback

I will provide assignment feedback within seven (7) days of the due date. My feedback will be provided in the form of comments on the assignment in D2L.

You are welcome to come and talk to me about any assignments and any feedback that I have provided.

Your grades will be posted to the D2L.

Communication with the Instructor

Please follow the below template when sending me an email. Failure to follow this format will result in a response email from me stating, "Please read the syllabus and follow the email formatting instructions." Students are welcome to ask any questions, but I want the students to first check the syllabus for the answer before asking or clarifying a question.

Dr. Cohoon

My name is (Xyz), and I am a student in your SOCL 4733: Sociology of Religion class this fall semester. I am emailing to ask you about (*blank*). I looked in the syllabus, and it states (*blank*) about my question.

Thanks,

(*Your Name*)

Late Work

All assignments are due in D2L before 11:59 p.m. on their listed due date in a Word document. If the assignment does not upload, I do not have it. The student is responsible for ensuring that their assignments are uploaded. Corrupted documents do not count, and you need to ensure that the assignment is uploaded in the proper format. I will deduct ten percent per day for late assignments. ***There are no exceptions, and all late work will be deducted 10% for every day it is late.*** This late policy is generous, and students can still earn a good grade on an assignment even when it is late.

Evaluation & Grading

All grades will be made available to students in D2L.

A. Class Attendance – 28 %

Students can earn a total of 28 points for class participation, which equals one point per class. If students attend class, they get full credit for that day. I currently do not have a way or a plan for students to make up class participation points. *If a student has an excused or unexcused absence, they cannot earn class participation for the classes that they miss the class.* While that may appear harsh, students can still miss several classes and still earn a good grade in the course.

B. Worldview Autobiography – 32 %

Students will write their worldview autobiography, which is a self-reflective essay about identity formation, world-building, and world-maintaining. This assignment is designed so students can gain insight and evaluate how they socially construct and socially maintain their worlds. The assignment is to be 1,750 to 2,500 words, and it is due by December 9th.

I suggest that students begin this exercise by freewriting and answering some of the prompts in the sections. Then, the students can go back through and apply the sociological theories to their writing. Finally, students can proofread and integrate the theories with their experiences.

Writing a worldview autobiography allows students to bridge the gap between sociological theories and practical experiences. The grading of this assignment is not based on the student's religious life or beliefs; instead, I want to see sociological engagement. This assignment will allow students to gain insights into themselves and how reality is socially constructed. I have detailed instructions below.

Religious and Non-Religious Students

Students do not have to profess, have a connection with, believe in, or follow any organized religion. By studying the sociology of religion this semester, we recognize that religion is consistent with how people socially construct and maintain their realities. Since reality is socially constructed and maintained, everyone has a “religion” (or a worldview that functions like religion).

This assignment is for students to demonstrate they understand their worldview development. Students are not to justify their religious beliefs or development. Do not focus on supernatural activities. You need to frame your experiences sociologically (which includes ways we can measure and evaluate)—not supernaturally. Sociology is a science to provide a sense of thoughts, feelings, and observations.

You need to make sure to use sociological language—not theological language. There may be times when you use theological language. If you need to do that, you need to interpret it sociologically. You are not writing this paper to convince anyone of your beliefs or try to convert anyone. Recognize your bias, but at the same time, try to stay objective. Most people think they are right. Do not spend the paper offering a justification or reasons for your religion. The point is for you to use sociological language and theories to understand your experiences, the sociology of religion, and the community where you live.

Remember, this is a self-reflective academic paper. It is not a traditional research paper. You need to write well and engage the reading and lecture materials, but there is no outside sources limit. Students are welcome to use or not use external sources—but they must use sociological theories and concepts we discuss in class.

The grade of this assignment is not based on the religious content of the paper but instead focuses on successful analysis.

Confidentiality

I am the only one who will view your worldview autobiography. We will not discuss papers in class, and students are not required to share the contents of their papers with anyone else. Your writing with this assignment is anonymous. Once again, the grade of this assignment is not based on the religious content of your paper or your personal beliefs or experiences. I am looking for your ability to connect the theories with your practical experiences.

Sections for the Worldview Autobiography

- Introduction
- Beliefs and Practices
- Community
- Identity Sacred and Profane
- World-Building and World-Maintaining
- Purpose and Meaning
- Conclusion

What is Required for Each Section

- Introduction – ½ to 1 page
 - Offer a brief introduction of yourself and your background
- Beliefs and Practices – 1-2pages
 - Identify your beliefs and practices. Do not just include specific religious doctrines, but primarily focus on the beliefs/practices that most impact your life. Your beliefs can consist of your assumptions about the world, the meaning of life, and what you value. Your practices are how you put those beliefs into actions or the actions that result from those beliefs.
 - What social variables have impacted your beliefs and practices? Some examples are things like the country you were born (or live in), region of that country, time period, family, societal expectations, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.
 - Discuss how those beliefs and practices connect you to a community.
 - How are you both consistent and inconsistent with your beliefs and practices?
- Community – 1-2 pages
 - If you are a member of a specific religious community (like a church or mosque), do
 - Where do you find community?
 - How are you connected to these people? Why?
 - If you are a member of a specific religious community (church, mosque, synagogue, etc.), how are your interactions different in that community and other places where you experience community?
 - What role does community play in influencing your beliefs and actions?

- Identity – 1-2 pages
 - What is your source of identity? For example, how would you describe yourself to others? What parts of that description make you most proud?
 - What type of identity do you want to have in the future? How is that similar or different from your current identity?
 - How does the community you are part of impact your identity?

- Sacred and Profane – 1-2 pages
 - When answering this section, go beyond simple answers and challenge your assumptions. For example, if you are a Dallas Cowboys fan, you may find the Philadelphia Eagles profane. Another example is that there could be a specific ideology that challenges your beliefs, your values, and makes you feel uncomfortable.
 - What makes these things sacred or profane to you? Why do they bother you or cause a sense of respect? The things that we designate sacred and profane can reflect our ultimate values.
 - What objects, behaviors, or people do you identify as sacred? These are things that you think are good and you treat them with reverence or high regard. Sometimes when people dismiss what we hold as sacred, it causes anger, stress, or feeling threatened.
 - What objects, behaviors, or people do you identify as profane? These are things that you think are bad and you treat as dirty, corrupt, or with contempt. The profane sometimes threatens our values, beliefs, or assumptions. We may look down on items, actions, or people we classify as profane and probably don't want to associate with it/them.

- Purpose and Meaning – 1-2 pages
 - How do you define the purpose of life?
 - What in life gives you meaning?
 - How does how you view life's meaning and purpose impact your daily behaviors?
 - How do your beliefs and practices connect with how you find purpose and meaning?
 - What helps you, and how do you cope when things go badly? For example, what actions, thoughts, or beliefs make you feel better when you receive bad news? How do you handle adversity? When you feel unwanted emotions (anger, sadness, jealousy, shame, etc.), what grounds you or makes you get through the situation?

- World-Building and World-Maintaining – 1-2 pages
 - How do you confirm your reality? Consider what groups you are part of, your friends and family, and how the media you consume confirms your reality. For example, someone with a particular political leaning may only watch the news from a station confirming their particular political views.
 - How does your religion (beliefs, practices, community, identity, ideas of sacred and profane, and a sense of purpose) confirm your reality?

- How does society confirm your reality? What people confirm your reality? Who pushes against your reality?
- How is the reality you have constructed different than people from another society, culture, or with different beliefs?
- Conclusion – ½ to 1 page
 - What did you like and dislike about this assignment?
 - How would this assignment be different if you had completed it at the beginning of the semester before taking this class?
 - How was this worldview autobiography helpful or not helpful in understanding the sociology of religion?

Grading Criteria for Worldview Autobiography

Well-written— 40%

- Paper meets the word count minimum – 5%
- Sections of the paper are appropriate length – 5%
- Grammar and mistake-free – 10%
- Logical and consistent argument – 10%
- Paragraphs are appropriate length – 10%

Formatted Correctly— 30%

- Word or PDF document with one-inch margins – 5%
- The font is 12-point, Times New Roman – 5%
- Paragraphs are double-spaced – 10%
- Paragraphs are indented – 10%

Demonstrated and Used Sociological Concepts in Each Section – 30%

- Introduction – 2.5%
- Beliefs and Practices – 5%
- Community – 5%
- Identity Sacred and Profane – 5%
- World-Building and World-Maintaining – 5%
- Purpose and Meaning – 5%
- Conclusion – 2.5%

C. Critical Book Review – 10 %

Students will provide one critical book review this semester. The book review will be over *The Social Construction of Reality*, and it is due by November 18th. The book review will be worth ten points.

The critical book review needs to be 500 to 750 words and written in paragraph form. Students are to engage the material from a sociological lens and address questions like:

- What did you like/dislike about the book?
- Explain your sociological or practical agreements or disagreements. What is the basis for your agreements/disagreement?
- What was confusing? Did the book leave you with any remaining questions?
- How does the book interact with your experiences and observations?
- Explain how the book holds value for you and your sociological understanding.

Grading Criteria for Critical Book Review

Well-written— 40%

- Paper meets the word count minimum – 10%
- Grammar and mistake-free – 10%
- Logical and consistent argument – 10%
- Paragraphs are appropriate length – 10%

Formatted Correctly— 30%

- Word or PDF document with one-inch margins – 5%
- The font is 12-point, Times New Roman – 5%
- Paragraphs are double-spaced – 10%
- Paragraphs are indented – 10%

Demonstrated an Ability to Think Sociologically – 30%

- Addressed the suggested questions and assignment critically – 15%
- Demonstrated an understanding of the material – 15%

D. Sociology of Religion Group Presentations – 30 %

Students will divide into groups and present an in-class group presentation. The student will engage in a sociological analysis of a piece of popular media and apply the principles and theories learned from the sociology of religion to the characters and the show. *Students must get their topic approved by the instructor before they present.* Some examples of television shows or movies include Handmaid's Tale, Vikings, After Life, Star Wars, anything in the MCU, etc. The presentation must be 8-10 minutes long, and the grading criteria is below. Half of the class will present on Monday, November 27th, and the second half will present on Wednesday, November 29th. Students are responsible for scheduling the presentation with the instructor.

Grading Criteria for Sociology of Religion Group Presentations

PowerPoint— 30%

- Students follow the 5x5 rule – 15%
 - No more than five words across and five bullets down
- Use of images and background – 10%
 - Students don't use a white background with only text
- Use of multiple slides – 5%

- Students don't just have one slide

Presentation— 30%

- Students do not just read from the presentation or their notes – 10%
- The presenter maintains eye contact with the audience – 10%
- The presentation fits in the required time slot – 5%
- Everyone from the group participates – 5%

Sociological Analysis– 40%

- Shows how the selected media fits within the sociology of religion – 10%
- Demonstrate a knowledge of the principles and theories taught in the class – 10%
- Proper application of the theories and principles with the media – 10%
- Presents the material from a sociological perspective – 10%
 - Focuses on sociology—not theology or epistemology
 - Critically engages the material

Final Grade	Final Points/Average
A	90% and above
B	80%-89%
C	70%-79%
D	60%-69%
F	Below 60%

Course Schedule

This calendar represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunities. Any changes will be communicated clearly and as soon as possible.

Class Assignment	Due Date
Week 1	Aug 28th-Sept 2nd
Mon Class Participation 1a: Introductions & Expectations	Aug 28th
Wed Class Participation 1b: Defining Sociology of Religion	Aug 30th
Week 2	Sept 3rd-9th
Read: Excerpt from Elementary Forms of Religion	Sept 3rd
Labor Day - No Class	Sept 4th
Wed Class Participation 2b: Key Sociologists Approaches to Religion	Sept 6th
Week 3	Sept 10th-16th
Read: Excerpt from Protestant Work Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism	Sept 10th
Mon Class Participation 3a: World Construction	Sept 11th
Wed Class Participation 3b: Religion and Culture	Sept 13th
Week 4	Sept 17th-23rd

Read: Excerpt from The Spirituality of Imperfection	Sept 17th
Mon Class Participation 4a: World Maintenance	Sept 18th
Wed Class Participation 4b: Stages of Faith	Sept 20th
Week 5	Sept 24th-30th
Read: Social Construction, p1-46	Sept 24th
Mon Class Participation 5a: Theodicy	Sept 25th
Wed Class Participation 5b: Faith and Belief	Sept 27th
Week 6	Oct 1st-7th
Mon Class Participation 6a: Religion and Alienation	Oct 2nd
Wed Class Participation 6b: Imbedded and Professed Beliefs	Oct 4th
Week 7	Oct 8th-14th
Read: Social Construction, p47-91	Oct 8th
Mon Class Participation 7a: Secularization	Oct 9th
Wed Class Participation 7b: Secularization	Oct 11th
Week 8	Oct 15th-21st
Mon Class Participation 8a: Problem of Plausibility	Oct 16th
Wed Class Participation 8b: Measuring Religion	Oct 18th
Week 9	Oct 22nd-28th
Read: Social Construction, p92-128	Oct 22nd
Mon Class Participation 9a: Problem of Legitimation	Oct 23rd
Wed Class Participation 9b: Sacred and Profane	Oct 25th
Week 10	Oct 29th-Nov4th
Read: Social Construction, p129-162	Oct 29th
Mon Class Participation 10a: Foundation of Knowledge in Life	Oct 30th
Wed Class Participation 10b: Religious Conversion	Nov 1st
Week 11	Nov 5th-11th
Read: Social Construction, p163-189	Nov 5th
Mon Class Participation 11a: Society as Objective Reality, Institutions	Nov 6th
Wed Class Participation 11b: Religious Oppression	Nov 8th
Week 12	Nov 12th-18th
Mon Class Participation 12a: Society as Objective Reality: Legitimation	Nov 13th
Wed Class Participation 12b: Crime and Religion	Nov 15th
Critical Book Review: Social Construction of Reality	Nov 18th
Week 13	Nov 19th-25th
Mon Class Participation 13a: Society as Subjective Reality: Internalization	Nov 20th
Thanksgiving Break - No Classes	Nov 21st-25th
Week 14	Nov 26th-Dec 2nd
Finalize Class Presentations	Nov 26th
Mon Class Participation 14a: Subjective Reality: Social Structures	Nov 27th
Sociology of Religion Group Presentations: First Half of the Class	Nov 27th
Wed Class Participation 14b: Subjective Reality: Identity	Nov 29th

Sociology of Religion Group Presentations: Second Half of the Class	Nov 29th
Week 15	Dec 3rd-9th
Mon Class Participation 15a: Civil Religion and Patriotism	Dec 4th
Wed Class Participation 15b: Religion as Therapy	Dec 6th
Worldview Autobiographies Due	Dec 9th
Final Examination Week	
Final Exam	N/A

University and Class Policies

Attendance

Presence is important. There is a high correlation between attendance and class grades. In-class attendance is required. If a student is going to miss class, they need to email the instructor. More than three absences can reduce in the drop of a full letter grade. Students with excessive absences, or those who fail to notify the instructor of class absences, can be dropped at the instructor's discretion.

Plagiarism

The appropriation, theft, purchase, or obtaining by any means another's work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one's own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another's work without giving credit. Using AI technology (like ChatGPT) to write assignments is considered plagiarism. Students who plagiarize will receive a zero on the assignment and can face additional academic consequences. However, students are welcomed and encouraged to use proofreading applications like Grammarly. The difference between technology ChatGPT and Grammarly is that technology like Grammarly uses the student's original ideas and helps proofread.

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exists in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “*Run. Hide. Fight.*” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [“Run. Hide. Fight.”](#)

Grade Appeal Process

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

Notice

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.