

Religious Institutions in America

SOCI 154

Winter 2026

MWF 11:00 - 11:50 AM

Podemos 1A19

THIS COURSE
PROMOTES
EQUITY AND
CELEBRATES
DIVERSITY.



Your voice
matters here



Welcome to our course!

I'm thrilled to be spending the quarter learning and growing with you! Please read this document to get a sense of what our time together will be like.

Instructor Contact Information and Office Hours

Instructor: Dr. Christine Crofts (she/her/hers)



Email: [Canvas Inbox](#) (preferred method of contact) or ccrofts@ucsd.edu

Text: 619-356-1951 (work mobile)

Zoom Room: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/my/christinecrofts>

Office Hours/Location: TBD!

Teaching Assistant: Stay tuned!

Communication, Office Hours, and Response Time

- In addition to our three weekly class meetings and announcements in Canvas, you'll receive feedback messages in the Submission Comments section of written work you turn in. You can write back (or send an audio/video message) to us there, too!
- **Office hours:** See above for times and locations! You can visit my office in person or connect via Zoom. If you want to chat but the scheduled office hours don't work for you, we can arrange another time to meet via Zoom.
- **Questions outside of office hours:** I'm happy to take questions outside of my office hours, and I'll typically respond to your email or text message within 24 hours, seven days a week. If you don't get a response after 24 hours, please resend!

Course Location & Technical Support

- Our course takes place in Podemos 1A19 and will meet between 11 and 11:50 AM on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Course materials and assignments will be located online within Canvas.
- Please contact me if you have any difficulties with accessing or logging into Canvas. This [Get started in Canvas](#) resource is helpful, too!

Course Information

Catalog Description

Examination of sociological theories for why people have religious beliefs. Also examines types of religious organizations, secularization, fundamentalism, religion and immigration, religion and politics, and religiously inspired violence and terrorism. The class will tend to focus on the American context.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

1. explain and evaluate sociology's unique approach to studying religion
2. recognize the roles religion and religious institutions can play in individual and group experience
3. analyze the effects of systemic inequalities on the functions and impacts of religious institutions
4. demonstrate understanding of the intersections of religion and other social institutions
5. connect theories and research about religious institutions to their own identity, experiences, and/or observations.

Course Format

For most weeks, our schedule will look like this:

1. Use the home page link to go to the new week's module. Use the "Next" button at the bottom of each page to progress through the module.
2. Start engaging with the content in the Canvas module, which may include readings, videos, and other activities.
3. Attend class on Monday, when we will typically focus on lecture, large group discussion, and/or other instructional activities.
4. Submit your journal assignment (if you have one) **by the end of the day on Tuesday**.
5. Attend class on Wednesday, when we will typically focus on group discussions and in-class work.

6. Attend class on Friday, when we will typically have large group discussion, share thoughts/resources/questions, and additional lecture/instruction.
7. Submit your (group or individual, depending on the week) discussion post or project (if you have one) **by the end of the day on Sunday**.

Content Warning and Class Climate

Our course content and class discussions will often focus on mature, charged, and potentially challenging topics. In the study of sociology, course topics are often political and personal (e.g., racism, gender identity, religion, sexuality). Course materials and discussions might trigger strong feelings – anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, nervous laughter – you get the idea. The use of precise words to describe social phenomena and/or events is part of the content of this college course. Some of us will have emotional responses to the course content; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the content; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree), and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

Required Materials

- All course assignments, readings, videos, and other materials will be available in our Canvas course! No textbook or other materials purchase required! 😊
- Reliable, high-speed Internet access on a desktop or laptop computer for homework
- [VPN access](#) for library materials (if off campus)
- Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or other software to save documents
- Paper and pen(cil) or note-taking app to jot down thoughts or complete activities during class meetings
- Optional but helpful: your phone/tablet/laptop for in-class work/activities/polls.

Expectations

Community Agreements/Course Values

TBD! We'll craft these together in Week 1.

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance and class participation are important parts of the learning experience and can impact student success. And this isn't just an assumption! [Research](#) suggests that regular class attendance positively affects course grades/GPA and in fact is the strongest predictor of GPA (more than study skills, work ethic, SAT scores, and more!).

So attendance is good! But mandatory attendance can feel forced and unsupportive of student autonomy. At the same time, no points for attendance can make it hard to motivate yourself to come to class.

For these reasons, our course will have an **optional mandatory attendance** policy. What does that mean? It means **YOU** get to choose whether you (as an individual) want attendance to be part of your grade or not. See the *Evaluation and Grading* section below for more details, but here's the bottom line:

- If you **opt in** to mandatory attendance, you will earn 10% toward your final grade if you miss no more than seven class meetings. If you miss more than seven class meetings, you will not earn that 10% (i.e., you'll receive a score of zero for that portion) of your final grade. (This is an all-or-nothing sort of thing; you either earn the full 10% or you don't.*)
- If you **opt out** of mandatory attendance, your attendance is not recorded and will have no impact on your final grade.

***If you are sick, please don't attend! Rest and return to class when you've recovered. Absences for illness or other hardships are excusable! Just let me know.**

Instructor Communication

Each week, we'll typically meet during our scheduled class times. In addition, we'll communicate throughout the week via Canvas. I'll post periodic announcements, share lecture content during our class meetings, join you in class activities to help you understand course concepts, and provide feedback on written assignments you submit via Canvas. I'll also be available to answer questions via Canvas Inbox, email, or text (usually responding within 24 hours). You'll have many opportunities to communicate with your classmates via weekly large- and small-group discussions and class activities.

Please contact me if you need help or have questions or concerns of any kind!

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty of any type by a student provides grounds for disciplinary action by the instructor or college. In written work, no material may be copied from another without proper quotation marks, footnotes, or appropriate documentation.

By enrolling in a course that uses Canvas, you agree that you are the person accessing and completing the work for this course and will not share your username and password with others.

Plagiarism is the act of using another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. Sources of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries must be properly documented [according to MLA format](#). This applies to all writing, including discussions. Plagiarism is considered academic theft because it is stealing someone else's words or ideas, but the plagiarizer robs himself or herself as well. This course will provide you with the opportunity to improve your reading, thinking, and writing skills - don't rob yourself of that chance!

Please read UC San Diego's [Policy on Integrity of Scholarship](#) and take the [integrity pledge](#)!

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) refers to the academic standards students must maintain to remain eligible for federal, state, and institutional financial aid. If you are receiving financial aid, please ensure you review the [SAP requirements and the appeals process](#).

Resources for Support and Learning

There are a variety of resources available to students at UC San Diego, which are designed to address needs and enhance the student experience. In this section, the course is connected to the broader university community by services and programs for students. If there are resources specific to the course, school, department and/or topic, be sure to include those here.

Learning and Academic Support	
<u>Ask a Librarian: Library Support</u> <i>Chat or make an appointment with a librarian to focus on your research needs</i>	<u>Writing Hub Services in the Teaching + Learning Commons</u> <i>One-on-one online writing tutoring and workshops on key writing topics</i>
<u>Course Reserves, Connecting from Off-Campus and Research Support</u> <i>Find supplemental course materials</i>	<u>Supplemental Instruction</u> <i>Peer-assisted study sessions through the Academic Achievement Hub to improve success in historically challenging courses</i>
<u>First Gen Student Success Coaching Program</u> <i>Peer mentor program that provides students with information, resources, and support in meeting their goals</i>	<u>Tutoring – Content</u> <i>Drop-in and online tutoring through the Academic Achievement Hub</i>
<u>Office of Academic Support & Instructional Services (OASIS)</u> <i>Intellectual and personal development support</i>	<u>Tutoring – Learning Strategies</u> <i>Address learning challenges with a metacognitive approach</i>
Support for Well-being and Inclusion	
<u>Basic Needs at UCSD</u> <i>Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live is encouraged to contact: foodpantry@ucsd.edu basicneeds@ucsd.edu (858) 246-2632</i>	<u>Community and Resource Centers</u> <u>Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion</u> <i>As part of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion the campus community centers provide programs and resources for students and contribute toward the evolution of a socially just campus (858).822-.3542 diversity@ucsd.edu</i>
<u>Counseling and Psychological Services</u>	

<p><i>Confidential counseling and consultations for psychiatric service and mental health programming</i></p> <p><u>Triton Concern Line</u> Report students of concern: (858) 246-1111</p> <p><u>Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)</u> Supports students with disabilities and accessibility across campus</p>	<p><u>Get Involved</u> <i>Student organizations, clubs, service opportunities, and many other ways to connect with others on campus</i></p> <p><u>Undocumented Student Services</u> <i>Programs and services are designed to help students overcome obstacles that arise from their immigration status and support them through personal and academic excellence</i></p>
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Assignments

- **Canvas Module Content** – Assigned readings, supplemental videos, podcasts, activities, and other learning materials.
- **Student Information Survey** – An opportunity for you to share a bit about yourself!
Journal Assignments – Some weeks you'll respond to a few questions or reflect briefly on an assigned topic in a journal assignment. These assignments will provide an opportunity to engage with the week's topics and/or relate them to personal experiences and/or observations about society. These journals will also serve as preparation for the week's discussion.
- **Discussions** – Some weeks you'll post and reply to a peer's post on a discussion board in response to a question or prompt related to the week's topics.
- **Research Report** – You'll (on your own or in a small group - your choice!) **EITHER**
 - conduct brief academic/online research about a religious institution of your choice

OR

 - conduct a brief participant observation study of a religious institution of your choice

and write a short report about it.
- **Pop Culture Analysis** – A short paper for which you'll select a piece of pop culture and relate it to what we've studied in class.
- **Take-Home Final** – You'll demonstrate your engagement with/understanding of the quarter's topics by responding to several essay prompts.

Course Schedule

Week	Subjects	Assignments
Week 1 – 1/5 - 1/11	Sociological Approaches to the Study of Religion	Student Information Survey
Week 2 – 1/12 - 1/18	Religious Belief and Practice	Week 2 Journal
*Week 3 – 1/20 - 1/25	Types of Religious Organizations	Week 3 Discussion
Week 4 – 1/26 - 2/1	Secularization	Week 4 Discussion
Week 5 – 2/2 - 2/8	Religion and Social Class	Week 5 Discussion
Week 6 – 2/9 - 2/15	Religion and Gender	Week 6 Discussion
*Week 7 – 2/17 - 2/22	Religion and Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration	Research Report
Week 8 – 2/23 - 3/1	Religion and Politics	Week 8 Journal
Week 9 – 3/2 - 3/8	Fundamentalism, Violence, and Terrorism	Pop Culture Analysis
Week 10 – 3/9 - 3/13	Religious Institutions and Social Change	Week 10 Journal
Finals Week – 3/14 - 3/16	---	Take-Home Final Due 3/16

*Week with a holiday so no class on Monday. Due dates may be adjusted.

Readings

These readings and additional required and optional learning materials (articles, videos, podcasts, etc.) will be included in each week's Canvas module.

Week 1	Perry, Samuel L. " Religion Matters (And Doesn't Go Away When Sociologists Ignore It) ." <i>Sociological Forum (Randolph, N.J.)</i> , vol. 38, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1456–63.
Week 2	Ammerman, Nancy T. " Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach ." <i>The American Journal of Sociology</i> , vol. 126, no. 1, 2020, pp. 6–51.
Week 3	Roso, Joseph, et al. " Changing Worship Practices in American Congregations ." <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> , vol. 59, no. 4, 2020, pp. 675–84.
Week 4	Allen, Shaonta' E. " Is the Black Church Dead?: Religious Resilience and the Contemporary Functions of Black Christianity ." <i>Religions (Basel, Switzerland)</i> , vol. 14, no. 4, 2023, 460.
Week 5	Wilde, Melissa J., et al. " Complex Religion: Toward a Better Understanding of the Ways in Which Religion Intersects with Inequality ." <i>Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> , John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2017, pp. 1–14.
Week 6	Schnabel, Landon, et al. " Gender, Sexuality, and Religion: A Critical Integrative Review and Agenda for Future Research ." <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> , vol. 61, no. 2, 2022, pp. 271–92.
Week 7	Dahab, Ramsey, and Marisa Omori. " Homegrown Foreigners: How Christian Nationalism and Nativist Attitudes Impact Muslim Civil Liberties ." <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i> , vol. 42, no. 10, 2019, pp. 1727–46.
Week 8	Braunstein, Ruth. " A Theory of Political Backlash: Assessing the Religious Right's Effects on the Religious Field ." <i>Sociology of Religion</i> , vol. 83, no. 3, 2022, pp. 293–323.
Week 9	Juergensmeyer, Mark. " Thinking Sociologically about Religion and Violence: The Case of ISIS ." <i>Sociology of Religion</i> , vol. 79, no. 1, 2018, pp. 20–34.
Week 10	Oyakawa, Michelle. " Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches ." <i>Sociology of Religion</i> , vol. 80, no. 4, 2019, pp. 496–517.

Evaluation and Grading

In this course, EVERYONE can – and I believe will – learn, grow, and succeed! This can include earning an A grade, if that's a priority for you.

When it comes to evaluating your written work, Yael or I will give you personalized feedback in the Submissions Comments section of Canvas. We'll note some ways in which you're demonstrating your knowledge and learning, and we'll let you know if we see areas for growth. You can comment back to us right there if you'd like to keep the conversation going!

Regarding points and grading:

- Each assignment has instructions on how to complete it successfully, as well as a rubric, which is a table that shows how you'll earn points for that assignment.
- If you successfully complete most or all of our assignments, you'll earn an A.
 - Missing a lot of our course assignments means you're missing out on opportunities to engage with our course concepts and may affect your grade.
 - If you have ANY barriers to completing our assignments, just let me know! We can figure out a plan for your success.
 - If part or all of a particular assignment is problematic for you, we can work together to modify the assignment.
- You are welcome to revise and resubmit most written assignments if you're not proud of your work (and can improve your point total by doing so).
- I do NOT take off points for grammar, punctuation, word choice, etc.
- I do accept late work! (See below.)
- Grades aren't everything! But if your goal is to earn an A in this course, you can easily do so by engaging with our materials and activities and completing our assignments.

Attendance Opt-In

Type of Assignment	Number	Points Each	Total Points	% of Grade
Student Information Survey	1	25	25	5%
Journal Assignments	3	25	75	15%
Discussions	4	35	140	28%
Research Report	1	75	75	15%
Pop Culture Analysis	1	60	60	12%
Take-Home Final	1	75	75	15%
Attendance	1	50	50	10%
			500	100%

Attendance Opt-Out

Type of Assignment	Number	Points Each	Total Points	% of Grade (Approx.)
Student Information Survey	1	25	25	5%
Journal Assignments	3	25	75	17%
Discussions	4	35	140	31%
Research Report	1	75	75	17%
Pop Culture Analysis	1	60	60	13%
Take-Home Final	1	75	75	17%
			450	100%

Letter Grade	Percentage	Points (Attendance Opt-In)	Points (Attendance Opt-Out)
A+	99+	494+	445+
A	92 - 98	460 - 493	414 - 444
A-	90 - 91	450 - 459	405 - 413
B+	88 - 89	440 - 449	396 - 404
B	82 - 87	410 - 439	369 - 395
B-	80 - 81	400 - 409	360 - 368
C+	78 - 79	390 - 399	351 - 359
C	72 - 77	360 - 389	324 - 350
C-	70 - 71	350 - 359	315 - 323
D	60 - 69	300 - 349	270 - 314
F	59 or below	≤ 299	≤ 269

Late Work



Assignments for this course should be completed on time so that we are all moving through the class together. Sometimes, though, life gets in the way of learning. In unexpected situations leading to late work, please contact me to discuss a plan for success. I do accept late work, and for full credit/no point deductions. But I don't want you to become too overwhelmed by incomplete assignments or miss out on the chance to engage with our course community around important topics, so I'll reach out if I see you're missing a lot of work. **The last day I can accept late/missing work is Monday, March 16th.**

Tips for Respectful Class Conduct and Netiquette

I would like our class to be a supportive learning environment that values and builds on the richly diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences of our group. Please help me develop this environment by honoring the diverse identities of your classmates and letting your instructor know (via anonymous surveys or email, for example) if an assignment, comment, etc. makes you feel uncomfortable.

Both in the readings and in discussions, you will likely encounter cultures, ideas, and values that differ from your own. These are valuable opportunities to learn more about different perspectives and where they intersect with yours. We all see the world from a point of view informed by our experiences and backgrounds, and what we read and discuss can open new windows through which to understand both our texts and the world around us. You are encouraged to contribute your ideas about our readings freely, but please remember to demonstrate respect for the works as well as your classmates and instructors. We all have unconscious biases that stem from our experiences; recognizing and discussing them can lead to unexpected insights.

Conversely, disrespectful or threatening responses tend to shut down conversation, so these kinds of comments will be promptly addressed by your instructional team. To keep our interactions safe and productive, please know that anyone who repeatedly engages in disrespectful or otherwise inappropriate behavior will be locked out of the discussion for the week and/or face student misconduct charges. Please join me in creating a comfortable and productive learning environment for us all.

Netiquette is etiquette for the internet – in other words, it's a set of guidelines for respectful behavior in an online environment. Knowing these social rules can help you have a more rewarding quarter. The netiquette guidelines here are ones that are especially important in the online aspects of our course (like discussion boards).

1. **Participate.** Hearing the ideas of others is helpful for you, but you must also do your part to be helpful for the group. Share your thoughts to strengthen our discussion, and don't wait until the last minute to contribute. Encourage others to participate by responding to their ideas. Be involved, but do not dominate a discussion with too many posts.

2. **Remember the human.** This common online mantra means that even though we may not be face-to-face, there is a real person behind each discussion post. Don't write something that you wouldn't feel comfortable saying in an in-person classroom setting. Discuss ideas, not people. In other words, don't attack a classmate for expressing his or her opinion; instead, discuss your position on the ideas that have been presented. Be kind and understanding with your classmates to keep our environment positive and productive.
3. **Help others.** We'll be working together all quarter, so let's try to be a good team. If you can help a classmate with a question, please do! Your efforts will be appreciated by both students and the instructor.
4. **Respect people's time.** Your posts should be focused, organized, and clear so that your classmates can quickly see your point and evidence. Another way to respect people's time is to look for answers before asking for help. For example, if you can't find something or you don't remember when an assignment is due, first look through the syllabus and other course documents for the answer. Try to ask for help only when you truly need it.
5. **Edit and proofread before posting.** We have lots of posts to read, so yours needs to be as clear as they can be. They should be organized and written in standard English. Unfamiliar abbreviations or easily fixed misspellings may tell your readers that you don't value their time.
6. **No flaming.** "Flaming" is an angry message, often directed at another person. When another person responds in anger, we have a "flame war" taking over the discussion. Personal attacks are unacceptable in the classroom, whether in-person or online. If you see a conflict developing, try to calm things down if you feel comfortable doing so. If you feel attacked, contact your instructor rather than responding to the flaming student. We all have biases, and sometimes we are not aware of how what we say may be viewed by others, so let's all try to be generous and kind in our responses to one another. Everything we do in Canvas is permanent, so please think very carefully about your tone before submitting a post.

You made it to the end! Congratulate yourself for reading this important document, and please return to it whenever you have questions about the details and logistics of our course.

