

# RELG 100

## Religion and American Youth

*Fall 2016*

*Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:20 p.m.*

*Wren 200*

### **Dr. Annie Blazer**

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### **Class Description:**

Religious Studies courses assume that religion forms a basic and essential element of all cultures, including our own. If one is to understand a society, it is vital to study its religious beliefs and practices. This course examines the religious beliefs and practices of American youth. Moving from the mainstream to the margins, we will critically examine cultural representations of American youth and compare these with youth experiences. COLL 100 courses are about “big ideas”—the significant questions and concepts, beliefs and creative visions, theories and discoveries that have shaped our understanding of the world. In this class, the big idea is *ambivalence*—the feeling of being pulled in multiple directions at once. As we examine religious beliefs and practices, we will continually return to the idea of ambivalence to help us explore the transition from youth to adulthood. **You will learn about and apply the concept of ambivalence in order to analyze representations and experiences of American youth.** We will pay particular attention to how religion contributes to these representations and experiences and will predominantly focus on college-aged Americans.

### **This course fulfills the COLL 100 requirement.**

This course is designed to give you a sense of the excitement of scholarly inquiry, and to challenge you to think rigorously about important ideas. This course will introduce you to the College's library and other academic resources, and to the ways information is accessed, evaluated, and communicated. This course will require you to **develop and practice communication skills beyond the written word** and into the realms of oral, digital, and multi-media expression.

### **Assignments:**

You will be responsible for a variety of assignments over the course of the semester. You will have periodic homework assignments that reflect the reading assignments and help you prepare for the major assignments of the semester. There are two large projects in this course. With a partner, you will anthropologically research a campus religious or cultural organization. The two of you will create a Pechakucha presentation to share your research findings. Pechakucha is a timed Powerpoint format—you will have a total of 20 Powerpoint slides that will automatically advance every 20 seconds. Your presentation should be a pitch to have your organization selected as a subject for the second big project of the semester. For this final project, you will work in small groups to create a 10-15 minute podcast on a campus organization. We will decide as a group which organizations to study based on the Pechakucha presentations. Detailed assignment sheets and rubrics will be distributed closer to the deadlines.

## Grading:

Each assignment has a point value:

- Attendance, 1 point x 23 = 23
- Response Papers, 10 points each x 6 = 60
- Homework, 10 points each x 9 = 90
- Pechakucha presentation = 70
- Podcast = 70

Other opportunities to earn points may become available over the course of the semester. Grades will be determined on a percentage scale (94-100% is an A, 90-93% is an A-, 87-89% is a B+, 83-86% is a B, 80-83% is a B-, etc.). You will receive periodic updates on your grade.

*Attendance Policy:* If you are sick, please do not come to class. You can submit a response paper/homework even if you are absent so long as it is submitted on time. If you have a significant illness or emergency that prevents you from attending class for more than four sessions, we can discuss a make-up assignment.

## Technology Policy:

This classroom is an electronics-free zone. Please power off all cell phones, tablets, and laptops. ***Failure to comply with this policy will result in a deduction of 7 points from your grade.*** For information on why an electronics-free environment is good for your education, see:

[“Why I Just Asked My Students To Put Their Laptops Away,”](#) by NYU Professor Clay Shirky.

## Contacting Dr. Blazer:

I have developed tendonitis in my wrists from computer overuse, so I have had to greatly curtail my typing. If you wish to discuss something with me at length, please come to my office hours or email me to arrange a phone-call or face-to-face meeting. I am happy to answer brief questions over email or text message.

## Disability Services:

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at [sas@wm.edu](mailto:sas@wm.edu) to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see [www.wm.edu/sas](http://www.wm.edu/sas).

## You are expected to adhere to the College of William and Mary Honor Code.

The College of William & Mary has had an honor code since at least 1779. Academic integrity is at the heart of the College, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led honor system is responsible for resolving any suspected violations of the Honor Code, and I will report all suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the honor system. The Student Handbook ([www.wm.edu/studenthandbook](http://www.wm.edu/studenthandbook)) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To read the Honor Code, see [www.wm.edu/honor](http://www.wm.edu/honor).

## Students should purchase the following books:

- Jessica Abel, *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio* (New York: Broadway Books, 2015)
- Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores* (Soft Skull Press, 2009)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)

All other readings will be available via the course Blackboard site.

## **Class Schedule:**

### **Introductions**

*Wednesday, August 24*

### **Unit 1:**

#### **Youth: America's Hopes and Fears**

*Monday, August 29*

**Reading Assignment:** Catherine Albanese, "Preface" and "Introduction: The Elephant in the Dark" in *America: Religions and Religion*, xix-xxii and 1-16. (available on Blackboard)

**Questions to think about while you read:** How does Catherine Albanese define/describe religion? Albanese argues that American religion is both many and one. What does she mean by this? What evidence does she provide for this claim?

#### **Response Paper Workshop**

*Wednesday, August 31*

**Reading Assignment:** Sarah Pike, "Religion and Youth in American Culture," in *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook* (NYU Press, 2011), 33-49. (available on Blackboard)

**Things to think about while you read:** How do American media characterize teens? What is Sarah Pike's response to these characterizations?

**Response Paper due.** The other five response papers can be turned in on classes of your choice.

*Monday, September 5*

**Reading Assignment:** Annie Blazer, "Challenging the Call: Sexual Desire and Sexual Deviance" in *Playing for God: Evangelical Women and the Unintended Consequences of Sports Ministry*, 129-156. (available on Blackboard)

**Things to think about while you read:** Compare the methods the Blazer and Pike use to study American youth. What are the benefits and challenges of each approach?

#### **Distribution of fieldwork assignment**

*Wednesday, September 7*

**Reading Assignment:** Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, "In the Field: Observing, Participating, and Jotting Notes" and "Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk" in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 17-65. (available on Blackboard)

**Things to think about while you read:** How do you do fieldwork? What do you think will be the most challenging thing for you about conducting fieldwork? Why?

#### **Homework 1 due: fieldsite proposal**

*Monday, September 12*

**Small group discussion on podcasting**

**Reading Assignment:** Jessica Abel, *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*, xiii-106.

**Media Assignment:** TBA

**Things to think about while you read:** Why did Abel write this book? What are some elements of a compelling podcast?

*Wednesday, September 14*

**Reading Assignment:** Jessica Abel, *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*, 107-210.

**Things to think about while you read:** What makes a good podcast?

**Development of podcasting assignment**

**Homework 2 due: Small group discussion report**

*Monday, September 19*

**Reading Assignment:** TBA

**Homework 3 due: progress report on ethnographic research.**

*Wednesday, September 21*

**Workshop: presenting ethnographic research.**

*Monday, September 26*

**Class will be held in Swem library, Media Center.**  
Pechakuchas

*Wednesday, September 28*

**Class will be held in Swem library, Media Center.**  
Pechakuchas

*Monday, October 3*

**Class will be held in Swem library, Media Center.**  
Pechakuchas

*Wednesday, October 5*

Reflection on Unit 1, looking forward to Unit 2

**Homework 4 due: reflection**

*Monday, October 10*

No Class. Fall Break.

**Unit 2:**

**Minority Youths in America**

*Wednesday, October 12*

**Class will be held in Swem library, Media Center.**

Library Workshop 1: Podcasting resources

### **Case Study 1: Muslim Youth**

*Monday, October 17*

**Reading Assignment:** Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*, 1-90.

**Questions to think about while you read:** How do different characters in this novel perceive Islam in America? What do you make of the intersection of Islam and punk?

**Homework 5 due: podcast proposal (submitted as a small group)**

*Wednesday, October 19*

**Small group discussion**

**Reading Assignment:** Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*, 90-165.

**Media Assignment:** TBA

*Monday, October 24*

**Small group meetings with professor**

**Homework 6 due: Small group discussion report**

*Wednesday, October 26*

**Reading Assignment:** Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*, 166-254.

**Things to think about while you read:** How does the novel end? What do you think are the major take-aways from this story? Is there a moral to the story?

*Monday, October 31*

**Class will be held in Swem library, Media Center.**

Library Workshop 2: editing and production

*Wednesday, November 2*

**Reading Assignment:** Moustafa Bayoumi, “Preface” and “Rasha” in *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America*, 1-44. (available on Blackboard)

**Things to think about while you read:** What comparisons does Bayoumi make to other minority groups in the US? What challenges do Muslim youth face? How does this narrative relate to *Taqwacores*?

### **Case Study 2: Black Youth**

*Monday, November 7*

**Reading Assignment:** Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow” in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, 178-220. (available on Blackboard)

**Things to think about while you read:** What is the “new Jim Crow”? How does it affect American youth?

**Homework 7 due: progress report, recording complete (submitted as a small group)**

*Wednesday, November 9*

**Media Assignment** (to be watched before class): Eugene Jarecki, *The House I Live In*  
(available on Netflix and Amazon Instant Video)

**Questions to think about while you read:** What are the contemporary ramifications of the war on drugs?

*Monday, November 14*

**Reading Assignment:** Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 1-71.

**Things to think about while you read:** What framework does Coates offer for understanding our nation's history and current crisis? What advice does he have for black youth?

*Wednesday, November 16*

**Reading Assignment:** Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 72-152.

**Things to think about while you read:** What do you make of this book? Why do you think it has become a bestseller?

*Monday, November 21*

**No Class.** Work on podcasts. Due Tuesday, November 22 at midnight.

*Wednesday, November 23*

**No Class.** Thanksgiving Break.

*Monday, November 28*

**Assignment:** listen to all podcasts

**Homework 8 due: commentary on podcast**

*Wednesday, November 30*

Reflections

**Homework 9 due: reflection**

Final Exam

None.