

*American Gods: Religious Diversity in the US*  
RE 105 – Fall 2017

**Meetings:** T/R 9:10 – 11:00 a.m., Ladd 206

**Instructor:** Dr. David J. Howlett, Teaching Professor of Religious Studies, dhowlett@skidmore.edu

**Office Hours:** Wednesday, 1:30-3:00 p.m.; Friday 9:30-11:00 a.m., or by appointment  
205B Ladd Hall, (518) 580-8404 (office)

**Course Description:** An introduction to the diversity of religions in America and to basic categories and questions in the academic study of religion. The United States is one of the most religiously diverse nations on earth. This course investigates that diversity, in the past and in the present, and explores traditions imported to America, recent traditions born in America, and/or traditions indigenous to the Americas. By doing so, this course engages how religious traditions shape and are shaped by other forms of difference (race, class, gender, age, sexuality, etc.). Significantly, the course also asks how what counts as “religion” in America has changed over time as a way of introducing students to basic categories and questions in the academic study of religion.

**Course Goals:** Students will leave this class with:

- an understanding of several basic concepts and approaches utilized by scholars in the academic study of religion.
- an awareness of some of the ethical issues and tensions confronted by religious studies scholars and the communities they study (i.e. variance in insider/outsider perspectives on religion).
- a capacity to write and think in an informed way about religious diversity in the United States across time and regions.
- an ability to critically engage primary and secondary sources through class discussion and thesis-driven essays.
- an ability to critically and empathetically analyze religions insofar as they orient people in time and space to mundane and ultimate horizons, causes, and concerns.

<b>Final Class Grade:</b>	Midterm Exam	50 points
	Final Exam	50 points
	Quizzes (4)	40 points (10 points each)
	History/Religious Practices Report	35 points
	Ethnographic Field Visit Report	35 points
	Website Entry	20 points
	Attendance and Participation	20 points
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250 points</b>

**Midterm and Final:** These examinations will consist of short identification terms and two essay questions, respectively. You will be given a review sheet one week before each examination, and we will conduct a brief review session in class.

**“Open Student” Quizzes:** Over the course of the semester, you will have four quizzes over the readings. Unlike most quizzes in most courses, you will have time to consult with your classmates on the quiz. The quiz will consist of 5 questions, drawn from the readings since the last quiz. In the first ten minutes, you will answer the questions on your own. In the second ten minutes, you may consult any students in the class for assistance. The quiz is not “open notes,” but it is “open student.” This assessment activity is intended to develop your understanding of the material, as well as develop problem solving skills in consultation with a group.

**Religious Pluralism in New York’s Capitaland:** Our class is part of a multi-semester project that will be researching religious pluralism in New York’s Capitaland region (the greater Albany area). This project will consist of several parts, spread over the semester.

In the second week of the semester, you will be assigned to research a particular religious tradition. For our section of this course, we’ll be researching Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and minority Christian traditions in the Capitaland region. Students who take this course in subsequent semesters will research other traditions.

- 1) **History and Religious Practices Report.** You will complete an initial report on the background of the group you are studying. This will include a section on religious practices and beliefs of the group, as well as a very brief history of this group in the US. For this assignment, you will need to consult at least three reputable academic secondary sources (journal articles, books, or book chapters). These sources may not include internet sites, though the journal articles, books, or book chapters potentially could be accessed by electronic means. This project will be between 3-5 pages in length. For a few suggested readings as well as detailed requirements for your report, see the Blackboard site. (Due 10/10)
- 2) **Ethnographic site visit report.** You will find a place of worship or cultural center for your particular assigned tradition and conduct an ethnographic field visit of the site at a time when it welcomes visitors. You will take notes about your visit (either during or after the visit, depending on the appropriateness of this). Then, you will use your notes to construct a site visit report. This report has two main sections: (1) a section recording your observations, and (2) a section of analysis that integrates a reading from the syllabus and one of the readings that you have used for your background report. The length for your site visit report should be between 3-5 pages. A detailed write-up of the requirements for this assignment is on your Blackboard site. (Due 11/2)
- 3) **Website Page.** This final project asks you to take your previous two reports and condense them into an 800-word entry with three sections: (1) a brief description of the site you visited, (2) a brief history of the site, and (3) information about when it is best to visit the site if you are a visitor, complete with the norms you should observe to be a good guest. This final report should be submitted in written form as a hard copy and then uploaded to our website. In addition, you will need to upload a photo that you took of the exterior of the site. If your site hosts allow for interior shots, you may do so, though you should not have people in these photos (each person in the photo would have to sign a release form to do so). Finally, you will place a pin on our collective google map on our website that shows the location of your site. (Due 11/28)

**Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions. Students are expected to arrive on time. If a student is ten or more minutes late, he or she will

be counted as absent, even if he or she attends the rest of class. If a student misses four classes, he or she may have his or her final grade dropped by one full letter grade. If a student misses eight classes, he or she may be expelled from the course. Each class will have a daily question or exercise that students are expected to complete in the first few minutes of class. Daily questions will be collected at the time of the midterm and at the last class of the semester.

**Assessment of Student Work:** Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A+	97-100%
A	94-96%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-69%
D	60-66%
D-	56-59%
F	55 and below

There is no curve for this class. A student will receive the grade he or she earns.

### **Classroom Procedures and Policies:**

**Academic Dishonesty:** Skidmore College's *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* defines plagiarism and its consequences as follows:

Presenting as one's own, the work of another person (for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else). Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgment, submission of another student's work as one's own, the purchase of prepared research or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging his or her academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness, and the consequences for violating the Skidmore Honor Code. THE JUDICIAL BOARDS OF THE COLLEGE WILL NOT REGARD CLAIMS OF IGNORANCE, OF UNINTENTIONAL ERROR, AND OF ACADEMIC OR PERSONAL PRESSURES AS AN ADEQUATE DEFENSE FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE HONOR CODE.<sup>1</sup>

Further information on the college-wide policy on plagiarism and proper citation methods may be found on pages 16-27 of *The Academic Integrity Handbook*.

**Late Assignment Policy:** Any paper not given to the instructor in person by the student on the due date is late and will have its grade automatically dropped by one full letter grade. A student will have forty-eight hours to e-mail the instructor a copy of the late paper. (The student must still submit a hard copy.) Any

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<sup>1</sup> *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* (Saratoga Springs, New York: Office of Academic Advising--Skidmore College, 2016), 8.

paper that is not given to the instructor within forty-eight hours of the due date will not be accepted, and the offending student will receive a zero for that assignment.

**Accommodations for Students:** If you are a student with an approved accommodation for your courses, please see me in private or e-mail me about the agreement that has been worked out with the Coordinator of Student Accessibility Services. If you do not have a documented accommodation and need one, contact Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will need to provide her office with documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the Office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

**Sexual- and Gender-based Misconduct and Title IX Rights:** Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available. More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator.

**Work Expectations:** Students should expect nine to ten hours of outside preparation work for class each week. On written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week rather than cram their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

**Textbook** (available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop)

- Michael Pasquier, *Religion in America: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2016).  
ISBN-13: 978-1138805576

## SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY TOPICS & STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENTS

RLST 105 - Fall Semester 2017

All assignments are to be read before each class. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the reading schedule. Should changes be made, students will be informed in advance.

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**WEEK 1**      Course Introduction

(9/7)

Topics:      Course outline; overview of contemporary American religious diversity; “diversity” and “pluralism” as key concepts

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**Unit I: Religious Power in Colonial America**

**WEEK 2**      Lived Religion in Colonial America

(9/12 – 9/14)

Topics:      Overview of religions in colonial America; Native American vs. Euro-American cosmologies; Pueblo cosmology; “lived religion” as an analytic term; Puritan cosmology; witchcraft and the Devil in colonial New England; “strategies” and “tactics” as analytic concepts

Readings:      1) Michael Pasquier, “Religion and Colonialism in Early America, 1400-1770s,” in *Religion in America: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 25-57.

2) Ramon A. Gutierrez, “The Pueblo Indian World in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, ed. by David G. Hackett (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-27.

3) Anne S. Brown and David D. Hall, “Family Strategies and Religious Practice: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper in Early New England,” in *Lived Religions in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 41-68.

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**WEEK 3**      Lived Religion in Colonial America, cont’d.

(9/19 – 9/21)

**No Class 9/21 – Rosh Hashana  
Quiz 1 (9/19)**

Topics:      Islam in colonial America; “slave religion”; “hegemony” and “weapons of the weak” as analytic concepts

Readings:      1) Jeffrey R. Halverson, “West African Islam in Colonial and Antebellum South Carolina,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 3.3 (2016): 1-14. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 4**      Gendering Religion

(9/26 – 9/28)

Topics:      Mohican Christianity; gender and theories of conversion; colonial-era Judaism; material culture as religious medium; “agency” of material objects and religion

Readings:      1) Rachel Wheeler, “Mohican Men and Jesus as Manitou,” in *To Live Upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 105-132.

2) Ellen Smith, “Portraits of a Community: The Image and Experience of Early American Jews,” in *American Jewish Women’s History: A Reader*, ed. by Pamela Susan Nadell (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 13-25.

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**Unit II: Prophets and Civil Religions**

**WEEK 5**      Prophets and New Religious Movements

(10/3 – 10/5)

**Quiz 2 (10/3)**

Topics:      Overview of religion in antebellum America; prophets and prophecy in antebellum America; explaining visions and new religious movements

Readings:      1) Pasquier, “Religion in a New Nation, 1770s-1860s,” in *Religion in America*, 58-85.

2) Richard H. Broadhead, “Prophets in America circa 1830: Nat Turner, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Joseph Smith,” in *Joseph Smith: Reappraisals after Two Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13-30. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 6**      Prophets and New Religious Movements; Religion in the “Gilded Age”

(10/10 – 10/12)

**History/Religious Practices Report Due (10/10)**

Topics:      Insider versus outsider positionality; sociological versus historical approaches to new religious movements; overview of religious diversity in post-Civil War America; “reform” movements and race, class, and gender

Readings:      1) James R. Lewis, “Shamans and Prophets: Continuities and Discontinuities in Native American New Religious Movements,” *American Indian Quarterly* 12.3 (1988): 221-228. [Blackboard]

2) Pasquier, “Religion in a Modernizing America, 1860s-1920s,” *Religion in America*, 85-109.

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**WEEK 7**      Civil Religion and Consumer Religion

(10/17 – 10/19)

Topics:      Race, power, and the ritual memorialization of the Confederacy; religion, fashion, and consumption; “commodification,” “collective memory,” and “civil religion” as analytic concepts

Readings:      1) Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of Southern Civil Religion,” *Journal of Southern History* 46.2 (1980): 219-238. [Blackboard]

2) Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Easter Parade: Piety, Fashion, and Display,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4.2 (1994):135-164. [Blackboard]

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**Unit III: Forming Categories and Constructing Difference**

**WEEK 8**      Marginality and Racializing Religion

**Midterm (10/24)**

(10/24 – 10/26)

Topics:      Jewish marginality and African American exclusion; cultural appropriation; boundary maintenance theories

Readings:      1) Michael Alexander, “ ‘Mammy, Don’t You Know Me’: Al Jolson and the Jews,” in *Jazz Age Jews* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 130-179.

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**WEEK 9**      Marginality and Racializing Religion, cont’d; Claiming Religious Status

(10/31 – 11/2)

**Ethnographic Field Visit Report Due (11/2)**

Topics:      Islam and new religious movements; religion and the body; “religious freedom” as a contested term; the shifting boundaries of “religion” in America; “intersectionality” as an analytic concept

Readings:      1) Judith Weisenfeld, “Spiritual Complexions: On Race and the Body in the Moorish Science Temple of America” in Sally Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sense and Contention in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 413-428.

2) Tisa Wenger, “ ‘We Are Guaranteed Religious Freedom’: Pueblo Indians and the Category of Religion in the 1920s” *History of Religions* 45.2 (2005): 89-113.

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**WEEK 10**      Constructing Religion as a Category      **Quiz 3 (11/9)**  
(11/7 – 11/9)

Topics:      “Genealogical” approaches to studying religion; the origins of the “world religions” framework; overview of religion in the “short twentieth century;” globalization and religion; “alterity,” “mimesis,” “glocalization,” and “McDonaldization” as analytic concepts

Readings:      1) Michael J. Altman, “The Construction of Hinduism in America,” *Religion Compass* 10.8 (2016): 207-216.

**Unit IV: A New Religious America**

2) Pasquier, “Religious Diversity in a Globalizing America, 1920s-2010s,” 110-142.

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**WEEK 11**      Materializing Religion  
(11/14 – 11/16)

Topics:      Growing up Catholic in America; “childhood” and religion in America; “age” as a category of difference; “kosher-style” and American Judaism; foodways and religion in America; theorizing religious “presence”; “emergent ethnicities” and “hybridity” as analytic concepts

Readings:      1) Robert Orsi, “Material Children: Making God’s Presence Real for Catholic Boys and Girls and the Adults in Relation to Them,” in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 73-109. [Blackboard]

2) Jenna Weissman Joselit, “Kitchen Judaism” in *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880 1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 171-218. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 12**      Professor Howlett at American Academy of Religion Meeting. Thanksgiving Break

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**WEEK 13**      Religious Intolerance, Religious Adaptation  
(11/28 – 11/30)

**Website Entry Due (11/28)**

Topics:      Islam in post-50s America; the Nation of Islam; immigration and Islam; Islamophobia; Western Buddhism; theories of “center” and “periphery”

Readings:      1) Edward E. Curtis, IV, “The Black Muslim Scare of the Twentieth Century: The History of State Islamophobia and Its Post-9/11 Variations,” in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. by Carl W. Ernst (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 75-106. [Blackboard]



**WEEK 13**      Religious Intolerance, Religious Adaptation (Cont'd.)

2) Jeff Wilson, "Buddhism with a Southern Accent: American Buddhists in a Southern Culture," *Dixie Dharma: Inside a Buddhist Temple in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 153-185.

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**WEEK 14**      Nuns and "Nones": Contemporary Trends in American Religions  
(12/5 – 12/7)

**Quiz 4 (12/5)**

Topics:      Culture wars and post-Vatican II Catholicism; gender and Latinx Catholicism; religion and borderlands; spiritual-but-not-religious Americans; secularization theories; the future of religious groups in America; "secularity," "vicarious religion," and "implicit religion" as analytic terms

Readings:      1) Kristin Nabhan Warren, "Little Slices of Heaven and Mary's Candy Kisses: Mexican American Women Redefining Feminism and Catholicism," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 294-318. [Blackboard]

2) Elizabeth Drescher, "Introduction: An American Spiritual Pilgrimage" and "Conclusion: The Noneing of American Religion and Spirituality," in *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-15, 246-252. [Blackboard]

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**FINAL Exam – 12/13, 9:00 a.m., Ladd 206**

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