
Religion, Schools and Society

EDUC 5500

WED 11:10- 1:20 Blended Course

NAB 105

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OVERVIEW

Issues involving public schools and religion are perennial topics of heated debate. Legal doctrines like “separation of church and state” co-exist uneasily with an expectation that schools teach “values” as well as knowledge. America’s growing religious diversity, a result of Civil Rights Era immigration reform, creates challenges and opportunities when it encounters the continuing primacy of Christian ideas and social structures in the public square, including the public classroom. In recent years, all three branches of the federal government, as well as many state and local governments, have attempted (with varying degrees of success) to clarify the appropriate interplay between religion and public schools. Philosophical questions and practical inconsistencies remain, however, when it comes to public schools’ ability to “neither foster religion nor preclude it,” in the words of then-Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

This course will investigate the relationship between religion and public education in the United States with a focus on issues affecting classroom practice, curriculum, and pedagogy. Based in large part on legal decisions in the area and relying primarily on a discussion format, it will be a blend of three elements: a brief examination of the historic relationship of religion and education in the United States; an analysis of historic and current legal and public policy materials related to that relationship; and an exploration of ways of balancing the relationship in curricula so as to respect the religious rights and responsibilities of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the educational system in which they encounter each other.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

From this masters-level course for in-service and pre-service teachers, students will:

1. Develop an ability to be introspective, to examine their own religious backgrounds and reflect on how their religious and cultural identities and perspectives affect their world-view and may influence their practices.

2. Become attuned to the educator's responsibilities toward religiously-diverse student populations.
3. Become aware of the variety of religious beliefs and practices within the U.S. population (and many classroom populations) and the practical impact of this diversity in the civic context.
4. Identify some of the complexities associated with religious diversity in a classroom that a teacher must acknowledge and embrace in order to teach effectively.
5. Articulate their own position within the kaleidoscope of American religious diversity and examine its likely consequences with reference to the "classroom society."
6. Develop a practical strategy for achieving objectivity as among belief systems without marginalization of belief or practice as such.
7. Be sensitive to problems of using language that is inherently not neutral or not inclusive, and develop a student-age-appropriate inclusive vocabulary.
8. Empathize with the underlying rationale and necessity for educator neutrality.
9. gain a basic understanding of the historical foundations and multiple legalinterpretations of the First Amendment religion clauses

At the end of the course, students will have (Outcomes):

1. A historical understanding of the relationship between religion and education in the United States;
2. An understanding of the legal complexities related to that relationship;
3. An appreciation of the impact of the educator-as-society's-representative on the religious and moral self-understanding of students;
4. The skills to have civil dialogue on seemingly controversial topics;
5. The basic tools necessary to engage the range of contemporary issues related to religion in the public schools in a manner consistent with current law, practical expectations, and students' best interests; and
6. An ability to incorporate religion into culturally-relevant pedagogy in a manner consistent with the above concerns.

REQUIRED READING:

Haynes, C., & Thomas, O. (2007). *Finding common ground: A guide to religious liberty in public schools*. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center.
PDF available at

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?id=6276>

Fraser, J. (1999). *Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America* New York Palgrave.

This hardcopy syllabus and the e-syllabus is a live document. Full Course Syllabus on Blackboard Site.

Other Readings posted on Blackboard.

Additional Course Material available at www.khyatijoshi.com

Useful/Interesting websites to peruse:

www.teachingaboutreligion.org

www.teachingtolerance.org

www.freedomforum.com

www.religiondispatches.org

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSIGNMENTS:

Attendance & Participation(25%)

Each member of the class shares the responsibility for creating a positive and challenging learning environment. Preparation, participation, and respect for the ideas of other will allow for in-depth exploration of complex issues an examination of multi-perspectives. The comments, questions and insights of each student are needed to enhance the learning of all students.

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. Repeated absences and/or tardies will severely lower your grade. Should an emergency arise (illness, accidents, etc.) that prevents you from attending a session, it is your responsibility to contact the professor.

Class time provides opportunity for interaction and collaboration that cannot be easily “made up” in other ways. For this reason, there are no excused absences. If absence should become unavoidable, your responsibilities include the following:

- Contact me by phone or e-mail
- Arrange for a peer to obtain hand-outs, announcements, assignments, etc., from class. Check with your peer, **prior to the next class session** so you can prepare assignments on time.
- Arrange for assignments due on the date of absence to be delivered before class.

Different types of assignments will help you synthesize the readings with your own experiences. Students are expected to participate responsibly in the seminar discussions.

Oral contributions in the course will be judged according to the following criteria:

- the degree to which they manifest genuine interest in, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

Discussion Board

Our on-line discussions are a key to making this class interactive. You will be expected to participate in those discussions as a way to stimulate ideas and for me to monitor your learning. Each of you has been put into a group so it is easier to chat and develop collaborative relationships. Your discussion group is counting on your participation. Just remember, we probably will never see you face-to-face. Don't be shy. Get involved. Keep those discussions lively. Don't be afraid to ask questions and stir things up. Your little spark or flame may be what keeps a fellow student awake as he or she works on "class stuff" at midnight. It's very helpful if you make your contributions to the discussion board well in advance from the due date. If you wait until the last minute, most of your group members will already be finished, so they will not have the chance to interact with you.

Coffee and News(5%)

Due every *online* class, *News Article*: Each student will need to find and post a current news article on something related to religion and education. You will post the title and the URL including the title and URL, you must provide a 200word post as to why you chose this article, agree, disagree, think it is crazy, etc. Everyone must comment (a few sentences) on at least 2 other colleagues' post.

Reflection Paper(10%)

Think about a memory from your k-12 experience that relates to religion and schools. What happened? What did you think and feel about it at the time? What do you think your classmates or teachers felt or thought about it at the time? Thinking back on it now, what lessons might your experience hold for you as a teacher. 3-5pg.

Lesson Plan Project(10%)

You will develop 1 lesson plan (FDU lesson plans) that incorporate issues discussed in this class. More information to follow. April 25ish.

Interview a Teacher or Principal about Religion and Schools(15%)

You will interview a teacher or school administrator using A prescribed list of questions related to views on teacher professionalism and effectiveness will be developed in class.

After the interview, you will write a short paper discussing the interviewee's responses in light of what you have learned in class and in the readings. 6-8pgreport.

Submit questions to Prof Joshi – March 29th

Make appt to interview April 1-10.

Report Due: April 15ish

Seminar Curriculum small group Presentations(10%)

Students will lead seminar style, part of one course session.

Leading Discussions and Activities.

As the discussion leader(s), you should be prepared to engage your classmates in a discussion of your assigned reading. To assist you in doing this, prepare a 2-3 page synopsis of your assigned reading and distribute it to the class on the day of your discussion. Please note that this exercise is not intended to be only a summary of the reading, but you should also consider the following points:

- a. What is the problem being addressed by the author?
- b. What is the historical and immediate background of the problem according to the author?
- c. What is the author's primary argument/point?
- d. What sources of evidence/data are used to support the argument/point?
- e. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence/data?
- f. Are the author's analyses and conclusions appropriate?
- g. What are the educational/policy implications of the conclusions drawn by the author?
- h. How does this reading compare/relate to other readings?

FINAL PAPER/PROJECT (25%)

Students may choose between a research paper (paper to be approved) or a curricular project. The paper should be a traditional research-based examination of an issue (with requisite thesis, evidence, and conclusion). The project should be a detailed plan for introducing religion into a public school's curriculum. This project may contain audio/visual aids, but must have a textual component. Greater detail about both possibilities will be provided in class. Research Paper 13-15 pages OR workshop/professional development project. Group Projects maybe done in pairs with prior approval from Professor Joshi.

Approval by Prof Joshi – deadline XXX

Paper/Project due XXXX.