

Eastern Illinois University
New Course Proposal
CMN 3240, Religion in the American Public Sphere

1. Catalogue Description

- a. Course Number: 3240
- b. Course Title: Religion in the American Public Sphere
- c. Credit 3-0-3
- d. Term to be Offered: On Demand
- e. Short Title: Rhet & Religion
- f. Course Description:

This course will explore the intersection of religion and public discourse in the political, social, and cultural spheres of the United States. The course will examine the extent to which religious ideas and language influence our collective identities and our ability to conceptualize various social, cultural, political, and ethical issues.

- g. Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.
- h. Initial Term of Course Offering: Spring 2007

2. Student Learning Objectives and Evaluation

- a. Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

- 1. Describe the impact that religious ideas and expression have had and continue to have on our democracy.
- 2. Analyze the role that religious ideas and expression have played in the shaping of social policies and controversies.
- 3. Articulate how religious ideas and expression construct personal and collective identities.
- 4. Evaluate the way in which language orients religious expression and in turn how religious ideas and expression shape our language use.
- 5. Implement accepted methods of rhetorical research methods to conduct their own research.

- b. Sample Assessment

	Quizzes	Thought Papers	Exams	Term Paper
2.a.1.	X	X	X	X
2.a.2.	X	X	X	X
2.a.3.	X	X	X	X
2.a.4.	X	X	X	X
2.a.5.				X

- c. N/A.
- d. N/A.
- e. This course is writing-intensive; written papers and daily discussion questions allow for frequent writing activities designed to help students master course content and improve their writing. At least 35% will come from writing assignments and students will be provided the opportunity to revise at least one writing assignment.

3. Sample Outline of the Course

a. Week One

Brief History of Religion in America;
Significant Religious Concepts

Week Two

How Religion is Experienced in the U.S.

- The circulation of Biblical stories through American public consciousness
- American beliefs and worship practices.

Week Three

A logological interpretation of central Judeo-Christian stories.

- Burke's pollution-purification-redemption cycle.
- Narrative and mythic elements in Judeo-Christian stories.

Week Four

Religious Aspects of Early American Identity

- Winthrop and the city upon a hill.
- Evangelism and the Great Awakening

Week Five

Structural attempts to balance religion and politics.

- Development and rationale behind state-church separation.
- Judicial and public interpretation of the establishment clause

Week Six

Public efforts to balance religion and politics.

- Debating the "war on Christmas"
- The intersection of secular and sacred in public policy: Faith-based initiatives and school vouchers.

Week Seven

19th century American religious sentiment – the maturing of American Civic Piety

- Western settlement and the "Ungenteel" style.
- Reaffirming the chosen people: the Civil War, Lincoln's Second Inaugural, and the cementing of civic piety

Week Eight

Religious elements of social protest in 19th century America.

- Abolition: Invoking the Bible to challenge and defend slavery.

- Suffrage: Religiosity and the Ideal of Pure Womanhood

Week Nine

Religious elements of social protest in 20th century America

- And Justice shall roll down like a mighty stream . . .
- The beginning of the end: moral authority & the church's role in Vietnam.

Week Ten

Religious elements of the American mythic hero

- Eden under siege: American westerns
- Secular millennialism: Hollywood and the problem of evil.

Week Eleven

Religious elements of the American mythic hero.

- Truth, justice, and the American way: Literalizing “the Captain America Complex”
- Might makes right: the action film genre

Week Twelve

International actions and religious justifications

- Why we fight: religious justification for armed intervention

Week Thirteen

Crusading for virtue: Public efforts to sanitize media entertainment.

- From Comstock to Powell: defining decency
- The rise of faith-based film.

Week Fourteen

Exploring the merger between sacred and secular.

- “Desecrating” the secular: a case study of flag-burning.
- Theodicy and natural disasters.

Week Fifteen

How Americans attempt to reconcile their faith in God with a faith in science.

- Evolution and Creationism: the legacy of Scopes and Bryant.
- Competing covenants: debating stem cells

4. Rationale
 - a. Judeo-Christian beliefs have been one of the primary influences on American culture and politics. Rhetoric has consistently proven to be a significant way of negotiating the various tensions that arise when religious ideals clash with or reinforce various cultural, political, and social practices.
 - b. The amount of reading, assessment measures, and nature of the material covered warrant a 3000 level. There are no prerequisites.
 - c. Similarity to existing courses:
 1. There are no courses similar to this one. Philosophy offers a course on the Philosophy of Religion (PHI 3600) that focuses on religious experience and the underlying dilemmas of major religious issues. History offers a course on Religion and Society (HIS 1500/1590) that is a gen ed course exploring religious dimensions of society. This proposed course focuses on how religious belief and expression is rhetorically situated within American culture and society.
 2. No courses will be deleted.
 - d. Impact on the program.
 1. This course is part of a new option in Rhetoric and Public Advocacy. It will serve as an elective for this option as well as other options in the major.
 2. N/A.
5. Implementation
 - a. Angela Aguayo, Suzanne Enck-Wanzer & Shane Miller will all be able to teach this course.
 - b. There will be no additional costs for students.
 - c. Texts

Burke, K. (1970). *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.

Hart, R.P. & Pauley, J.L. (2005). *The Political Pulpit Revisited*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Jewett, R. & Lawrence, J. (2003). *Captain American and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
6. Community College Transfer

A community college course will not be accepted as a substitute for this course.
7. Date approved by the department. 11/04/05
8. Date approved by the college curriculum committee: 4/5/06
9. Date approved by CAA: 4/27/06