

## Final Syllabus 2021

### **RS-672: TACKLING THE ISSUE: RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN US CONGREGATIONS**

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No specified office hours for online course.

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

OVERVIEW: In this asynchronous online semester course, recent research studies, lectures, and weekly discussion will address challenges many US congregations and faith communities confront in retaining young people's worship attendance and religious affiliations as they mature to full adult status.

THIS IS A SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION COURSE. It is catalog-identified as another "RS" or Religious Studies course, however, it is more distinct.

- Religious Studies is an expansive interdisciplinary humanities field, gathering *cultural aspects* of sacred texts, history, philosophy, languages, and art, along with loose connections to the more empirical, *science-based* disciplines of Psychology of Religion and Sociology of Religion.
  - Sociology of Religion is a discipline centered on examining with facts and theories, the faith commitments, religious practices, and interfaith activities of various types of individuals, groups, and institutions. This discipline prioritizes research that gives a more focused vision of beliefs, religious behaviors, and reasons for changes in beliefs and affiliations. In sociological research attention can focus on clusters of persons similar and differing from other groupings in faith affiliations and maybe ethnic, sexual, political and national identities, as well as gender, age, educational attainment and a host of other characteristics.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ If you have an interest in learning from research analyses on why different clusters of young people may stay committed or leave a faith community, and implications such findings might hold for your or another congregation/faith group, then a sociological approach can extend your understanding and provide new insights for action.

#### IMPORTANCE OF: KEEPING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN US CONGREGATIONS.

"Why are there so few teens and young adults active in this congregation? What can we do?" This is a very familiar plaint of leaders and members of churches, mosques and synagogues in the United States.

- Psychologists and Social-Psychologists of Religion report that teenagers and young adults who participate in congregational/religious group programs benefit in comparison to those who do not, in their overall health, academic motivation, and avoidance of alcohol, drugs, or other risky behaviors.
- Sociologists of Religion have found that retaining young people in the faith communities has major consequences for the future vitality of individual congregations, and potentially affiliated educational institutions and denominational offices. Sociologists are engaged in research on what young people are

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<sup>1</sup> Among those who have written on the distinctions, see: Rhys Williams, "Sociology of Religion and Religious Studies: Institutional Contexts and Religious Concerns." *Critical Research on Religion*. 2016, v 4, pp. 299-306; and Adam Ancyk, Halina Grzymala-Moszcynska, "Psychology of Religion and Religious Studies: Into the Future." *Religion*. 2020, v 50, no 1, pp. 24-31. See Seminary definition of the Sociology of Religion at: [hrr.hartsem.edu/sociology/about\\_the\\_field.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/sociology/about_the_field.html)

“like” now in views on religion, and social factors important in why various types of young people may stay or leave a faith community.

### Course Requirements and Learning Outcomes

In this graduate level course, the reading assigned is intended to provide facts and theories on the extent and changes in teenagers’ and young adults’ degree of religious involvement in different faith communities and social contexts. The instructor posts discussion questions, which chiefly ask students to reflect on the relevance of issues in the weekly reading to young people they have observed in their faith or social communities. Each student is also asked to respond to the weekly post of at least one other student. Students are expected to write a final essay centered on young people and religion that reflects their particular concern or interest.

Many articles, books, and online reports have been published on why young people’s religiosity has declined and what might be done. Still, the search for answers continues unabated. The reading will mainly cover facts and themes from research conducted in 21<sup>st</sup> century, including very recent publications, e.g.:

#### ➤ **Books**

- Melinda Lundquist Denton, Richard Flory. 2020. *Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Paul L. Gareau, Spencer C. Bullivant, Peter Beyer. 2019. *Youth, Religion and Identity in a Globalizing Context: International Perspectives*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill.

#### ➤ **Articles**

- Abiya Ahmed. 2020. “Between ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’: Navigating Religion at an American Islamic High School.” *Religious Education* 115 (4): 384-399.
- Christopher P. Scheitle, Katie E. Corcoran. 2020. “More than Nothing: Examining the Worldview Influences of Nonreligious College Students.” *Review of Religious Research* 62 (2): 249-272.
- Douglas Jacobs, et. al. (8 others). 2019. “Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults Connection to the Church.” *Review of Religious Research* 61 (1): pp. 39-56.

#### ➤ **Research Center reports**

- LifeWay Institute
  - Aaron Earls. 2019. “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults.”
- American Enterprise Institute
  - Daniel Cox, Jacqueline Commence. 2019. “The Decline of Religion in American Family Life: Findings from the November 2019 American Perspectives Survey.”
- Pew Research Center:
  - Elizabeth P. Sciupac, Anna Schiller, Kelsey Beveridge. 2020. “U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals. *But American adolescents often participate at parents’ behest, and tend to be less religious in more personal, private ways.*”
  - Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnick. 2020. “On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What we know about Gen Z So Far.”
  - 2019. “For a Lot of American Teens, Religion is a Regular Part of the Public-School Day. *Yet many other US adolescents rarely observe religious behavior in their schools, and a majority say they rarely or never discuss religion with friends*”

Weekly reading assigned is primarily to help students gain understanding of themes and trends (rather than historical or statistical details). Students are not expected to read those articles that include many tables of numbers, however. Very empirical articles will be summarized in lectures, and for those interested, some will be available for download under the reading category “Additional Studies.”

Learning Goals: Over the semester students are encouraged and expected to take theories, concepts or findings discussed in the course, and comment: (1) on how these relate (or do not) to involvement of young people in the faith community the student knows best; (2) or, on whether methods discussed for energizing congregational involvement of youth and “emerging adults” would likely be more effective for those of particular religious upbringing, family culture, or gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment. Reading, reflecting and writing on such comparisons can assist students’ meeting MA Learning Outcomes, especially: #3 and #5.

- #3. To demonstrate knowledge and of practices of one’s own religious tradition and the capacity to appreciate the practices of other faith traditions.
- #5. To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist.

The final essay will be collected by the registrar at the end of the course, and should exemplify Learning Outcome #5.

**Requirements and Grading** The instructor will privately give each student discussion points for the week and comments, as well as post a weekly summary of the discussion for all.

- ✓ Weekly: Complete the assigned reading; answer one of the questions posed by the instructor with each lecture, and comment on at least one of the answers written by another student. **40% of final grade**
- ✓ Mid-term proposal for final essay: 800-1000 words on your proposed subject and approach on a final paper for this course. **15% of final grade**
- ✓ Final essay: About 4,500 or more words (15 pages double-spaced) on what you see or propose for the future of young people’s involvement in your congregation, teenage or young adult group, denomination, or other faith community -- AND WHY (using your scholarly reflections, assigned readings, interviews, insights, and hopes.) **45% of final grade**

## **ALL READING ASSIGNED WILL BE AVAILABLE ON-LINE**

***There are two major course sections.***

- I. The first section is somewhat more theory focused on what research findings and theories indicate about the religiosity of youth and young adults.*
- II. The second section is more praxis focused on applying concepts and ideas to ways of retaining young people in various faith communities or any faith affiliation.*

## **COURSE SESSION I: RESEARCH BASED THEORIES ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND RELGION**

### **MODULE 1: Introduction: Religious Views, Religiosity and Religious Commitment of Young People**

- Lecture: Week 1
- *Reading Assigned*  
Only the on-line lecture
- Class Discussion: *Students introduce themselves* to the class, and give some information about their backgrounds, and what their particular interests in this course are for ministry, career, and degrees.

## MODULE 2: Social Generational and Global Effects on Young People's Religious Views

- Lecture: Week 2
- Reading Assigned
  - Vern Bengtson, et al. 2013. Chapter 2. "Religion and Spirituality across Generations." In *Families and Faith: How Religion is passed Down across Generations*. NY: Oxford: 21-43.
  - Robert Wuthnow. 2007. Chapter 1: "American Religion: An Uncertain Future." In *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press: 1-19.
  - Patrick Nachtigall. 2010. Part of Chapter 2: "Boomers, Xers, and Y Should I Care?" In *Mosaic: A Journey across the Church of God*. Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press: 25-37.
- Additional Studies, Pew Research (cited in lecture)
  - Michael Dimock. 2019. "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins."
  - Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnick. 2020. "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What we know about Gen Z so far."
  - Conrad Hackett, Stephanie Kramer, Anna Schiller (main authors). 2018. *The Age Gap in Religion around the World*. (Empirical study, skim)
- Class Discussion: Go to 'Discussions' for Module 2 and choose a question.

## MODULE 3. Emerging Adults in Different Contexts and Faith Affiliations

- Lecture: Week 3
- Reading Assigned
  - Jensen Arnett. 2000, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties." *American Psychologist* 55:469-480.
  - Ahmed, Patel, Hanson. 2015. "Developmental Context" and "Underserved American Muslim Youth Subgroups" in *State of American Muslim Youth*. ISPU & FYI.
  - Wuthnow. 2007. Chap 9, "Emerging Trends: Immigration & Ethnic Diversity." op cit: 183-200.
- Additional Studies (cited in lecture, but not assigned):
  - Jaimee Stuart. 2014. "A Qualitative analysis of Muslim young adults' adaptation experiences in New Zealand." *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 8 (2):21-46.
- Class Discussion: Go to 'Discussions' for Module 3 and choose a question.

## MODULE 4. Parents and Family Religiosity Effects on Faith Affiliations of Young People

- Lecture: Week 4
- Reading Assigned
  - R. Stephen Warner and Rhys H. Williams. 2010. "The Role of Families and Religious Institutions in Transmitting Faith among Christians, Muslims, and Hindus in the U.S." In *Religion and Youth*, edited by Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion: 159-165. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing.
  - Vern Bengtson, et. al. 2018. "Bringing up Nones: Intergenerational Influences and Cohort Trends." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 57 (2): 258-275.
  - Jeff Diamant and Elizabeth Podrebarac Scrupac. 2020. "10 key findings about the religious lives of U.S. teens and their parents."
- Additional Empirical Studies (cited in lecture, but not assigned):
  - Pew Research Center: Elizabeth P. Scrupac, Anna Schiller, Kelsey Beveridge. 2020. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals. *But American adolescents often participate at parents' behest, and tend to be less religious in more personal, private ways.*"

- American Enterprise Institute: Daniel Cox, Jacqueline Commence. 2019. "The Decline of Religion in American Family Life: Findings from the November 2019 American Perspectives Survey."
- Stephen Eric Krauss, Azimi Hamzah, Ismi Arif Ismail, Turiman Suandi, Siti Rabaah Hamzah, Dzuhaulmi Dahalan, Fazilah Idris. 2012. "Religious Socialization among Malaysian Muslim Adolescents: A Family Structure Comparison." *Review of Religious Research*. 54 (December): 499-518.
- *Class Discussion: Go to 'Discussions' for Module 4, and choose a question.*

## **MODULE 5: Teenage Years: Peers and High School Effects on Beliefs and Religiosity**

- Lecture: Week 5
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Christian Smith, (skim) Chapter 4 "God, Religion, Whatever." Pp. 118-171. In *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford U. Press.
  - Patricia Snell Herzog and Robert Wedow. 2012. "Youth Group Cliques: How Religious Goals Can Disguise Discriminatory Group Dynamics." *Review of Religious Research*, 54 (2012): 217-238.
  - PEW Research Center. 2019. "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion is a Regular Part of the School Day". (skim) pp:1-23.
  - Abiya Ahmed. 2020. "Between 'Islamic; and 'un-Islamic'; navigating Religion at an American Islamic High School". *Journal of Religious Education*, vol 115 (4):384-399.
- *Additional Empirical Studies (cited in lecture, but not assigned)*
  - Philip Schwadel. "Jewish teenagers' Syncretism: A Research Note." *Review of Religious Research*, 51 (March 2010): pp. 324-332.
- *Class Discussion: Go to 'Discussions' for Module 5 and choose a question.*

## **MODULE 6: Importance of the College Years in Faith Stability and Change**

- Lecture: Week 6
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Damon Mayrl and Freeden Oeur, "Religion and Higher Education: Current Knowledge and Directions for Future Research." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48 (2009). Pp: 260-275.
  - a. Perry Glanzer, Jonathan Hill, Todd Ream. 2014. "Higher Education's Influence Upon the Religious Lives of Emerging Adults." In *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality*, edited by Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona Abo-Zena, 152-157. New York, Oxford University Press.
  - b. Lori Peek, 2005. "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity". *Sociology of Religion*, 66: 215-232.
  - c. Selections from: Astin, Astin & Lindholm. 2011. (skim) Chapter 6, "The Religious Life of College Students." and Chapter 9. "Higher Education and the Life of the Spirit". 9-10, 83-100, 137-157. In *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 2. *Empirical Studies: (cited in lecture but not assigned)*
  - Christopher P. Scheitle, Katie E. Corcoran. 2020. "More than Nothing: Examining the Worldview Influences of Nonreligious College Students." *Review of Religious Research* 62 (2): 249-272.
  - Jonathan P. Hill. 2009. "Higher Education as Moral Community: Institutional Influences on Religious Participation during College." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48: 515-534.
  - Jenny L. Small, Nicholas A. Bowman. 2011. "Religious Commitment, Skepticism and Struggle among US College students: The Impact of Majority/Minority Religious Affiliation and Institutional Type." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 50 (March):154-174.
- *Class Discussion: Go to 'Discussions' for Module 6 and choose a question.*

## **MODULE 7: Young Adults: Religious “Nones” or Spiritual Independents?**

- Lecture: Week 7
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Melinda Lundquist Denton, Richard Flory. 2020. Chapter 2. “Setting the Context: Transitions to Adult Life.” 33-56. In *Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in The Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Russell Jeung, Brett Esaki, and Alice Liu. 2015. “Redefining Religious Nones: Lessons from Chinese and Japanese American Young Adults.” *Religions*.6: 891-911.
  - Andrew Singleton. 2014. Chapter 13. “The Future of Religion. Young People’s Religion and Spirituality.” Pp. 208-224. In *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*. Los Angeles, Sage.
  - Courtney Hughes Rinker, et al. 2016. “Religious Aps for Smartphones and Tablets: Transforming Religious Authority and the Nature of Religion.” *Interdisciplinary Research on Religion*, 12: article 4.
- *Empirical Studies: (cited in lecture but not assigned)*
  - Jeremy E. Uecker, Samuel Stroope, Damon Mayrl. 2016. “Family Formation and Returning to Institutional Religion in Young Adulthood.” *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion*, 55 (June): 384-406.
  - Renee Ryberg, Kathleen Mullan Harris, Lisa Pearce. 2018. “Religiosity of Young Adults: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health.” *Add Health*, Carolina Population Center, U of NC at Chapel Hill.
  - Gregory Smith and Alan Cooperman. 2016. “The Factors driving the growth of religious ‘nones’ in the United States.” Pew Research Center (September).
  - Yunping Tong and Fenggang Yang. 2018. “Internal Diversity Among ‘Spiritual but not Religious’ Adolescents in the United States: A Person-Centered Analysis”. *Rev. of Religious Research*, 60:435-453.
- *Class Discussion: Go to ‘Discussions’ for Module 7 and choose a question.*

## **MODULE 8: Transitioning from Young Adult to Adult: Seeking a Spiritual Identity and a Faith Community**

- Lecture: Week 8
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Christian Smith. 2005. (skim) Chapter 5: “The Cultural Structures of Emerging Adult Religion” pp. 143-165, plus 166-168. In *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford U. Press.
  - Robert Wuthnow. 2007, Chapter 6: “Spirituality and Spiritual Practices: The Role of Faith in Personal Life”. 112-135. In *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press.
  - Melinda Lundquist Denton, Richard Flory. 2020. “Will Emerging Adults Return to Religion? Religion for Individuals and Institution.” 233-240. In *Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in The Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Mike Hayes. 2007. Chapter 1. “Identifying Young Adults: Would you know a young adult if you fell over one in the aisle?” 3-24. In *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20’s and 30’s* (New York, Paulist Press, 2007).
- *Empirical Studies: (cited in lecture but not assigned)*
  - Douglas Jacobs, et. al. (8 others). 2019. “Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults Connection to the Church.” *Review of Religious Research* 61 (1): 39-56.
- *Class Discussion: Go to ‘Discussions’ for Module 8 and choose a question.*

## **MODULE 9: Catch up reading week, and proposal for final essay.**

No new reading or web discussion posting is required. Instead, students should ensure that their 800+ word proposal for their final essay is posted in Canvas or emailed to the instructor by the end of the week or soon thereafter. More information will be forthcoming.

## COURSE SECTION II: CONGREGATIONS and FAITH COMMUNITIES: ATTRACTING AND KEEPING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

(General Outline of Section II Modules: More Reading to be Included in Final Syllabus)

### **MODULE 10: Perplexing: Developing “Sustainable” Congregational Programs for Teenagers**

- Lecture: Week 10
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Mark DeVries. 2008. Chapter 2 “The Easy Button: The Crisis of Chronic Underinvestment”, pp 28-39; Chapter 12 “Dancing with Alligators: Navigating the Turbulent Waters of Church Politics”, pp. 175-187. In *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why most youth ministry doesn’t last and what your church can do about it*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- *Class Discussion: Go to ‘Discussions’ for Module 10 and choose a question.*

### **MODULE 11: More Challenging: Attracting and Keeping Young Adults Involved with Congregations**

- Lecture: Week 11
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Monte Sahlin and David Roozen. 2015. Chapter 1: “A Profile of Congregations with Significant Young Adult Participation”. 11-24. In *How Religious Congregations are Engaging Young Adults in America*. Hartford, CT: Faith Communities Today.
  - Kristina Lizardy Hajib, *Engaging Young Adults (Hartford, CT: Faith Communities Today, 2015)*
  - Rhys Williams, Courtney Ann Irby, and R. Stephen Warner. 2016. “‘Church’ in Black and White: The Organizational Lives of Young Adults.” *Religions*.
  - Mike Hayes. 2007. Chapter 8: “Resources for Building a Young Adult Ministry”, pp. 157-201. In *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s*. New York: Paulist Press.
- *Class Discussion. Go to ‘Discussions’ for Module 11 and choose a question.*

### **MODULE 12: Case Studies for Discussion**

- Lecture: Week 12
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Case study Selections from: Paul L. Gareau, *et al.* 2020. *Youth, Religion and Identity in a Globalizing Context*. Boston: Brill.

There will also be a selection of US congregational case studies provided, which are trying to have youth and young adult programs. Students will be asked to choose one or more to read and comment on.

### **MODULE 13: Pulling Together as an Age-Diverse Congregation**

- Lecture: Week 8
- *Reading Assigned*
  - Wuthnow. (2007), Chapter 11 “Vital Congregations, Youthful and Diverse”, pp 214-232.
  - Carol H Merritt. 2007. Chapter 2: “Fostering Intergenerational Relationships”. 19-38. In *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation*: Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute.
- *Class Discussion: Go to ‘Discussions’ for Module 13 and choose a question.*

### **MODULE 14: Final Lecture & Final Essay Due**

- ✓ Final Essay, 4,500 words, about 15 pages double-spaced is due on or before May \_\_(?)