Contemporary American Religion
First Year Seminar — Fall 2017
Instructor: Samuel Avery-Quinn, PhD

Office: 113 Howard Street Hall
Office Hours: T/Th 8:20-9:20am, 12:50-1:50pm
Virtual Office Hours (Google Hangouts): M/W 9:00am-12:00pm
Or in person by appointment.

Email: averyquinns@appstate.edu
Phone: 865.309.6914(c)
Professor’s Website: www.samuelaveryquinn.com

Course Description
This course explores religion in contemporary American society. As a discussion and research-focused course, we begin our semester exploring themes in the religious experiences of college-age Americans as these relate to larger trends on the changing American religious landscape. Turning to the Appalachian State University campus as a laboratory, we create own own sociological research projects to explore these themes among your fellow students. While conducting our research in the field, we’ll continue meeting in our classroom to further discuss issues of ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation in contemporary American religious life.

Course Objectives
Success in any course, you may have been told, is a good grade. Grades have their place. Good grades are nice for your GPA, for keeping your scholarships. Success, though, is far more measurable in the quality
of a learning experience you take from a course. I want you to be successful in this course, but I will not guarantee your success. Only you can do that. This course, like any college course, will be for you what you make of it with some constraints. As you work on making this course a success for you (by regularly attending class, by reading the assignments, contributing to discussion, taking notes when necessary, and completing your research projects) you’re doing so in a course framework created by your instructor. While that framework relies on your instructor’s knowledge, experience, and research interests, it is built on a foundation of both your instructor’s philosophy of undergraduate education and the learning goals for Appalachian State’s First Year Seminars. This foundation consists of a number of goals for your learning experience, including:

**First Year Seminar Goals**

First Year Seminar (UCO 1200) introduces first year Appalachian students (first year students and transfers) to rigorous academic study at the University level through interdisciplinary engagement with a broad topic or question. Experienced faculty engage FYS students in a shared process of inquiry in small seminar-style classes. (The average class size is 22.) The faculty also help students make the transition to academic life at Appalachian by introducing students to a variety of library research tools, making connections with faculty and other students, introducing the wide range of resources Appalachian provides its students, and involving the university and local community. Additionally, all First Year Seminars share in common the following learning goals, which are the foundation of the University’s General Education Program: developing creative and critical thinking abilities; cultivating effective communication skills; making local-to-global connections; and understanding responsibilities of community membership.

Appalachian’s First Year Seminar course also serves as a designated Global Learning Opportunity ("GLO" for short) because all FYS courses cultivate intercultural competence by examining a single issue from multiple perspectives.

Every First Year Seminar is designed by the individual faculty member on their topic of choice that
integrates the aforementioned objectives. Prospective instructors propose their topic and describe how they will meet the common learning goals to an elected faculty committee which reviews each proposal about a year in advance.

**Critical and Creative Thinking**
The goal of Appalachian’s general education program is to instill and nurture in its students the knowledge, skills, and values of a liberal education, including the skills of effective critical thinking, listening, and communicating. A successful liberal, broad-based education prepares students for lifelong learning, reflective living, public engagement, and vocational success.

Critical and creative thinkers (“CCT”) possess a combination of essential characteristics: skills, knowledge, and dispositions. Critical and creative thinkers are intellectually humble and curious. They use an inquiry-based, systematic, and logical process to promote greater understanding and further learning, considering intra- and inter-disciplinary sources as appropriate. They are open minded and willing to consider alternative and unconventional methods, sources, and conclusions, as part of an evidence-based and rational process. The critical and creative thinker is able to apply knowledge innovatively toward useful and meaningful goals.

These characteristics are subject to some limitations and caveats. They are not exhaustive, and they may apply in various ways and to varying degrees, depending on the discipline and/or particular assignments. Some are more aspirational in nature (e.g., intellectual humility and curiosity) and may be difficult to measure even though they are worth nurturing.

**Communicating Effectively**
The General Education Program prepares students to employ modes of communication that can help communities reach consensus or respectful disagreement. Effective communication leads to discovery and significant changes in the sender (who may be a writer, speaker, dancer, musician, visual artist, or actor) that produce sophisticated reading skills and a high level of quantitative, technological, and information literacy. The sender is successful in delivering the message to the receiver, who may be listening, reading,
or watching. As both senders and receivers, successful communicators interact effectively with people of both similar and different experiences and values. They adapt their communication skills with increasing complex situations.

**Making Local to Global Connections**

Appalachian State University is both in and of the southern Appalachian region, and it is also part of a world that is globally connected. Life in the twenty-first century requires an understanding of the connections and multi-layered interactions among diverse local and global human cultures, as well as between humans and the natural and physical environments. In this context, the general education program helps to cultivate an active understanding of global change and the effect of human agency on both natural and cultural environments. Students should understand the importance of biodiversity, ecological integrity, and the need to achieve sustainable benefits for communities. Knowledge of other cultures, diverse cultural frames of reference, and alternative perspectives are essential to thinking critically and creatively and to understanding the responsibilities of membership in local, regional, and global communities. The cultivation and maintenance of intercultural relationships require active cultural understanding, which is achieved by exploring multiple strategies for interacting with other peoples and cultures.

**Community Membership**

General education prepares academically skilled and engaged citizens capable of contributing to the betterment of society and taking responsibility for the common good. Responsible contribution to a vibrant democracy governed by the rule of law requires a basic understanding of the ways in which governments, economies, and societies function. Moral reasoning skills, necessary in a world characterized by often conflicting beliefs and attitudes, enable students to reflect critically on ethical issues and to make reasoned, intelligent judgments about complex moral problems. Effective moral reasoning includes questioning one’s own assumptions and beliefs, understanding the reasoning of others, and accepting disagreement about important matters. An understanding of the broad range of past and present moral positions should be accompanied by shared beliefs regarding honesty, integrity, and obligation to others. In addition, fostering the well-being and personal development of students will help
them lead thoughtful and purposeful lives in their communities.

**Required Readings**


All other course readings are saved as PDF documents to our course AsULearn Website. All texts are expected to be read by their assigned class day.

**Common Reading Program Book:** *One Amazing Thing* by Chitra Divakaruni

Your required Common Reading Program book will help transition us from our introduction to learning in a university setting into developing robust and flexible strategies for college reading. In the Fall, if you were enrolled at ASU, each of you should have taken part in a discussion of the text (facilitated by ASU staff) and attended Convocation at which Chitra Divakaruni was the keynote speaker. During the Fall semester, we spend a class session using the text to explore different modes of college-level learning. In the Spring semester, the Common Reading Program Book provides an opportunity for reflection and extra credit.

**Course Policies**

**ASULearn and Email Policy**

All students are required to register and log-in to the AsULearn website. Further, all students are required to have a regularly-checked email address registered with or capable of receiving emails from the AsULearn system. Your instructor will make regular class announcements via the AsULearn system. It will be your responsibility to ensure your email is capable of interacting with the AsULearn system.
Classroom Conduct

You are expected to behave as if you are in an academic environment. Opinions, questions, and concerns should be freely shared. To promote a successful learning environment, discussion of course material should be conducted with mutual respect.

Cell phones: Students do not necessarily need to turn their cell phone ringers off during class, however, no calls or texts, short of demonstrable emergencies should be made during class time. All cell phones must, however, be put away during class time. Students with cellphones on their desk or in their lap during class will be asked to put their phone away. If your instructor has to make more than three requests for your cell phone to be put away during the semester, you will lose the equivalent of one readings quiz from your course grade. Subsequent instances will lead to further point deductions at the rate of one readings quiz per instance.

Students with Special Needs

Students needing special accommodations in the classroom should discuss their needs with the instructor as soon as possible after the start of the semester. Students with disabilities registered with the University should provide the instructor with documentation of their needs during the first two class sessions of the semester.

Counseling and Support Services

Appalachian’s goal is to maintain a safe campus for students, faculty and staff. If you know some-one who:
• behaves in an aggressive or out of control manner or has mood swings,
• has stopped talking to others or is spending a lot of time alone,
• drinks more or uses drugs to deal with feelings,
• talks about harming him or herself or others,
**Academic Integrity**

Generally, you are expected to adhere to the Academic Honesty policy of Appalachian State University. This policy is available online at: http://studentconduct.appstate.edu/filecabinet/13

Everything you write in this class must be in your own words. If you reference (quote or paraphrase) a reading (book, article, etc.), you must cite the reading. If you plagiarize either a course reading or material you did not write, or you re-use material you wrote in a different class, you will receive “zero credit” for that entry. Plagiarism will result in much more severe sanction, however.

**Statement on Student Engagement with Courses**

In its mission statement, Appalachian State University aims at “providing undergraduate students a rigorous liberal education that emphasizes transferable skills and preparation for professional careers” as well as “maintaining a faculty whose members serve as excellent teachers and scholarly mentors for their students.” Such rigor means that the foremost activity of Appalachian students is an intense engagement with their courses. In practical terms, students should expect to spend two to three hours of studying for every hour of class time. Hence, a fifteen-hour academic load might reasonably require between 30 and 45 hours per week of out-of-class work.

**Writing Center**

Consultants at the University Writing Center will work with you one-on-one and provide assistance with style, organization, content, voice, grammar, and documentation (including MLA and APA formats). In addition to your draft and/or any pre-writing notes, bring your assignment to your session. ESL students are encouraged to make use of the University Writing Center. Consultants can help you with clarity, organization, grammar and spelling, formatting, and documenting outside resources. Consultants can also help you better understand assignment guidelines. Appointments are limited to one hour per day, but students are welcome to schedule multiple visits for longer assignments or more in-depth assistance.
throughout the writing process.

The Writing Center is located on the Lower Level of Belk Library & Information Commons (Room 008) and is open Monday through Thursday from 9am-9pm and Friday from 9am-1pm. To make an appointment, call 262-3144.

**Plagiarism**

Students shall not plagiarize. Plagiarism is using the intellectual property or product of someone else without giving proper credit. The undocumented use of someone else’s words or ideas in any medium of communication (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge, or is the result of the student’s direct and unique reflection on a subject) is a serious offense, subject to disciplinary action that may include failure in a course and/or disciplinary action by the University.

**Grammar and Citations**

Unless otherwise stated, all papers you write in this course are to be in Chicago Manual of Style Format. This is a widely-used style for academic writing in many disciplines - from Anthropology to Literary Studies to Sociology and Urban Studies.

To find out more about the style, you can purchase a copy of the Chicago Manual of Style at the ASU Campus Bookstore.

Kate Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* 7th Edition is also available at the ASU Campus Bookstore. Not just a style guide based on Chicago Style, Turabian is (a) less expensive, and (b) offers undergraduate students additional guidance on how to research and write college-level papers.

An online resource guide to Chicago Style is available at: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/)
Another online source provides a quick guide for citing sources in Chicago format: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

**Inclement Weather Policy**

As you may know, winters in Boone may see snow, and more snow, and more snow, and even more snow. For the first two months or so of class, we can reasonably expect a few of our classes to be impacted by snow. How these snow days impact our class varies, but students should assume, unless otherwise notified by their instructor, two general conditions for inclement weather days:

(1) University closure. If the University cancels classes meeting during our class time, students will be expected to continue their readings for the next assigned readings discussion class. In addition to reading and preparing for class discussion, students will additionally need to log on to our ASULearn website and complete an out-of-class activity posted under an INCLEMENT WEATHER forum. More details on inclement weather activities will be provided by your instructor.

(2) Instructor stranded in the snow. There may be days where the University is open, but road conditions between campus and your instructor’s home prevent him from driving to campus (his fault for owning a small gas-saving car and a sports car, neither good on snow). On these days your instructor will upload a video presentation to our course Youtube site. It will be your responsibility to view this presentation before our next class (at the start of which we will have a short quiz on the presentation content).

**Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to attend every class session. Students are allowed two (2) unexcused absences, and two (2) excused absences, but cannot exceed a total of three (3) absences combined. Upon the third unexcused absence, or fourth total absence, and for each subsequent absence, students will have their course grade reduced by the point value of one-half a letter grade. Excused absences mean contacting your instructor by no later than 24 hours after
missing a class session. After three (3) missed classes in a row, your instructor will email you. If you do not respond to this inquiry by the end of that week, your instructor will notify the University’s Early Intervention Team. A team member will subsequently attempt to contact you.

**Religious Observance Policy**

You will be allowed two excused absences for religious observances. You are responsible for requesting excused absences for religious observances in writing no later than three weeks after the first class day of the term. For purposes of this policy, the term “religious observances” shall include religious holidays or holy days or similar observances that require absence from class. You will be afforded the opportunity to make up tests or other work missed due to an excused absence for a religious observance. Specific arrangements to make up work will be made upon receipt of your written request.

**Syllabus Changes**

This syllabus is subject to change based on your instructor’s assessment of our course progress. The least likely aspects of the syllabus to change are grading and assignment components. The most likely aspect of the syllabus to change is our course schedule. If any changes are made to components of this syllabus OTHER THAN the course schedule, your instructor will notify you verbally in class, and will post an announcement of the syllabus change to AsULearn. It will be the student’s responsibility to check for syllabus changes via AsULearn.

**Grading & Assignments**

**Course Introduction Research Activity (10 points)** — Due Tuesday, August 29, 2017 by class time.

This assignment has two steps: (1) determining a definition of “religion” that makes the most sense for you; and (2) determining the reasons scholars say you should study religion as an undergraduate. The
The first part of the assignment relies on your expert internet search skills and ability to reflect on claims made about “what is religion” that seem, to you, to reflect a good summary of what you think “religion” is. The second part is, in part, an early test of your ability to look at diverse data sets and identify commonalities in the data.

Statement of Hypothesis and Literature Review (25 points) — Due Friday, November 17, 2017 by 11:55pm via AsULearn.

This assignment is the first part of our research project for the semester. For this assignment you will craft a hypothesis for your research survey of religion and spirituality among college students at Appalachian State University. Following your working hypothesis, you will conduct a review of relevant published literature available via the Appalachian State University library. Your assignment will summarize the available research findings and draw a number of issues or themes you may expect from your data set. You may begin this project at any time during the semester, but the official release date will be October 17, 2017 with a one-month time frame in which to complete this portion of your research.

Religion and Spirituality at Appalachian State Survey Project (65 points) — Due Friday, December 15, 2017 by class 11:55pm via AsULearn.

This is our major research project for the semester. Drawing on our discussion of Christian Smith’s study of religion and spirituality among emerging adults in the United States, as well as subsequent special topics covered in class during the second half of the semester, you will choose a topic, craft a hypothesis and survey, conduct the survey among students at App State, analyze your results, draw conclusions, and write up your research results. Your work should comprise around 10-12 pages including charts and tables. Details will be released early in the semester with an official start date of October 17, 2017. Your paper will be due on the last day of Final Exams week, Friday, December 15, 2017 by 11:55pm via a dropbox available on AsULearn.

Grade Scale: A > 93, A- 90-93, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 74-76, D 69.5-73, F < 69.5
Fall 2017 Schedule

August 21  M  Black & Gold Convocation

August 22  T  First Day of Class  Course Introduction and Common Reading

August 24  Th  Common Reading Program Book Day

August 28  M  Last Day to Drop & Add a Course

**PART 1: Introduction to Studying Religion in Contemporary America**

August 29  T  Studying Religion 2
   Presentation/Discussion
   Readings: "Introduction" & Chapter 1 "Brad, June, and Amanda" from Christian Smith *Souls in Transition* (30p.).

August 31  Th  Religion and the Cultural World of College Students - I
   Discussion
   Readings: Chapter 2 "The Cultural Worlds of Emerging Adults" from Christian Smith (pp. 33-66)

September 4  M  State Holiday

September 5  T  Religion and the Cultural World of College Students - II
   Discussion
   Readings: Chapter 2 "The Cultural Worlds of Emerging Adults" from Christian Smith (pp. 66-87)
September 7  Th  The American Religious Landscape
   Presentation/Discussion
        "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (13p.).

September 12  T Emerging Adults on America's Religious Landscape
   Discussion
   Readings: Chapter 4 "Religious Affiliations, Practices, Beliefs, Experiences, and More" from Christian
        Smith (30p.).

September 14  Th Religious Paths of Emerging Adults in the U.S.
   Discussion
   Readings: Chapter 8 "Religious Trajectories from the Teenage Years" from Christian Smith (pp.
        211-224, 229-241, 248-256*).

September 19  T  Types of Religious and Spiritual Expression
   Discussion
   Readings: Chapter 6 "Six Major Religious Types" from Christian Smith (14p.).

########Release of "Souls in Transition" Reflective Essay.  Read Chapter 10 "Making Sense of it All" from Christian Smith
(21p.).########
PART 2: Methods in Sociology of Religion

September 21 Th Hypotheses and Hypotheses Testing in Social Science Workshop
Readings: Chapter 1 "What Research Is and How Researchers Think About It" from A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations by Kate Turabian (16p.)
Chapter 2 "Finding a Research Question" from Turabian (13p).

September 26 T Library Research 1 Workshop
Readings: Complete Library Orientation Activities on AsULearn.
Chapter 4 "Finding Useful Sources" from "A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations" by Kate Turabian (11p).

September 28 Th Library Research 2 Workshop
Reading: "Engaging Sources" from "A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations" by Kate Turabian (6p).

October 3 T Surveys & Survey Design 1 Workshop

October 5 Th Surveys & Survey Design 2 Workshop
October 10  T  NO CLASS

October 12 & 13  Fall Break

October 17  T  Research Project Orientation

PART 3: Topics in Contemporary American Religion

October 19  Th  Adolescents and Religious Socialization
   Discussion

October 24  T  "Jesus Camp"
   Documentary

October 26  Th  Houses of Worship and Community 1
   Discussion

October 31  T  Houses of Worship and Community 2
   Discussion
November 2  Th  Women in Religious Communities 1
    Discussion

November 7  T  Women in Religious Communities 2
    Discussion
    Readings: Chapter 6 "Women in the Changing Mosque" in Abdo (28pp).

November 9  Th  Women in Religious Communities 3
    Documentary
    "Mosque in Morgantown"

November 14  T  Being LGBTQ in the Protestant Mainline 1
    Discussion

November 16  Th  Being LGBTQ in the Protestant Mainline 2
    Documentary
    "Call Me Malcolm"

November 21  T  Religious Conversion
    Lecture
    Readings: selections from Understanding Religious Conversion by Lewis R. Rambo
    Chapter 7 "Heeding the Call" in Abdo (22 pp.).

November 22 - 26  Thanksgiving Break
November 28  T  Losing My Religion: Americans becoming Atheists  
  Discussion  
  Readings: "What is Atheism?" from atheists.org 
  Chapter 2 "Lynette" from Atheists in America by Melanie Brewster 
  Chapter 3 "Chris" from Brewster 
  Chapter 20 "Brittany" from Brewster

November 30  Th  Spiritual, but not Religious  
  Discussion  
  Readings: Selections from Belief Without Borders by Linda Mercadante.

December 5  T  Research Project Strategy Day

December 6  W  Last Day of Classes

December 7  Th  Reading Day

December 12  T  11am T/Th Exam Day 11:00am-1:30pm 
December 12  T  2pm T/Th Exam Day 2:00pm - 4:30pm 
December 14  Th  9:30am T/Th Exam Day 8:00am - 10:30am 
December 14  Th  3:30pm T/Th Exam Day 2:00pm-4:30pm