

First Year Seminar  
Faith and Difference in America: Learning to Live Together  
Spring 2024

Instructor: Dr. Craig T. Kocher

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Office hours: by appointment

Class meeting time: Monday/Wednesday 3:00-4:15pm, Wilton Center 103

**Course description:** Religious faith is central to the daily life and identity of a majority of the population in the United States. As a result of globalization, individuals and communities with diverse worldviews - both religious and secular - interact more closely than ever before, with results ranging from insightful dialogue to violent discord. Furthermore, religious convictions shape debate about a range of policies in domestic affairs, leading at times to unified action for peace and justice, and at other times to rancor and mistrust. This course will investigate these tensions in light of students' own commitments and beliefs, those of others, and the increasingly diverse society in which we live.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Attendance and active participation in each class session
2. Three major papers
3. Four reading quizzes
4. One experiential reflection paper
5. In class presentation
6. Participate in learning experiences outside of class

**Required books:**

Patel, Eboo. *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*

Patel, Eboo. *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*

Other readings are found on Blackboard or via the link in the syllabus.

**Graded work (1000 points total)**

- Class participation: 100 points
- Religious experience reflection paper: 25 points
- Reading quizzes (3): 75 points (25 points each)
- Paper 1 150 points
- Paper 2 200 points
- Paper 3 300 points
- In-class presentation 150 points
- Total: 1000 points

## Graded work defined

- **Class participation:** This means attending class prepared and alert. High marks will be given to students who engage thoughtfully and regularly with the readings, the content of the lectures, and the reflections of their peers. Students will be penalized for coming to class unprepared, late, or being otherwise disruptive. In addition to reduced participation points, students' final grade will be lowered by half a letter grade for each unexcused absence.
- **Reading quizzes:** The course readings are central to the learning goals of the class. There will be three quizzes throughout the semester to ensure students are reading and comprehending the material.
- **Paper 1:** Write a paper describing and analyzing a personal encounter you have had with a person of another religious faith or worldview, or an experience that complicated your own understanding of your own faith tradition or worldview. **The paper is due by the beginning of class on February 14 and should be 1400-1600 words.**
- **Paper 2:** Write a paper analyzing a recent article by a public intellectual that addresses a social issue in the United States such as: science curricula in public schools, LGBTQ rights, poverty, religious expressions in the public square, religious influence on government policy, etc. You are to take a position on the issue and show how it relates to the broader plural society, with a particular focus on the religious implications of the issue. You should accurately present the argument in the article. Then you should evaluate it critically, making suggestions on how it could be improved or deepened. Articles may be drawn from the following sources: The New York Times, the Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, or [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com). **The paper is due by the beginning of class on April 1 and should be 1500-1700 words.**
- **In class presentation:** Each student will present the themes of his or her second paper via an in-class presentation. The presentation will share your research and analysis of the social issue addressed in the article. Each presentation should be no more than 10 minutes in length. Comprehensive instructions will be given in class.
- **Religious experience reflection paper:** You are required to attend two religious experiences outside your own tradition over the course of the semester and they should be within the United States. For example, if you are a Protestant you may choose to attend a Shabbat service and Muslim prayer service. If you are Jewish you may choose to attend a Catholic mass and prayer at a Hindu temple, etc. Your paper should describe how you experienced the religious services. What did you find particularly interesting or meaningful? How did it make you feel? What did you learn about the religious tradition you visited? What did you learn about your own tradition or worldview as a result of these explorations? The paper should be sent to the instructor as an attachment to an email. **The paper is due by the beginning of class on April 22. The paper should follow the same format as the three major papers and should be 700-800 words.**

- **Paper 3:** Write a research paper analyzing a religious community in America today. The paper should analyze the group's stand on one particular social or political issue such as: immigration, poverty, abortion, gay marriage, healthcare, etc. The paper should include an analysis of the tensions, challenges, and opportunities for this community in the context of its particular beliefs and plural American society. The paper should include at least five reputable sources to support your argument. **This paper is due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, May 1 and be 2500-3000 words.**
- **All papers should be emailed to the instructor as a PDF attachment. Links to a google document will not be accepted.**
- **Extra Credit:** Students are highly encouraged to work with a writing consultant throughout the semester. Students will receive five additional points on each of the three major papers if the student has had at least one session with the consultant working on that paper. Students who have a review session at the speech center will receive five additional points on the presentation.
- Boatwright Library staff have created the following website to help students with the research components of this class: <https://libguides.richmond.edu/fys-kocher>

The three major papers and the religious experience paper should be organized as follows. Points will be deducted from papers that do not follow this template.

1. *Format.* Please type the paper double-spaced, in Times New Roman font size 12, on one side of the paper only, with one-inch margins all the way around. Page numbers should be at the bottom center.
2. *Title.* Think carefully about how your title communicates the argument of the paper in an attractive way, and whether you want to use a subtitle. The title, name of course, and your name should be on a cover sheet. The cover sheet should also include the number of words in the paper, excluding any footnotes.
3. *Introduction.* Write this after you have written your paper, so that it genuinely introduces:
  - the argument that follows
  - the specific ways in which you are narrowing your subject down to a manageable size
  - the specific terms you are using that need some definition
  - One paragraph is sufficient for the introduction.
4. *Main body of the paper.* A sequence of subheadings that divide the paper into logical, roughly even-length sections reassures the professor that the argument has been planned and reasoned carefully before being written.
5. *Conclusion.* Should be one paragraph and summarize main findings.
6. All source material should be documented using Chicago style footnotes.

### **Grading Standards:**

These standards have been articulated by Jepson faculty members and serve as a helpful guide for students preparing papers.

“A” work is well-written, well-argued, and thoroughly conversant with the source material, containing no major inaccuracies or contradictions, and illustrating subtlety and nuance of argument. “A” papers consist of interesting, substantial thoughts well-packaged in technically proficient writing.

“B” work attempts to forward an argument and shows good familiarity with and understanding of the source material, and is generally well-written. There are generally two genres of “B” work: papers that have some of the qualities of an “A” paper, but also contain serious flaws; and papers that contain no serious flaws, but also lack originality or depth of perceptiveness, or simply fail to be persuasive.

“C” work makes an attempt to complete an assignment but contains substantial flaws, either of writing quality, inadequate comprehension of the material, unsupported arguments, and/or logically contradictory or implausible arguments.

“D” and “F” work refers to papers that are seriously inadequate and fail to meet the basic requirements of the assignment

**Late Paper Policy:** Students will receive a one letter grade penalty for every day the paper is late.

**The Honor System:** Students must adhere to the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. All work should be your own. A violation of the Honor System may result in a failing grade for the course.

**The Honor System and Artificial Intelligence:** The Honor System prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as but not limited to ChatGPT) is considered unauthorized assistance, and using it in connection with any assignment will be considered an Honor Code violation. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion. The use of artificial intelligence will result in a zero for the assignment and may result in a failing grade in the class.

**Religious Observance Policy:** Students needing to miss class because of religious observance should contact me within the first two weeks of the semester to discuss the absence. The University’s full religious observance policy may be found here:  
<http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/religiousobsv.html>

## **Outline of Study**

W January 17 Introduction to the class

- What is College for Essay (Delbanco)

M January 22 How Not to Chase a Fake Rabbit

- How Not to Chase a Fake Rabbit essay (Kocher)

W January 24 Religion in America: From Diversity to Pluralism

- Diana Eck essay: From Diversity to Pluralism  
<http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges>
- American Grace, Chapter 1

M January 29 The American Religious Landscape

- American Grace, Chapter 3
- Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-last-archive-scopes-monkey-trial/id1493453604?i=1000527855000>

W January 31 Travelers on a Journey

- American Grace, Chapters 9 and 15
- An introduction to Mindfulness

M February 5 Religion as Social Change

- The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr., Chapters 7-8
- Discuss approaches to Paper 1

W February 7 Religion and Social Change

- The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr., Chapters 13-14, 20, 32
- Valerie Kaur on Revolutionary Love  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/valerie\\_kaur\\_3\\_lessons\\_of\\_revolutionary\\_love\\_in\\_a\\_time\\_of\\_rage?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/valerie_kaur_3_lessons_of_revolutionary_love_in_a_time_of_rage?language=en)

M February 12 I have a Dream: Faith in the Public Square

- Watch King's [I Have a Dream speech](#)
- Watch King's [Mountaintop Speech](#)

W February 14 Paper 1 due – Class meets in Boatwright Memorial Library, Seminar 2, Room 181.

- Introduction to library research. Guest presenter, Librarian Nick Dease.
- Review in preparation: <https://libguides.richmond.edu/fys-kocher>

M February 19 Catholicism in America, Guest presenter: The Rev. Mr. Tom Mullen

<http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview>

W February 21 Religious Memoir

- Acts of Faith, Chapters 1-3
- Watch: [Eboo Patel: Interfaith Leadership](#)

M February 26 – Religious Memoir

- Acts of Faith Chapters 4-6
- Discuss approaches to Paper 2

W February 28 – Religious Memoir

- Acts of Faith, finish the book
- Discuss approaches to the Presentations

M March 4 – No Class

W March 6 – Meet with your partner and work on presentations.

March 11 and 13 No class for spring break

M March 18 – Presentations

W March 20 – Presentations

M March 25 – Presentations

W March 27 – Presentations

M April 1 – Buddhism

- Paper 2 due
- Guest Presenter, Rev. Kevin Heffernan, Zen Buddhist Priest
- Watch: [The Buddha](#) (six minutes)

W April 3 – Interfaith Leadership

- Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, Chapters 1-3

M April 8 – Interfaith Leadership

- Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, Chapters 4-5

W April 10 – Judaism in America

- Guest Presenter, Mr. Josh Jeffreys, Jewish Chaplain
- “Hebrew Bible, Ancient Israel, and the Basis of Modern Judaism,” Josh Jeffreys

M April 15 – Islam in America

- Guest Presenter: Waleed Ilyas, Muslim Chaplain
- Read these four brief introductory essays:
- [Essay 1](#)
- [Essay 2](#)
- [Essay 3](#)
- [Essay 4](#)

W April 17 – Interfaith Leadership

- Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, Chapters 6-7
- Discuss Final Papers

M April 22 – Religious experience reflection paper due

*The paper should follow the outline for major papers in the syllabus.*

- Discuss reflection papers

W April 24 – Course Conclusion

*Your final paper should be emailed to the instructor by Wednesday, May 1 at 5pm.*

## **FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COMMON EXPECTATIONS**

### **Aims of the Course**

Your two First-Year Seminars will form the foundation of your general education at the University of Richmond, introducing you to college-level reading, writing, and critical thinking. While each seminar will also have specific course goals tied to the subject matter of the seminar, you can expect all First-Year Seminars to pursue the five following shared goals:

1. Expand and deepen students' understanding of the world and of themselves
2. Enhance their ability to read and think critically
3. Enhance their ability to communicate effectively, in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms
4. Develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research
5. Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor

Of course, these are essential components of a liberal arts education and, as such, are goals or aspirations common to most of your courses. But the First-Year Seminar concentrates on them in several specific ways.

First, seminar topics are chosen for their potential to raise new questions, to approach familiar topics in a new way or to open up entirely new areas of study to students. Readings and other course materials have been selected to spark discussion and debate, not simply to convey information (though they may do that as well).

Second, much of your time spent both in and out of your seminar will focus on developing critical reading and thinking skills through close reading, comparative analysis of texts and other materials, and intellectual discussion and debate.

Third, the seminars are writing- and speaking-intensive classes. You can expect to participate in discussion every day and, in some courses, to make oral presentations on course materials to the class. Seminars will also focus on the writing process, using some combination of the following techniques: freewriting, drafts, peer editing workshops, consultation with Writing Consultants, and staged development of writing projects, to inform and facilitate completion of your assigned writing projects.

Fourth, all seminars will include at least one class session focused on information literacy and library research skills, and will also include instruction in the appropriate research methods for

the course material. While not every seminar will assign a formal research paper, all will incorporate research skills and at least one research-based assignment

Finally, all First-Year Seminars are capped at 16 students, offering every student the opportunity to work closely with the course professor.

All First-Year Seminars will be demanding and intense, but they should also be rewarding and enjoyable. You'll encounter a new subject area or deepen your understanding of a familiar topic, and develop foundations for your further study at the University,

## **COURSE WORK**

Your main job in your seminar will be to master the course materials by reading, viewing, listening, discussing and writing. The minimum writing requirement for all First-Year Seminars is approximately 5000 words (about 20 standard typed pages); this may be divided into many short papers or fewer longer ones, and may include a variety of types of writing, including analytical prose, creative expression, scripts for oral or digital presentations, etc. You should expect work beyond this minimum. The nature of this work will vary from seminar to seminar: your instructor might require more extensive formal essay writing, journal-keeping, the leading of class discussions, participation in electronic discussion groups, blogging, digital story-telling, drawing, making music, or other activities. Some seminars may include in-class midterm and/or final examinations; others will focus exclusively on formal papers and presentations, as appropriate to the course material.

In taking your First-Year Seminar, you are embarking on an educational journey that is likely to be quite different from what you experienced in high school. Not only will you encounter new kinds of texts and new kinds of writing and presentation, you will also encounter heavier demands on your mind and time since many of the materials and concepts will be more challenging and extensive than those you've worked with in the past, and you will be asked to get more out of them. Below are some guides to what your professor will expect of you.

### **How much time should you spend on First-Year Seminar work?**

- Although the length of assignments will vary according to both the text and the seminar, you should expect on average to spend 2-3 hours reading or otherwise preparing for every hour you spend in class.
- Most of the writing you do for your seminar will require some pre-writing time, perhaps research, and one or more drafts before it is ready to hand in. The night before a paper is due will not be the best time to get started; plan accordingly. The same holds true for oral presentations, digital scholarship, and other kinds of out-of-class projects. You might want to think of college as your full-time job: you may only be spending 15-16 hours a week in class, but your out-of-class work should add up to at least a 40-hour week.

### **By what standards will your writing be judged?**

Essays and other written work in your First-Year Seminar should:



- Articulate a clear focus and purpose
- Exhibit awareness of and attention to audience
- Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate organization to meet disciplinary and / or task conventions
- Analyze evidence from sources, experience, and empirical research to provide proper support to ideas
- Demonstrate a command of writing mechanics

Since these dimensions are interrelated in many ways (good organization, for example, is often a product of clarity of purpose), they cannot be used as a simple checklist for judging your writing. But they should help you understand what you are aiming for: to be judged excellent, an essay must score very high on all these dimensions.

## **GRADING**

Each instructor will determine the relative weight of discussion, written and/or oral assignments, and examinations (if applicable) in calculating the final grade.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Your instructor will set the specific attendance policy for your seminar, but it should be obvious that you cannot participate in class discussions, as required, without being present.

## **HONOR CODE**

All students are expected to abide by the University Honor Statute. Individual seminars may include group work and consultations with Writing or Speech Consultants and/or peer editors—such collaboration, of course, does not violate the University Honor Statute, which prohibits *unauthorized* assistance in the completion of a given assignment. All students are expected to understand and avoid plagiarism and all other forms of academic dishonesty.

## **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT**

If you experience difficulties in your seminar, do not hesitate to consult with your instructor. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

**Academic Skills Center** (<http://asc.richmond.edu> or 289-8626) helps students assess their academic strengths and weaknesses; hone their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information processing, concentration, and related techniques; work on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encourage campus and community involvement.

**Career Development Center** (<http://cdc.richmond.edu/> or 289-8547) can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major, connecting with internships and learning experiences, investigating graduate and professional school options, and landing your first job. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor during your first year.

**Counseling and Psychological Services** (<http://caps.richmond.edu> or 289-8119) assists students in meeting academic, personal, or emotional challenges. Services include assessment, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention and related services.

**Speech Center** (<http://speech.richmond.edu> or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

**Writing Center** assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work: <http://writing.richmond.edu>

**Boatwright Library Research Librarians** assist students with identifying and locating the best resources for class assignments, research papers and other course projects. Librarians also assist students with questions about citing sources correctly. Students can schedule a personal research appointment, meet with librarians at the library's main service desk, email, text or IM. Link to <http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask.html> or call 289-8669.

## Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common Syllabus Insert

### Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.

[registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)

### Disability Accommodations

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.

[disability.richmond.edu/](http://disability.richmond.edu/)

### Honor System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work."

[studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

## Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.

[registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)

## Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.<sup>1</sup> Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).<sup>3</sup> A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.<sup>4</sup>

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

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<sup>1</sup>Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

<sup>2</sup>Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. *About Campus*, 15: 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

<sup>3</sup>Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

<sup>4</sup>Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

<sup>5</sup> <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>

\*Updated 8/11/2021