

BREL302 Religion and Society

ECTS Value: 5 ECTS

Module Description

What does it mean to study religious beliefs, practices and organizations from a sociological perspective? Although most definitions of religion rest on a belief in the supernatural, human practices of religion are also (at least in part) a socially constituted reality. In other words, the way that humans come to know particular religious beliefs and the ways humans practice religious rituals are shaped by their social context, such as language, symbols, groups, norms, interactions, resources, organizations, etc. In this module we will explore processes by which individuals acquire religious beliefs and identities, and the functions religion serves for its adherents and for society. We will also examine changes in the organizational structure of religion, the mutual influence between religion and state, and the dynamics of religious decline and persistence in modern societies.

In this module we will grapple with the following questions: What is the relationship between religion and society? Does religion help with social cohesion or does it bring about social strife? Does religion act as an opiate of the masses, or does it inspire social change? Does religion reinforce racism, sexism and classism, or does it help break down discrimination? Does religion help humans evolutionarily, to adapt to certain locations? Or, is religion maladaptive or a sheer by-product of evolution? This module will provide a broad introduction to the study of religion as a social phenomenon. While the term “religion” is often associated with personal feeling and belief, in this module participants will be asked to examine religion from the outside by exploring its connection to other aspects of cultural, economic and political life. What is the relationship between religion and society? Undoubtedly, religious institutions, texts and practices have played a monumental role in influencing and shaping society. However, religion does not “happen” within a vacuum. Thus, society has simultaneously influenced and shaped religious ideas and values. A sociological approach to religious studies analyses the complex varieties of social interaction that compose the religious phenomena.

Overall Objectives and Outcomes

By the end of this module, the learner will be able to:

Competences

- a. devise tasks that help their students to identify religious responses to the question of how an individual should live his/her life interest in the relationship between religion and aspects of society such as the arts, theatre, literature, media, law codes, ethical understandings;
- b. be responsible for any initiatives that students in the school might raise regarding this area;
- c. guide students in the sociological approach to the study of religion and its relevance for informing decisions as educated citizens in today’s world;
- d. possess the learning skills to develop further studies in this area.

Knowledge

- a. define the dynamic process of interaction between society and religions as each shapes, and is shaped by the other interest in the relationship between different religious traditions in a multicultural context;
- b. study religions as 'living' systems which have, and continue to, play a central role in human societies across geographical and cultural boundaries;
- c. describe ways in which religious understandings and worldviews influence aspects of society (e.g. legal codes, social mores, ethics, the Arts, politics, economics, and individual identity);
- d. understand that the phenomenon of religion has been an integral part of all human civilisations; develop definitions of terms and concepts specific to religion and spirituality;
- e. examine ways in which society has been influenced by religion (and the ways in which society influences religion);
- f. examine the place of religion in society;
- g. identify religious behaviours, attitudes, and ways of life;
- h. identify aspects and expressions of religious belief and practice, and participate in group discussions about aspects of religion in society (e.g. culture, economics, legal codes, political debates);
- i. identify ethical perspectives and moral viewpoints which are based on the worldviews of particular religions;
- j. draw conclusions about ways in which religions contribute to global efforts to promote human rights, peace, justice, and environmental sustainability;
- k. use strategies for planning, drafting and presenting ideas in written, oral and multimodal forms.

Skills

- a. demonstrate familiarity with classic and contemporary sociological approaches to the study of religion;
- b. demonstrate ways in which religions provide people with a way to shape their lives and interpret their life experiences;
- c. show understanding about the relationship(s) between religion and social change;
- d. practise ways in which religion intersects with ethnic, racial and gender identities;
- e. design ways in which religion addresses the environment and interspecies relationships;
- f. construct resources online that help students in their understanding, and analyse the relationship between religion and human evolution;
- g. arrange, collect, organise and manage information from a variety of.

Mode of Delivery

This module adopts a blended approach to teaching and learning. Information related to the structure and delivery of the module may be accessed through the IfE Portal. For further details, kindly refer to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures found on the Institute for Education's website.

Assessment Methods

This module will be assessed through: Reflective Tasks, Fieldwork and Write-up

Suggested Readings

Core Reading List

1. Casanova, José. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. US: University of Chicago Press.
2. Chaves, Mark. (1994). "Secularization as declining religious authority." *Social Forces*, 72(3). pp. 749-774.
3. Davie, Grace. (2003). "The Evolution of the Sociology of Religion." In *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. SAGE Publications.
4. Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2004) *Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Hamilton, M.B. (2001). "Religion and rationality: Max Weber". In *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*. UK: Routledge.
6. Hamilton, M.B. (2001). "Religion and ideology: Karl Marx" In *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*. UK: Routledge.
7. O'Toole, Roger. (2001). "Classics in the sociology of religion: an ambiguous legacy." In Fenn, R.K. (Ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*. UK: Riley Blackwell.
8. Hamilton, M.B. (2001). "Religion and solidarity Emile Durkheim". In *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*. UK: Routledge.
9. Riesebrodt, M., and Konieczny, M.E. (2005). "Sociology of religion." In Hinells, J. (Ed.). *The Routledge Companion to Study of Religion*. UK: Psychology Press.

Supplementary Reading List

1. Aldridge, A. (2007). *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction*. Polity Press.
2. Johnstone, R. L. (2006). *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion (8th Ed)*. US: Routledge.
3. Mcguire, M. (2008). *Religion: the Social Context (5th Ed)*. Waveland Pr. Inc.
4. Wilson, B. (1982). *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford University Press.