

**SYLLABUS**  
**“Spiritual But Not Religious”: Spirituality in America**  
**RELG 2660, Spring 2012**  
**University of Virginia, Prof. Matt Hedstrom**

**Institutional Setting**

The University of Virginia is the flagship public university of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Founded by Thomas Jefferson, it is a university that remains at once distinctively Virginian in many ways, and yet also a top-tier national and international research university. The total enrollment of the university is roughly 21,000, with approximately 14,000 undergraduates and 7000 graduate and professional students. Among these, 7.2 percent are African American, 12.3 percent Asian American, and 5.2 percent Hispanic. The student population is 55 percent female and 69 percent Virginia residents. It is fair to describe UVA students as largely upper-middle class and as academically well prepared. The admission rate for the class of 2015, for example, was 32 percent, with 94.5 percent of those admitted graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Though not terribly diverse by race or social class, the student population is quite politically diverse. In addition, student ministries of all varieties are present on campus, with a particularly large and robust set of evangelical student organizations.

**Curricular Context**

The academic strengths of the university are in the humanities, especially History, English, and Religious Studies. This course is offered through the Department of Religious Studies, which is one of the largest Religious Studies departments in the nation (and the largest at a public university) and one of the highest profile departments on campus. It is a popular major and minor. The undergraduate curriculum is tradition-based—majors are required to develop a major concentration in one tradition and a minor concentration in another. This course, then, cuts against the grain of the typical undergraduate offerings in the Department by being theme (spirituality) and geography (the United States) based. It does, however, complement the regularly offered course “Religion in America since 1865.”

This course is designed to be an accessible, appealing, feeder course into the major. It is capped at 120 students, and in the spring of 2012, the first semester I offered it, it met that number and ran a small waitlist. The Department hopes it will grow to 180 students.

**Teaching Methodology**

The class meets in three 50 minutes sessions per week. Two of these sessions are devoted to lecture, given with the aid of visual and audio materials. I aim to make these lectures as interactive and, to a degree, “entertaining” as possible, though with 120 students extended discussion is not possible. In these lectures, I endeavor both to present information and to model ways of thinking about the phenomena of religion and spirituality in their cultural, social, and political contexts and manifestations. To this end, I try to balance the professorial-authority voice with the fellow-inquisitor voice, all while cracking a few jokes and showing a few youtube clips.

One session per week is devoted to discussion of lecture and readings in the TA-led sections. Each TA holds three sessions per week, resulting in 20 students in each section. I know many students feel frustrated by the limited opportunity for discussion of such a lively, contentious, and personal topic. I agree. In the future I intend to teach one section myself.

The assignments for this class are fairly traditional. In addition to attendance, participation, and readings, students write three short papers (for a total of about 12 pages over the course of the semester) and take an in-class midterm and final.

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**Course Description**

What does “spiritual but not religious” mean, and why has it become such a pervasive self-description in contemporary America? This interdisciplinary course surveys spirituality in America, with a particular eye for the relationship between spirituality and formal religion, on the one hand, and secular modes of understanding the self, such as psychology, on the other. Along the way we’ll study everything from AA to yoga to Zen meditation, with stops in Christian rock, Beat poetry, Abstract Expressionist painting, spirit photography, the feminist movement, environmentalism, and recent film. The study of spirituality forces us to confront many of the central concerns of modern American life: psychology, self-help, and therapeutic culture; global religious and cultural encounters; gender and sexuality; and consumerism and mass culture. In the end, we’ll come to see spirituality in America as a complex intermingling of the great world religions, modern therapeutic psychology, the politics of movements for social change, and a crassly commercialized, billion-dollar culture industry.

Is this the fate of religion in a modern, capitalist, globalized society?

**Course Objectives**

**1. Content.** The primary objective of this course is to acquire a deeper understanding of the history and religious, cultural, and political significance of spirituality in the modern United States. Students will learn not only about specific aspects of spirituality, but also about the way spirituality is shaped by, and in turn shapes, mass culture, consumerism, psychology, politics, and social diversity.

**2. Theory and methods.** In addition, by the end of the course students should be accustomed to thinking about religion as a cultural system. To investigate religion as an aspect of culture we will employ the tools of cultural studies and cultural history. We will also confront foundational religious studies questions: What is spirituality? What is religion? What is the secular? How do these relate to culture, economics, and politics? Greater familiarity with these theoretical concerns is a second objective of this course.

**3. Humanistic education.** Finally, this course, like all courses in the humanities, aims to sharpen students’ abilities to read, reason, write, and discuss. These are the essential skills of educated life, and we hone them through continual practice.

**Format:** Class time will consist of lectures twice a week, and a weekly mandatory discussion section.

**Requirements:** Assignments are listed in the Course Schedule on the day or week they are due. In summary, the course requirements are as follows:

- reading of all assigned texts;
- regular class and discussion attendance and participation;
- a mid-term exam;
- three short papers;
- one or two in-lecture quizzes;
- and a final exam.

**Due Dates:**

**Short Paper 1:** February 1

**Short Paper 2:** April 9

**Short Paper 3:** April 30

**Midterm Exam:** February 29

**Final Exam:** Thursday, May 10, 2012 from 2:00-5:00

**Communication:** All students are required to maintain a working UVa email address and to check it regularly. Correspondence related to this class must be via email, phone, or in person (not via Facebook, text message, IM, carrier pigeon, or smoke signal). Also, this course has a Collab site that students are required to check regularly for postings and updates.

**Grading:** Paper 1: 10%; Paper 2: 10%; Paper 3: 10%; Midterm Exam: 20%; Quizzes: 5%; Attendance and Participation: 15%; Final Exam: 30% I will assign grades using the following scale:

A=93-98	B=80-82	D+=67-69
A=90-92	C+=77-79	D=63-66
B+=87-89	C=73-76	D=60-62
B=83-86	C-=70-72	F=below 60

See the Grading Rubric handout on Collab for more details on my grading policy.

**Make-Up Policy:** Late papers will be docked one letter grade per day, except under a few limited circumstances: **1)** You have **prior** approval from me to turn in the paper late. The longer before the paper deadline you contact me, the more likely I am to grant an extension. Trying to contact me does not cut it—I must respond to your email or phone call. If you have not heard from me, you must turn in the paper or receive the late penalty. **2)** Under certain circumstances I will grant an extension after the fact, but only if it is clear that in no way were you able to meet the deadline or contact me. This is at my discretion. Do not count on it. Remember, a C, D, or even an F is much better than a zero.

I do not offer make-up exams for a missed quiz, midterm, or final, unless you have made prior arrangements with me or your TA, and then only under very limited circumstances.

**Tardiness:** Tardiness greater than 5 minutes late will count as an unexcused absence; repeat offenders will not be admitted to class.

**Cell Phones and Laptops:** Cell phone use, including texting, is not permitted in class. Violators will be removed from class. Laptop use for notetaking is permitted as long as they don't become a distraction (meaning, as long as you don't screw around online and distract yourself and others).

**Attendance:** A critical aspect of fulfilling your obligations as a citizen of this class is being physically present. We all learn from each other, whether through discussion, by asking questions during lecture, or in conversation outside of class stimulated by what happens in class. The learning of all is therefore diminished by the absence of some. For this reason, if you acquire more than two unexcused discussion section absences, you will lose one step on your final grade for each subsequent absence.

But attendance is about more than avoiding such a penalty. On the most basic level, I will present information in class, and your TAs will cover material in section, that you get nowhere else. Attendance is first and foremost a self-enforcing proposition—those who skip class do poorly.

**Disabilities:** If a student has a disability that might qualify under University guidelines for special accommodations, he or she should contact the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center for information on appropriate policies and procedures.

**Drop/Withdraw:** February 2 is the last day to drop a course without the “w” (withdraw) grade. March 14 is the last day to withdraw from a course and receive the “w” (withdraw) grade.

**Honor:** All work must conform to the requirements of the University Honor System. For our purposes, you are encouraged to converse and study with your classmates, both in and out of the classroom, and to

discuss ideas for papers. However, all writing must be done independently. Please see me with any specific questions or concerns.

**Escape clause:** Everything in this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.

### **Reading List**

All assigned books are available for purchase from the University Bookstore, as well as Amazon and other online bookstores. Additional readings, as noted in the Course Schedule below, will be available for download from the Resources area of the course Collab site.

### **Required reading**

1. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (ISBN: 978-0415302098)
2. Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (ISBN: 978-0385496094)
3. Don Lattin, *Following Our Bliss: How the Spiritual Ideals of the Sixties Shape Our Lives Today* (ISBN: 0060730633)
4. Dinty Moore, *The Accidental Buddhist* (ISBN: 978-0385492676)
5. Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (ISBN: 0060858346)
6. Additional readings posted in the Resources area of Collab, as indicated below.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1**

#### **Wednesday, January 18**

Orientation and Introduction

### **Week 2**

#### **Readings**

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, “Introduction”
- King and Carrette, *Selling Spirituality*, Introduction and Chapter 1
- Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart*, “Religion” (1985) on Collab
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0926/Millennial-Generation-challenges-religion-in-America>

#### **Lectures**

#### **Monday, January 23**

Setting the Scene: The State of American Spirituality

#### **Wednesday, January 25**

Hearing from the Critics: A Culture of Narcissism?

## **PART I: A HERITAGE OF SEEKING: 1830-1945**

### **Week 3**

#### **Readings**

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, Chapters 1 and 2
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Divinity School Address” (1838) on Collab
- “the Clifton Buddha” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

#### **Lectures**

#### **Monday, January 30**

Transcendentalism and Romantic Spirituality

**Wednesday, February 1**

Nature and the Sacred in the Nineteenth Century

\*\*Due Feb 1: Short Paper #1\*\*

**Week 4**

**Readings**

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, Chapters 3 and 4
- Ralph Waldo Trine, “Fullness of Life—Bodily Health and Vigor” from *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897) on Collab.

**Lectures**

**Monday, February 6**

Spiritualism, Spirituality and Women’s Empowerment

**Wednesday, February 8**

Spirit, Mind, and Healing: New Thought

**Week 5**

**Readings**

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, Chapter 5
- Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road,” “I Sing the Body Electric,” “Mediums,” and “A Clear Midnight” from *Leaves of Grass* (1855 and later) on Collab
- William James, selections from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) on Collab
- “Alcoholic Anonymous” and “belief-science” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

**Lectures**

**Monday, February 13**

Walt Whitman: Beauty and/of the Body

**Wednesday, February 15**

William James: Father of Modern Spirituality?

**Week 6**

**Readings**

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, Chapter 6
- Walt Whitman, “Passage to India” (1870) on Collab
- Swami Vivekananda, “Hinduism” (1893) on Collab
- Paul Carus, “The Dharma” (1898) on Collab
- Swami Yogananda, excerpts from *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) on Collab
- “Zen in America” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

**Lectures**

**Monday, February 20**

Mysticism and the American Encounter with the East

**Wednesday, February 22**

Mysticism and the American Encounter with the East, Part II

**Week 7**

**Readings**

- Study for midterm!
- Note: sections will not meet this week.

**Lecture**

**Monday, February 27**

The Spiritual Origins of Advertising and Consumerism

**Wednesday, February 29**

\*\*In-class midterm exam\*\*

**SPRING BREAK**

**PART II: THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY**

**Theme 1: The Therapeutic**

**Week 8**

**Readings**

- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Introduction and Chapter 1
- Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, Chapter 2
- Abraham Maslow, selections from *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* on Collab

**Lectures**

**Monday, March 12**

Humanistic Psychology and Positive Thinking

**Wednesday, March 14**

Esalen and the Counterculture: The Human Potential Movement

**Week 9**

**Readings**

- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapter 8
- Moore, *The Accidental Buddhist*, 1-71
- Ram Dass, *Be Here Now*, excerpts on Collab
- “cannabis club” and “LSD” at <http://frecuenci.es>

**Lecture**

**Monday, March 19**

Psychedelica: New Ways of Seeing and Hearing?

**Wednesday, March 21**

Psychology and Self-Help in Contemporary America

**Theme 2: Turning East**

**Week 10**

**Readings**

- Moore, *The Accidental Buddhist*, 72-136
- Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, Chapter 3
- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapters 4 and 5
- Jack Kerouac, selections from *Dharma Bums* (1958) on Collab

**Lectures**

**Monday, March 26**

Spirituality and The Beats

**Wednesday, March 28**

The Counterculture and Asian Religions

**Week 11**

***Readings***

- Moore, *The Accidental Buddhist*, 139-197
- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapter 2
- Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Miracle of Mindfulness” (1975) on Collab
- Thomas Merton, selections from *Seeds of Contemplation* (1961); “A Christian Looks at Zen” from *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968); and “Letter from Asia” (1968) on Collab
- “Who Owns Yoga?” at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/who-owns-yoga/2012/01/11/gIQA0ZZ9rP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/who-owns-yoga/2012/01/11/gIQA0ZZ9rP_story.html)
- “meaninglessness,” “John Cage,” and “Iyengar” <http://freq.uenci.es>

***Lectures***

**Monday, April 2**

Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hahn: Christian-Buddhist Dialogues

**Wednesday, April 4**

Yoga and Mindfulness in Contemporary America

**Theme 3: Nature, Gender, and the Body**

**Week 12**

***Readings***

- Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*, 1-114
- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapter 3
- “highway,” “science,” “paradox,” “Hawaii Volcanoes National Park,” “indian,” and “A Course in Miracles” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

***Lectures***

**Monday, April 9**

Modern Environmentalism

**\*\*Due April 9: Short Paper #2\*\***

**Wednesday, April 11**

New Age

**Week 13**

***Readings***

- Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*, 117-198
- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapter 7
- Starhawk, selection from *The Spiral Dance* (1979) on Collab
- Excerpts from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976) on Collab
- “Burning Man,” “Ira C. Craddock” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

***Lectures***

**Monday, April 16**

Wicca and Neo-paganism

**Wednesday, April 18**

Sexual Revolutions

**Theme 4: Consumerism and Popular Culture**

**Week 14**

***Readings***

- Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*, 199-272
- Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*, Chapters 9, 11, 12 and Conclusion
- “The Whole Earth Catalog,” “iPhone,” and “chicken sandwich” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

***Lectures***

**Monday, April 23**

Spiritual Consumerism and Popular Culture

**Wednesday, April 25**

Spiritual Consumerism and Popular Culture, Part II

**Week 15**

***Readings***

- Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, “Epilogue”
- Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, Chapter 4 and Conclusion
- “spirituality, revolutionary” at <http://freq.uenci.es>

***Lecture***

**Monday, April 30**

Spirituality, Politics, and Ethics: A return to the question of narcissism

\*\*Due April 30: Short Paper #3\*\*

Final Exam: Thursday, May 10, 2012 from 2:00-5:00

Have a great summer. You’ve earned it!