

REL 773: Seminar: Religion and Secular States

Fall 2009, Tuesdays, 2:30-5:00 pm

Instructor: Dr. Robert N. Minor

<http://www.people.ku.edu/~rminor>

This seminar is an analysis and comparison of a variety of ways selected countries that value secularism are working out the idea of a "secular state." It centers on the reading and discussion of the required texts and the research papers prepared for distribution and presentation in class at the end of the semester. Students are expected to take an academically critical stance and come to each class prepared to initiate discussion and actively participate in it, not worried about having the "right" answers but showing an engagement with the readings. Do the authors make their cases and provide evidence for them?

The semester grade is based on discussion of readings (50%) and a final 20-25-page research paper (50%). Attendance is crucial, required, and the minimum for passing the course. Students are expected to be prepared in every class period to initiate discussion in order to receive an "A" or "B" grade for discussion. Missing one class period is missing a week of classes and missing that day means a zero, not merely an "F," for that week of discussion. One cannot get an "A" in this class if one has any unexcused absences, a "B," two or more absences excused or unexcused, a "C" three or more. The only acceptable excuses are documented illness and documented death in the family. The final grading scale for this course will be: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F.

The following required texts are available from the bookstores. Assignments in the texts will be made in the prior class.

- (1) Robert N. Minor. *The Religious, the Spiritual and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- (2) M. Hakan Yavuz. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- (3) Helen Hardacre. *Shinto and the State, 1888-1988*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- (4) Ronald B. Flowers. *That Godless Court? Supreme Court Decisions on Church-State Relationships*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- (5) John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

The student and instructor very, very, very early in the term (in order to obtain necessary interlibrary loan materials for the paper) must mutually agree on a topic for the research paper. The paper should have the following features:

- (1) It has a thesis, and, thus, is an argument for at least one main point. The author should usually be able to state this thesis in one declarative sentence.
- (2) It ranges widely in the primary sources. It is not just limited to one work by a thinker or movement, but shows familiarity with all of the thinker or movement's products.
- (3) It is a part of a scholarly tradition. It shows familiarity with all of the relevant scholarly literature on the topic as related to the thesis and is clear that it is not repeating a previous thesis.
- (4) It contributes to our knowledge of the topic, thinker, or movement. The contribution may be to "pure knowledge," i.e. it is an interesting point toward the understanding of the thinker, movement, or period; or "practical knowledge," i.e., it has an application.
- (5) It is to be distributed in class a week before it is presented so that all students will be able to read it before coming to class. It becomes required reading for all the students in the class. Obviously, late papers are not possible and require dropping the course.

Evidence of plagiarism or other academic misconduct will result, at the minimum, in failure of the course. Any student who has an identified disability that prevents the fullest expression of abilities should see the instructor immediately.