

Religion and Sports: RELS008

Lectures: Tuesday/Thursday 10:15 – 11:15 AM

Lectures occur in BENN 231

Recitations: Friday 10:15-11:15 AM or 12:00-12:59 PM

Recitations occur in Claudia Cohen Hall 203

Professor: Megan Robb (robbme@sas.upenn.edu)

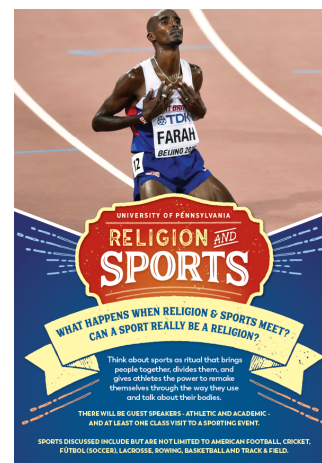
Office: Claudia Cohen Hall 225

Office Hours: In person, Tuesday 1-3 PM; Thursday 12-2 PM

TA: Rushnae Kabir (rukabir@sas.upenn.edu)

Office: Claudia Cohen Hall 231

Office Hours: Drop-in style, in person, Tuesday 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM



Professional football player Tim Tebow used to publicly kneel in prayer before almost every game. Elite runner Mo Farah rescheduled his Ramadan fast in 2011 when the Muslim month of fasting coincided with the world championships. What happens when religion and sports meet? Can a sport really be a religion? How do sports communities grapple with questions of equity and power, particularly in Philadelphia? By the end of this course you will be able to articulate a sophisticated answer to these two questions and be better prepared to understand and interpret the role of sports in society today.

This course will teach you how to think about sports as ritual that brings people together, divides them, and gives athletes the power to remake themselves through the way they use and talk about their bodies. We will first look at the ceremonial and ritual aspects of sports from the view of the spectator or fan, considering the question of whether sports teams are functionally similar to religion. Then we will look at the ritual aspect of sport from the viewpoint of the athlete, considering the ways that athletes use their bodies in sports to foster community and self-realization. There will be a secondary focus on raising ethical questions through a discussion of case studies based on real events. Issues of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, age and disability will be prominently featured. There will be guest speakers- athletic and academic and at least one class visit to a sporting event. Sports discussed include but are not limited to American Football, Baseball, Cricket, Wrestling, Football (Soccer), Basketball and Track & Field.

Grade Breakdown:

Reading questions: 22%

- Writing/reflection/research assignments due throughout the semester, 1 point each

Basketball Event Analysis: 15%

- 5% field notes, 10% final analysis

Midterm Exam: 15%

- You will get a study guide two weeks before the exam

Final Auto-ethnography: 40%

- 5% field notes, 35% final product

Participation: 10%

- Showing up ready to work is a huge part of success. Each class you are present and engaged you will earn a point. If you have perfect attendance (we have 28 lectures and 14 recitations) you get more than 100% on your participation grade. This also means you can miss a couple of classes and still be fine.

Required Texts:

1) Alpert, Rebecca T. *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*. New York: Columbia, 2015. The book is available as an Ebook on Penn Libraries.

2) Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*. 2nd Edition. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. Two copies of this book are at the Course Reserve desk in Van Pelt; it is available as an audiobook on Amazon if you prefer to listen to it.

3) All other readings are available on Canvas/Perusall.

Important Note: If the price of the book/s would make it hard for you to stay in the class, please let me know; there are places where you can borrow a book, and I have one or two spare copies to loan out.

You must attend the following athletic event and write field notes:

Philadelphia 76ers vs. Miami Heat, Wednesday, February 14th at 7 PM

Make-up date:

Philadelphia 76ers vs. Golden State Warriors, Wednesday, February 7th at 7 PM

In an emergency if you are not able to attend one of those games, as a fallback you should attend one of the following:

Penn vs. Yale at the Palestra on February 16th

Penn vs. Brown at the Palestra on February 17th

Class Syllabus

Unit 1: Are Sports like Religion?

Functionalist, Essentialist, and Constructivist Definitions of Religion

*All homework assignments are listed on the date that they are assigned, NOT the date on which they are due. All homework assignments are due before the next class (not recitation) listed on the syllabus. Check Canvas for all updated due dates.

Class 1, Thursday, January 18th - Syllabus Review

Homework: Read pages 1-35 of Alpert, Rebecca T. "Introduction." In *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*, 1-35. New York: Columbia, 2015. [35 pages]

Recitation 1

Class 2, Tuesday, January 23rd – Introduction to the Category of "Religion"

Homework: Read pp. 42-46 in Alpert, Rebecca T. *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*. New York: Columbia, 2015. (NB: Read the first assignment BEFORE you start *Friday Night Lights*) AND Read "Pre-Season" Chapters 1-3 of Bissinger, H.G. "Pre-Season." In *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 1-78. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. [82 pages]

Class 3, Thursday, January 25th – Reflecting on the Category of "Sport"

Homework: Read Chapters 4-8 of Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 79-186. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. [107 pages]

Recitation 2

Class 4, Tuesday, January 30th - Beyond Essentialism and Functionalism: Religion & Sport Intertwined

Homework: Read Chs. 9-12, Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 187-270. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. [83 pages]

[Please note: course selection period ends January 25]

Class 5, Thursday, February 1– Religion and Sport Defined in *Friday Night Lights* (FNL)

Homework: Finish Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 271-364. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. [93 pages]

Recitation 3

Unit 2: Functionalism: Sports as Sites of Collective Effervescence (Durkheim)

Class 6, Tuesday, February 6th – Religion and Sport Defined in *Friday Night Lights* (FNL); Intro to Collective Effervescence

Homework: Read Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Field. New York: Free Press, 1995. Read from bottom of page 216 (beginning of part III) to the middle of 221. [5 pages]

Class 7, Thursday, February 8th – Introduction to Collective Effervescence in FNL

Homework: Read Bale, John. "Space, Place, and Body Culture: Yi-Fu Tuan and a Geography of Sport." *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* (78), no. 3 (1996): 163-171. [9 pages]
 Extra Credit: "Deepen your understanding of Durkheim's Collective Effervescence" Assignment

Recitation 4

Unit 3: Constructivism: Body Culture, Habitus, and Sport (Bourdieu)

Class 8, Tuesday, February 13th – What is Body Culture?

Homework: Attend 76ers game on Wednesday evening

Class 9, Thursday, February 15th – Body Culture Continued; Field Notes to Analysis

Homework: Read Grenfell, Michael. "Bourdieu on Sport." In *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport*, edited by Richard Giulianotti, 61-71. New York: Routledge, 2016. [10 pages]

Recitation 5 – Basketball Event Analysis Workshop

[Note: drop period ends February 27]

Class 10, Tuesday, February 20th – Bourdieu and the Habitus of Sports

Homework: Read Alpert, Rebecca T. "Juju: Witchcraft and African Football." In *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*, 75-84. New York: Columbia, 2015. [9 pages]

Class 11, Thursday, February 22nd – Juju, Witchcraft, and Bourdieu

Homework: Submit Basketball Event Analysis by Sunday, February 25th at 11:59 PM

Recitation 6 – Midterm Review

Class 12, Tuesday, February 27th – Midterm Review and Intro to Auto-Ethnography Assignment

Class 13, Thursday, February 29th – Midterm Exam

Homework: Read "Jewish Umpires and Baseball Chapel." In *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*, 85-93. New York: Columbia, 2015. [8 pages]. See Canvas page for full assignment.

[SPRING BREAK: March 2-10]

Class 14, Tuesday, March 12th – Case Study: Jewish Umpires and Baseball Chapel

Homework: Watch documentary *By the Dawn's Early Light*.

Class 15, Thursday, March 14th – Case Study: Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and the National Anthem Ritual

Homework: Read Alpert, Rebecca T. "Oscar Pistorius and What it Means to be Human." In *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*, 47-56. New York: Columbia, 2015. [9 pages]

Recitation 7

Unit 4: Applying Theory to Ethics and Practice in Sports in the USA

Class 16, Tuesday, March 19th – Disability, Power, and Habitus

Homework: Prepare for Guest Visit using discussion board

Class 17, Thursday, March 21st – Guest visit from Pastor Ted Winsley, Christian Chaplain of the Philadelphia Eagles

Homework: Reflection exercise (you will reflect during recitations on Friday)

Homework: Read Fridley, Alison, Daniel Springer, Sarah Stokowski, and Arden Anderson. "Athlete–Student–Influencer: How the Introduction of Name, Image, and Likeness in Intercollegiate Athletics Further Complicates Applications of Role Theory." *Sociology of sport journal* (2023): 1–9.

Recitation 8

[Note: Grade type change deadline March 22nd]

Class 18, Tuesday, March 26th – The Ethics of Amateurism and Professional Athletics

Homework: Preparation Exercise for expert visitor

Class 19, Thursday, March 28th – Expert Guest Visit

Homework: Read Byrne, Julie. "Introduction," and "Chapter 3: Bodies in Basketball." In *O God of Players: the Story of the Immaculata Mighty Macs*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 1-30; 76-112. [66 pages]

Recitation 9

Class 20, Tuesday, April 2nd – Fun, Bodies, and Basketball in Catholicism

Homework: Martínková, Irena, Jim Parry, and Miroslav Imbrišević. "Transgender Athletes and Principles of Sport Categorization: Why Genealogy and the Gendered Body Will Not Help." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2023): 21–33.

[Note: April 2nd is the last day to withdraw from a course]

Class 21, Thursday, April 4th – Attitudes to Transgender Inclusion in Athletics

Homework: Read Putney, Clifford. "Introduction" and "Men and Religion," In *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*, 1-11; 73-98. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. [36 pages]

Recitation 10

Unit 5: Sports, Nationalism, and Colonialism (South Asia, Britain, and North America)

Class 22, Tuesday, April 9th– Muscular Christianity in Protestant America

Homework: Read Guha, Ramachandra. "Preface," "The Homesick Colonial and the Imitative Native," AND "The Condemned Playground." In *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport*, xi-xv; 3-15; 304-318. London: Picador, 2002. [30 pages total]

Class 23, Thursday, April 11th – Cricket and Colonial Masculinity in South Asia

Homework: Watch two videos on Perusall and comment.

Recitation 11

Class 24, Tuesday, April 16th – Guest Lecture by Rushnae Kabir

Homework: Read three Moeen Ali Op-Eds

Optional: Burdsey, Daniel. "Un/making the British Asian Male Athlete: Race, Legibility and the State." *Sociological Research Online* (2015) Vol. 20, No. 3: 190-206. [16 pages]

Class 25, Thursday, April 18th – Race, Legibility, and the State in the South Asian Diaspora

Homework: Read Zirin, David. "Jackie Robinson and the Politics of Stealing Home" and "Rumble, Young Man, Rumble: Muhammad Ali." In *What's My Name Fool: Sports and Resistance in the United States*, 37-72. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005. [35 pages]

Recitation 12

Class 26, Tuesday, April 23rd – Nationalism, Sport and Race in 20th Century USA

Class 27, Thursday, April 25 – Christian Athletes and the Black Athlete in the 21st Century; Discussing Auto-ethnographies

Recitation 13

Class 28, Tuesday, April 30th – Class Retrospective

Additional Course Information

Missing Exams and Classes:

There are a few types of absences where you still earn credit for being “present” even if you are not in the room: religious holidays and athletic competition (not practice). If you will miss class because of a religious holiday, let me know within the first two weeks by email. If you are an athlete and anticipate conflicts between competition and class send me the following:

- 1) A PDF or screenshot of your competition and practice schedule within the first two weeks of class and
- 2) The email address and name of your coach.

Important dates:

Drop period ends: February 27

Midterm Exam: February 29th

Spring Break: March 2-10

Grade Type Change Deadline: March 22

Last Day to withdraw from a course: April 2

Last Day of Class: April 30

Electronic Devices:

I encourage you to monotask in this class. It will help you focus and learn more effectively. Please turn your phone on silent and do not have it out on the desk unless it is needed for a class activity. Please only use your laptops for work related to this class – I encourage you to take notes by hand, as research shows that this leads to better comprehension. It is easy to transcribe what someone is saying without processing the content of that lecture. This policy helps us cultivate a classroom space that promotes reflection and risk-taking; your screens can distract other people as well as yourself.

What happens if I turn in an assignment late?

Sometimes things come up. Sometimes you need more time to do your best and get the most from an assignment.

If this is the case for you for a particular assignment, in an assignment due date extension form available on the course home page on Canvas, tell me for which assignment you need more time, and then give a reasonable updated due date (your email will be collected when you submit the form). **You can do this only twice in a semester.** Once you identify a new due date, you have to stick to it, so plan carefully.

Terms and Conditions:

1. Assignments submitted more than two days after the due date may not be graded and/or returned in the normal time frame. Sometimes such assignments may not be graded until the end of the term. You probably will not get as much feedback.

2. Everyone needs extensions sometimes, and this will be true for you beyond this course, and

beyond your college career. However, remember that if you are requesting extensions frequently, then people may begin to wonder if everything is OK, and if this is the case in this course, you and I should have a more meaningful and in-depth discussion than just this Google Form.

Academic Integrity

An important element of academic integrity is fully and correctly attributing any materials taken from the work of others. Feel free to talk to me before completing assignments if you are confused about the right way to reference the work of others.

You may not consult the submitted, graded work of students who have taken this or similar classes previously in order to get a leg up on any assignment. You may look at the lecture notes of students who were in previous classes or chat informally with them about class concepts. Sharing knowledge is great; sharing graded work is not.

If you plagiarize or cheat in this course you will receive a failing grade in the class. This includes using Chat GPT to craft written responses. All written assignments are run through Turnitin, and Turnitin has a built-in tool that allows me to detect whether something is written by Chat GPT.

Please familiarize yourself with Penn's [Code of Academic Integrity](#), which applies to this course. I do not anticipate any problems with academic integrity. In the unlikely event that any concerns do arise on this score, I will forward all related materials to [Penn's Office of Student Conduct](#) and if they determine you cheated by plagiarizing or copying the work of others, you will fail the class. If you are unsure if you can abide by the code of academic integrity, please drop the class.

Grading:

Except in cases where the grader has added numbers incorrectly, I will only regrade entire exams or papers. You must wait 24 hours after receiving the grade to request a regrade. In addition, you may not request a regrade more than one week (seven days) after seeing the grade. All regrade requests must be submitted in writing with a full explanation of why you think the work was incorrectly graded. Please understand that once you submit your work for regrading, the grade can go either up or down.

Academic Accommodations

I am available to discuss academic accommodations that you need. Requests for academic accommodations should be made during the first two weeks of the semester, unless the need for accommodations surfaces after the semester's start. Students should register with Student Disabilities Services (SDS) to determine what qualifies as reasonable academic accommodations. Please see Penn's policy on equal access for more information.

Academic Freedom Statement

The policies of the University of Pennsylvania protect academic freedom, as defined in the [AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles](#). This statement has been endorsed by over 250 scholarly and educational organizations in the United States, and its principles are written into faculty handbooks nationwide, including [Penn's](#). The principles of academic freedom were established to protect the integrity of research and teaching from interference by donors, trustees, politicians, and others who might seek to make universities serve private and political interests. They are founded on the idea that a university's purpose is to generate new knowledge that can serve the common good in a

democratic society, and that generating new knowledge requires free and open inquiry. To safeguard the university's public mission, academic freedom entails the following rights for all faculty members—whether tenure-track or non-tenure track, and including graduate research and teaching assistants—and for students:

- The right of faculty members to full freedom in research, teaching, extramural speech (public speech on issues of general concern) and intramural speech (speech about the university itself, including criticism of it).
- The right of students to freedom in learning, which includes freedom of association and expression and freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

Academic freedom is only as strong as the institutions, procedures, and professional norms that faculty members established over the last century to protect it: institutions of faculty governance such as Faculty Senates and unions; the institution of tenure; and due process procedures that protect both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty against unjust discipline or dismissal. For further information about academic freedom, see the [AAUP-Penn website](#).