

Draft PGS Syllabus – subject to change before class begins

SACRED STUFF:

RELIGIOUS BODIES, PLACES, AND OBJECTS

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Drop-in Hours: **Mon. 3:00-4:00** in person **Cohen 226** or **ON ZOOM**

Class time: **Tues./Thurs. 5:15-6:45**



Stonehenge, Wiltshire, UK

"Now, as in the past, we see that society never stops creating new sacred things."

- **Emile Durkheim**, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912

"Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane."

- **Mircea Eliade**, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 1957

"He says he believes, but what he really does is feel, smell, hear, and see."

- **David Morgan**, *Religion and Material Culture*, 2012

The Sacred: Where Does It Come From? And What Does It Do?

Does the sacred start with what's in our heads—our concepts and beliefs? Or is our encounter with the sacred made, shaped and strengthened by the people, places, and things around us? This course will explore how sacrality happens in the material world. We'll start with classical and contemporary theories on the relationship of the sacred to stuff. We'll then consider examples of how sacrality is animated not just by books, but through interactions with objects, spaces, bodies, monuments, color, design, architecture, and film. We'll ask how these material expressions of religion move beyond private faith and connect the sacred to politics and identity.

As a Penn Global Seminar, this class includes a week and a half of travel at the end of the spring semester. Students are required not only to join the travel portion of the class, but to participate fully in class discussion and pay close attention to course materials during the semester to make sure you derive the full benefit from the travel component.

Student work will be assessed in **two research papers**, one at midterm and one at the end of the semester, a **midterm exam**, daily **reading sheets**, and **participation**. There will be no final exam.

Course Objectives

This class is not just about supplying you with a body of facts, but training the set of skills that drive intellectual inquiry. My objectives in this course are:

- *To introduce you to current debates about the nature of "the sacred" and especially how that concept is applied to the study of material culture and to identity.*
- *To equip you with a basic working knowledge of three areas of material culture studies: space (like architecture), things (like monuments), and embodiment (like practice), and to supply you with a sense of the issues each of these raises for sacrality.*

- *To develop your conversational, reading, observational, and writing skills.*
- *To challenge you: to provide difficult, theoretical, counterintuitive material, and in the process to strengthen your ability to read, to ask questions, and to test the limits of existing knowledge.*

Texts

All class books are available as eBooks through Penn library. All other course materials will be posted on Canvas.

Reading Sheets

For most classes, there will be a reading sheet posted on Canvas corresponding to the assigned readings (or films). These assignments are pass/fail—you get either one point, half a point, or zero points for each depending on how well you respond to the questions. These are not meant to be hard: they should add at most 10–15 minutes to your reading time. They will show me that you’re doing the readings in depth and they will help you create an ongoing written record of your engagement with the texts of the course—a record that will become a resource for you as it comes time to write your papers. However, they must be completed on your own. See the [Reading Sheet Instructions](#) on Canvas for more about this.

Midterm Exam

This class has one **in-class exam** that will test your general knowledge of key terms and concepts up to and including **week 7**. The midterm questions will mostly come from the readings but will also include some major terminology from the lectures, which I’ll flag as they come up.

Papers

You’ll have two papers in this class, one running 1800–2000 words (6–7 pp) and the other 2500–3000 words (8–10 pp). Each paper will combine the theoretical problems we’ve discussed in the class with case studies. Within those broad guidelines, you will develop your own thesis and topic according to your interests.

A few weeks before each paper you'll send me a **proposal** that lays out the approach you'll be taking. I'll return this to you with comments and questions. This exchange will become the basis of the essay you end up writing.

These are **analysis papers** showing me that you are **thinking through the issues of the class and developing a persuasive point of view**, *not* research papers that require you to comprehensively explore a new topic. Therefore, although you will be expected to use multiple sources from the class readings, the papers **will not require you to use material from outside class**. (But you can if you wish.)

Writing is an important mechanism that teaches you not just how to communicate information, but how to organize it. Writing, like thinking, is a lifelong discipline, and you can never invest too much in becoming a better writer. The [Office of Learning Resources](#) has lots of great workshops and training sessions that are available to you if you're anxious about writing or if you just want to build up your skills.

Instructions for your first proposal and essay are available [here](#).

Instructions for your final proposal and essay are available [here](#).

Class Conduct

The classroom is a community of learning. The foundation of this community is respect. Disagreement is productive, but learning to create a space within which we can constructively disagree with one another will be one of the projects of this class.

At the same time, this class is going to challenge you with difficult readings and concepts. Some of these readings may even provoke discomfort, which I encourage you to explore as best you can. I respect your willingness to tax yourself intellectually, and to allow yourself to be frustrated and to take risks with this material. If you find some of the material distressing, let me know. I'm happy to flag up any content you may find upsetting in advance or to discuss any issues you might be having in office hours. Drop-in hours are generally a great way to come and talk to me or the TA if you have questions or concerns.

One part of the community of respect is not bringing other conversations into the classroom. That means no cell phones, no texting—reading or sending. If you have a special situation and need to take a call, let me know ahead of time. Laptops are fine as long as you **keep other conversations off your laptop** while you're in class—email, social media, chats, etc. Please **close all programs on your laptop** other than your word processor if you are taking notes.

Fragmenting your attention makes you miss things and degrades your ability to participate. Most people don't realize this but it's also very distracting for me and people sitting nearby.

Building a community of learning also requires a full commitment to academic integrity. The course will follow all relevant procedures on academically dishonest behavior, which sabotages trust between you and me and you and other students. That can include not only things like plagiarism, but providing or soliciting reading sheet answers, submitting incorrect documents, using AI-generated material, or deception. Please spend some time with Penn's [Code of Academic Integrity](#) to make sure you're aware of these parameters. And see me (in advance!) if you are unsure about citations or **anything else** that could be a violation of good academic practice.

Because the evaluation and development of your writing is a major element of this class, AI-generated and AI-assisted text cannot be used under any circumstances. It's implicitly calling on me to provide detailed feedback on work that you did not create. Any written assignment that is found likely to have incorporated any amount of AI-generated or AI-assisted text—even a single sentence—will be given a grade of zero and no feedback will be provided. Some such cases may also (1) result in an automatic failing grade for the class as a whole and/or (2) be reported as an academic integrity violation, at my discretion.

Finally, as a Penn Global Seminar, this class will require a high degree of commitment **during the semester** to make sure we get the full benefit of our travel experience in May. If you are overloaded this semester—or are anticipating difficulty completing the daily reading sheets or meeting the attendance requirements—this class will not be a good option for you this year and I encourage you to look into it the next time it's offered!

Individual Concerns

There will be some very difficult material raised in this class. If you want a heads-up about any potentially emotionally challenging topics, **please don't hesitate** to come talk to me anytime and we'll figure out a strategy. I'm also available to talk about any needed accommodations for this class based on the impact of a disability. We should consider this within the first 2 weeks of the semester in light of [Student Disabilities Services](#) guidelines.

Participation

Participation is a major component of this class, but how you participate is (in part) up to you. In-class discussions, meetings in drop-in hours, contributions to Canvas discussion boards, and correspondence with me will all be factored into participation. Respect for the classroom space—helping to create an environment where other students can learn—will be considered, as well.

Canvas

This class has a Canvas site where all materials will be posted. I'll also use Canvas any time I need to send a message to everyone in the class. I encourage you to keep your notifications set to "on" (the default) for the site.

There are two discussion boards set up on Canvas. These are optional but there for you if you want to talk something out. One board is for general questions about the class policies and procedures. You can, of course, contact me with any questions you have, but if you ask your question in the forum it might help someone else who is wondering the same thing. I'll respond as quickly as possible to these questions.

The second board is for any issues relating to the content of the class. Questions you have about the readings, ideas you want to present or think through, and thoughts prompted by current events are all great uses of this forum. If you ask a question, I'll wait a few days before responding to give other people a chance to add their thoughts.

Attendance

This is a conversation class, which means a major part of the work of the class comes from our discussions. **The texts are not the class!** Attendance at all sessions is important. You may miss up to **two** sessions for any reason—illness, religious observance, sporting events—with no penalty. Beyond these two, each absence will lower your grade by **two points** unless we've come to an agreement in advance (regarding documented medical concerns, for example). You'll be responsible for making up missed work and material for any missed class by liaising with your peers.

Important: Missing a significant number of class sessions will make it impossible for you to fully engage with the material and you **will be required to drop the course**, at my discretion. If you know you'll be missing a significant number of class sessions, you must come see me at the beginning of the semester. If circumstances arise during the semester that will force you to miss multiple sessions, you must reach out to me after no more than **one** missed session.

Grading

Grades are calculated using a points system. At the end of the course, your points are converted into a letter grade using this scale.

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
97-100	94-96	90-93	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	60-69	<60

A-range grades are given for truly exceptional scholarship. They are assigned to work that goes above and beyond, demonstrating a mastery of the material, a unified and focused argument, and an innovative approach.

B-range grades are given for very good work. They reflect a skillful argument that is perhaps a bit distracted in places, but still in excess of expectations. The engagement with the material is nonetheless comprehensive and rich.

C-range grades are given for work that is satisfactory. Such work shows evidence of thoughtful engagement with the material, but perhaps with some redundancy in the writing or shallowness in the argument.

D-range grades are given for work that is unsatisfactory. The material is only shallowly encountered and the analysis weak or haphazard. It is applied to work that merely restates other sources or appears to have been hastily thrown together the night before.

A **failing** grade is given for scholarship that shows little or no engagement with the material and is often applied to work that misses a key criterion such as a minimum word count or number of sources used

(Note that **reading sheets** are given a completion grade rather than a letter grade.)

The **maximum number of points** for each grade category is as follows:

Reading Sheets	25
Participation	10
First Paper	20
Midterm	20
Final Paper	25
Total	100

Grades are sensitive and require face to face communication to make sure nothing gets lost in translation. For this reason, we can't discuss your grades over email. If you wish to request a reconsideration of one of your grades, the first step is to come meet me during my office hours, where I'll be happy to talk to you about it. The next step is a formal request, in writing, documenting what you think was overlooked in your work.

Late or Missing Work

For every day or part-day late, an essay will be assigned a 2-point penalty. A late reading sheet will be assigned a daily 0.5-point penalty. A missed paper or reading sheet will be assessed as 0 points. A missed exam can only be made up if we have made a prior agreement to do so, at my discretion. Otherwise, a missed exam will be assigned 0 points. If you need to submit work on a date other than the assigned due date (due to a religious holiday or sports event, e.g.), let me know in advance and we'll work something out.

COVID Policy

COVID is still having profound effects in our lives and our communities. Even for those of us who are healthy, many people are struggling with long-term effects of stress, exhaustion, and the illness itself. One thing we've learned from COVID is that its effects are hard to predict. Our main task will be to be flexible and responsive to new situations as they arise. Although we are beginning the semester in-person and without a mask requirement, we should be prepared to adapt to new developments as the semester unfolds. Needless to say, anyone who wishes to wear a mask should do so.

One thing I started doing during COVID was allowing folks to join the class informally on Zoom in case of illness or forced absence (this is **not** an alternative

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to attendance). Zoom is a bare-bones version of the class and takes extra work to manage, so I can't promise flattering camera angles or that I'll be able to take real-time questions. But given how important class discussions are in this course, being able to listen in is **much** better than nothing.

Another thing I started doing during COVID was encouraging everyone to proceed through this class with patience. That means patience with other people, who are probably going through things that we don't have a clear picture of. It means being patient with me, since, like you, I'm trying to adapt on the fly to new situations. And, crucially, it means being patient with yourself: you all expect a lot from yourselves, and that's good, but it's important to recognize how much and how rapidly things have changed over the last several years. Expect that you may not be the same kind of student you were back in 2020, and allow things to not go perfectly if that's what's happening. Even if you're not at 100%, you're going to learn a **lot** in this class.

SACRED STUFF: RELIGIOUS BODIES, PLACES, AND OBJECTS

Schedule of Readings

- This schedule is subject to change given **2 weeks' notice**.
- Reading sheet is due for the readings listed on each day.
- Remember to **bring the readings** to class each day!

THE SACRED: IS IT MADE OR FOUND? AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

Week 1

Day 1

Introductions!

Week 2

Day 2

- Thomas Tweed. *Our Lady of Exile*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#) or [PDF \(INTRO\)](#) and [PDF \(Ch 1\)](#)
 - Introduction
 - Ch 1: The Virgin's Exile
- Miami Archdiocese. "The Dress is the Virgin." [ONLINE](#)

GALLERY VISIT: CATHOLIC SACRAMENTS, PROTESTANT REFORMATION, CUBAN REVOLUTION

Day 3

- Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane*. [PDF](#)
 - Introduction
 - Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred

GALLERY VISIT: ROMANTICISM, NATIONALISM, FASCISM, INTRO HISTORY OF RELIGIONS SCHOOL

Week 3

Day 4

- Jonathan Z. Smith. "The Wobbling Pivot." [PDF](#)
- Joseph Frank. "Thinkers and Liars." [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
 - Sections 1, 3, 5-6.
- *Optional*: "Mircea Eliade and Antisemitism: An Exchange." [ONLINE](#)

Day 5

- Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. [PDF](#)
 - Ch. 1
- *Just for fun*: Rolf Reichardt. "The French Revolution as a European Media Event." [ONLINE](#)

GALLERY VISIT: MONARCHIES, REPUBLICS, HISTORY OF FRANCE

Week 4

Day 6

- Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. [PDF](#)
 - Ch. 7
- Karen Fields. "Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation between W.E.B. Du Bois and Emile Durkheim." [PDF](#)
- Nick Gendler. "How the Anti-Semitic Dreyfus Affair Led to the *Tour de France*." [ONLINE](#)

Day 7

- David Morgan. *Religion and Material Culture*. [PDF](#)
 - Preface
 - Introduction: The Matter of Belief.

FILM: Before Class, watch Vikram Gandhi. *Kumaré*. [YOUTUBE](#)

PLACES

Week 5

Day 8

- Robert Bellah. "Civil Religion." (1967) [PDF](#)
- Jackie Craven. "About Neoclassical Architecture." [ONLINE](#)
- Lois Craig. *The Federal Presence*. [PDF](#)
 - Prologue
 - Beginnings

Day 9

- Lois Craig. *The Federal Presence*. [PDF](#)
 - American Temples and Needful Buildings
 - Epilogue
- Joseph Hudnut. "Twilight of the Gods." [PDF](#)
- *Architectural Record*, "Will the White House Order New Federal Architecture to Be Classical?" (Feb 2020) [ONLINE](#)
- *designboom* (blog). "Donald Trump Issues Executive Order Promoting 'Beautiful Federal Architecture.'" [ONLINE](#)

Feb 13: [PROPOSAL FOR FIRST ESSAY DUE](#)

Week 6

Day 10

- St Mary Magdalen Church, Oxford. "What Is Anglo-Catholicism?" [ONLINE](#)
- John Ruskin. "On the Nature of Gothic." [PDF](#)

Day 11

- Augustus Welby Pugin. *Contrasts*. [PDF](#)
 - Preface to the Second Edition
 - Ch. 1: On the Feelings which Produced the Great Edifices of the Middle Ages.
- **VIDEOS:** Before class, watch one of the following and upload to the relevant discussion board.
 - *If you usually sit on the left side of the classroom, do the assignment for [Pugin: God's Own Architect](#).* (~1 hr total)
 - *If you usually sit on the right side of the classroom, do the assignment for [The Family that Built Gothic Britain](#).* (~1 hr total)

GALLERY VISIT: BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Week 7

Day 12

- Ralph Adams Cram. "Work of Messrs. Cope and Stewardson." [PDF](#)
- Daniel Manheim. "Sacramental Views." [PDF](#)
- *Just for fun:* David Murrell. "An Architecture Critic Ranks the Five Most Interesting Buildings in Philadelphia." (*One is at Penn--but it's not what you think!*) [ONLINE](#)

Day 13

- **FIELD TRIP:** Penn Campus Tour, meet in classroom at normal time. (No readings.)

FIRST ESSAY DUE

THINGS

Week 8

Day 14

- Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* Chs. 1-4. [PDF](#)
- Bond, "Why We Need to Start Seeing the Classical World in Color." [ONLINE](#)

Day 15 – [MIDTERM EXAM](#)

- Covers up to and including **Week 7**. The exam template is [here](#).
- (No readings!)

Week 9 – SPRING BREAK

Week 10

[Day 16](#)

- Erika Doss. *Memorial Mania*. [PDF](#)
 - Introduction
 - Ch. 1.
- *Just for fun*:
 - Paul Fahn, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. "Letter to the Editor: The Button." (198?) [ONLINE](#)
 - Julia Rubin, *Under the Button*. "In Defense of the Button." (2009) [ONLINE](#)
 - *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. "Campus Blooms with Variety of Sculpture." (1982) [PDF](#)

[Day 17](#)

- Julian Carr. "Unveiling of Confederate Monument at University. June 2, 1913." [PDF](#) or [ONLINE](#)
 - *Content warning: racist violence.*
- *Chicago Defender*. "Tear the Spirit of the Confederacy from the South." [PDF](#)
- W.E.B. Du Bois. "On Confederate Monuments." [ONLINE](#)
- W.E.B. Du Bois. "On Robert E. Lee." [ONLINE](#)

GALLERY VISIT: CIVIL WAR, RECONSTRUCTION, CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS

Week 11

Day 18

- Mitch Landrieu. "New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu's Speech On Removing Confederate Monuments." [ONLINE](#) or [PDF](#)
- Gary Shapiro. "The Meaning of Our Confederate 'Monuments.'" [ONLINE](#) or [PDF](#)
- Vann Newkirk. "Growing up in the Shadows of the Confederacy." [ONLINE](#) or [PDF](#)

MAP: SPLC, [Whose Heritage?](#)

Day 19

- Barbara Bender. *Stonehenge: Making Space*. [ONLINE](#)
 - Introduction
 - Chs. 1-2
- *BBC*. "We May Have Cracked the Mystery of Stonehenge." [ONLINE](#)
- *Just for fun*: Emily Cleaver. "Against All Odds, England's Massive Chalk Horse Has Survived 3,000 Years." [ONLINE](#)

Week 12

- Barbara Bender. *Stonehenge*. [ONLINE](#)
 - Chs. 4, 6.
- *BBC*. "Summer Solstice: How the Stonehenge Battles Faded." [ONLINE](#)
- *BBC*. "Summer Solstice: Thousands Gather at Stonehenge for Longest Day." [ONLINE](#)

GALLERY VISIT (without commentary): [Stonehenge and Related Monuments](#)

[Day 21](#)

- Barbara Bender. *Stonehenge*. [ONLINE](#)
 - Chs. 3, 5
- *Daily Telegraph*. "Neo-Nazis Use National Trust Sites to Launch 'English Resistance.'" [PENN LIBRARY ONLINE](#) or [PDF](#)
- *BBC*. "Stonehenge Bone Display Prompts Protest by 'King Arthur.'" [ONLINE](#)
- **DISCUSSION GALLERY:** Before class, post an entry on the [discussion gallery](#) for today. (See instructions at link.)

BODIES

Week 13

[Day 22](#)

- Angela Zito. "Body." [PDF](#)
- Iris Marion Young. "Throwing Like a Girl." [PDF](#)

[Day 23](#)

- Vasudha Narayanan. "Embodied Cosmologies." [PDF](#)

Week 14

[Day 24](#)

- Max Weber. "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority." (1922) [PDF](#)
- James Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time*. (1963) [PDF](#)

[Day 25](#)

- Saba Mahmood. *Politics of Piety*. [PDF](#)
- or [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)

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- Ch. 5: "Agency, Gender, and Embodiment." pp 153-167 **ONLY**

PROPOSAL FOR FINAL ESSAY DUE

Week 15

Day 26

- Michelle LeLwica. "Embodying Learning." **PDF**
- William Bodiford. "Belief Systems: Japanese Martial Arts and Religion Since 1868." **PDF**
- **OPTIONAL:** Peter Goldsbury. "Political Conflict and Aikido 1931-1942." **PDF**

GALLERY VISIT: East Asian Religions, History of Japan, Martial Arts

Day 27

- **FILM:** Before class, watch Kim Ki-Duk. *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*. **LIBRARY STREAMING**

Week 16

Day 28

Wrap-up. (No readings.)

May 15–26 – PGS United Kingdom (Oxford, London, Stonehenge, Cambridge, Ramsgate)

Schedule TBD. Short readings and assignments will be part of the travel experience.

May 31 – FINAL ESSAY DUE