

LISTENING FOR RELIGION

CS 5691

May 2015

Instructor: Dr. Isaac Weiner
Contact Information: 433 Hagerty Hall
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Class Meetings: Tu/Th 12:30pm-5:15pm, Hagerty Hall 056
Office Hours: Tu/Th, 10am-12pm, or by appointment

I. Course Description and Objectives

What does religion sound like? Where should one go to hear it? In this course, we will learn to listen for religion, here in central Ohio. Part of our time will be spent in the classroom, reading and thinking about religion, sound, and space, listening to recordings, and learning how to conduct community-based research and high-quality field recordings. Part of our time will be spent “in the field,” exploring how religion is practiced throughout central Ohio and producing our own digital recordings of the sounds of local religious life. These recordings will eventually be integrated into an ongoing scholarly research initiative, called “The Religious Soundmap Project of the Global Midwest.” Students in this course will cultivate a new set of theoretical tools for making “sense” of American religion, will acquire new practical skills such as digital sound recording and editing, will learn more about the diverse social landscape of our local surroundings, and will contribute to an exciting new collaborative research project and public initiative.

II. Required Texts

There are no required books to purchase for this class. All readings will be available on Carmen: <https://carmen.osu.edu>. Log-in and go to the Content section of CS 5691 to access readings.

→In addition to the required readings listed below, I will ask graduate students to read either Leigh Schmidt’s *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard, 2002) or Jason Binvis’ *Spirits Rejoice!: Jazz and American Religion* (Oxford, 2015).

III. Course Requirements

Your grade will be determined by the following:

Attendance and Participation – **20%**

Reflective Essays – **40%**

Final Project – **40%**

Attendance and Participation

This is a Maymester class. While it will include a good deal of reading and writing, we will also be engaging in a number of other activities, including hands-on workshops, field trips, and collaborative projects. Your effort, energy, and enthusiasm are integral to the course’s success. A high grade will depend on your active participation in all class activities.

You are expected to come prepared for each class session. This includes completing all required readings prior to the start of class and bringing copies of them with you to class. To foster class participation and accountability for assigned readings, there will be in-class writing during some class meetings. These will be neither extensive nor time-consuming, but they will reward you for your attention to the readings. They will be graded pass/fail.

Because of the condensed format of the Maymester schedule, your attendance at all class sessions, for their entire duration, is absolutely essential. If you know in advance that you will have to miss all or part of a session, for any reason, please let me know *as soon as possible*, so we can plan accordingly. Unexcused absences will lower your grade. In addition, successful completion of the course will require your attendance at a few events outside of regularly scheduled class time. We will discuss this further in class.

Reflective Essays

Over the course of the session, you will write four reflective essays, due each Thursday in class. Please see attached handout for further details.

Final Project

Final projects will be completed in groups of 3-4 students. Each group will be responsible for preparing one page of our class's digital gallery, which will introduce a public audience to selected sounds of local religious life. Projects will involve producing, editing, and logging field recordings and digital images, conducting and transcribing interviews with local practitioners, writing accompanying essays, and submitting field notes. Please see attached handout for further details. We will discuss these projects extensively in class. You will also have time in class to work on them.

Plus and minus grades will be given according to the following scale: A+ 97-100; A 93-96; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D 60-69; F 0-59.

IV. Technology

The use of cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other devices are permitted *only for class-related purposes*, as determined by the instructor. Any use of these devices for non-class related purposes will negatively impact your participation grade.

V. Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person. It is a serious academic offense, and is described in detail in your student policies handbook. Please read this information carefully, and remember that at no point (including discussion) should words or ideas that are not your own be represented as such.

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info_for_students/csc.asp).

VI. Disability Services

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Ave; telephone 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Note: This course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; the instructor reserves the right to change the schedule as necessary.*

CLASS 1 (May 12): Introductions: Listening for Religion

Read (before class):

- Charles Hirschkind, "Religion," in *Keywords in Sound*, eds. Novak and Sakekeeney (Duke, 2015)
- Rosalind Hackett, "Sound, Music, and the Study of Religion," *Temenos* 48:1 (2012): 11-27
- Isaac Weiner, "Soundmapping Religious Boundaries" (unpublished conference paper)

Assignments:

- Begin CITI on-line research ethics course and complete OSU Conflict of Interest form (COI) (see links on Carmen)

In-class:

- Introduction to course and to the Religious Soundmap Project
- Presentation from Patrick Potyondy (OSU History) on Columbus
- Sensory walk around campus + Look/listen for religion exercise

CLASS 2 (May 14): Field Recording

Read (before class):

- James Andean, "Toward an Ethics of Creative Sound," *Organised Sound* 19:2 (2014): 173-181
- Feld and Brenneis, "Doing anthropology in sound," *American Ethnologist* 31:4 (2004): 461-474

Assignment:

- Complete CITI on-line research ethics course and OSU Conflict of Interest form (COI)
- ESSAY #1 due in-class (letter to instructor). Please bring two copies.

In-class:

- Field Recording workshop w/ Ely Rosenblum, PhD candidate, Cambridge University (<http://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/directory/ely-rosenblum>)

CLASS 3 (May 19): Community-based Research and Lived Religion

Read (before class):

- Harriet Simpson Arnow, "The Goat Who Was a Cow"
- Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America*, ed. Hall (Princeton, 1997)
- Robert Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42:2 (2003): 169-174
- Americo Paredes, "On Ethnographic Work among Minority Groups: a Folklorist's Perspective"

Assignment:

- Conduct site visit #1

- Bring to class an example of a sound that is significant to you. Be prepared to discuss why. If you cannot bring a recording of the sound, be prepared to describe it for us.
- Prepare sample interview questions to ask others about their selected sounds

In-class:

- Community-based research workshop w/ Cassie Patterson, assistant director of OSU Center for Folklore Studies and Director of the Folklore Archives

CLASS 4 (May 21): Thinking about Sound and Space

Read (before class):

- Andrew Eisenberg, "Space," in *Keywords in Sound*, eds. Novak and Sakekeeny (Duke, 2015)
- Bret Carroll, "Worlds in Space," (pp. 56-79 only), in *Gods in America*, eds. Cohen and Numbers (Oxford, 2013)
- Erika Meitner, "The Mezuzah," in *American Sanctuary*, ed. Nelson (Indiana, 2006)
- Jeanne Kilde, "Reading Megachurches," in *American Sanctuary*, ed. Nelson (Indiana 2006)

Assignment:

- ESSAY #2 due in class (site visit)

In-class:

- Field trip to home of Sharon Mars
- Workshop w/ Madeleine Fix, multimedia specialist and interdisciplinary artist (<http://madeleinefix.com>)

CLASS 5 (May 26): Religion in Public

Read (before class):

- Isaac Weiner, "Calling Everyone to Pray: Pluralism, Secularism, and the Adhan in Hamtramck, Michigan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87:4 (2014): 1049-1078
- Matthew Engelke, "Angels in Swindon: Public Religion and Ambient Faith in England," *American Ethnologist* 39:1 (2012): 155-170
- John Burdick, "We are Modern Levites," in *The Color of Sound* (NYU, 2013)

Assignment:

- Conduct site visits for final project, incl. field recording

In-class:

- Digital Humanities workshop w/ David Staley (OSU History) and Melanie Schlosser (OSU Libraries)
- Neighborhood explorations

CLASS 6 (May 28): Listening for Religion in New Places

Read (before class):

- Kathryn Reklis, "Give me that Digital Religion," *The Immanent Frame*, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2015/03/03/give-me-that-digital-religion/>

- Patricia Averbach, “Virtually Jewish,” *Lilith* 35:3 (2010): 18-22
- Courtney Bender, “Shamans in the Meetinghouse,” in *The New Metaphysicals* (Chicago, 2010)
- Brett Esaki, “Multidimensional Silence, Spirituality, and the Japanese American Art of Gardening,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 16:3 (2013): 235-265
- Eric Bain-Selbo, “From Lost Cause to Third-and-Long: College Football and the Civil Religion of the South,” *Journal of Southern Religion* 11, <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume11/Selbo.htm>

Assignment:

- ESSAY #3 due in class (reading response)

In-class:

- Digital editing and production workshop w/ Paul Kotheimer (audio engineer, ASC Tech)

CLASS 7 (June 2): Constructing a Digital Gallery

Read (before class): TBD

In-class: Work on final projects

CLASS 8 (June 4): Conclusions and Celebrations: The Religious Soundmap Project

Read (before class): TBD

Assignments:

- Final projects due
- ESSAY #4 due (final reflections)

In-class:

- Present final projects
- Celebrate our work and plan next steps

Reflective Essays
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Over the course of the session, you will write four reflective essays, due each Thursday in class. Collectively, the essays are worth **40%** of your final grade. **Please submit two (2) copies of each essay.**

Essay #1 (Letter to Instructor) = 5% of final grade

Your first essay is due MAY 14 at the beginning of class. It should be single-spaced and at least 750 words.

This essay should take the form of a letter written to me in which you focus on two different but related issues. First, tell me what you want me to know about your background and how your background might affect your approach to the study of religion in the United States. This is your opportunity to introduce yourself to me and tell me about who you are—especially those things that might be relevant to our course of study. It will also give you the chance to reflect on how your background will influence your approach to the materials in this class. Second, I would like you to address your learning goals for the semester. Why have you chosen to enroll in this course? What do you hope to learn by the end of the session? How do your personal learning goals fit with the goals of the course as stated on the syllabus? Is there a relationship between your background and your learning goals for this course?

If you take this assignment seriously and address both of these issues clearly and thoughtfully, then you should expect to earn an A for this assignment. This is an opportunity to begin the course with a strong grade!

Essay #2 (Site Visit) = 10% of final grade

Your second essay is due MAY 21 at the beginning of class. It should be double-spaced and approximately 1200-1500 words (4-5 pages).

In this essay, please reflect on your first site visit experience. Site visits may be conducted and discussed in groups, but each student should write their own paper. Provide a detailed account of your site visit, identify at least one thing that you learned about the group from being present during the event, and include at least one question you would want to learn more about. In your observations, take note of the different features outlined in the “Guidelines for Site Visit #1” handout, such as the community, the space, the event, and the senses. You are encouraged to draw on insights from and make reference to our class readings and discussions.

Pay particular attention to the sounds of the event. If you were asked to identify 1 or 2 sounds as particularly significant or representative of your experience, what would you choose and why? In other words, if you went back to this site with a recorder, what would you want to make sure to record?

Essay #3 (Reading Response) = 10% of final grade

Your third essay is due MAY 28 at the beginning of class. It should be double-spaced and approximately 1000 words (3-4 pages).

In this essay, please offer some substantive reflections prompted by the readings assigned for classes 5 and 6. You should make concrete reference to our readings, though you do not need to discuss each by name. Instead you should organize your essay around a few key ideas. You may reference readings from earlier in the course, as appropriate.

Some questions to consider as you organize your thoughts:

- How did these readings encourage you to think differently about religion? What new sounds or spaces did they make you think about?
- What counts as a religious space or a religious sound? What does not count? Is there a difference between religion and spirituality?
- What kinds of unique issues or problems does the *public* practice of religion present? What do you think it means for a practice or space to be “public”? How might we represent these issues through our class project?
- What particular sites or sounds here in central Ohio did these readings make you think about and/or want to record? Why?
- What questions do you have about these readings? What didn’t you understand? What do you want to know more about?

Essay #4 (Final reflections) = 15% of final grade

Your fourth essay is due JUNE 4 at the beginning of class. It should be double-spaced and approximately 4-5 pages for undergraduates, 6-8 pages for graduates.

Like the first essay, this essay should take the form of a letter to the instructor in which you tell me about your learning experiences during the course.

You will need to address four related issues:

(1) The **content** of your learning: what key ideas or information have you learned in this course? In this section, I would like you to focus especially, though not exclusively, on your final projects. What, specifically, did you learn from conducting your site visits and field recordings? Why did you choose the sound clip that you did? What did you learn about the particular community/site/sound you studied? What did it teach you about religion in Ohio or in the United States? What might you want someone else to know about the community/site/sound you studied? What would you want to study further if you had more time?

(2) The **context** of your learning: how does what you have learned in this course fit into the larger context of your life? For graduate students, I would like you to reflect concretely here on how the content and skills acquired in this class might inform your broader scholarly trajectory or academic research.

(3) The **process** of your learning: what was the best learning experience you had this semester? What have you learned about how you learn best?

(4) The **outcome** of your learning: which of the learning goals, identified in the course syllabus and in your first “Letter to the Instructor” did you achieve? What evidence do you have that they were achieved? Which of the learning goals will you continue to pursue after the course has finished?

Each of these four issues should receive a separate section in your letter, though the first section should be the longest and most substantive. Please do not respond to the above questions mechanically, but shape your response into a LETTER that offers a personal, but critical, evaluation of your learning experience in this course.

Final Projects
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By the end of the session, our class will construct a public digital gallery showcasing the sounds of religion in central Ohio. Students will be divided into collaborative teams of 3-4 students each. Each team will be responsible for preparing at least one page of our gallery, featuring a particular sound or site. This assignment is worth **40%** of your final grade.

Each team will be responsible for providing the following components:

- 8 horizontal images
- Field recording(s)
- “Documenting religious sounds” worksheet, filled out for each field recording, including field notes and an audio log
- 1-2 edited selections from the field recording <1-2 minutes each
- At least two interviews w/ transcription notes and audio log
- 2-3 selected quotes from interviews for display on gallery page
- 3-4 paragraph essay contextualizing the field recording

In addition, each student will be responsible for writing a self-assessment of their contributions to the team’s work.

In most cases, successful completion of final projects will require multiple visits to selected site. The first time you visit, you will probably not use your recorder. Instead, you should listen carefully, speak with participants, and think about how best to represent the experience. This can be, though does not have to be, the basis of your second reflective essay (site visit #1). The second time you visit, you should plan to conduct your field recording. On your third visit, you might conduct additional field recordings and interviews. This is a rough plan. Individual groups may proceed differently. We will discuss this extensively in class.

All materials should be uploaded and saved on Buckeye Box. We will demonstrate how to do this in class. We will also discuss how to fill out the worksheet, how to collect field notes, and how to conduct audio logs and transcription notes.

The **3-4 paragraph essay** should include the following components:

- **Description:** drawing on your fieldnotes, describe the sound and the context of its performance. Offer pertinent details about the site and community.
- **Justification:** Explain why you chose the particular excerpt/clip that you did.
- **Analysis:** drawing on your experience in the field, the data you collected, and insights gained from class discussions, offer some reflections on what we might learn from this recording – about the community with which it is associated, about religion in central Ohio, or about other themes and topics of your choice. What do you want visitors to your page to understand about your research? What do you hope they will learn?

Self-assessments should be two paragraphs long. In the first paragraph, describe your individual contributions to the group’s work. Which aspects of the assignment did you take responsibility

for? How would you assess your performance as a member of the group? In the second paragraph, describe how your group worked together as a team. What were your group's strengths? Were there challenges or concerns you would like me to know about?

A final note: we will provide a template for constructing your digital gallery page, but I want to encourage your creativity!! If you have innovative ideas for how to conduct and/or present this research, please share them with your team, with your instructor, and with the class. This is an exciting opportunity for you to help shape the future of this collaborative research project. I welcome and invite your contributions!