# **Journalism 377 & 515**

**Special Topics in Journalism:**

**Reporting Religion and Spirituality**

Sections.: JOUR 377-801 and JOUR 515-201

Quarter: Winter 2012

Days: Mondays, 5:45 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Place: 14 E. Jackson Blvd., Room 1129

Instructor: Margaret Ramirez

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Office hours: TBA

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## **Course Description**

This is a content-based course in Community Journalism in which we will report and write stories about religion, faith, spirituality, and Chicago’s influential religious newsmakers and communities.

This effort will be based on traditional fundamentals of reporting, including observation, research, sourcing, interviewing and writing about people, rituals, traditions and beliefs.

As the 2012 Presidential election gets underway, the diverse religious beliefs of the candidates have become a crucial issue for reporters in their coverage.

This course will delve into some issues related to politics and the election. However, we will also cover various other important issues in religion news today such as the nation’s growing Muslim community and homosexuality in the Church.

Students are urged to join the Religion Newswriters Association for a free first year of membership. The organization periodically distributes helpful guides and story tip sheets to members and also conducts an annual contest for student work.

**Course Objectives**

\* Gain key knowledge about religious groups, doctrines and their belief systems

\* Attend religious services and interview some of Chicago’s prominent religious leaders

\* Become familiar with notable religion websites, databases and blogs

\* Write compelling and accurate stories on religion and moral issues

**Reading, resources**

**“Reporting on Religion: A Primer on Journalism’s Best Beat,” by Diane Connolly and Edited by Debra L. Mason**

(Instructor will distribute this booklet on first day of class)

In addition, there will be selected, weekly readings that can be found on the DePaul Library Reserves course page.

http://eres.lib.depaul.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=5484

Password: jour377

A list of suggested books will be provided on the first day of class and students should select one as a topic for a book review. In addition, students may suggest other relevant religion books with those subject to approval of the instructor.

Students will be expected to stay abreast of current events and developments related to religion by reading newspapers, magazines, and blogs.

**Attendance**

It is mandatory. The class meets only ONCE per week, or 10 times per quarter, and one absence equals two class sessions in the university’s regular format.

Points will be deducted for missing class without a legitimate excuse established beforehand.

If that is not possible, the absence will be documented.

Arriving to class late or leaving early, without previously notifying the instructor will be marked as an absence.

**MORE THAN THREE UNEXCUSED ABSCENCES WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.**

In learning to cover religion, students in this course should also be prepared to attend several evening and weekend religious services. Some exceptions will be made, if the instructor is notified beforehand. However, students with a heavy calendar of weekend commitments, or logistical problems, should check with the professor at the start of this course.

**Assignments, Grading**

You will be graded on the following: Writing stories, in-class participation, book review, final enterprise story. Class participation is especially encouraged and will be important on field trips and when there are guest speakers.

**Graduate students**

15 percent: class participation, class attendance, weekend services

45 percent : final enterprise story with a multimedia element

20 percent: Book review

20 percent: Weekly assignments for class website

**Undergraduate students**

15 percent: class participation, attendance, weekend services

40 percent final enterprise story

15 percent: Book review

30 percent: weekly assignments for class website

Deadlines are everything in journalism. Your stories are not theme papers to be put off to the last minute. Well-done feature articles require you to get started when material is fresh in your mind or the effort greatly suffers. Grades will be penalized for late work.

**Policy Regarding Cheating**

Cheating on assignments will not be tolerated. Fabricating information or claiming another’s work as your own is cheating. Anyone caught cheating will be assigned a failing grade for the class. Consult the student handbook for the university’s policy on plagiarism, but in this course there will be modifications.

**Sexual Harassment**

The policy as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this class.

**Disabilities**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs.  All discussion will remain confidential. Students should also contact: Center for Students with Disabilities at 773.325.1677

**Course Schedule Highlights**

WEEK 1- Mon., Jan. 9

Introductions, course overview, discussion of syllabus

Covering religion, writing about faith and rituals

Why is Chicago a center for religion news?

What makes a good religion story?

What were the big religion stories for 2011 and the stories to watch for 2012?

Guest speakers:

Manya Brachear, Chicago Tribune religion reporter

Jeremy Weber, News Editor, Christianity Today magazine

**Assignment 1 – Religion in your life due Mon., Jan. 16**

WEEKEND **FIELD TRIP: Sun., Jan. 15 - Class will attend Sunday service at 11 a.m. at St. Sabina Catholic Church and interview Rev. Michael Pfleger**

WEEK 2 – Mon., Jan. 16

Christianity

Discuss Pfleger interview, deadline writing in class

Prepare for Mormon interview

**Assignment 2 – Story on St. Sabina or the Black Church**

WEEK 3 – Mon., Jan. 23

Mormonism

FIELD TRIP: Class meets at a Mormon Church in Hyde Park

5200 South University Avenue

Guest Speakers:

President Sherman L. Doll, Illinois Chicago Mission

President Gary Blakely, Chicago Stake President

**Assignment 3: Story on Mormons due Mon. Feb. 6**

**WEEK 4 – Mon., Jan. 30**

Orthodox Judaism

Guest Speaker: Rabbi Asher Lopatin, leader of Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation

**WEEK 5 – Mon., Feb. 6**

Islam

Guest Speakers:

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, chairman of Sound Vision Foundation, [the leading producer](http://www.soundvision.com/about/dallasnews.asp) of educational content on Islam and Muslims; columnist for Huffington Post

**Assignment 4: Story on Islam due Mon. Feb. 20**

**WEEK 6 – Mon., Feb. 13**

Islam – Part 2

Guest Speaker: Shamar Hemphill, Youth Organizer for Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)

Aymen Abdel Halim, Communications Coordinator, The Council on American-Islamic Relations

Documentary screening: New Muslim Cool

**WEEKEND FIELD TRIP: Sun. Feb. 19 – Class attends Willow Chicago services at 10 a.m. at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Parkway, then meets at Willow Ministry Center at 418 S. Wabash.**

Guest Speaker: Jon Klinepeter, pastor of Willow Chicago

**Assignment 5 –Deadline story on Willow service**

**WEEK 7 – Mon., Feb. 20**

Evangelical Christians

Lecture on covering rituals

Film screening “Jesus Camp”

Book review due: Mon., Feb. 27

**WEEK 8 – Mon., Feb. 27**

Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism

Guest Speaker: Rajinder Mago, Sikh leader

Lecture on conversion stories and trend stories

Discuss final projects

**WEEK 9 – Mon., March 5**

Homosexuality in the Church

**WEEK 10 – Mon., March 12**

Final Projects due

Graduate student presentations