EXPLORE AMERICAN SACRED SPACE

Religion and the sacred have taken on many forms in the American landscape, from traditional churches on the town green to more ethereal constructions of spirituality in parks and cities. Shifts in architectural expressions of religion reveal changes in the practice of religion in the United States, which has been and remains a foundational component of American culture. This course examines sacred space in the United States within its context as a public expression of belief and its connection to place and landscape. Our charge in this seminar is to explore the many ways in which Americans have constructed religion and the sacred in the American landscape.

HOW THIS COURSE IS STRUCTURED

This is a seminar course centered on discussions of key readings introducing influential and new research on American sacred space. We will structure our time in class around discussions of the readings to draw out their salient themes and connections. In addition to discussing these readings, we will also undertake a study of Villanova’s sacred space. Your final project for the semester is to write an original research paper on a topic of your choosing related to American sacred space.

WHY THIS COURSE?

Sacred space is all around you, and it is my hope that you will carry with you long after your time at Villanova the awareness of sacred space in our world. My goals for you this semester are to:

1. Articulate your own definition of sacred space
2. Understand theories of sacred space
3. Expand your understanding of what constitutes a sacred or religious space
4. Strengthen your ability to discern key arguments and evidence from readings and synthesize these ideas
5. Contribute to scholarship on American sacred space by writing a well-researched, well-written original paper
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Participation & Presentation of the Readings (20%).** Because this is a seminar class, your participation is vital. Successfully participating in class means that you come prepared for class, having read and thought about our readings; share your thoughts; respond to your classmates’ ideas; and are respectful in your comments. Simply showing up for class does not fulfill your participation requirement; you must **participate**.

You will also be responsible for introducing the readings for one week of our class. Be especially attentive to the background of the authors (remember Google is your friend), when the piece was written, and what methodologies or perspectives the authors employ. Summarizing what you see as the arguments and supporting evidence, how the readings relate to each another, and the themes they share will help to guide our discussion.

**Sacred Space Blog (20%).** For each day that we have class, you will create an entry on our class’s sacred space blog. In this entry, you are to write a one to two paragraph response to the day’s readings. **You are to submit your entry by 10 a.m. the day of class.** Late entries will not be counted in your grade.

**Sacred Space Villanova Project (20%).** Over this semester we will apply our understanding of sacred space to our own campus. You will be asked to write a 4-5 page paper on some aspect of the Villanova campus as it can be interpreted as a sacred space. You will post your writings to a website that will (hopefully) be available to the Villanova community. I will distribute further instructions about this project later in the semester.

**Research Paper (30%).** The culmination of the course will be an original research paper on a topic related to American sacred space of your choosing. Your main charge is to write a clear argument and to support that argument with evidence, both textual and visual. This paper will be 8 to 10 pages in length with associated images and appropriate footnotes following the Chicago Manual of Style. You will also submit a research paper proposal with a beginning bibliography. You are encouraged and welcome to discuss with me your ideas and progress on the paper. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported. Late papers will be penalized by one-half grade for each 24 hours that they are late.

**Research Presentation (10%).** Each student will also make a 15-20 minute in-class presentation of his or her paper in the final weeks of the class.

**Attendance**

I will take attendance in this course. **If you miss more than 4 unexcused classes over the course of the semester, you will **FAIL** this course.** More than two
unexcused absences may lead to the lowering of your final grade. If you have to miss a class for a valid reason, please email me ahead of time.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

You are expected to uphold academic integrity as outlined by the university. In the spirit of St. Augustine, students at Villanova are expected to engage in and contribute to a culture of cooperation and trust. This means avoiding cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions of work, and assisting in or contributing to dishonesty. For the first offense, students who plagiarize or cheat on any assignment will receive either an F for the assignment or an F for the course (depending on the severity of the offense), and a letter will be filed with the student’s dean and with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. A second offense either in this course or any other course at Villanova will result in dismissal from the university with a permanent indication of the reason for dismissal on the student’s transcript.

**LEARNING NEEDS**

It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability please contact me after class or during office hours and make arrangements to register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5636 or at nancy.mott@villanova.edu as soon as possible. Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.

**TEXTS**

These books are available at the Villanova University Book Shop:


Please also purchase online:


Additional readings will be posted as PDF files on Blackboard under the section “Work of the Week.”
SCHEDULE OF READINGS & DISCUSSION SUBJECTS

Note: This is an approximate schedule for the semester. I reserve the right to change readings and assignments.

INTRODUCING SACRED SPACE

Week One
1.14 M  Introduction: Sacred Space on Villanova’s Campus


Week Two
1.21 M  NO CLASS—MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY


Week Three

EXPERIENCING SACRED SPACE

Week Four


2.6 W  G. van der Leeuw, “Sacred Space” in *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vol. 2 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1967), 393-402.


**SACRED GEOGRAPHIES**

Week Five


**NATURE’S SPIRITUALITY**

Week Six


RELIGION IN THE CITY

Week Seven


2.27 W Daniel Bluestone, selections from Ch. 3 “’A Parallel Moral Power’: Churches, 1830-1895” in Constructing Chicago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 62-64, 91-103.


Villanova Sacred Space paper due

Week Eight

3.3 M NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

3.5 W NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

SPACES OF MEMORY

Week Nine


Week Ten


**PUBLIC/PRIVATE SACRED SPACES**


**Week Eleven**

3.24 M NO CLASS—HAPPY EASTER!


**CIVIL RELIGION, CIVIC SACRED SPACE**

**Week Twelve**


**Week Thirteen**


**RELIGION ON CAMPUS: THE CASE OF WILLIAM & MARY**


George M. Marsden, Ch. 21 “Liberal Protestantism without Protestantism” and Ch. 22 “Concluding Unscientific Postscript” in *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 408-444.

**SACRED SPACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Week Fourteen**


**Week Fifteen**

4.21 M Presentations

4.23 W Presentations

**Week Sixteen**

4.28 M Presentations

4.30 W NO CLASS—HAPPY READING PERIOD

**FINAL PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE BY WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 5:00 PM**