

DAVID YAMANE

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (SOC 301) MATERIALS

I have taught three different versions of this course at Wake Forest, two in the sociology department and one for the Divinity School, where I am an Associated Faculty member. The sociology department course is cross-listed with the religion department (REL 351), where I am also an Associated Faculty member, so each semester five to six of the 25 seats are held out for religion majors.

Standard Course

One of the sociology courses and the Divinity School course are standard introductions to the sociology of religion. Both of these courses survey the major developments in the sociological study of religion, beginning with its roots in Enlightenment thought and the work of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim, and continuing through to current debates over religious growth and decline, contemporary spiritual transformations, and the reality of secularization. Along the way, the courses examine the cultural and social structural factors that have transformed religion in modern society, especially the United States. The courses examine these transformations at both the individual and organizational levels, and also explore the ways in which religion enters civil society and public life.

In the Divinity School course, I require class participation, short papers, a class presentation, and a major final paper. The main assignments for the undergraduate course are the same, except that the students take two essay exams rather than writing a major paper.

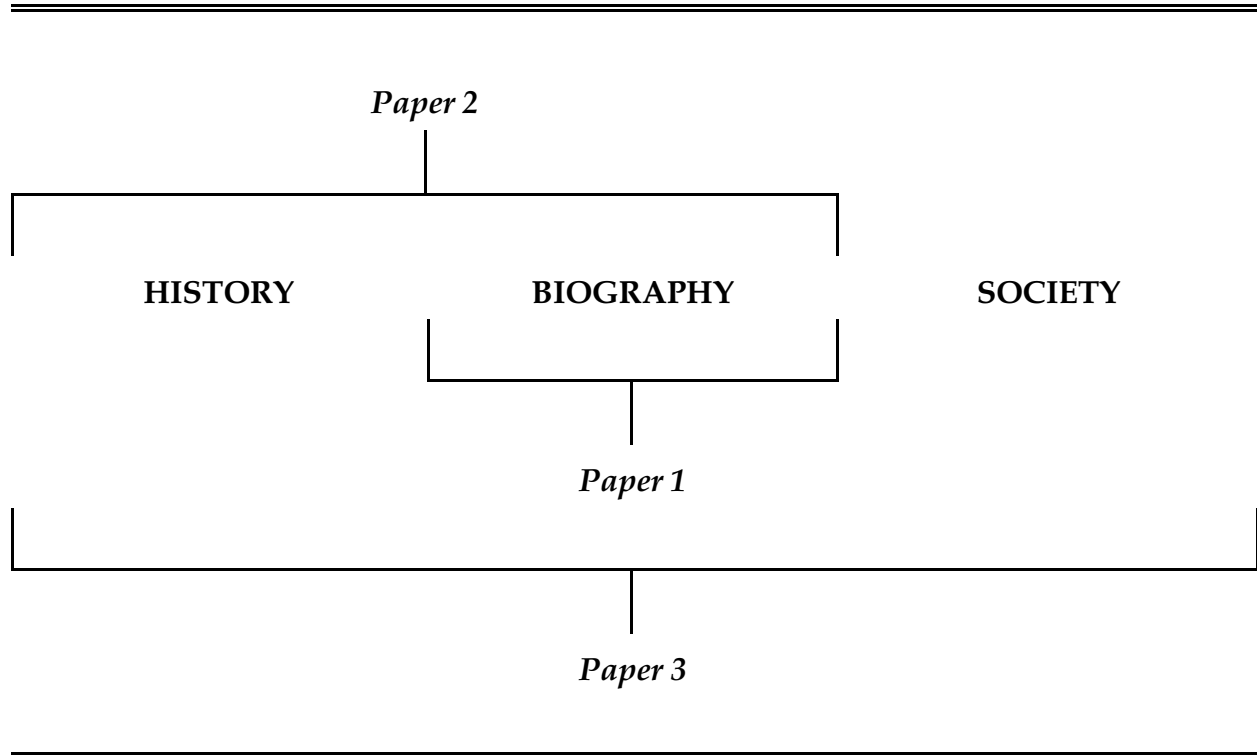
In addition to the syllabi for these two courses, I include in this section samples of the class outlines I provide to the students, copies of the take home exams for the course (with grading criteria), and a grading rubric for the students' oral presentations.

Course Based on Sociological Autobiography

I sometimes teach the sociology of religion using a "sociological autobiography" as the main assignment. The overall aim of this course is to cultivate a sociological imagination and apply it to religious life. According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination allows us to see our lives "as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society." Students exercise this sociological imagination by crafting a "sociological autobiography." Robert K. Merton has written that "the sociological autobiography uses sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings, and analytical procedures to construct and to interpret one's own life history." Over the course of the semester, students in this course construct such a written interpretation of their own life histories, including comparisons to their grandparents, parents, and

peers.

Pages 4-5 of the Spring 2006 syllabus explain how students write and rewrite this paper in three stages, each part developing and incorporating one aspect of C. Wright Mills's tripartite understanding of the sociological imagination ("the intersections of **biography** and **history** within **society**"). The follow graphic shows how each of the papers is successively incorporated by the next paper.



I make sure the students understand that this assignment requires them not just to narrate their life histories, but to use the perspectives, ideas, concepts, and findings of the readings to construct and to interpret their life histories. In a word, the course materials *frame* their life histories. This is what makes it a *sociological* autobiography rather than just an autobiography.

This approach to teaching the sociology of religion has been popular among students, and has gotten the attention of my colleagues in the sociology of religion as well. This past August, I was asked to discuss this approach at a didactic seminar on teaching the sociology of religion at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion in New York City.

Ideally, I would like to develop a two-course sequence in the sociology department: in the fall semester I would teach the standard overview of the sociology of religion and in the spring semester I would teach the sociological autobiography based sociology of religion.