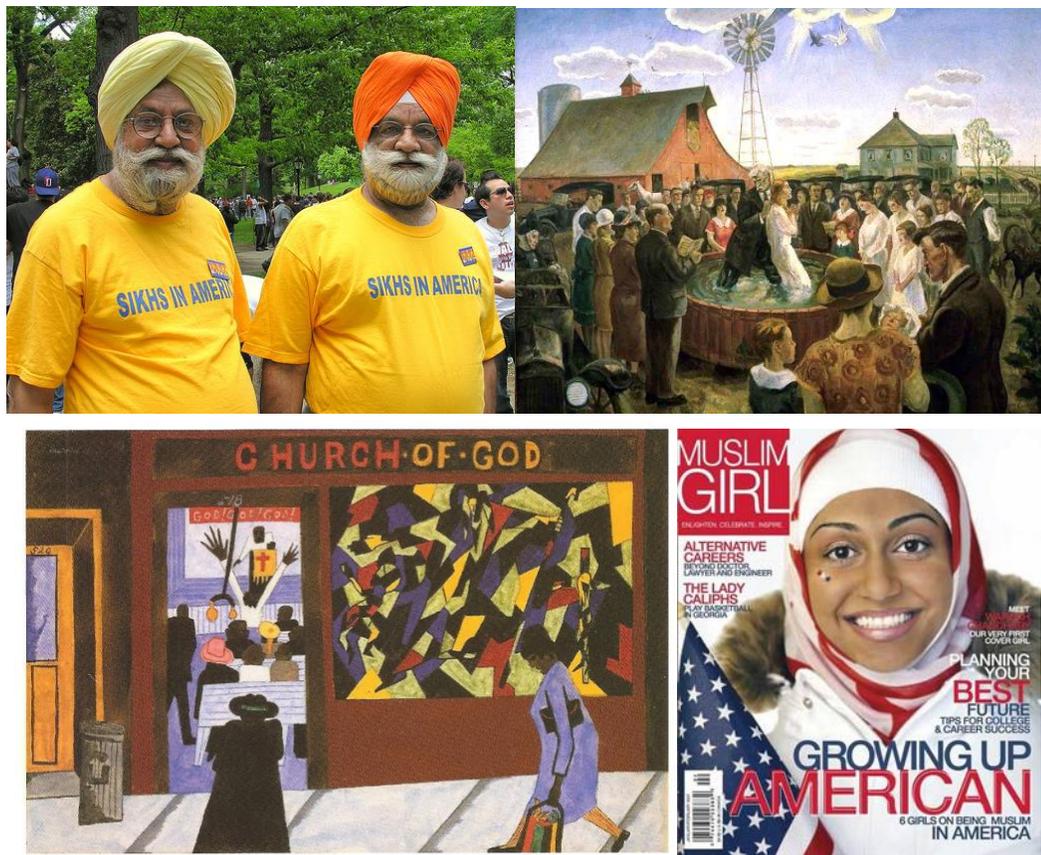


Harvard University  
Spring 2020  
Expository Writing 20  
Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:30 & 3pm  
Sever Hall 105

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## Religious Pluralism in the United States



### **Course Overview**

We're told the United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world, possessing a dizzying array of religious beliefs and behavior. And, despite predictions to the contrary, levels of religious belief remain high, as evidenced by controversies involving travel restrictions and religious property, as well as recent Supreme Court rulings on same-sex marriage, contraception, and commercial religious activity. But how do people—including nonbelievers—experience this religious multiplicity? How are these vast religious differences negotiated socially, culturally, politically, and legally? Moving beyond theological debates, this course will explore the broad concept of *lived religion* in the United States through readings in fiction, law, history, and sociology.

In this course, you'll write three essays, each of increasing complexity. In Unit 1, you'll write an argumentative essay using a single source: Ayad Akhtar's play, *Disgraced*. In Unit 2, we'll tackle constitutional question of religious establishment. You'll read a selection of opinions by legal theorists which you'll deploy in an essay articulating your own position. In Unit 3, you'll research a topic of your own choosing, pose an analytical question, and write a substantial paper using both primary and secondary sources.

## **Course Outline**

### **Unit 1: Religion & Everyday Life (single-source essay, 4-6 pages)**

In the first unit, we'll read Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *Disgraced*. *Disgraced* premiered in 2013 in Chicago before moving to New York City's Lincoln Center and, along with his debut novel, *American Dervish*, cemented Akhtar as a leading interpreter of the contemporary Muslim-American experience.

Your essay assignment is to craft a persuasive argument that addresses a compelling issue in the play. Your argument should be based on evidence you've gathered from *Disgraced*, including the lines, passages, and scenes you've discussed in class and analyzed in your Response Papers (RP). In the first Response Paper, you'll generate an **analytical question** about a passage or scene in *Disgraced* which you found puzzling, intriguing, or otherwise thought-provoking. In the second Response Paper, you'll craft an original **thesis** that in some way reconciles your analytical question. The work you do in these response papers will allow you to shape your argument into a coherent essay. You should aim to write for a reader who has at least some familiarity with the play, and your argument should help the reader realize a specific insight—your **argument**—about *Disgraced*. Also remember that you will need to delve into the complexities of the **evidence**—and that this **analysis** will require you to weigh **arguments** and **counterarguments** against one another.

### **Unit 2: Religion & the Constitution (intervene-in-a-debate essay, 6-8 pages)**

In our first unit we read *Disgraced*, a work of fiction which explored religion in interpersonal relationships among family, friends, and co-workers. In this unit, however, we'll telescope out and turn to broad questions about religion in public life. A contentious and seemingly ever-present quandary in American public life is the relationship between religion and government (often shortened to “church and state”). The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,” but what exactly does this mean? When is the government's involvement with religion considered an “establishment”? Or, conversely, is it possible for religion to become overly involved with government? Can a school or city hall erect a religious display without alienating people who belong to other faiths? Can (or should) the public square ever be kept completely “naked” of religion?

In this unit, we'll read several theories regarding the First Amendment and religious establishment. Your initial task is to master the **key terms and arguments** used by these legal scholars. You'll then weigh these theories as you analyze a recent situation involving religious establishment. In doing so, your assignment is to construct an original argument about what you think should be the proper interpretation of the First Amendment.

### **Unit 3: Researching Religion (research essay, 8-10 pages)**

In Unit 3, students will choose a topic involving some aspect of religion in America, and use it as a springboard into a research paper. Beginning with an analytical question, you'll familiarize yourself with the sides of the debate, using sources which you locate and analyze. The essay needs to put forth a well-argued thesis, supported convincingly by evidence. I'll distribute a list of possible paper topics later in the semester, though you're certainly welcome to propose your own!

## The Writing Process (we'll follow this sequence for all three units)

1. **Response Papers:** Before drafting each essay, you will complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills important for the relevant essay type. Think of these as building scaffolding for your essay!
2. **Drafts:** You will submit a draft of each of the three essays and I will give you detailed comments. My comments are *not* simply a checklist to transform your draft into an A revision. As you revise your draft, you'll need to rethink your argument and evidence, as well as how to deal with new argumentative challenges and opportunities that present themselves.
3. **Draft Workshops:** After you've submitted your drafts, we'll have an in-class draft workshop in which we'll collectively critique two student papers. You will offer the authors constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement. You will submit your written comments for both drafts.
4. **Draft Conferences:** After I've read your draft, you and I will meet for a draft conference. These will last 15-20 minutes during Units 1 & 2. In Unit 3, we'll have small-group draft conferences. During the draft conference, we'll go over my comments on your draft. This is an opportunity to devise strategies for revising the essay, so come to the conference ready to tell me how you're going to revise your draft! Plan to take notes in our conference.
5. **Final Revisions:** You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it for a grade. I will provide written comments and a grade on essay revisions with the aim of helping you work through future assignments.

**Submitting Electronic Files:** You will submit much of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in Microsoft Word (file extension .docx). Do not submit your essay as a PDF, Pages, etc. It is also your responsibility to ensure that your essay is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty. You will upload your essays online to Harvard's Canvas. **Do not submit it via email or Google docs.**

**All work you submit is for public readership**—in other words, we will use essays and excerpts from the writers in the class (possibly yours!) as some of our texts this semester. If at any point you submit a draft or revision that you would prefer other students not read, please let me know that—but please don't make that request about everything you turn in this semester.

**Deadlines:** We are on a very tight schedule so it is imperative that you submit work on time. For many class meetings, you will have due a response paper or some other reading or writing exercise to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise—therefore each student in this section is allowed ONE 24-hour “wildcard” extension on a response paper, draft, or revision during the semester. **(Exception: the 24-hour extension may not be used for the Essay 3 revision, because I'm up against a firm deadline to submit final course grades to the registrar.)**

To use that 24-hour wildcard extension, simply send me an email *before* the deadline. Then submit the late work to Canvas. Otherwise, the work will be counted as late. And beware: taking that one-day extension can

mean that you're crunched for time at the beginning of the next unit. Other than this "wild card" extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I do not grant further extensions. Essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to produce a note from HUHS; in the event of a family emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to ask your dean to contact me by e-mail or phone.

**Late Papers:** all late work will be subject to a penalty of 1/3 a letter grade per day (e.g. A- goes to B+).

### **Getting Help**

**Office Hours:** Office hours (listed at the top of the syllabus's first page) are a time to come and ask questions, talk about your work in the class, and get help specific to your individual process as a thinker and a writer. I am always happy to meet with you to discuss both your progress and your concerns!

**Writing Center:** At any stage of the writing process—while brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions—you may find yourself wanting help with your essays beyond what I provide in comments and conferences and what your peers provide in workshops. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. These tutors provide a valuable service: any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's website at <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/> to make an appointment.

### **Required Texts**

The following materials are required for the course:

- Ayad Akhtar, *Disgraced* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013). ISBN: 978-0-316-32446-5; you must have a print copy. It's available for purchase at the Harvard Coop.
- The readings for Units 2 & 3 will be on the course website (you must print them for class discussions)
- *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*. It is available at <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>
- In this course, we'll use the Chicago citation method. If you have any questions about how to cite materials, your first stop should be the *Chicago Manual of Style* at [www.chicomanualofstyle.org](http://www.chicomanualofstyle.org).

# Course Policies

## **Grading**

Course components are weighted according to the following:

- Essay 1 25%
- Essay 2 30%
- Essay 3 35%
- Class Participation 10%

These grades will be based on the quality of your final essay for each unit. Grading becomes more stringent as we progress (since you are expected to have mastered certain skills and techniques). Please be advised that final grades (that is, grades on revised essays) are indeed final; I will not read or grade a further revision of a revision. My goal is to return your graded revision within two weeks of submission; regardless, you'll always receive your graded revision before the next draft is due.

Although class participation counts for only 10%, do not underestimate its value in determining your final course grade! It includes, but is not limited to:

- arriving on time
- arriving prepared
- active listening
- active speaking
- strong small group participation
- valuable contributions in the draft workshops and draft conferences

## **Class Participation & Technology Use**

Most of our time in class will be in a discussion or workshop format—which may include the whole class, small groups, or one-on-one activities. As such, your participation in each class is vital to your success in the class and the success of the class as a whole. I value prepared and thoughtful contributions over sheer volume (i.e. quality > quantity). Regarding readings, always bring print copies of the day's readings to class. Early in the semester, locate a reliable printer on campus in order to print the readings and assignments. **Unless I expressly grant permission, you may not use a laptop, tablet, or phone in class. Should you need to use a laptop or other technology for a specific reason, please talk to me after class.**

## **Email**

As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your Harvard email account daily; you are responsible for the information I email and which I post to Canvas. Likewise, I make sure to check mine once every weekday for questions from you. I can answer most questions within 24 hours, except over the weekend.

## **Attendance**

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical/religious excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you

of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should send me a note from UHS or another medical official, or from your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

### **Completion of Work**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

### **Collaboration**

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

### **Academic Integrity**

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. Please feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

For every essay you write in this class, you’ll include a cover letter (more info on that later!). But please note now that in each cover letter I’d like you to include the sentence:

“I affirm my awareness of the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code.”

Throughout the semester, we’ll talk more about academic integrity and how it relates to writing!

## **GRADING FRAMEWORK FOR ESSAY REVISIONS**

**An A grade** is for work that is excellent in every way (note: this is not the same as perfect):

- This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen, well-integrated evidence.
- The author has a clear and appropriate method for approaching the analysis of evidence, and uses theoretical concepts and key terms appropriately and consistently.
- The discussion enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply rehash obvious points). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay.
- Its introduction is clear, gives the reader a reason to read on, and clearly states what the argument of the essay is. Its end is something more than a summary and explores the next step this essay could take, or the next level of implications of the author's argument.
- The language is clean, precise, often elegant. As a reader, I feel surprised, delighted, engaged.

**A B grade** is for a solid piece of writing that reaches high (although not as high as an A essay) and achieves many of its aims:

- The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The reasoning and argument may be rather routine.
- The method for analyzing evidence is appropriate, but may not be clearly spelled out or sources may not be critically evaluated. Theoretical concepts and key terms are employed, but not accurately or consistently.
- The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not.
- The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be fully explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made.

**A C grade** is for a piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas:

- Conception (there's at least one main idea but it's fuzzy and hard to get to). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth.
- Structure (confusing)
- Use of evidence (weak or non-existent--the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or add up to platitudes or generalizations). No clear rationale for choosing evidence. No reference to concepts from the secondary sources.
- Language (the sentences are often awkward, vague, abstract, and contradictory). Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.

OR essay that merely summarizes what is evident in the primary or secondary sources, but is written without major problems.

OR an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something instead of a piece of reasoning. Well-written, but scant intellectual content—mostly personal feelings.

**A D grade** or lower goes to efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas or those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc., OR those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.