

HIST 4910: MORMON HISTORY AND CULTURE

(Religious Studies credit available)

Philip Barlow

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Contact: 7-3406; Old Main 332

Office hours: 2-3 pm, Monday, Wednesday, by appointment, or catch me after class

Class meeting time: MWF 3:30-4:20

Classroom: Main 119

Undergraduate Teaching Fellow:

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[Note: this syllabus is subject to change and is for orientation only. The final syllabus, along with a calendar of readings and due dates for assignments, will be posted online and available in paper form on the first day of class.]

Course description & Goals:

“Mormonism” is among the most widely studied religious movements of the modern era. There are reasons for this, quite apart from religious belief or doubt. Hence understanding the movement in an academic sense is significant not only for believers, but for those of any religious or secular orientation who wish to become serious students of religion or of American history and culture. A better understanding of Mormonism may be particularly helpful for anyone directly impacted by Mormon culture—certainly including anyone living in the intermountain West.

This course is designed as an entry into such study. It is not conceived as a traditional chronological historical survey, but as a historically-informed topical consideration.

This semester we will emphasize three themes: 1) Mormonism’s contact with culture that is not Mormon, which will bring “Mormon culture” into sharper relief to be recognized and considered; 2) three transformations that have altered the character of Mormonism over time, which will help us to distinguish the permanent from the transient and to ponder what is essential to the phenomenon; and 3) Mormon identity: how Mormons have construed themselves over time?

These three themes will lead us generally to a consideration of what Mormons are like, how they are perceived, and what it means to be Mormon. All this amounts to a particular case study of the wider question underlying the liberal arts: What does it mean to be human?

Our overarching goals, then, will be 1) to identify crucial contours of Mormon history and culture in relation to the wider culture (both religious and secular) and 2) to develop critical conceptual tools as we explore these contours that will be useful to those inside and outside the Mormon faith.

Our procedure will include lectures, but often I will invite you into critical thought and joint exploration—thus into conversation. This will entail discussions of primary source documents and of film; an excursion to Salt Lake City; a group project; three essays, and perhaps an experimental method or two that we invent along the way.

Required texts:

Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L Foster, The Mormon Quest for the Presidency. John Whitmer Books, 2008. ISBN: 13 978-1-934901-10-6

Kathleen Flake, The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle. The University of North Carolina Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-8078-5501-4
Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought: vols. 1—39; 1966 to 2006. (I will make a CD available to you in class rather than through the bookstore.)

Course pack: to be discussed in class.

Optional/supplemental text:

You may find it helpful to purchase, from the bookstore or online, a general historical account of Mormonism for background reading to better orient you to our work. There are many poor ones,

so either consult with me before purchasing or choose one of the following. These are not the only good options, but they may be purchased inexpensively online, used or new:

Richard and Claudia Bushman, Mormons in America (Oxford, 1999).

Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, The Mormon Experience (Knopf).

James B. Allen and Glen Leonard, The Story of the Latter-day Saints. (Shadow Mountain, 1992; enlarged edition).

GRADING

800 points possible in the course, apportioned as follows:

Paper #1: 100 points

Paper #2: 200 points

Paper #3 (Final paper): 300 points

Quizzes (usually unannounced): 100 points

Participation: 100 points

For the quizzes (graded cumulatively) and Paper #1, the points equate to the following:

A 93-100 **C+** 77-79

A- 90-92 **C** 73-76

B+ 87-89 **C-** 70-72

B 83-86 **D** 60-69

B- 80-82 **F** 59 and below

For Paper #2, the scale is doubled; e.g., the lowest score to obtain a "B-" is 160 points. For Paper #3 the scale is 3x that of Paper #1.

The participation component is more subjective. I assume that you will be a reasonably good contributor in the ways described below and will get 80 points. You will be bumped up or down from there as I see that your contributions are stronger or slighter.

Incompletes are given only in special cases with extenuating circumstances (not for poor performance).

Final grades cannot be posted, emailed, or given out over the phone. If you want your final grade conveyed directly, please provide me with a legal size self-addressed stamped envelope when you turn in your final paper.

Paper Assignments

All written work is to be:

- typed, double-spaced
- 12-point font
- physically handed in rather than sent electronically
- based on evidence and reason rather than assertion
- documented as appropriate in the "humanities" version of The Chicago Manual of Style (easily accessed online by Googling "Chicago Manual of Style")
- protected with a safe backup copy kept in your possession.
- turned in on time. Due dates according to the Calendar to be handed out in class. Late papers will lose 10 points per day.

Criteria: Learning cogent expression is central to what you should take from the University; good writing matters. What I am looking for in particular is your knowledge and understanding of the cumulative material in the lectures, discussion, and reading; evidence of active, imaginative, and critical reflection on the issues at hand; persuasiveness and insightfulness of your argument; clarity, organization, and good form in your expressions; and use of evidence, documentation, and reason, rather than mere proclamation or sentiment, supporting your thesis.

Paper #1: a 3-page essay responding to **EITHER** (your choice):

- a) Richard Poll's sermon, "What the Church Means to People Like Me" (an essay that the entire class will read together). Critique Poll; Is he accurate and fair in describing the two fundamental types of Mormons? Would you add additional types

or change his paradigm? How? And: So what?—why do his assertions or your critique matter?

OR

- b) William MacKinnon's "Leonard Arrington Lecture" (which the class will attend on the evening of September 25; make plans now to attend). Summarize MacKinnon's points, critique them as appropriate. What reflections does his lecture prompt in you? What are the implications of his talk?

Paper #2: a 5-page treatment of Kathleen Flake, The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle. The requirements for this paper will be discussed more fully in class.

Paper #3: A term-end paper of 8-12 pages. Informed by the materials and discussions of the class and using these resources as central to your evidence (though you may draw also on any additional evidence you wish), produce an essay addressing this question: What is a Mormon? Due:

The quality of your **Participation** in our context has five aspects:

- evidence of daily pre-class preparation and in-class engagement with the issues. What are you doing to help our class thinking? (It usually helps to prepare, before each class, questions or insights that you may wish to bring to our group attention.) As in your future or current workplace, absences will affect your experience, understanding, performance, and grade, as will disregard for class rules.

- an initial 2-page reflection paper, which will be critiqued by one of your peers but not assigned a letter grade, addressing the question "What is a Mormon?" How would you define "a Mormon"? How would you explain this to a friend from Indonesia or Ghana or Stockholm who had never yet met a Latter-day Saint? Due at class time on Friday August 29.

- your thoughtful critique of the paper described above, produced by one of your classmates. Sign the paper after correcting/critiquing the paper. Due Monday September 1.

- journal notes about your excursion and observations **EITHER** to LDS General Conference on October 4 and 5 **OR** to the LDS Church's Welfare Square in Salt Lake City. Details of what you will be looking for will be explained in class, but again the idea is to keep notes as though you were going to have to explain this to one who had never yet heard of Mormonism. At conference, for example, you may keep notes on what goes on outside the Conference Center as well as what you see and hear inside. You might take in one or two sessions at an LDS home and describe what you observe in that private setting.

- your contribution to a group project in which you will be assigned to a team that will become expert (and lead the class discussion) on one candidate for U.S. President who has had LDS connections. On successive days, the class as a whole will read a relevant chapter from our assigned text, Bringham and Foster, The Mormon Quest for the Presidency. On one such occasion your team will have done some extra work on your assigned candidate and will lead class discussion that day.

Class rules: 1) Note that this is not a religious course, but an academic course about religion.

We are not here to determine spiritual truth or falsity; the promotion of or attack upon the subject of our consideration is beyond our bounds. However, in the course of studying Mormon history and its contact with American culture, we will necessarily encounter documents and film that promote or criticize Mormon thought or culture. Don't be offended; these are part of trying to understand Mormon history and its relation to (which sometimes means tensions with) other societies. You can do well in the course whether you personally are inside or outside the religious tradition being studied. You are encouraged to ask any question that occurs to you, but I will be the arbiter of its appropriateness in our setting.

2) I construe that we share responsibility for the quality of our academic experience this term. I will offer lectures at key points, but often we'll shed more light through probing conversation. Come to class having prepared questions or insights from your reading and reflection.

- 3) Our time is limited as we grapple with complex matters; during class time, banish cell

phones, tardiness, or anything that would distract the rest of us from our task. Do not bring your computer for matters extraneous to the course.

Special Needs: If you have special needs in relation to the course, please immediately inform me and contact the Disability Resource Center, located in the University Inn, Room 101: (435) 797-2444 and (435) 797-0740, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Academic Integrity:

Trust is a precious commodity. Cheating will trigger an automatic grade of "F" in the course and a report to the Dean. Especially important as you master the world of academic inquiry is the issue of plagiarism: Thou shalt not claim another person's ideas as if they originated with you. Thou shalt not copy, paraphrase, or borrow an idea from another work without citing the source. Thou shalt not cite a work and then paraphrase too closely or copy directly without quotation marks. Please see the USU General Catalog for explicit descriptions of and procedures for Academic Dishonesty: http://studentlife.tsc.usu.edu/stuserv/pdf/student_code.pdf;
<http://www.usu.edu/policies/PDF/Acad-Integrity.pdf>.