

Field Reports

How do I do this assignment?

In order to help you better understand American religions you will be writing essays that deepen your knowledge of faith communities in Utah.

Pick a service different from your own faith tradition. Learn something new!

The goal of the faith community essays is to apply what you have learned in this class to the “real” world. It is to give you a “hands on” experience of religion in America.

Your essay must accomplish two goals: What are they doing? Why are they doing that?

First, it should **describe (the what)** the service you attended. In order to provide a “thick description” of what you saw, think about the “four Cs” of religion—Creed, Code, Cultus, and Community. What beliefs (creed) are articulated verbally, in writing, in singing, in what they put on their walls, in how they behave. What kind of morality—social and personal--(code) is expressed intentionally or unintentionally? Keep in mind that creeds and codes are often subtly expressed—keep your eyes and ears open. What does the ritual (cultus) look like? In the first few pages of the essay, introduce the community—How do they name themselves? What are the people like (gender, race, class, ethnicity, age)? How do the people relate to the leader? You need to cover these points in your description, but you do not have to do it in any particular way.

Second, you must **analyze (the why)** your service using the information contained in the lectures, discussions, and readings. Why do they have such a creed, code, or cultus? Discuss what you have experienced **in relationship to** what you have learned about **in this class**. **Integrate specific** information from our class into your essay. What elements do you see in the service that illustrates ideas you have learned about in class? What historical and cultural reflections can you make? Why are they doing what they are doing?

If you don't know what is going on or what something means, go to the library and look it up. Using the correct terms—those that the community uses—is important. Check the internet for the names of the objects used in the service. Ignorance is not bliss.

Set up an appointment with me to discuss the requirement if this description is too vague.

What's a Faith Community and How do I Find Them?

A faith community is just a fancy way of saying “religion.” It could be an American Baptist congregation that meets in a church or Jewish community that meets in a synagogue. The best way is to Google the type of faith community you are interested in along with “salt lake city” (or

a town nearby). You can also look them up under “churches” or “synagogue” in the Yellow Pages. If you cannot find the community you want, check with me.

Feel free to ask the people at the service questions, but remember they might not know (or think they know) what is going on so you should **always** go to the library (or internet) and check as well.

Isn't Attending a Service of a Religion I don't Belong to Scary?

It may be, but don't worry! Just follow four simple rules 1) Be on time (although they might not be) 2) Dress well (again, they might not but be polite) 3) Put your on beliefs on hold for awhile 4) take a friend along for support.

Before you go, read something from the library or Internet in addition to the course materials. Go to the service prepared with background. Keep your eyes and ears open. Be a detective and see what they do that reflects what you have learned. Sometimes they will do things rather than say things. If the service has many confusing parts, go back a second time.

Religious people are welcoming and interested in helping you learn about their history and traditions. Just explain you are studying American religions and you are writing a report on your visit.

What Are the Elements of a Good Essay?

- 1) describes the key elements of the service you saw (good evidence)
- 2) illustrates that you have attended class, understood the materials, and done the homework (application)
- 2) clearly communicates your ideas (organization)
- 3) contains no mechanical errors (correct spelling, grammar, notation, proofreading)
- 4) demonstrates your understanding of the community (empathetic not judgmental)

Is There a Particular Style That You Want?

Yes. Make sure it is: 1) at least 5 pages long 2) double spaced 3) left margin of one inch and right margin of 1 ½ inches, one inch top and bottom 4) pages numbered on bottom 5) **Stapled** in upper left hand corner.

If you use **any** outside materials or talk with **any** “informants” these must be put in a bibliography. Quotes and paraphrases must be put in notes **in the proper University of Chicago style**. See the “Ten Commandments of Writing” handout.

You will loose points if it is not in this shape; I'm strict about this.

I want to get an “A” on this essay what should I do?

Start immediately to find a faith community and go this weekend. Go a couple of times to make sure you have a good sense of the service. Give yourself enough time for writing.

Go over the lectures and reading with your service in mind. What can you see in the service that relates to the history of the religion? Show me what you have learned **from the course** and how it is relevant to today’s religion. If there seems to be nothing to connect the service with its history, then explain that and speculate as to why. Do not merely describe what you saw in the service or summarize your notes from our course. The goal is to bring these two approaches **together**.

Read the assignments in the textbook carefully and integrate ideas that they generate into your essay. Connect the reading to *real life*. As an aid in doing this, underline with a colored marker all the places in the essay where you connect your service to the course materials in the process of interpreting the religious practice. In other words, highlight your analysis so you can see how much is analysis and how much description.

Keep focused on the religious group you have visited. Do not compare it with your own religious tradition. Use the terminology that *they* use, not that *you* use to describe things. If they talk about their church, don’t call it a chapel or cathedral. If they call their leaders priests, don’t call them ministers. Find out what they call things (don’t say: “they seem to be reading out of a big book”). Know what you are witnessing and what it means.

The key to an “A” grade is producing an interesting and well-thought out interpretation that is flawlessly written. Think, write, revise, think, write, proofread. Master the style of notes and bibliography.

Read your essay aloud to a friend and see if he or she “got it.”

Have me read a draft.

Does Spelling Count?

Absolutely. In fact, essays that are poorly written (weak organization, typos, awkward prose, simplistic language) will not get more than a “C-” grade even if the ideas are profound. I take writing seriously.

When is it Due and What if the Dog Eats It?

Each essay is due on the day we discuss those traditions. If your dog looks hungry--if you have any problems--notify me by phone **before** class.