



Hammurabi's Law Code

REL 306
**Law, Religion
& Society**
Syracuse University
Fall 2026

Time: 12:30-1:45 on Tuesdays & Thursdays
Place: Smith Hall 337

Instructor: [Jim Watts](#) (PhD)
Office: Hall of Languages 501
Chat with the Prof: T 2:00-3:00 pm and by
appointment, in person or on Zoom
E-mail: jwwatts@syr.edu
Office Phone: 443-5713

Course Description: The relationship between law and religion has defined and distinguished religious traditions and secular states. Religious assumptions shape the meaning of “law” and national laws try to define “religion.” Both have played fundamental roles in shaping social practices, including economics and family life. This course explores the interaction of law and religion over time and across cultures, and with attention to important recent cases. Different renditions of this course will focus on different cultures, religions, and cases.

This rendition of the course takes a historical approach. It is organized around the fact that the history of writing has decisively shaped the relationship between law and religion in the three Western religions. We will trace the entanglement of law and religion from the ancient Middle East through Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cultures up to controversial American cases.

Audience: Students interested in law, literature, history, political science and religion, and the humanities generally. This course fulfils

- A&S core requirements in *Humanities* and *Critical Reflections*
- SU shared competencies in *Critical and Creative Thinking* and *Ethics and Integrity*

Course Objectives: The goals of this course are to have students gain sufficient familiarity with the history of law in different Western religious traditions to be able to

1. recognize their distinctive tendencies and how they have influenced each other;
2. develop an understanding of how the definitions of both law and religion have been shaped by their interaction over several thousand years;
3. recognize the influence of religious traditions on contemporary legal and political conflicts.

Course Requirements: The course consists of class discussions, student study and research, and, most of all, readings. This course is a **reading** course, and students' completion of all reading assignments is essential for their success. Assignments, discussions, lectures and tests all presuppose that students have read carefully and on schedule the assigned readings. Questions to guide students' reading can be found in the schedule below.

Evaluations of students work:

Daily reading responses due at 10 am on days with reading assignments	15%
Two in-class tests on September 27 and November 2	25% each
Group presentation of one U.S. legal case	25%
Attendance and participation	10%

The grading scale is: A+ = 100, A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, B- = 82, C+ = 78, C = 75, C- = 72, D+ = 68, D = 65, D- = 62, F = 55. The grades of late assignments will be reduced by one grade level (e.g. B to B-). Incidents of plagiarism or cheating result in no credit (0) for the test or assignment and may result in further disciplinary action (see academic integrity statement below). Students may check their grades online through the [Blackboard Learning System](#).

Class-room Behavior: A successful learning experience depends on students' behavior in class, as much as on the quality of their work and on the teacher's presentations.

- I encourage energetic discussion of relevant topics and I expect different opinions among class members, but always express your ideas with respect for those who may disagree with you or have different life experiences from yours.
- Arrive on time. If you must be late, enter quietly. Do not leave during class except for emergencies.
- Turn off cell phones, laptops, and tablets. Texting, e-mailing or web browsing during class are grounds for being dismissed from that day's class and counted absent.

Are YOU participating?

Attendance isn't enough. To succeed in this class, you must fully engage in activities and discussions. These criteria determine your participation grade.

EXCELLENT: You are present, prepared, and engaged. You consistently refer to the readings, lectures, and class discussions from other weeks. You encourage others' comments and questions in a productive and respectful manner.

GOOD: You are present and prepared, and you offer thoughtful questions and comments that demonstrate your preparation for discussion and attention to readings and lectures.

ADEQUATE: You are present and prepared, but limit your contributions to several surface-level observations or clarifying questions about lectures or readings.

MINIMAL: You usually make a single comment during discussions in response to another student's observations or insights. ("I agree with them.")

Textbooks: All readings are available through the Blackboard System or online by links imbedded in the syllabus.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

Reading assignments must be completed by class on the day listed. Keep the reading questions in mind as you read and take notes.

- **Pdf** = pdf files available in Blackboard > Content.
- **Online** = online readings hotlinked in the syllabus in Blackboard > Content.

Dates	Topics	Assignments (excerpts from these works as pdfs or weblinks)
Mon Aug 31	Which comes first: law or religion?	
Wed Sep 2	Which came first: law or religion?	Dubler and Weiner, Introduction to <i>Religion, Law, USA</i> (2019) Class: History of religion, law, and writing; Oral norms and laws
Mon Sep 7	Labor Day	NO CLASS
The Origins of Written Law		
Wed Sep 9	Writing and economics	Online: BBC First Accountants
Mon Sep 14 MEET in Bird Special	Material Texts: SU's cuneiform tablet collection	Pdf: Robinson 123-134 "Chapter 8: Scribes and Materials"

Collections, 6th floor		
Wed Sep 16	Ancient contracts, treaties	Online Babatha's Marriage Contract Online Succession Treaties of Esarhaddon
Mon Sep 21	Writing and religion	Bible: Exodus 24 ; 32-32; Deuteronomy 31
Wed Sep 23	Writing and law	Pdf: Hammurabi's Law Code
Mon Sep 28	Test #1	In classroom
A Social History of Law and Religion		
Wed Sep 30	Torah as law	Bible Exodus 20:1-17, 21, Leviticus 1, 11, 19 ; Class: Watts, "Political and Legal Uses of Torah" or "Torah as Divine Rhetoric"
Mon Oct 5	Jewish legal tradition (<i>halakhah</i>)	Saiman, <i>Halakhah</i> , pp. 3-8, 17-19
Wed Oct 7	Christian Scripture	Bible: Romans 7:1-8:9 ; Matthew 5-7 ; Pdf: Irenaeus (Class: Verheyden, "New Testament Canon")
Mon Oct 12	Fall Break	NO CLASS
Wed Oct 14	Christian Roman Law	Online Roman Law and Justinian's Code (Class: Humfress, "Judging by the Book"; natural law vs. the laws of nations)
Mon Oct 19	Muslim scripture, The Qur'an	Peters, <i>The Voice</i> , pp. ???
Wed Oct 21	Muslim law (<i>sharia</i>)	Hallaq 2009, pp. 7-19
Mon Oct 26	Medieval Christian (canon) law	Berman 1993, pp. 40-44. (Class: Hoeflich and Grabher, "The Establishment of Normative Legal Texts")
Wed Oct 28	Colonialism, Law, and Religion	Goody 1986, pp. 149-58.
Mon Nov 2	Test #2	In classroom
Law and Religion in America: Case Studies		
Wed Nov 4	The First Amendment	Gaffney in Johnson 1985, pp. 82-84; Green 2020, pp. 160-68.
Mon Nov 9	Conscience	Stahl, "Conscience" in Weiner and Dubler 2019
Wed Nov 11	Schools and Religion	Pew, " Religion in the Public Schools " <i>Abington v. Schempp</i> in Setzer and Shefferman 2011, pp. 82-84
Mon Nov 16	Marriage	Leviticus 18 ; Connoly, " Changing Attitudes on Incest "
Wed Nov 18	Sexuality	White "Sexuality" in Weiner and Dubler 2019
Nov 22-29	Thanksgiving Break	
Mon Nov 30	Public health	Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah (1993)
Wed Dec 2	Sabbath laws	Weeks in Johnson 1985, pp. 70-73
Mon Dec 7	Sacred land	Dew "Indigeneity" or Wenger "Sovereignty" in Weiner and Dubler 2019

Wed Dec 9	Ten Commandments	<i>Glassroth v. Moore</i> in Setzer and Shefferman 2011, pp. 88-90
Mon Dec 14	Wrap up	No reading assignment: answer usual reading questions about entire course.
	Final Exam	In classroom

Bibliography:

- Berman, Harold J. *Faith and Order: the Reconciliation of Law and Religion*. Atlanta: Emory University Press, 1993.
- Ferrari, Silvio, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Law and Religion*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Goody, Jack. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Hallaq, Wael B. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Hoeflich, Michael H. and Jasonne M. Grabher, "[The Establishment of Normative Legal Texts: The Beginnings of the *Ius commune*](#)," in *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140-1234* (ed. Kenneth Pennington, Wilfried Hartmann, Washington, D. C. : Catholic University of America Press. 2008), 1-21.
- Johnson, James Turner, ed. *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- The Journal of Law and Religion*, 1983-
- Peters, F. E. *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Robinson, Andrew. *Writing and Script: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Saiman, Chaim N. *Halakhah: The Rabbinic Idea of Law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Setzer, Claudia and David A. Shefferman, eds. *The Bible and American Culture: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Setzer, Claudia and David A. Shefferman, eds. *The Bible in the American Experience*. Atlanta: SBL, 2020.
- Watts, James W. "[The Political and Legal Uses of Scripture](#)," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 345-64.
- Watts, James W. "The Torah as Divine Rhetoric." *Leviticus 11-20*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 40-48.
- Weiner, Isaac and Joshua Dubler, eds. *Religion, Law, USA*. New York: NYU Press, 2019.

ADD

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Captive Gods: Religion and the Rise of Social Science*, 2025/6?

Academic Integrity: Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific expectations, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and

truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy also prohibits students from: 1) submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving advance written authorization from both instructors and, 2) using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and presenting the work as their own. Under the policy, instructors who seek to penalize a student for a suspected violation must first report the violation to the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS). Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Instructors must wait to assign a final course grade until a suspected violation is reviewed and upheld or overturned. Upholding Academic Integrity includes abiding by instructors' individual course expectations, which may include the protection of their intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or otherwise share instructors' course materials without permission. Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered, as outlined in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty and instructors, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level. In this course, students found cheating on a test or assignment will receive zero (0) credit for that test or assignment and may result in further disciplinary action. For more information and the complete policy, see the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) in Bird Library or at <http://class.syr.edu/>.

Academic Integrity Online: All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person quizzes and exams also apply to online quizzes and exams. In this course, all work submitted for quizzes and exams must be yours alone. Discussing quiz or exam questions with anyone during the quiz or exam period violates academic integrity expectations for this course. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero, ChatGPT) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and present the work as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation, resulting in suspension or expulsion from Syracuse University.

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system Turnitin. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the final paper through Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at Syracuse University and at other colleges and universities. Turnitin also assess whether text was written by AI software. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting Turnitin's originality report. Keep in mind that all take-home tests you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

In this course, students found cheating on an assignment will receive zero (0) credit for that test or assignment and may result in further disciplinary action. For more information and the complete policy, see the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) in Bird Library or at <http://class.syr.edu/>.

Discrimination or Harassment:

The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, age, race, color, veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 005 Steele Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; by email: titleix@syr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-0211.

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443-4715, 200 Walnut Place, Syracuse, New York 13244-5040). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269).

I will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes I learn about to help make our campus a safer place for all.

Religious Observances Policy: SU religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through *MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances* from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Disability-Related Accommodations: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) located at 804 University Avenue, third floor or go to the ODS website at disabilityservices.syr.edu and click current students tab to register on-line. You may also call 315.443.4498 to speak to someone regarding specific access needs. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue 'Accommodation Letters' to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal as your instructor is to create learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite you to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.