

## **Hartwick College**

### **RELS-146-1 Sacred Space in America**

January Term 2026 4 credits

MT TF 9:30-12:00 Golisano 303

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Office Hours: Smaller requests and issues can be done immediately after class.

Larger conversations via Zoom appointment. "All reasonable times considered"

### **Description**

Sacred space refers to the structures and landscapes that communities hold to be particularly powerful and meaningful. Typically these are set apart from ordinary spaces because of ritual use, distinctive events that once happened there, or intrinsic qualities such as beauty or austerity. In the most basic sense, sacred space refers to religious architecture—churches, mosques, temples, shrines, etc. In a broader sense, however, sacred space encompasses memorials, monuments, museums, parks, sites of tragedy, sites of protest, extraordinary natural areas and even the virtual spaces of our cybernetic age. In this course, students will explore the conceptual foundations of sacred space and learn about the diverse types of sacred space found in the United States.

### **Major learning outcomes for this course.**

- You will learn how to describe and compare diverse types of sacred space found in the United States.
- You will learn how to describe and compare the relationship between form and function in sacred spaces.
- You will apply concepts and theories of sacred spaces in creative collaborative projects.

### **Texts**

All readings and videos will be made available on the D2L page for the course.

### **Course Website**

A course website has been created through D2L. It will include announcements, research links, handouts, additional readings, assignments, a discussion board and other useful things, as well as any other materials used in the class, like slides, links, videos, etc.

### **We will have in-person sessions during the normal class period, MTThF 9:30 - noon EST.**

These sessions will include discussions to clarify questions about the readings and assignments, some short lectures, videos, and eventually, some work with small groups. These sessions will be a crucial component of the course and in general terms we will start with simple things and then work towards more complex activities. **Wednesdays and weekends** will often include reading, film watching, and other work.

**If you miss a session or cannot access because of illness, or some other reason – don't despair!** We anticipate this will happen for some students at some sessions.

Send an email to me at [daltonl@hartwick.edu](mailto:daltonl@hartwick.edu) as soon as you know you cannot attend. You should expect that your make-up work will cover what everyone else did in the online sessions, or a near equivalent. This might mean doing a comparable assignment, or scheduling a make-up Zoom session with the instructor.

**Decorum.** While you will be encouraged to offer your frank opinions in this class, we recognize that both religion and politics can be emotionally charged and highly controversial subjects (and we will study why this is our current situation!). Thus while you are encouraged to offer your opinions, strive to do so in a manner that is **polite and respectful** of the opinions of others.

**Academic Honesty.** All students are expected to adhere to the college's policies on Academic Honesty in all assignments. Please look over our philosophy, definitions and procedures found here: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.

**Accommodations.** Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of Access Ability Services at [sanfordl@hartwick.edu](mailto:sanfordl@hartwick.edu) or [AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu](mailto:AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu). Access Ability Services is located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Yager Hall in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

### **Grading**

**Questions and Projects (75%)** To encourage careful reading, preparation, and class discussion, there will be a number of written assignments and projects, usually related to the reading. On a regular basis, you will be called upon to answer specific questions, give your opinion, pose questions to the class, work with a smaller group, or otherwise participate in class activities. Most worksheets and projects will take place over multiple days with the final versions submitted online to the D2L/Assignments drop-box.

**Creative Team Project (25%)** Done in the last week. Tasks include conceptualizing, modeling, and making a short presentation of a hypothetical sacred space or memorial.

### **Grading Scale**

A (93-100) A- (90-92) B+ (87-89) B (83-86) B- (80-82) C+ (77-79)  
C (73-76) C- (70-72) D+ (68-69) D (65-67) D- (63-64) F (0-62)

**Note: I reserve the right to fail any student who does not complete the final project.**

## Schedule

**Week 1) Introduction to Sacred Spaces.** The first section of the course will introduce the idea of sacred space via explorations of Martin Luther King Jr. memorials, and then Christian sacred spaces.

Day	Topic	Daily activities	Reading and Homework
1	Introduction Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sacred Space	--Syllabus --King Project	Read, "Kings Body" on D2L Start MLK Question responses
2	MLK Start: Christian sacred spaces	-- Discuss MLK Questions -- Film: <i>Cathedral</i>	Read "Interpreting Churches" by J. Booth Work on Cathedrals Project
3	Christian Sacred Spaces	<b>No Class Meeting Today</b>	<b>MLK Questions due</b> Work on Cathedrals Project
4	Christian Sacred Spaces	--Cathedrals Project Discussion -Types of Churches -Elements of Sacred Spaces	<b>Cathedrals Project Due</b>
5	Christian Sacred Spaces	More Elements of Sacred Spaces	<b>Comparing Christian Sacred Spaces Due</b>

**Week 2) Islam and Buddhism.** To explore the diversity of sacred spaces, this week we will look at the Islamic traditions of art and architecture and then Buddhist temples, monasteries, and retreat centers. Along the way we will focus on comparing and analyzing diverse sacred spaces.

Day	Topic	Daily activities/ Location	Reading and Homework
6	Islamic Art and Architecture	Film, lecture, discussion	TBA
7	Islamic Sacred Space in America	Mosques in USA	TBA
8		No Class Today	<b>Islamic Sacred Spaces Due</b>
9	Buddhist Sacred Spaces	Film, lecture, discussion	TBA
10	Buddhist Sacred Spaces in America	Monasteries, centers	<b>Buddhist Sacred Spaces Due</b>

**Week 3) Theories of Sacred Space and Virtual Sacred Space.** This week we will build upon the comparative work we did in weeks 1 and 2 by exploring some general theories about sacred spaces. Then we will look at how virtual spaces convey the sacred – on the internet, in games, and in other online environments.

Day	Topic	Daily activities	Reading and Homework
			(Weekend) Read: <i>Sacred and Profane</i> by M. Eliade.
11	Theories of Sacred Space	--Discussion of theory --Start Virtual Sacred	TBA
12	Virtual Sacred Spaces	Online worship	Theories Questions Due
13	Virtual Sacred Spaces	No class session	Online Worship Project Due
14	Virtual Sacred Spaces	Games	TBA
15	Virtual Sacred Spaces	Sacred Virtual Worlds	Virtual Sacred Spaces Project Due

**Week 4) Creating Sacred Space.** In the final week of the course students will focus on a culminating creative project that will involve designing an architectural model of a hypothetical memorial site. You will work in teams to build models, plans and elevations of their sites, present them to the class, as well as critique the works of other teams.

Day	Topic	Daily activities	Reading and Homework
			Think of project ideas
16	Creating Sacred Space	Teams form and plan projects.	TBA
17	Creating Sacred Space	Teams continue work on projects.	TBA
18	Creating Sacred Space	No class meeting	TBA
19	Creating Sacred Space	Presentations Due	