

Economics of Religion

Course title – Intitulé du cours	Economics of Religion
Level / Semester – Niveau /semestre	MRes/S2
School – Composante	Ecole d'Economie de Toulouse
Teacher – Enseignant responsable	Paul Seabright
Lecture Hours – Volume Horaire CM	15
TA Hours – Volume horaire TD	n/a
TP Hours – Volume horaire TP	n/a
Course Language – Langue du cours	English
TA and/or TP Language – Langue des TD et/ou TP	English

Teaching staff contacts – Coordonnées de l'équipe pédagogique :

Paul.Seabright@tse-fr.eu

Students should please make contact by email and I will suggest a time to meet.

Course Objectives – Objectifs du cours :

In more detail :

- ideas, theories or methods that will be illustrated in class;
- methods that will be used and that students are expected to be proficient in;
- skills that will be developed during the course (type of problems to be resolved, ability to provide written and oral comments on an empirical analysis,...).

In this course we will take the example of religious organizations to form a bridge between behavioral economics and the economics of institutions. We will be interested in studying the demand for religious activity - what makes individuals want to undertake the activities that religion provides? We will also look at the supply side – how do such religious organizations as churches, mosques, synagogues and temples (but also madrassas, convents, monasteries and many other institutions) meet the demand of individuals for religious activity? We will explore the idea that religious organizations can be analyzed as platforms that put different groups of members in touch with each other. We will show how experiments can cast light on both demand and supply characteristics. We will consider how such evidence can be used alongside evidence from other sources – surveys, macroeconomic data, census data – to consider both the economic determinants and the economic consequences of religion, both historically and in the world of the 21st century. We will examine the interaction of religious movements and political institutions, and consider whether there are grounds for modifying the regulation of religious organizations. We will spend some time considering potential areas for future research, in case students are interested in pursuing this area for their Ph.D. But interest in doing research in this field is not a prerequisite for participating in the class.

The purpose of the course is to a) develop the skills required to apply simple theory models to real world institutions; b) enable students to reflect on the kinds of evidence that would be required to test those models; c) help them to be aware of the limitations of economic analysis in tackling areas of social life outside the traditional domains of production and consumption decisions; d) develop an understanding of the history of ideas within economics (to help understand for example why the economics of religion was of great interest to Adam Smith but not to his successors until late in the 20th century).

Prerequisites – Pré requis :

- skills and competences needed/previously acquired
- or the title(s) of the compulsory course(s) which should have been taken before

Apart from the general core skills of microeconomic analysis and familiarity with data analysis, no specific competences are required.

Practical information about the sessions – Modalités pratiques de gestion du cours :

- please specify if laptops or tablets are accepted or not in the class,
- expectation on students' participation,
- how will be treated students that arrive to class late.....

Laptops and/or tablets are accepted in class. Students will be expected to participate actively in the sessions, which will be more like seminars than like standard lectures.

Grading system – Modalités d'évaluation :

- final exam or midterm exams
- Teaching Assistant grading
- weights of the weighted average main cours-TA (consistent with the voted examination "arrêté d'examen"),
- semester calendar,
- how to handle late homework...

The course will be assessed by means of a project, which will be discussed in detail beforehand between the student and the professor. The project may be either theoretical or empirical, and suggestions for topics will be provided in both areas.

Bibliography/references – Bibliographie/références :

- list of assigned readings and other course materials: books (chapters), internet links,...

There is no assigned textbook for the course, and no prior reading is required, but at the end of each lecture students will be given a list of references which have been cited in the lecture, as well as to potential further reading. A shared Dropbox folder will be created so that students have access to a regularly updated reading list, as well as to electronic data and bibliographical resources.

My book entitled *The Divine Economy: How Religions Compete for Wealth, Power and People* (Princeton University Press, 2024) covers much of the ground of the lectures, albeit in a more informal way than the lectures will. This book will be available for consultation by students who are interested (but will not be required reading). It will contain a much more extensive bibliography than the lectures, for those who want to explore the subject further. I also have a forthcoming paper on "The economics of religion" in the Annual Reviews in Economics series for 2026, which will be available for students to consult.

Session planning – Planification des séances

- presentation of the sessions, connection with the resources

The course will consist of ten 90-minute lectures, with the following titles:

- 1) What has happened to religion in the world since the Second World War? The secularization hypothesis.
- 2) What has happened to religion in the world since the Second World War? Corporatization and the decline of folk religion.
- 3) Economic models of religious competition from *The Wealth of Nations* to the present– an overview.
- 4) The demand for religious services.
- 5) Religions as platforms - theory.
- 6) Religions as platforms – evidence.
- 7) What makes religions different from other platforms? Ritual, belief, narrative, ethics and meaning.
- 8) Religion and beliefs – an economic analysis.
- 9) Religion and political institutions.

Regulating religious power.

Distance learning – Enseignement à distance :

Distance learning can be provided when necessary by implementing, for example:

- Interactive virtual classrooms
- Recorded lectures (videos)
- MCQ tests and other online exercises / assignments
- Remote (online) tutorials (classes)
- Chatrooms

This will be determined by discussion during the first session according to the needs and preferences of the students who attend.