

ENG 461.01 – Spring 2021 – Wednesdays, 4:00-6:45 – Dr. Barbara Liu  
**American Gods: Religious Expression in the U.S.**



For good and for ill, religious expression has been a part of public life in the United States from its colonial beginnings on to today. American poets, novelists, and playwrights have infused their work with their beliefs and perspectives on religion. Political activists and elected officials have grounded their calls to action in scripture and religious systems. And as the American religious landscape has become more diverse, so have the ways in which Americans publicly and creatively express their religious views and commitments. This capstone seminar will explore that diversity.

The spring semester will be an immersion in the topic through reading, writing about, and discussing a variety of primary literary and rhetorical texts, as well as some works of criticism and commentary that provide historical and scholarly context. In the fall semester, students will (with the support of the instructor and classmates) complete individual capstone projects in whatever form interests them most—whether literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, or original creative work (poetry, fiction, drama, film, etc.)

Note: This course will focus on religious expression rather than spiritual expression. The key difference between “religious” and “spiritual,” for our purposes, is that “religious” refers to the shared beliefs, practices, and history of an organized *group* of people, while “spiritual” refers to an *individual’s* way of relating to or thinking about some higher power. These two categories might overlap—and often do—but our focus will be on texts that are clearly tied to a particular religious tradition (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hoodoo, etc.).

*If you have questions about what to expect, please contact Dr. Liu ([liub@easternct.edu](mailto:liub@easternct.edu)).*