

Course Description V58.0185-001

Seminar: Religion, Identity & Politics – Northern Ireland Conflict & Resolution
1969-2005

Summer Session I 2007

This course is aimed at undergraduate students interested in the interplay of religion, identity and politics by examining Northern Ireland as a detailed case study, with an investigation of the historical context of the conflict and an exploration of the contemporary political situation. Between 1969 and 2000 the conflict in Northern Ireland produced a death toll exceeding 3,600. The vast majority of Northern Ireland's 1.6 million inhabitants have always desired peace, yet conflict was endemic from 1969 until the mid-1990s and has been sporadic since then despite an ongoing peace process. The political problem in Northern Ireland is based upon the assertion of competing national identities, identities which are coupled with different religious affiliations. There is a majority population in Northern Ireland which sees itself as British. There is a minority of people in Northern Ireland who see their identity as Irish. The majority group wishes to remain part of the United Kingdom, while the minority group wishes to be part of the overall Irish majority on the island. Protestants form just over half of the population in Northern Ireland while Catholics form 40 per cent of the population.

The course will begin with a detailed examination of the creation and evolution of Northern Ireland as a state in the early twentieth century followed by a mainly contemporary focus on Northern Ireland, examining party ideologies, paramilitary organizations and aspirations. Governance, policing, religion and identity will be assessed, followed by a concentration on analyzing attempts to resolve the conflict until the present moment. The roles of the British government, the government of the Republic of Ireland, influential figures within the Irish American community, and the politics of the Clinton Administration will all be examined. The course will include consideration of the burgeoning literature which has emerged from Northern Ireland since the 1960s, the attention which film-makers have paid to various aspects of the conflict, and a number of guest speakers will address the class.