

Popular Culture and the Religious Marketplace

RELS 340

Fall 2021

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***Please include RELS 340 in the subject line of all emails to me.**

Course Description

Popular Culture and the Religious Marketplace explores the interaction between religion and popular culture in North America and globally. Students will learn about the constructions of popular culture (storytelling, sports, music) through course texts, films, and other media. Students will also study religious entrepreneurs, including those who profit from New Age and spiritualist movements. This course includes both written assessments and presentations and as such, is geared toward different learning styles. Students will gain an appreciation for different cultures through this course, which is not limited to the American context.

Welcome

Welcome to class! I am so happy to have you here and look forward to spending the next several months together online. As part of that welcome, I invite you to this learning community.

Here are a few important notes about our community:

With the expense of college education in mind, I have kept the cost of texts for this book low. The total cost of texts is low.

Communicate! If you are having any trouble with a reading or assignment, EMAIL me. We can set up a chat and discuss!

This class is asynchronous — meaning, we don't meet as a class. However, I strongly urge you to meet with me via Zoom or Skype during the semester if you would like to chat about class, need help with an assignment, etc. There will also be a Meet Up on Zoom for the class during Week One that I encourage you to attend.

Lastly, this syllabus is critical. Think of it as a map for a journey you are taking to a new country. You will need to refer to it constantly or get lost!

Dr. Arjana

Required Texts and Blackboard Readings

This course has two required texts you need to purchase:

Forbes, Bruce David and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America: Third Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017.

Arjana, Sophia. *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace*. London: Oneworld, 2020.

All other required readings are listed in the schedule of classes and are available on Blackboard.

Colonnade Learning Outcomes/Artifacts and Evidence

During the course of the semester, students will have: (1) An appreciation of the complexity and variety of the world's cultures, (2) A historical perspective and an understanding of connections between past and present, (3) An understanding of human society and behavior, (4) Proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking

During the course of the semester, students will do the following:

1) Write a midterm essay, 2) Write a final paper on religious and popular culture, and 3) Research and present on two topics related to the course, 4) Create a scrapbook of popular culture images

Grading

Grading is on a 100-point scale. No weighted grades, no surprises, no pop quizzes, no final exam, no extra credit. This is as straightforward as it can be.

Weekly Discussions	35% (35 points)
Orientalism Infographic	25% (25 points)
Scrapbook	40% (40 points)

****All assignments are due on Blackboard on their due date.**

Note: THERE IS NO MIDTERM OR FINAL EXAM IN THIS CLASS. THERE ARE NO QUIZZES OR TESTS. THERE IS NO EXTRA CREDIT.

Weekly Forum Discussions

7 discussions at 5 points each

Due Each Discussion Week on Tuesday and Thursday at Noon

***Check Schedule of Classes for Weeks We Will Have Forum Discussions**

Objective: We will have forum discussions most weeks, which are required for all students. I will pose a question for most weeks you will respond to. You will also be required to respond to another student's original post as well.

Initial post always due TUESDAY by noon.

Response to another student's post always due THURSDAY by noon.

*Please note that given the number of students I have, I cannot accept late posts. If your posts are not up by Thursday afternoon, I will **not** go back later and grade it. *Except for documented cases of illness.

Both posts (to me, and to another student in this class) must be a minimum of ten sentences long and you MUST refer to the reading(s) for that week by providing quotes with page numbers. If you do not refer to the readings in your posts, you will receive a ZERO for that week's post.

I will post a WEEKLY MESSAGE on Friday that lifts up some of the main themes of the week's discussion, the readings, and more. MAKE SURE you read these as they are part of your learning.

Assignment Rationale: Students have weekly discussions in order to process the readings, engage with other students, and be exposed to different ideas and perspectives on pilgrimage and other topics.

Orientalism Infographic

25 points

Due Wednesday October 13th by 5 p.m.

Each student will create an infographic that reflects Orientalism in religious popular culture. You may choose a product from the Arjana text or find one on your own. The infographic will include an explanation of your image and how it reflects Orientalism (minimum of two pages, double-spaced) with Chicago Style footnotes from at least one academic source (you can use the class texts for your sources or go outside of these).

Scrapbook

40 points

Due Friday December 3rd by 5 p.m.

The scrapbook is a way of you engaging with religious popular culture in a country or region either inside or outside of North America.

Think of this as a journal of your reflections on religious popular culture that includes references to the readings on every page.

Requirements: A minimum of one page per week, for a total of 15 pages. You may include images from magazines, the internet, or other sources. Your scrapbook should include a cover page that identifies your subject and what you learned from the scrapbooking exercise. This portion should be no longer than two pages double-spaced Times New Roman 12.

Academic Integrity

Regarding *cheating*, the University states, “No student shall receive or give assistance not authorized by the instructor in taking an examination.” In this course, specific examples of unauthorized assistance include sharing reading notes with other students, including those enrolled in subsequent sections of this course.

Students must work independently on papers and writing assignments and avoid *plagiarism*, which the University defines as “any use of another writer’s words, concepts, or sequence of ideas without acknowledging that writer properly.” Violations almost always result in a zero on the paper or an automatic F in the course.

Title IX, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Policy Statement

Discrimination, harassment, and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.

Accommodations

In compliance with University policy, students who have disabilities and require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course are encouraged to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, which is located in Downing Street Union 1074 (270-745-3004; 270-745-3030TTY); sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please obtain a faculty notification letter (FNL) from the Student Accessibility Resource Center before requesting accommodations directly from the professor.

Course Expectations

Course Expectations

You need to be prepared for class by having the assigned readings done by their discussion date (which are listed in the syllabus).

No late submissions of assignments, including class discussion posts, will be accepted unless there is documented illness or other (i.e. family) situation.

You should have expectations of your professors as well. I am in my 11th year of teaching university and am very supportive of my students and their learning. I will post email messages (“Announcements” on Blackboard) or videos each week with feedback for the class.

Also, you can contact me via email if you have any questions and I am very responsive — you will likely hear back from me within 24 hours. Do keep in mind that I have over 100 students a semester and do my best to communicate with all of them.

My email is: sophia.arjana@wku.edu. ***Please put “RELS 340” in the subject line of all emails to me.**

I do NOT answer (or even read) emails between Friday 4 p.m. and Monday 10 a.m.

Also, if you email me with a question that is answered by you reading the syllabus I will simply respond, “Read the Syllabus.” I will not retype information contained within the syllabus or found on Blackboard.

Other Important Stuff

Communication! I am **very** good about answering student emails, but do not answer emails on the weekends (Friday afternoon through Monday morning). Please do not email me with an emergency (“I cannot finish my paper on time!”) on the weekends because I will not see your email.

Food Insecurity: Around 50% of college students have difficulty affording groceries. Please contact the WKU Food Pantry (270-745-2508) or email them at sustainability@wku.edu.

An Important Reminder on Religious Studies in the Public University

“The school's approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.

The school strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student *acceptance* of any religion.

The school sponsors *study* about religion, not the *practice* of religion.

The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.

The school *educates* about all religions; it does not *promote* or *denigrate* religion.

The school *informs* students about various beliefs; it does not seek to *conform* students to any particular belief.”

A Teachers Guide to Religion in the Public Schools, First Amendment Center, Nashville, 1999, p. 3].

Additional Learning Resources

The WKU Center for Literacy is located in Gary A. Ransdell Hall 2066. At the Center for Literacy, students can receive assistance in developing strategies to help with **reading/studying to learn** and **writing for evidence and argument**. The Center for Literacy offers both individual and small group sessions throughout the semester. Please email @ literacy.center@wku.edu to schedule an appointment or ask questions, visit the website at <http://www.wku.edu/literacycenter/>, or stop by GRH 2066 for more information.

The WKU Writing Center is at 123 Cherry Hall and can be reached at writingcenter@wku.edu or 270-745-5719. They have great resources and can offer support for writing — either in person or online (for distance learners). Their website is <https://www.wku.edu/writingcenter/>

Schedule of Classes and Readings

The schedule is organized according to topic and texts (readings and visual texts, which are largely comprised of film clips). *A list of prospective readings is included here. All the underlined readings are from the first required text: Forbes, Bruce David and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America: Revised Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Week 1: Defining Religion

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 1

Visual Text: *Blessings: The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet* (entire film)

Zoom Meet Up on Wednesday August 25th at 4 p.m. *Come if you can! No penalty if you can't make it. No Forum Discussion This Week

***We will discuss reading and film in our Meetup so read chapter and watch film before Wednesday.**

Week 2: Approaching Popular Culture

Reading: David Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock and Roll”

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 2

Visual Text: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*

Discussion Prompt: Define Orientalism and cultural colonialism. Explain their significance in religious popular culture.

Week 3: Popular Culture

Reading: Forbes, Introduction

Visual Text: Metropolitan Museum Cloisters Gallery @ <https://www.metmuseum.org/visit/met-cloisters> (website)

Discussion Prompt: Define popular culture. In your definition, include how it is related to religion and religious products.

Week 4: The Religious Marketplace

Reading: Lelwica, Chapter 13

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 3

Visual Text: The Goop Lab, “Are You Intuit?” (Netflix)

Discussion Prompt: Discuss how the search for enchantment is linked to products in the marketplace with specific examples from Goop and other sellers.

Week 5: Judaism and Christianity

Reading: Gross, Chapter 9

Visual Text 1: <https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/Home.aspx> (website)

Visual Text 2: *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (film)

No Forum Discussion This Week

Week 6: Islam

Reading: Peterson and Echchaibi, Chapter 7

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 5

Visual Text: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68sMkDKMias> (video)

No Forum Discussion This Week

Week 7: Hinduism and Buddhism

Readings: Iwamura, Chapter 2, Ghandi, Chapter 16

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 4

Visual Text: <https://boulder.shambhala.org/> (website), *The Matrix* (film)

Discussion Prompt: Describe the role of the Oriental monk OR yoga in popular culture.

Week 8: FALL BREAK

Orientalism Infographics Due Wednesday October 13th by 5 p.m.

No Forum Discussion This Week

Week 9: Sports

Reading: Price, Chapter 14

Visual Text: *Field of Dreams* (film)

No Forum Discussion This Week

Week 10: Science Fiction and Fantasy

Reading: Arjana, Chapter 6, Johnston, Chapter 18

Visual Text: *Star Wars: Rogue One* (entire film)

Visual Text: LOST (TV series, any two episodes)

Discussion Prompt: Choose either Star Wars or LOST as your case study and identify the mystical themes in these visual texts/films.

Week 11: The Religious Marketplace: Pastorpreneurs and Oprah

Reading: Katja Rakow, “Therapeutic Culture and Religion in America,” Luke A. Winslow, “The Imaged Other: Style and Substance in the Rhetoric of Joel Osteen,” Karlyn Crowley, “New Age Soul: The Gendered Translation of New Age Spirituality on The Oprah Winfrey Show”

Discussion Prompt: Identify an item sold by Joel Osteen or Oprah (you can check out her magazine for her recommended products) and explain how it reflects the religious marketplace. Be specific in the themes this product reflects and describe how it reflects contemporary religious trends.

Week 12: The Religious Marketplace: New Age and Mysticism

Readings: Catherine L. Albanese, "The Aura of Wellness: Subtle-Energy Healing and New Age Religion" and Hans A. Baer, "The Work of Andrew Weil and Deepak Chopra: Two Holistic Health/New Age Gurus: A Critique of the Holistic Health/New Age Movements"

Discussion Prompt: Define New Age religion and modern mysticism. Describe their similarities and differences.

Week 13: The Religious Marketplace: The Business of Mindfulness

Readings: Terry Hyland, "McDonaldizing Spirituality: Mindfulness, Education, and Consumerism"

No Discussion this Week

Week 14: THANKSGIVING

Week 15: **Scrapbooking Time**

No Forum Discussion This Week

Scrapbook Due Friday December 3rd by 5 p.m.