Course Description
This course examines the important relationship between religion and popular culture. In the first section, we examine the foundational components of “religion” while complicating our understanding of the term through an exploration of contemporary pop culture movements/artifacts that, on some level, resemble “religion.” The second half of the course focuses on the religious landscape and the ways in which popular culture identifies, reproduces, and even ignores the complexity of that landscape. In order to accomplish these tasks we will (1) read foundational texts in the field of religious studies, (2) explore academic writings on the intersections of religion and popular culture, and (3) watch, listen, discuss, and critically analyze, television, film, music, sports, celebrity, and other popular cultural movements and artifacts.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and understand the broader components and functions of human religious experience
- Critically analyze popular cultural artifacts from within the subject-field of religious studies
- Understand the complex religious landscape

Required Readings
2. Additional online resources and other material listed in syllabus

Evaluation
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<tr>
<th>Performance Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Artifact Analysis Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>February 13 (outline=5%), March 20 (paper)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (Seminars)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take Home Exams</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>March 4, April 8</td>
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Cultural Artifact Analysis Paper (30%) – 5% for proposal and 25% for final paper
This paper is a critical analysis of a cultural artifact of your choosing (such as a film, music album, material object, television program,) that exemplifies the intersection of religion and popular culture. You will approach your selected artifact using the analytical tools gathered from the classroom and your readings. The first step of this project involves submitting your selected artifact and a research question for approval and feedback. This first step is worth 5% of your grade.

Sources: While the use of secondary sources outside of the assigned readings is not strictly required for this assignment, the thoughtful incorporation of other research cannot help but benefit your grade. All secondary sources should be properly cited.

Format: Students will be required to write a short paper of approximately 2000 words in length. The essay is to be double-spaced and in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1” margins on all sides. Include page numbers on the bottom of every page. Make sure you reference all sources and provide a bibliography at the end of your assignment. At the beginning of your assignment, you must list your name, student #, class code, instructor’s name, and date. Any method of citing is acceptable, as long as you are consistent.

Submission: All papers will be submitted electronically through the course website. E-mail submissions will not be accepted. All submissions should be in .rtf, .doc, or .docx format.

Participation (20%)
This course is divided into two sections, a lecture on Mondays and seminars on Wednesdays. The objective of designing the course in this way is to promote engaged critical thought. The course and, in particular, the seminars will be conducted dialogically (i.e., class discussions, small group work, debates, presentations, etc.). For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that you come to seminars prepared to discuss the readings. Your participation mark will reflect your attendance, preparedness, and contributions to the seminars. In addition, weekly discussions will be hosted on the course website.

Take Home Exams (25% x 2)
Following sections I and II of this course, you will be presented with a “take home exam” that will ask you a series of short answer questions related to the broader purpose of the unit. In these exams, you will be expected to reference course material and demonstrate your comprehension of the material. The exam questions will be distributed following the conclusion of the units (February 27 and April 3) and will be due by the following Monday. If you keep up to date with your readings, attend class, and take good notes, the exams should not take you very long to complete. Like the rest of the material in this course, your exams will be submitted online in .doc, .docx, or .rtf format.
Reading Schedule

Introducing Religion and Popular Culture

January 7: Popular Culture
Readings: Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman, “Introducing Popular Culture” (CP)

January 14: Religion and Religious Studies
Readings: Scott Kline, “The Study of Religion” (CP)

Part I: The Foundational Aspects of Religion and Challenging the Boundaries of Religion

January 21: Sacred Power, Religious Experience, and Encounters of the Fourth Kind
Readings: Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (parts I through IV) (CP)
Watch: History Channel’s Ancient Aliens: Chariots, Gods, and Beyond (2009),
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbBXD0Ditvg&feature=fvst

January 28: Sacred Space, Ritual and Sports
Readings: Mircea Eliade, “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” (CP)
Tom Sinclair-Faulkner, “A Puckish Reflection on Religion in Canada” (CP)
Watch: Superbowl, at least one quarter and some of the pre-show (February 3)

February 4: Sacred Stories, Celebrity and Superheroes
Readings: Russell McCutcheon, “Myth” (CP)
William Indick, “Classical Heroes in Modern Movies: Mythological Patterns of the Superhero,”
http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfischo/ClassicalHeroes.html

February 11: Identity, Community and Fandom
Readings: Emile Durkheim, “The Social Basis of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge” (CP)
Porter, “‘I Am a Jedi’: Star Wars Fandom, Religious Belief, and the 2001 Census” (CP)

February 13: DUE Outline for Cultural Artifact Paper (Submit online by 2:00 p.m.)

READING WEEK (February 18 to February 22)

February 25: Human Existence and Destiny in Science Fiction
Readings: Peter Berger, “Religion and World Construction” (CP)
Douglas Cowan, “The Truth is Out There: Transcendence and the Neverending Quest” (CP)
**Part II: Beyond the Study of Traditions: The Religious Landscape and Popular Culture**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 4</td>
<td>The Spiritual Marketplace: Buying and Selling Religion</td>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong> Vincent J. Miller, “Consumer Religion” (CP)</td>
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<td>March 4</td>
<td>DUE Take Home Exam #1 (by 2:00 p.m. online)</td>
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<td>March 11</td>
<td>Crossing and Dwelling in Canadian-Indian Cinema</td>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong> Thomas Tweed, “Confluences: Toward a Theory of Religion” (CP)</td>
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<td>In class film: Srinivas Krishna’s <em>Masala</em> (1992)</td>
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<td>Jose Casanova, “Secularization, Enlightenment, and Modern Religion” (CP)</td>
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<td>Greg Graffen, “The Problem with Authority” from <em>Anarchy, Evolution, Faith, Science and Bad Religion in a World without God</em> (CP)</td>
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<td>Read Lyrics and Listen to the following songs:</td>
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<td>(1) Bad Religion – Bad Religion (1984)</td>
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<td>(2) Bad Religion – The Answer (1992)</td>
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<td>(3) Leftover Crack - Atheist Anthem (2001)</td>
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<td>(4) NoFX – Best God in Show (2009)</td>
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<td>(5) NoFX - The Idiots are Taking Over (2003)</td>
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<td>(6) NoFX – Blasphemy (The Victimless Crime) (2009)</td>
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<td>(8) Propangadhi - Haillie Sellasse, Up Your Ass (1993)</td>
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<td>Watch music videos and read lyrics:</td>
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<td>(1) Bad Religion – American Jesus (1993)</td>
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<td>(2) Bad Religion – New Dark Ages (2007)</td>
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<td>(3) D.O.A. – That’s Why I’m an Atheist (2010)</td>
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<td>March 20</td>
<td>DUE Cultural Artifact Paper (Submit online by 2:00 p.m.)</td>
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**March 25: Defining “Normal” and Misunderstanding Cults in *The Simpsons* and *South Park***

*Thomas Robbins, “Balance and Fairness in the Study of Alternative Religions” (CP)*


*Isle Dalton, Eric Mazur, and Monica Siems, “Homer the Heretic and Charlie Church: Parody, Piety, and Pluralism in the Simpsons”.(CP)*
April 1: Postcolonialism and the “Other” in Television and Film
Edward Said, “Introduction” from Orientalism (CP)
Caroline T. Schroeder, “Ancient Egyptian Religion on the Silver Screen: Modern Anxieties about Race, Ethnicity, and Religion,”
http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol7No2/ancienteqypt.htm

April 8: DUE Take Home Exam #2 (by 2:00 p.m. online)

Course Website Information
Using your WatIAM username and password, you can access the course website at

http://learn.uwaterloo.ca

LEARN is a web-based course management system that enables instructors to manage course materials (posting of lecture notes etc.), interact with their students (drop boxes for student submissions, on-line quizzies, discussion boards, course e-mail etc.), and provide feedback (grades, assignment comments etc.). The degree to which LEARN is utilized in a particular course is left to the discretion of the instructor; therefore, you may find a large variance in how LEARN is being used from one course to another.

On the RS150 course website, you will be able to:

- Download select lecture slides
- Submit assignments
- Access some reading material
- Read announcements
- View important dates
- View your grades
- Participate in online discussions

For further help on LEARN you may visit the help website at
http://av.uwaterloo.ca/uwace/training_documentation/student_index.html

You may also contact support staff via e-mail at learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca

Statement on Academic Offense

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek
guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, [http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71](http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71).

**Grievance**: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70](http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70). In addition, consult [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-arts-processes](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-arts-processes) for the Faculty of Arts’ grievance processes.

**Appeals**: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, [http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72](http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72).

Academic Integrity website (Arts): [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)

Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo): [http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/](http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/)

### US Policy Regarding Illness and Missed Assignments/Tests

The University of Waterloo Examination Regulations ([www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf](http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf)) state that:

- A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at [www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html](http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html).

- If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.

- The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations.

- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

### Additional Information

**Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities**

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.
Electronic Gadgets
Please turn off your cell phones and/or any other electronic devices before entering the classroom. Laptops and PDAs with keyboards may be used, but only to take class notes. If you abuse this privilege by accessing social networking sites, web browsing or by playing games during class, the instructor will ask you to leave class immediately. You will then be asked to drop the course at that time. Should you violate this rule more than once, the instructor reserves the right to submit a failing mark for you in the course.

Classroom Ethic
This course will be guided by an ethic of mutual respect and responsibility. At times, the topics may become controversial and in-class debate rather tense. While disagreement is part of a healthy university environment, please engage your colleagues (including the instructor) with respect and in such a way to promote a response. Occasionally, the instructor will need to close down a debate when time is running short, when a conversation devolves into a series of monologues, or when we are bogged down on a topic. And at all times, please refrain from chatting.

E-mail Correspondence
Email is NOT the preferred method of correspondence in this course. The preferred method of correspondence is through face-to-face contact during instructor office hours or through a scheduled appointment. Emails requesting information that is already posted on our course website or communicated in class will not be returned. Should you need such information, please see the instructor. Moreover, email correspondence is NOT a good method of communicating class material or explaining fairly complex concepts. Again, the preferred method of communication is face-to-face contact. Please USE email primarily to make appointments and, if need be, to refine your ideas in communication with the instructor. In some cases, the instructor may request a meeting in lieu of further emails. In all email correspondence, please include your full name and a subject heading that includes RS 150 in its title.