



AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

**Renison University College**  
Affiliated with the University of Waterloo  
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## **Renison University College Land Acknowledgement**

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

### **Fall 2017**

**Course Code: RS 170**

**Course Title: Religion and Popular Culture**

**Class Times/Location:** 2:30-3:50 pm (Tues/Thurs); REN 1918

**Instructor:** Douglas E. Cowan

**Office:** REN 0217

**Office Phone:** 519-884-4404 (x28607)

**Office Hours:** 12:00-1:30 pm (Tues/Thurs), or by appointment

**Email:** [decowan@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:decowan@uwaterloo.ca) (preferred way to reach me)

### **Course Description**

This course examines the relationships and entanglements between religion and popular culture, two of the most powerful ways through which we understand the world and give it meaning. We will examine not only how popular culture reflects and refracts religious belief and practice, but also how religion embraces, colonizes, and opposes various aspects of popular culture.

## Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Identify aspects of religion as they are seen in different forms of popular culture, and explain their significance both in the context of pop culture, and in terms of their importance to wider society.
- B. Identify and explain how different religious groups appropriate and/or resist popular culture.
- C. Critically analyse aspects of popular culture from within the conceptual field of Religious Studies.

### Required Text

- Courseware available from the University of Waterloo Bookstore
- Additional material may be added through LEARN during the course.

### Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date Due	Weighting
Class Participation	Ongoing	20%
In-class Quiz #1	October 12	10%
In-class Quiz #2	November 30	10%
Pop Culture Reflection #1	October 5	15%
Pop Culture Reflection #2	November 14	15%
Major Term Project	November 30	30%
Total		100%

### Class Participation (20%)

Because so much of what we learn happens in the context of class discussion, class participation is crucial to success in the course. Beginning in Week 2, each student will be permitted two unexcused absences; any others require proper documentation per university policy. Note well that class participation is not the same as class attendance. Learning happens most effectively when we are actively engaged with the material. Mid-way through the course, I will be in contact with each student to let you know where I see you in terms of your participation. This will not be a "participation mark" for half the semester, but my sense of your effort in the class. If, throughout the course, you are concerned about your participation, don't hesitate to come and see me.

### **In-Class Quizzes (2 x 10%)**

There will be two in-class quizzes, based on material from the readings and class discussions. While I will have more to say about that in class, the usual format will be short answer and/or short essay format. IMPORTANT: If for any reason you are late to class on these days, you will not be admitted and will be offered no opportunity for a make-up exam. There are no exceptions to this.

### **Pop Culture Reflections (2 x 15%)**

These are written assignments, 900-1200 words (3-4 pages of essay text, typed and doublespaced). Each student will choose some aspect of popular culture and write a critical reflection on it. This can be any aspect of popular culture you like—movies, television, YouTube, videogames, music, theatre, fashion and design, cosplay, art, comedy, literature, graphic novels and comic books, manga and anime, extended universe fiction, material culture, and so on. If it's pop culture, it's grist for our mill. I will go over this assignment more thoroughly in class.

### **Major Term Project**

This assignment can be done in a number of ways. How you choose to approach it is up to you, but it MUST be cleared with me before you get started. You can write a traditional paper; you can produce some kind of multimedia presentation; you can stream-capture a videogame with commentary; you can produce some kind of art project with commentary. These are just a few suggestions. There are three required elements to this assignment:

1. By September 21, identify a topic and write a one-page (no more!) outline telling me what you plan to do, how you are going to do it, and why you think it fits the assignment.
2. By October 26, provide a one-page (again, no more!) state-of-the-assignment report, telling me how you're doing and an initial sense of what you've found. We'll also be sharing in class how our work is going.
3. By November 30, turn in your major project. Depending on what you do, we may have to discuss how this happens.

### **Course Outline (required readings are printed BELOW the topic)**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Sept 7	Introduction to the Course
2	Sept 12-14	Introduction to "Popular Culture" Introduction to "Religion"
<b>Readings</b>		Dick, "We can remember it for you wholesale" O'Brien and Szeman, "Introducing popular culture" James, "Reality of the Unseen"
3	Sept 19-21	Religion and Pop Culture: Comedy
<b>Readings</b>		Cowan, "Episode 712"
4	Sept 26-28	Religion and Pop Culture: The Ritual Process
<b>Readings</b>		King, "N." King, <i>Pet Sematary</i> (excerpt) Cowan, "Return to Ackerman's Field"
5	Oct 3-5	Religion, Popular Culture, and the End of the World As We Know It
<b>Pop Culture Reflection #1 Due (Oct 5)</b>		
<b>Readings</b>		Watson, <i>Mark of the Beast</i> (excerpt) Betzer, <i>Beast</i> (excerpt) LaHaye and Jenkins, <i>Left Behind</i> (excerpt) Gribben, "The <i>Left Behind</i> Phenomenon"
	Oct 10-11	Study Days – No classes
<b>6</b>	<b>Oct 12</b>	<b>In-class Quiz #1</b>
7	Oct 17-19	Popular Culture and the Lifestyle Religion
<b>Readings</b>		Radosh, "As Goods Increase..." Bado-Fralick and Norris, "Holy Commerce, Batman!"
8	Oct 24-26	Pop Culture and the "Mystic East"
<b>Readings</b>		Lau, "Yoga and T'ai Chi"
9	Oct 31-Nov 2	Pop Culture Panic!
<b>Readings</b>		Barkman and Kowalski, "Cooper Considerations..." Cowan, "And take your invisible friends with you..." Laycock, " <i>Dungeons &amp; Dragons</i> as Religious..."
10	Nov 7-9	Playing with Religion
<b>Readings</b>		Luft, "Hardcore Christian Gamers" Campbell, "Islamogaming..."
11	Nov 14-16	Religion and Anime I
<b>Pop Culture Reflection #2 Due (Nov 14)</b>		
12	Nov 21-27	Religion and Anime II
13	Nov 30	<b>In-class Quiz #2</b>

*Tips on doing well:*

- *For any of these assignments, do not write only what you think I want to hear. The intention of all assignments is to encourage you to think critically about the course content, the primary examples we consider, and the course readings.*
- *All assignments will be graded on the depth of thought presented and how well those thoughts are articulated.*
- *Think and write in terms of asking questions and solving problems. Do not simply synopsise the material. If you want to critique it, that's fine, but you have to make an argument for your critique. You can't simply say whether you liked something or not.*
- *Use concrete examples from pop culture, from religion, and from the course to illustrate and support the argument you are making or your solution to the problem you present.*
- *Start early and rewrite or rework your project often. The single most common reason for students doing poorly on any assignments—bar none—is leaving them until the last moment. Speaking of that...*

### **Late Work**

Assignments turned in past the due date will be assessed a penalty of 10% per business day late, including the day on which you turn it in. If a paper is due on Wednesday and you turn it in Friday, that is a 20% penalty. Unless I specify otherwise, I expect you to turn assignments in, not simply email them to me. I do not grant extensions except for reasons of medical and family emergency, and documentation is required in both instances. Please note that I submit my grades as soon as I have finished marking those assignments turned in on the due date. Unless you have made arrangements with me prior to the due date, once grades are submitted, they are final. Extensions beyond the end-of-semester require that students complete a Request for Incomplete form, available at the Renison University College registrar's office, and provide medical (or other) documentation supporting their request.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

Respect the opinions of others. During class discussions, it is very likely that contradictory opinions will emerge, especially when we are dealing with highly emotional topics such as religion and popular culture. There is no requirement in our class that students agree with each other, or with the instructor, but there is the mandate that opinions expressed be respected.

Please be on time. We will begin each class promptly, and I expect students to be in the room and ready to proceed. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and if you are late, it will count as an absence.

### **Electronic Device Policy**

Use of CELLPHONES or other ELECTRONIC DEVICES for voice or text communication is prohibited in class, and all devices must be TURNED OFF when you enter the classroom—not simply set to silent ring—and off the desk. With the widespread availability of wireless access to the Internet, it has become evident that LAPTOPS and TABLETS have become too much of a distraction in the classroom. Unless special arrangements have been made with me, or they are being used for specific class assignments cleared by me at the time, use of these in the classroom is not permitted. Continued use of these devices in contravention of this policy WILL affect a student's participation grade.

### **Attendance Policy**

See above.

### **Final Examination Policy**

There is NO final examination in this course.

### **Accommodation for Illness or Unforeseen Circumstances:**

The instructor follows the practices of the University of Waterloo in accommodating students who have documented reasons for missing quizzes or exams. See

[http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/students/accom\\_illness.html](http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/students/accom_illness.html)

### **Academic Integrity:**

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic](#)

[Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour) for more information.

**Discipline:** Every student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their own 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 Academic Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties are imposed under the University of Waterloo Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties).

Students should also be aware that copyright laws in Canada prohibit reproducing more than 10% of any work without permission from its author, publisher, or other copyright holder. Waterloo’s policy on Fair Dealing is available here: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-guidelines/fair-dealing-advisory> Violation of Canada’s Copyright Act is a punishable academic offence under Policy 71 – Student Discipline.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4 (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant, who will provide further assistance.

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there are grounds. Students who believe they have grounds for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72\)](#).

**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/>

### **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:**

**Note for Students with Disabilities:** The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), 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 AAS office at the beginning of each academic term.

**Intellectual Property.** Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of the instructor, which can include:

- lecture handouts and presentations (e.g., PowerPoint slides)
- lecture content, both spoken and written (and any audio or video recording thereof)
- questions from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams)
- work protected by copyright (i.e., any work authored by the instructor)

Making available the intellectual property of instructors without their express written consent (e.g., uploading lecture notes or assignments to an online repository) is considered theft of intellectual property and subject to disciplinary sanctions as described in Policy 71 – Student Discipline. Students who become aware of the availability of what may be their instructor’s intellectual property in online repositories are encouraged to alert the instructor.

### **A respectful living and learning environment for all**

1. It is expected that everyone living, learning or working on the premises of Renison University College will contribute to an environment of tolerance and respect by treating others with sensitivity and civility.
2. Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of jokes, insults, gestures, gossip, or other behaviours that are meant to intimidate. Some instances of harassment are against the law in addition to Renison University College policy.

3. Discrimination is treating people differently because of their race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry, colour, age, creed, marital status, or other personal characteristics. The Ontario Human Rights Code considers actions and behaviours rather than intentions.
4. If you experience or witness either harassment or discrimination, you may contact the Renison University College Interim Harassment and Discrimination Officer at [megan.collings-moore@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:megan.collings-moore@uwaterloo.ca) (519-884-4404, ext. 28604).