



# RSOC 119: MEDIA & RELIGION



## Summer Session 1: Online COURSE SYLLABUS

**Course Description:** Examination of the religious, theological and ethical issues and perspectives raised by various media: print, visual, audio, multimedia, and virtual. Special attention will be given to the nature of their relationship and the religious and spiritual issues currently present in their interface and convergence. (5 units)

**Course Rationale:** What is the relationship between religion, media and culture? Is media anti-religious or religion anti-media? Is there a religious media or a mediated religion? Is mass media transforming and/or subverting religion? Has religion transformed and/or restrained the media? Has the media usurped religion's place in culture in any of the following ways: as the locus of giving shape to a value system; as arbiters of meaning; as custodians of culture; as the source that tells us how the world is, how it works and what it means; as it has appropriated religious language and ritual; as the fabricator of religious themes with no connection to organized religion? Are religion and media converging on one another? Can we develop a religious perspective or theology *out of* popular media and culture as opposed to one *of* media and culture? What would this entail?

In our present context, the rise of the power and authority of the media has accompanied the seeming decline in the power and authority of religion in the local and wider culture. This third level course will investigate some of the problems, issues and controversies presented by this new arrangement.

**Core Learning Objectives:** Taking as our entry point our present cultural moment, students will explore multiple media objects and effects and their impact on traditional and emerging religions and spiritualities, as well on the wider culture. Two core learning objectives are the focus of this RTC 3 course:

3.1 Our first Core Learning Objective is to *think critically and analyze diverse perspectives, situations and events in which religion and media interact and evaluate the ethical positions of this arrangement.*

3.2 Our second Core Learning Objective will challenge students to draw on a wide array of cultural and religious resources (visual culture; digital culture; music; advertisement,

etc.) to think about how religion and spirituality are interlaced in our contemporary culture and their formative implications .

### **Digital Age Pathway:**

This course is associated with Pathway(s) in the *Digital Age Pathway*. If you declare a Pathway in this area, you may use a representative piece of work from this course in the Pathway Portfolio you will complete during your senior year. Recommendation: Please keep electronic copies of your work.

**Texts and other Course Resources:** All texts and reading/viewing materials will be posted online at our Camino course site. There is no specific required text for this course. However, you are asked to rent the film we will watch offline and then discuss online. This information and available websites for renting the film will be posted on Camino.

### **Assessment and Grading**

Because this is an online course there is both an individual role in participating and a group role. For this reason, when it comes to assessment, there are basically two types of assignments: *individual assignments* and *group assignments*.

#### Individual Assignments

There are two types of individual assignments - *individual assignments posted in each Module* (25%) based on the readings or videos or websites and due in the designated drop box each Tuesday and Friday by midnight during the course. The other individual assignment is the *individual final project* (25%). The information on this final project is in the "Final Project" Module on Camino and will be accessible during the first week of the class so you can begin thinking about what you would like to do. There are three options available for the individual final project and you can get information on them in the Final Project Module: "Guidelines for the final project."

#### Group Assignments

There are also two types of *group assignments*. One of the group assignments is the *group discussions* (25%) that are part of Modules 1 through 10. Each discussion has a prompt or project online and each student is required to make at least one contribution to the discussion and also to respond to one other student in a discussion thread. This requirement is for each of the 10 discussions. The other group assignment is the *Group Project* (25%). Early in the course we will divide into groups and for the group project you are asked to work with your other group members investigating an issue that you are free to select at the intersection of media and religion. There are guidelines for this group project in Module 10 folder and it will be available the first week of class. All work on the group project and its presentation will take place online.

Thus, course credit is assessed in the following way:

Individual Assignments (9)	25%
Group Discussions (10)	25%

Group Project	25%
Individual Final Project	25%

### **Grading Scale**

94%-100%	A
90%-93%	A-
87%-89%	B+
83%-86%	B
80%-82%	B-
77%-79%	C+
73%-76%	C
70%-72%	C-
67%-69%	D+
63%-66%	D
60%-62%	D-

**Instructor feedback:** reaches students through comments and grading on individual assignments and projects, as well as on group discussions (I will be a part of these discussions but your grade for them will be privately posted). I will also post online office hours and also invite you to chat with me anytime you would like via Skype or Zoom.

### **Course Modules**

Module 1 (opening of course to 6/17)

- Introductions
- Read Course Syllabus by 6/17

Module 2: Culture, Religion & Media: Interrelationship and Convergence (6/17-6/21)

- Reading: Mahan, J. Media, Religion and Culture. Chapter 1: "Relating Religion, Medias and Culture," pp. 3-20. (textbook); Lynch, Chpt. 2: "Why should theologians and scholars of religion study popular culture"? pp. 20-42 (posted on Camino)
- Individual Assignment due 6/21
- Group Discussion response 6/21

Module 3: Literacy: Understanding how Religion, Media and Culture Communicate (6/21-6/24)

- View 3 videos on the various literacies (Media Literacy; Religious Literacy; Cultural Literacy)
- Individual Assignment due 6/24
- Group Discussion response 6/24

Module 4: Identity and its Shapers (6/24-6/28)

- Readings: "Selena – Prophet, Profit, Princess: Canonizing the Commodity," by Karen Anijar, pp. 83-101 from McCarthy/Mazur, God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture [posted on Camino]; "Cathy on Slenderness, Suffering and Soul," by Jean Graybeal, pp. 181-197 [posted on Camino]; Detweiler and Taylor, A Matrix of

Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture, chpt. 3: "Celebrities: Ancient and Future Saints", pp. 89-123 [posted on Camino]

- View short video on celebrity identity
- Individual Assignment due 6/28
- Group Discussion response 6/28

Module 5: Ethics – Media and Religion (6/28-7/1)

- Reading: Detweiler, C. and Taylor, B., chpt. 7: "Fashion: Dressing Up the Soul", pp. 221-241 (Camino); Einstein, Mara - chapter 4: "Branding Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age" (Camino)
- View video on consumerism
- Individual Assignment due 7/1
- Group Discussion response 7/1

Module 6: Religion/Spirituality and Visual Culture (7/1-7/5)

- Reading: S. Brent Plate, "Introduction: Worldmaking Onscreen and at the Altar," from Religion and Film: Cinema and the Recreation of the World, pp. 1-17 (Camino); Detweiler and Taylor, chpt. 5 "Movies: Look Closer", pp. 155-183 (Camino); Detweiler and Taylor, "Television: Our Constant Companion", pp. 185-219 (Camino)
- View assigned film
- Individual Assignment due 7/5
- Group Discussion Response 7/5

Module 7: Religion, Media and Community – Music (7/5-7/8)

- Readings: Four readings divided by groups on how media and religion form communities
- Individual Assignment due 7/8
- Group Discussion response 7/8

Module 8: Ritual: Media and Religion (7/8-7/12)

- Readings: Four readings divided by groups examining how media ritual and religious ritual function
- Individual Assignments due 7/12
- Group Discussion response 7/12

Module 9: Videogames & Art: Media & Religion (7/12-7/15)

- Readings: Detweiler and Taylor, chapt. 9: "Art: sharks, pills and Ashtrays", pp. 271-291 (Camino); Rachel Wagner, "Religion and Video games: Shooting Aliens in Cathedrals" (Camino).
- Individual Assignment due 7/15
- Group Discussion response 7/15

Module 10: Group Project (7/20)

**Disability Accommodation Policy:** To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in The Drahmman Center in Benson, room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodations.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** The University is committed to academic excellence and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work and to cite any sources they use. A student who is

guilty of a dishonest act in an examination, paper, or other work required for a course, or who assists others in such an act, may, at the discretion of the instructor, receive a grade of F for the course. In addition, a student found guilty of a dishonest act may be subject to sanctions up to and including dismissal from the University as a result of the student judicial process as described in the Community Handbook. A student who violates copyright laws, including those covering the copying of software programs, or who knowingly alters official academic records from this or any other institution is subject to similar disciplinary action.