

## **Term Information**

Effective Term Spring 2018

## **General Information**

Course Bulletin Listing/Subject Area Religious Studies  
Fiscal Unit/Academic Org Comparative Studies - D0518  
College/Academic Group Arts and Sciences  
Level/Career Undergraduate  
Course Number/Catalog 3679  
Course Title Popular Culture and World Religion  
Transcript Abbreviation PopCult&WorldRel  
Course Description The representation of religion in visual culture, in the United States and around the world; the ways that religious traditions are represented or misrepresented; the ways religious traditions appropriate popular culture for their own purposes; new forms of religious practice and community that grow directly out of popular culture.  
Semester Credit Hours/Units Fixed: 3

## **Offering Information**

Length Of Course 14 Week, 12 Week, 8 Week, 7 Week, 6 Week  
Flexibly Scheduled Course Never  
Does any section of this course have a distance education component? No  
Grading Basis Letter Grade  
Repeatable No  
Course Components Lecture  
Grade Roster Component Lecture  
Credit Available by Exam No  
Admission Condition Course No  
Off Campus Never  
Campus of Offering Columbus

## **Prerequisites and Exclusions**

Prerequisites/Corequisites English 1110  
Exclusions  
Electronically Enforced No

## **Cross-Listings**

Cross-Listings

## **Subject/CIP Code**

Subject/CIP Code 38.0201  
Subsidy Level Baccalaureate Course  
Intended Rank Sophomore, Junior, Senior

## Requirement/Elective Designation

General Education course:

Visual and Performing Arts

The course is an elective (for this or other units) or is a service course for other units

## Course Details

### **Course goals or learning objectives/outcomes**

- Students will analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art; observe and evaluate how images of the sacred are generated and circulated across a number of traditions and contexts;
- shift from a relatively passive mode of consuming of popular culture to a relatively active critical engagement with popular culture;
- develop skills in analytical writing, public presentation and thoughtful, constructive peer review.

### **Content Topic List**

- Popular culture
- art
- film
- comic books
- religion
- Christianity
- Judaism
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- United States
- Asia
- Africa
- museums
- capitalism
- African-American
- Asian-American

### **Sought Concurrence**

No

**Attachments**

- Popular Culture and World Religion Sample Syllabus.pdf: syllabus  
*(Syllabus. Owner: Marsch,Elizabeth)*
- Popular Culture and World Religion COMPSTD 3679 - GE Visual and Performing Arts - Rationale.docx: GE rationale  
*(GEC Model Curriculum Compliance Stmt. Owner: Marsch,Elizabeth)*
- Popular Culture and World Religion COMPSTD 3679 - GE Visual and Performing Arts - Assessment Plan (1).docx:  
GE Assessment Plan  
*(GEC Course Assessment Plan. Owner: Marsch,Elizabeth)*
- Religious Studies Curriculum Map (9-15-17).docx: revised curriculum map  
*(Other Supporting Documentation. Owner: Marsch,Elizabeth)*

**Comments**

- Please see revised curriculum map with new course highlighted in yellow. *(by Marsch,Elizabeth on 09/15/2017 10:15 AM)*
- See 9-15-17 email to B Shank and E Marsch. *(by Vankeerbergen,Bernadette Chantal on 09/15/2017 08:55 AM)*

**Workflow Information**

Status	User(s)	Date/Time	Step
Submitted	Marsch,Elizabeth	04/28/2017 03:28 PM	Submitted for Approval
Approved	Shank,Barry	04/28/2017 03:41 PM	Unit Approval
Approved	Heysel,Garett Robert	04/28/2017 09:38 PM	College Approval
Revision Requested	Vankeerbergen,Bernadette Chantal	09/15/2017 08:55 AM	ASCCAO Approval
Submitted	Marsch,Elizabeth	09/15/2017 10:15 AM	Submitted for Approval
Approved	Shank,Barry	09/15/2017 10:51 AM	Unit Approval
Approved	Heysel,Garett Robert	09/16/2017 07:19 PM	College Approval
Pending Approval	Nolen,Dawn Vankeerbergen,Bernadette Chantal Oldroyd,Shelby Quinn Hanlin,Deborah Kay Jenkins,Mary Ellen Bigler	09/16/2017 07:19 PM	ASCCAO Approval

Popular Culture and World Religion  
RELSTDS 3xxx  
Spring 2018, \_\_\_\_\_



Melissa Anne-Marie Curley  
curley.32@osu.edu, 448 Hagerty Hall  
student hours \_\_\_\_\_  
or schedule an appointment by email

#### Course Description

Popular Culture and World Religion considers the intimate relationship between religion and vision, seeing and believing, as it plays out in modern and contemporary popular representations of religion and the filtering of popular culture back into religious art and ritual across the globe. Treating imagery and artifacts from across religious traditions, this class begins with representations of the sacred within the framework of art galleries and museums, and then moves to other sites of creation and consumption. Rather than taking the approach of mechanically decoding religious symbols circulating in popular visual culture, it will concentrate on the ways that religious institutions and actors formulate their own questions of ultimate concern through popular visual culture, and the ways that popular visual cultures have given rise to new kinds of religious iconography and imagination.

#### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students will have had an opportunity to

1. analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art;
2. observe and evaluate how images of the sacred are generated and circulated across a number of traditions and contexts;
3. shift from a relatively passive mode of consuming of popular culture to a relatively active critical engagement with popular culture;
4. develop skills in analytical writing, public presentation and thoughtful, constructive peer review.

## Readings

### To purchase (available at Barnes & Noble and on reserve at Main Library):

- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin, 1974). ISBN 978-0140135152. (Used copies available on Amazon starting at \$1.99.)
- G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* (Marvel Now!, 2014). ISBN 978-0785190219. (Used copies available on Amazon starting at \$5.79; also available on Kindle.)

The remaining readings will be posted on our Canvas site. You do not need to print out the readings for class; in the event that we will be doing close reading during class time, I will provide hard copies of the text. Some of the “readings” listed in the reading list are actually image galleries, films, and videos—for most of these, you’ll find a link on Canvas that will make it easy to access the material on any device, in your own time. Where the link is to a subscription service, I’ll also set up a screening in Hagerty Hall ahead of time for those who would prefer to watch it together (this is marked on the list with an [X]).

## Requirements and Evaluations

### Attendance and Participation ... 30%

Your consistent attendance and thoughtful participation is essential to the success of the course (and to doing well on all the other assignments) so to reward it directly, it’s a big part of your final grade. But participation grades can also feel kind of subjective. This semester, we’ll use a different approach that involves more work for you but also more control over your grade. I’ll take attendance every class; at the end of the term, I’ll assign you a grade for attendance out of **10** (more than one unexcused absence will impact that grade). Every four weeks or so, you’ll submit a self-assessment of your own class participation, reflecting on your preparation, engagement, and attention; at the end of the term, you’ll assign yourself a grade for participation out of **10** that reflects your effort and growth over the course of the term. And the other members of your team will submit an assessment of your contributions to the success of the team, and assign you a grade out of **10** for those contributions. I reserve the right to adjust this grade if it seems wildly high or wildly low.

### Online Gallery Contribution ... 15%

This assignment is designed to develop capacity to attend to the visual environment that surrounds us. As a group, we’ll develop and curate an online gallery of public religious art in Columbus—each member of the class will be tasked with locating three possible images to include in the gallery, selecting one to photograph and research, and writing up a brief note on the provenance and context of the image. The class will host an exhibition during the final week of the term.

### Seminar Presentation ... 20% ... 3-4 pages

This paper gives you an opportunity to delve deeply and critically into a single image or artifact—a piece of visual art, a commercial image, a single film scene, a single comic panel—and charges you with unpacking that image or artifact for your peers and leading us in a discussion of it, building on the themes of the unit in which you present. Your paper should reflect both your independent research and your own critical insight. We’ll meet outside of class in teams before you present to discuss your work in progress; you’ll give feedback on one of your team member’s paper outlines and receive feedback on your own outline from another team member.

### Final Paper ... 35% ... 12-15 pages

In this final paper, you are free to build on the work you did/are doing for the seminar paper, or to pursue a new question; like the content paper, the seminar paper should focus on close readings of one of the images or artifacts we’ve been discussing, although in this case you may choose to look at more than one image, including images we have considered in class, and you may choose to incorporate illustration or other kinds of creative work. The topic and focus of the seminar paper should reflect the convergence of the themes of the course and your own interests and training. We’ll meet outside of class in teams during the final week of class to discuss your work in progress; you’ll give feedback on one of your team member’s paper outlines and receive feedback on your own outline another team member.

Plus and minus grades will be given according to the following scale:

A 100-93; A- 90- 92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C 70-72; D 60-69; E 0-59.

## Syllabus

### Week 1 – Introductions

Tuesday – Defining our terms

- Watch (in class): IKEA, “Lamp” (2002).

Thursday – Defining our terms: religion and visual culture

- Read: David Morgan, “Defining Visual Culture,” in *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (University of California Press, 2005), 25-47.

### Weeks 2 & 3 – Religious Art in the Museum Space

Tuesday – How to Look at Icons

**\* class meets at Thompson Library today**

- Read: Bernard Faure, “The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze,” *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998), 768-813.
- Read: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin, 1972).

Thursday – How to Display Icons

- Read: Susan Vogel, “Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

Tuesday – Museums and the Idea of Sanctity

**\* class meets at the Wexner Center for the Arts today**

- Read: Carol Duncan, “The Art Museum as Ritual,” in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge, 1995), 7-20.
- Look: Rothko Chapel (<http://www.rothkochapel.org/>).

Thursday – Art and the Idea of Blasphemy

- Look: Works by Andres Serrano, Chris Ofili, Kara Walker (gallery of images on Canvas).

### Weeks 4 & 5 – Religious Art in the Domestic Space

Tuesday – Religious Art in American Homes

- Read: David Morgan, “Reading the Face of Jesus,” in *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (University of California Press, 1998), 124-151.
- Watch: Kanye West, “Jesus Walks,” versions 1, 2, and 3 (2004).
- Look: Jesus across the Americas (gallery of images on Canvas).

Thursday – Religious Art in South Asian Homes

- Read: Kajri Jain, “Introduction: Calendar Art as an Object of Knowledge,” in *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Duke University Press, 2007), 1-30.
- Read: Jürgen Wasim Frembegen, “Saints in Modern Devotional Poster-Portraits: Meanings and Uses of Popular Religious Folk Art in Pakistan,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 34 (1998), 184-191.
- Look: Calendar art (gallery of images on Canvas).

Tuesday – Kitsch

- Read: Colleen McDannell, “Christian Kitsch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste,” in *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Yale University Press, 1995), 163-197.

Thursday – Presentations: Team 1

### Weeks 6 & 7 – Religious Art in Public Spaces

Tuesday – The Idea of Spectacle

- Read: Andrew L. Markus, “The Carnival of Edo: Misemono Spectacles from Contemporary Accounts,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2 (1985), 499-541.
- Look: Misemono-e (gallery of images on Canvas).

Thursday – Secular Spectacle

- Read: Eric Michael Mazur and Tara K. Koda, “The Happiest Place on Earth: Disney’s America and the Commodification of Religion,” in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy eds. (Routledge, 2001), 299-316.

**\* Saturday – Field Trip to Ark Encounter, Williamstown KY**

Tuesday – Religious Spectacle

- Read: John Fletcher, “Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House,” *Theatre Survey* 48.2 (2007), 313-330.
- Watch: George Ratliff, *Hell House* (2001).

Thursday – Presentations: Team 2

### **Weeks 8 & 9 – Captured by Popular Culture: Religion and Comic Books**

Tuesday – Looking Seriously at Comics

**\* class meets at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum today**

- Read: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Kitchen Sink, 1993).

Thursday – Cartoon Demons

- Read: Jason Dittmer, “Of Gog and Magog: The Geopolitical Visions of Jack Chick and Premillennial Dispensationalism,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 6.2 (2007), 278-303.
- Read: Joshua Gunn, “The rhetoric of exorcism: George W. Bush and the return of political demonology,” *Western Journal of Communication* 68 (2004), 1-23.

Tuesday – Real American Hero: Re-Casting Ms. Marvel as Muslim

- Read: G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* (Marvel Now!, 2014).
- Read: Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, “Comic Heroine Ms. Marvel Saves San Francisco From Anti-Islam Ads,” NBC News (January 27, 2015).

Thursday – Presentations: Team 3

### **Weeks 10 & 11 – Captured by Popular Culture: Cameras and the Sacred Gaze**

Tuesday – Thinking about Taking Pictures

- Read: Daniel Wojcik, “‘Polaroids from Heaven’: Photography, Folk Religion, and the Miraculous Image Tradition at a Marian Apparition Site,” *Journal of American Folklore* 109.432 (1996), 129-148.
- Read: Elizabeth Edwards, “Grasping the Image: How Photographs Are Handled,” in *The Book of Touch*, ed. Constance Classen (Berg, 2005) 421-425

Thursday – Evil Eyes: The Camera and the Twentieth-Century Zombie

- Read: Zora Neale Hurston, “Zombies,” in *Tell My Horse* (J. B. Lippincott, 1938).
- Watch: Victor and Edward Halperin, *White Zombie* (1932).

Tuesday – Open Eyes: The Camera and the Twenty-First Century Zombie

- [X] Watch: Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (2017).

Thursday – Presentations: Team 4

### **Weeks 12 & 13 – Capturing Popular Culture: Looking to the Future of Religion**

Tuesday – Post-Humanism

- Read: Elaine L. Graham, “Mapping the Post/Human,” in *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1-19.
- Watch: Janelle Monáe, “Many Moons” and “Cold War” (2010).

Thursday – Afrofuturism

- Kodwo Eshun, “Further considerations on Afrofuturism,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003), 287-302.
- Michael Brandon McCormack, “‘Your God is a Racist, Sexist, Homophobic, and a Misogynist... Our God is Change’: Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler and Afrofuturist Critiques of (Black) American Religion,” *Black Theology* 14.1 (2016), 6-27.
- Look: Lina Iris Viktor ([www.linaviktor.com](http://www.linaviktor.com)).

Tuesday – Afro/Asian/American

- Read: Vijay Prashad, “Kung Fusion: Organize the ‘Hood Under IChing Banners,” in *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Beacon Press, 2001), 126-49.

Thursday – Presentations: Team 5

### **Week 14 – Final Meetings**

## Course Policies

Your success in this class matters to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises are encouraged to contact the OSU Counseling and Consultation Service (614-292-5766; [www.ccs.osu.edu](http://www.ccs.osu.edu)) for assistance, support and advocacy. This service is free and confidential.

### **Laptops, Cell Phones, Email**

The evidence increasingly suggests that most students produce better work and receive higher grades when taking notes by hand rather than using a laptop, and that sitting near students using laptops and other electronic devices has a negative effect on your grades *even if you are not using such devices yourself*. I also find the presence of laptops distracting. For these reasons, I encourage everyone to consider leaving them packed away. If you do wish to use your laptop during class, I ask you to sit in the back row. No laptops out during seminar presentations, and no cell phones or other devices out during class at any time, please.

During the semester, I make answering emails from students a priority—if you email me during the week, you should expect a reply within 24 hours. In the event that you have to miss class, you do not need to email me; you can simply note that fact in the self-assessment you turn in at the end of each unit.

### **Extensions**

Your seminar papers are genuinely the focus of the class on the day—if you're not prepared to present, we can't have an effective class, so no extensions are possible on this assignment, except in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If you need an extension on the final paper, please request one in writing no later than the first day of Week 13.

### **Disability Services**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor of their needs as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Ave (292-0901; [www.ods.ohio-state.edu](http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu)).

### **Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Academic Misconduct**

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute "Academic Misconduct." Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person. It is a serious academic offense, and is described in detail in your student policies handbook. Please read this information carefully, and remember that at no point should words or ideas that are not your own be represented as such.

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University's Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me. For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct ([http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info\\_for\\_students/csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info_for_students/csc.asp)).



GE Status for Popular Culture and World Religion COMPSTD 3679  
**Visual and Performing Arts**

**Assessment Plan**

GE Expected Learning Outcomes	Methods of Assessment	Level of student achievement expected for the GE ELO.	What is the process that will be used to review the data and potentially change the course to improve student learning of GE ELOs?
<u>ELO 1</u> Students analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art.	<u>Direct methods</u> Analysis of seminar presentation and final paper. (Please see 1 below.)  <u>Indirect methods</u> End of course discursive evaluation question. (Please see 3 below.)	Please see 4 below.	Please see 5 below.
<u>ELO 2</u> Students engage in informed observation and/or active participation in a discipline within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.	<u>Direct methods</u> Analysis of online gallery contribution, seminar presentation, final paper. (Please see 2 below.)  <u>Indirect methods</u> End of course discursive evaluation question. (Please see 3 below)	Please see 4 below.	Please see 5 below.

**1. Method of assessment for GE ELO 1: Direct methods**

Analysis of seminar presentation and final paper. Significant writing assignments may vary across semesters, but students will be required to prepare both a presentation and a final paper. The presentation offers students an opportunity to develop their skills as public speakers and facilitators, to practice analysis and interpretation, and to lead others toward a critical appreciation of the piece they are discussing. The final paper builds on the foundation established in the presentation, inviting students to expand and refine their analysis by taking up two works in conversation with one another. Both the presentation and the final paper thus require the analysis, appreciation, and interpretation of significant works of art.

**2. Method of assessment for GE ELO 2: Direct methods**

Analysis of seminar presentation and final paper; analysis of online gallery contribution. The seminar presentation and final paper give students an opportunity to rehearse and put to use the critical frameworks developed by scholars of religion, visual culture, popular culture, and folklore, including John Berger, Zora Neale Hurston, David Morgan, and Scott McCloud. The online gallery contribution asks students to act as curators, first training their eyes to notice the

richness of religious visual culture in Columbus, then selecting the work that is most compelling to them and articulating to their peers what makes that work compelling, and finally researching the work and devising a way to make it speak to a public audience outside of its original context. Success in these three assignments will allow students move from informed observation of religion and popular visual culture to active participation in making religion and popular visual culture visible to larger communities, within and beyond the classroom. (For a description of the assignments, please see sample syllabus.)

**3. Method of assessment for GE ELO 1 and 2: Indirect methods**

End of course discursive evaluation questions. Students will be given the opportunity to reflect on their learning experience over the course of the semester with respect to the two expected outcomes. An example of the self-evaluation survey reads as follows:

Expected Learning Outcome 1<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Students analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art.

This course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective.

Strongly Agree—Agree—Disagree—Strongly Disagree<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

How was the learning objective reached? Please comment.

Expected Learning Outcome 2

Students engage in informed observation and/or active participation in a discipline within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.

This course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective.

Strongly Agree—Agree—Disagree—Strongly Disagree<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

How was the learning objective reached? Please comment.

**4. Level of student achievement expected for GE ELO 1 and 2**

**Direct methods**

In general, “success” means that at least 75% of student will achieve level 2 or higher (out of a possible 4) according to the following scoring rubric:

(1) Novice (Basic)	(2) Intermediate	(3) Advanced	(4) Superior
Shows limited ability to analyze and interpret visual arts; has limited set of critical tools to draw upon in order to articulate appreciation of specific images and works; seems unaware of the ethical and aesthetic investments shaping the representation of	Shows comprehension of the critical tools but does not fully manage to apply the concepts to the analysis of specific images and works; shows an emerging awareness of the ethical and aesthetic investments shaping the representation of	Shows comprehension of the critical tools and is able to successfully use those tools to analyze, interpret, and articulate a critical appreciation of specific images and works; consistently shows an awareness of the ethical and aesthetic investments shaping the	Shows facility with the critical tools and is able to draw insightful connections across readings and examples, connecting concepts in new ways; consistently shows an awareness of the ethical and aesthetic investments shaping the representation of religion in art and

religion in art and popular culture.	religion in art and popular culture.	representation of religion in art and popular culture in different contexts.	popular culture in different contexts; is self-reflexive with respect to own sense of taste and incorporates that self-reflexive awareness into analysis.
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--	---

**Indirect methods**

End of course discursive evaluation questions: Faculty members will consider the self-reported responses of students. Student “success” will mean that at least 75% of respondents select “agree” or “strongly agree,” and are able to come up with their own examples of how the learning objectives were reached during the semester, during both the first and second half of the course.

**5. What is the process that will be used to review the data and potentially change the course to improve student learning of GE ELOs?<sup>[SEP]</sup>**

As noted above, faculty will evaluate the direct and indirect methods of assessment. Generally speaking, instructors will consider the extent to which students are able to articulate a critical appreciation of specific works of art, at the micro level, and complex interactions between religious traditions and popular visual culture, at the macro level, in addition to how well students are able to speak to the ethical questions involved in representing religion and religious communities. Based on an analysis of seminar presentations and fieldwork assignments, the instructors will identify problem areas and discuss possibilities for changing the course and the presentation of materials to ensure better fulfillment of the GE expected learning outcomes. They will also analyze the self-evaluation questions carefully to judge how students perceived their own progress and to determine whether student perception accorded with performance. If there is a conflict, adjustments to the presentation and assessment of material will be recommended. The assessment documents and end-of-semester reports will be archived in the department so that future instructors, coordinators, and subcommittees can have access to the materials and gauge the effectiveness of any changes made.

GE Status for Popular Culture and World Religion COMPSTD 3679  
**Visual and Performing Arts**

**Rationale**

Comparative Studies 3679: Popular Culture and World Religion is designed around the critical exploration of what it means to represent, and to gaze upon, the sacred. Departing from the usual Protestant-inflected emphasis on texts as the center of religious life, and taking an expansive view of what kinds of artwork qualify as significant, the course asks students to develop an eye for the variety and vibrancy of religious visual culture in the contemporary world. It seeks to illuminate widely circulated images, like Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* or Yogendra Rastogi's *Durga Maa*, by situating them in a historical context; and to cultivate an awareness of the religious repertoires informing apparently secular artists, like the commercial pageantry of Walt Disney or the utopian post-humanism of Afrofuturist artist Lina Iris Viktor. As they develop their skills in critical seeing, students will be asked to think and write about the ways in which religious traditions are visually represented, what it means for a given community to be represented by others and as Other, and how popular culture might open up new avenues of critique and resistance. The course introduces students to some of the many resources on campus for learning more about visual culture, and asks them to contribute to making the public religious art of Columbus more visible. In developing their capacities for aesthetic response to religious visual cultures, students also cultivate an appreciation for religious diversity and a critical awareness of the ethical stakes involved in artistic representation and aesthetic judgment.

The expected learning outcomes for Visual and Performing Arts are as follows:

1. Students analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art.
2. Students engage in informed observation and/or active participation in a discipline within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.

Religion and Popular Visual Culture addresses these learning outcomes in its course objectives, readings, topics, assignments, and classroom activities.

a) Course objectives. This course examines how religious ideas and communities represent themselves visually, how they are represented by others, how these representations are circulated and consumed, and how they ramify. Focusing on popular culture broadly defined, it asks students to shift from a relatively passive mode of consuming visual cultures to a more active critical engagement with visual cultures, both familiar and unfamiliar. It looks to take advantage of the immediacy and vividness of popular visual culture to provide an entry point to challenging theoretical approaches and cultivate new knowledge of and sympathetic interest in diverse religious traditions. Students will leave the course with increased sensitivity to the aesthetic principles informing popular expressions of religious feeling and belief, and to ethical questions around questions of representation, commodification, and appropriation.

b) Readings. The course focuses on the analysis and interpretation of modern and contemporary images and artifacts, including painting, architecture, film, photography, and comics. The works we consider invite students to attend to the complexity of visual cultures they might otherwise

dismiss, and to notice the ways in which they respond to widely circulated images as though they directly represent reality (as in, for example, one student's offhand remark that he "knows what Jesus looked like"). The supplementary readings, from scholars working across a variety of disciplines, including art history, theatre, anthropology, communication studies, folklore, history, and religious studies, introduce critical vocabulary and frameworks to support interpretation and analysis, and give students models for informed observation of religion and popular culture.

c) Topics. The topics address the expected learning outcomes by presenting examples drawn from modern and contemporary popular religious visual cultures in both the United States and globally; exposing students to visual cultures they have not previously encountered; exploring different approaches to analyzing and interpreting visual cultures; and considering the norms and values circulated through visual cultures. The course is organized under two broad rubrics. It looks first at how visual cultures drawing on religious repertoires make different kinds of sense, inviting different kinds of interpretation and appreciation, in different settings—the museum, the home, the public square, and the marketplace. It then takes up questions of representation and the sometimes agonistic encounter between religion and popular culture, exploring both how religious traditions have been captured by the interests and demands of popular visual cultures and how those traditions have sought to resist capture or establish new kinds of vision.

d) Assignments. The seminar presentation and final paper explicitly require students to interpret and analyze one or more significant works of art, to use the vocabulary and frameworks provided by the readings to arrive at an informed observation of those works, and to guide their team members and peers toward a thoughtful appreciation of those works. The contribution to the online gallery invites students to contribute to an online exhibition, taking on the role of curator (in selecting a piece for inclusion and providing the context that will allow the audience to appreciate the work) and of art historian (in researching and reporting on the provenance of the work).

e) Classroom Activities. The class emphasizes interpretation and analysis of works of art, with time scheduled in every class meeting for group discussion of our responses to specific pieces. Three special classes are planned that will bring students to places on campus where they can encounter religious art and popular visual culture in differently mediated ways—sacred manuscripts held by the Thompson Library, contemporary art in the Wexner Center for the Arts, and religion in comic books at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum. During the final week of the class, students will also organize and host their own digital exhibition of public religious art in Columbus. Students will be organized into teams and asked to work together throughout the semester as peer reviewers, giving students an opportunity to come to know each other better, to observe their own development as sophisticated viewers and critics over the course of the semester, and to share their work in progress with a generous audience.

## Curriculum Map for Religious Studies Major

Program Learning Goals for the Religious Studies Major

Goal 1: Students will attain a broad knowledge of the world's religions.

Goal 2: Students will understand some of the methodological challenges facing any scholar of religion.

Goal 3: Students will develop an understanding of religion and how to study it comparatively and critically in a range of cultural and historical contexts.

Goal 4: Students will develop multi-disciplinary skills to appreciate the role religion plays in social and cultural production (in terms of art, literature, politics, society).

\*Beg=Beginning; Int=Intermediate; Adv=Advanced

<b>CURRICULUM MAP FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES MAJOR</b>				
Learning Goals:	<u>Goal 1:</u> Students will attain a broad knowledge of the world's religions.	<u>Goal 2:</u> Students will understand some of the methodological challenges facing any scholar of religion.	<u>Goal 3:</u> Students will develop an understanding of religion and how to study it comparatively and critically in a range of cultural and historical contexts.	<u>Goal 4:</u> Students will develop multi-disciplinary skills to appreciate the role religion plays in social and cultural production (in terms of art, literature, politics, society).
<b>Core Courses (13 Credit Hours)</b>				
2099 The Question of Comparative Studies	beg	beg	beg	beg
2370 Introduction to Comparative Religion	beg	beg	beg	beg
3972 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion	int	int	int	int
3990 Approaches to Comparative Studies	int	int	int	int
4990 or 4970 Senior Seminar in Comparative Studies or Religious Studies Capstone	adv	adv	adv	adv
<b>Individual Religious Traditions courses (9-15 Credit hours)</b>				
ARABIC 5701 The Qur'an in Translation	adv	adv	adv	adv
CLAS 3401 Ancient Greek Religion	int	int	int	int

CLAS 3405 Christians in the Greco-Roman World	int	int	int	int
CS 4822 Native American Identity	adv	adv	adv	adv
HIST 2220 Introduction to the History of Christianity	beg	beg	beg	beg
HIST 2xxx Introduction to the New Testament	beg	beg	beg	beg
HIST 2351 Early Islamic Society, 610-1258	beg	beg	beg	beg
HIST 2376 Islamic Central Asia	beg	beg	beg	beg
HIST 3227 Gnostics and Other Early Christian Heresies	int	int	int	int
HIST 3229 History of Early Christianity	int	int	int	int
HIST 3245 The Age of Reformation	int	int	int	int
HIST 3xxx Paul and his Influence in Early Christianity	int	int	int	int
HIST 3xxx The Historical Jesus	int	int	int	int
JS 2201 Introduction to Jewish Culture, Thought and Practice	beg	beg	beg	beg
NELC 3501 Introduction to Islam	int	int	int	int
NELC 3230 Introduction to Shi's Beliefs and History	int	int	int	int
NELC 3502 Islamic Civilization through the Ages	int	int	int	int
NELC 3508 Sufism	int	int	int	int
NELC 5578 Islamic Law and Society	adv	adv	adv	adv
NELC XXXX The Anthropology of Islam	adv	adv	adv	adv
PHIL 2120 Asian Philosophy	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 2210 The Jewish Mystical Tradition	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 3671 Religions of India	int	int	int	int
RS 3673 The Buddhist Tradition	int	int	int	int
RS 3677 Asian Religions in America	int	int	int	int
RS 3675 Religions of Mesoamerica	int	int	int	int

RS 4872 Varieties of Christianity	adv	adv	adv	adv
RS 4874 New Age and New Religious Movements	adv	adv	adv	adv
<b>Comparative/ Interdisciplinary courses: 9-15 credit hours</b>				
CLAS 3403 Magic in the Ancient World	int	int	int	int
CS/ IS 4873 Contemporary Religious Movements in a Global Perspective	adv	adv	adv	adv
HEB 5806 Studies in Biblical Law	adv	adv	adv	adv
HIST 3214 Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the History of Christianity	int	int	int	int
PHIL 2120 Asian Philosophy	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 2102.01 Literature and Religion	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 2102.02 Comparative Sacred Texts	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS/CLAS 2222 From Ishtar to Christ	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 2670 Science and Religion	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 2677 Religion and Environmentalism	beg	beg	beg	beg
RS 3671 Religions of India	int	int	int	int
RS 3677 Asian Religions in America	int	int	int	int
RS 3678 Religion and American Culture	int	int	int	int
RS 3679 Popular Culture and World Religion	int	int	int	int
RS /HIST 3680 Religion and Law in Comparative Perspective	int	int	int	int
RS 4871 Religion and American Politics	adv	adv	adv	adv
RS 4874 New Age and New Religious Movements	adv	adv	adv	adv
RS 4875 Gender, Sexuality and Religion	adv	adv	adv	adv
RS 4877 Myth and Ritual	adv	adv	adv	adv
RS 4878 Rites, Ritual and Ceremony	adv	adv	adv	adv



RS 5871 The Japanese Religious Tradition	adv	adv	adv	adv
--	-----	-----	-----	-----