This course examines religion through the lens of popular culture, and popular culture through the lens of religion. Focusing mainly on examples from contemporary America, including but not limited to music, TV shows, social media, and sports, this course will help students become critical consumers of popular culture. We will analyze, appreciate, and articulate deeper meanings of mass forms of entertainment. We will also understand how religion in our society manifests itself beyond its traditional sectarian venues.

This course will fulfill the General Education Student Learning Outcomes:
Student Learning Outcome #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
Student Learning Outcome #2: Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments. These two learning outcomes will be assessed in the second essay (worth 20%), which will ask students to analyze primary sources in terms of their religious ideas.

Required texts:
(Note: Each chapter has related discussion questions on pp. 297-303. Be prepared to discuss these in class. These are marked in the schedule with an “*”).


There are also required short readings on OAKS. Print these out! Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.

Course Requirements:
- Participation and attendance including small group discussion, random attendance checks, and in-class writing assignments: 10%
- One 3-4 pp. paper due in class September 22: 15%
- One 4-6 pp. paper due in class November 17: 20%
• Two out of three “surprise” quizzes, which will be announced the class before. (The lowest quiz will be dropped.): \(2 \times 5\% = 10\%
• A midterm exam on October 10: 20\%
• A final exam on December 5: 25\%

We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due.

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online.

**Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

**ACT I: INTRODUCTION**

Wed 8/20: What is this class about?

Fri 8/22: How do we define religion?
Read: Studyreligion.org

Mon 8/25: How do we define popular culture?
Read: Forbes 1-18; Mazur 4-11

Wed 8/27: A Case Study: True Blood Title Sequence
Read: Mazur 41-61 (please read the endnotes)

**ACT II: HOW POPULAR CULTURE REPRESENTS RELIGION**

Fri 8/29: Depicting Religion on TV: Why Mainstream Rules
Read: Bird (on OAKS)

Mon 9/1: Vernacular Catholicism in The West Wing
Read: Primiano (on OAKS)

Wed 9/3: Islam: The “Dangerous” Other
Read: Hussein (on OAKS)

Fri 9/5: The Oriental Monk: The “Mystic” Other
Read: Forbes, 25-43 *
Mon 9/8: Catch-Up and Discussion

ACT III: HOW RELIGION USES POPULAR CULTURE

Wed 9/10: Introduction to Evangelical pop culture
Read: Radosh (on OAKS) 9-25

Fri 9/12: How Megachurches Sell Religion
Read: Forbes, 139-152 *

Mon 9/15: Rapture Culture: *Left Behind* in America
Read: Forbes, 270-285 *

Wed 9/17: True Love Waits? Selling Christian Abstinence
Read: Mazur, 197-218

Fri 9/19: Varieties of Popular Evangelical Music
Read: Forbes, 103-104, 118-120 *; Radosh (on OAKS), 152-170

ACT IV: HOW POPULAR CULTURE CREATES THE RELIGIOUS

Mon 9/22: Internet Religion
Read: Mazur 219-236; Forbes, 123-137 *

**Paper #2 Due in Class**

Wed 9/24: Screening of *Trekkies*

Fri 9/26: Fandom as Community: The Case of *Star Trek*
Read: Forbes, 159-171 *

Mon 9/29: American Rituals: The Case of Sports
Read: Forbes, 195-208 *; (recommended: Mazur, 120-139)

Wed 10/1: Southern Rituals: The Case of Barbecue
Read: Mazur, 108-119

Fri 10/3: New Rituals: The Case of Burning Man
Read: Mazur, 154-173

Mon 10/6: Disney’s America
Read: Mazur, 307-321

Wed 10/8: Mid-term Review and Catch-Up Discussion
Fri 10/10: Midterm exam

**ACT V: MORAL AND THEOLOGICAL DEBATE IN POPULAR CULTURE**

Mon 10/13: Debating Life and Death in American Horror  
Read: TBA (on OAKS)

Wed 10/15: Monsters in America  
**Special Guest Lecturer: Dr. Scott Poole**  
Read: Poole (on OAKS)

Fri 10/17: Discussion on Religious Meanings in Horror  
Read: TBA (on OAKS)

Mon 10/20: Religious Satire on *South Park*  
Read: Clark and Clanton (on OAKS), 13-27

Wed 10/22: Pluralism in *The Simpsons*  
Read: Mazur, 237-254

Fri 10/24: Cop Shows Part I  
Read: Clark and Clanton (on OAKS), 89-103

Mon 10/27: Cop Shows Part II  
Read: Mazur, 179-196

**ACT VI: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE**

Wed 10/29: Breaking Down the Boundaries Between Sacred and Profane  
Read: Taylor, Intro; Taylor, Surfing (1-15) (on OAKS)

Fri 10/31: Soul Surfing  
Read: Taylor, Surfing (15-end)

Mon 11/3: Fall break

Wed: 11/5: Sacred Music: From Bach to the Blues to The Dead  
Read: Laderman (on OAKS)

Fri 11/7: From African Polyrhythm to Hip-Hop Culture  
Read: Sylan (on OAKS); Mazur 291-306; (recommended: RPCA, 252-266 *)
Mon 11/10: Bruce Springsteen as American Prophet
Read: Mazur, 20-40

Wed 11/12: David Crowder*Band as Evangelical Mystics
**Special Guest Lecturer: Prof. Courtney Tepera**
Read: TBA (on OAKS)

Fri 11/14: Paper Writing Workshop

Mon 11/17: Madonna as Liberation Theologian
Read: Forbes, 75-90 *
**Paper #2 Due in Class**

Wed 11/19: Catch-up discussion and Listening Party

Fri 11/21: Religion and Popular Culture in Dialogue
Read: Forbes, 288-295

Mon 11/24: No Class!

Wed 11/26: Thanksgiving

Fri 11/28: Thanksgiving

Mon 12/1: Final Discussion and Exam Review

**Fri 12/5 9am-11am: Final Exam**

Note: Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at 953-1431.

A good resource for how to write a religious studies paper:
[http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/religious-studies/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/religious-studies/)

*Visit the Center for Student Learning for help with study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at [http://csl.cofc.edu](http://csl.cofc.edu) or call (843)953-5635.*