



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 Anishinaabeg, Hodinohsyó:ni, and Attawandaran (Neutral) Peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River from mouth to source. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place in all corners of our campus through research, learning, teaching, community building and outreach. We are guided by the work of our Reconciliation and Re-storying Steering Committee and Anti-Racism and Decolonization SpokesCouncil, as well as the [University of Waterloo's Office of Indigenous Relations](#).

## Winter 2024

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**Course Code:** RS 270R/FINE 252

**Course Title:** Religion in Popular Film

***Class Times/Location:*** Online

**Instructor:** Dr. Chris Miller

***Office:*** N/A

***Office Phone:*** N/A

***Office Hours:*** Virtual, by appointment

***Email:*** [chris.miller@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:chris.miller@uwaterloo.ca)

## Course Description

Religion reflects both humankind's search for meaning and its attempts to maintain particular meanings in the face of cultural challenge and social pressure. Film and television are two of the most important lingua francas—the "common languages"—of popular discourse. We use them as ways of establishing shared interests and in-groups, as well as exploring questions both mundane and momentous. In this course, we will use a number of films to examine ways in

which religious understandings are highlighted, reinforced, and challenged, both onscreen and off. While some films deal with obvious and easily recognizable religious topics, others reveal their relationship to religion only upon closer, more critical examination. As our culture passes relentlessly from literacy to visuality, discerning how the various dimensions of religious belief and practice are reflected and refracted in film and television is an important element in understanding the nature of religion in late modern society.

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes - (Upon completion of this course, students should be able to)**

- A. Learn to appreciate different genres of popular film as significant cultural texts that both reflect – and reflect on – the religious diversity, theological struggle, and ethical and moral dilemmas of late modern society
- B. Develop their understanding of how these texts come to constitute and influence, not merely represent or imitate, religious belief and practice
- C. Engage in critical dialogue with these texts and experiences, with scholars who have contributed to their interpretation, and with each other
- D. Improve communication skills through written assignments and class participation; and continue to foster skills in critical thinking and analysis

**Required Text**

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be made available through Course Reserves

**Readings Available on LEARN**

- The readings for each week can be found on Course Reserves. They will also be listed in the online module for each week.
- Please note that this course also requires students to view several films. While some of these are available through Course Reserves, please note that it is the student's responsibility to track down and view each film.

## Course Requirements and Assessment

We will be watching, discussing, and reading about six different films over the duration of this course. Each film will span across two Modules or weeks. For each film, there will be corresponding discussion questions, a short answer paper, and a critical reflection paper.

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
Discussion Participation	Ongoing, Weekly	40%
Critical Reflection Papers	Ongoing, Bi-Weekly	60%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

### *Discussion Participation*

Students will be placed in Discussion Groups on the Learn page for this course. Each week, you will find 2 discussion questions that relate to the film or reading(s) from that module. Each week, you are expected to contribute an initial post in the discussion forum, and then comment on the answers of 2 other students in your group. Your initial post should draw on the film, readings, lectures, and your own reactions or responses to the film/topic. In your responses to other students in your group, you are expected to demonstrate thoughtful and respectful engagement with everyone's ideas, and contribute something new or enriching to the discussion.

### *Critical Reflection Papers*

For each film that we watch in this course, there is a corresponding Critical Reflection Paper, which is due at the end of each even-numbered module. For your Critical Reflection Papers, you are able to select any of the 4 discussion questions that correspond to the movie/theme in question. Your paper should be at least 3-4 pages (800-1200), meaning that this assignment asks you to discuss the topic in even greater depth. Your response should draw on references to the film, the assigned readings, and any additional research or reflection that you have done on the topic.

Note: You are required to submit 5 Critical Reflection Papers over the course of the term. You can choose to submit a 6th paper if you are not happy with your marks on the first five papers. When calculating your final grade for this course component, only your four highest marks will count towards your total.

## Course Outline

Week	Date	Topic	Readings/Films	Assignments Due
1	Jan 8 – 14	Introduction to Religion and Film	Prothero, "Religion Matters" Berger, "Homo Ridiculus: Social Construction of the Comic" Watch: Saved!	Introduce Yourself Discussion Posts
2	Jan 15 – 21	What is Religion? What is Film?		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper
3	Jan 22 – 28	Jesus on the Silver Screen	Kozlovic, "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure" Deacy, "Reflections on the Uncritical Appropriation of Cinematic Christ-Figures" Watch: Life of Brian	Discussion Posts
4	Jan 29 – Feb 4	The Interface of Interpretation		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper
5	Feb 5 – 11	Buddhism and Orientalism	Mullen, "Orientalist Commercializations" Lopez, "New Age Orientalism" Watch: Little Buddha	Discussion Posts
6	Feb 12 – 16	The Lenses of History and Sociology		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper
Feb 17 – 25		Reading Week		
7	Feb 26 – Mar 3	Religion and Horror	Cowan, "Religion and Cinema Horror" Cowan, "Mainstreaming Satan" Watch: The Exorcist	Discussion Posts
8	Mar 4 – 10	The Lens of the Mind		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper
9	Mar 11 – 17	The Quest for Transcendence	Cowan, "Seeing the Saviour in the Stars" Cowan, "First Contact" Watch: Contact	Discussion Posts
10	Mar 18 – 24	The Philosophical Lens		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper
11	Mar 25 – 31	Religion and Popular Culture	Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao's Anime" Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant	Discussion Posts

Week	Date	Topic	Readings/Films	Assignments Due
			Insects and World Trees” Watch: Princess Mononoke	
12	Apr 1 – 8	The Theological Lens		Discussion Posts Critical Reflection Paper

As noted, we will be exploring 6 films over the space of 12 different modules. This means that each film will span two modules. You are expected to view the film, complete the required readings, and watch the embedded lecture videos before your discussion posts are due each week. Although some modules will not introduce a new film or set of readings, you might find it useful to re-watch or re-read certain materials so that you can engage with the content more deeply.

### **Late or Incomplete Work**

Late assignments, without a valid and approved reason (e.g. medical reason with a doctor’s note, arranging an extension before the deadline) will be accepted up to 6 days past their due date. For each day that an assignment is late, the final grade of that assignment will be docked 10%. After 6 days, assignments will no longer be accepted, and you will receive a mark of zero.

### **Coursework Submission Policy**

All assignments must be submitted to the appropriate Dropbox on Learn by the deadlines outlined in the Course Schedule. Assignments must be submitted as a PDF, .doc, or .docx file

### **Policy on Plagiarism**

“Policy 71’s glossary defines plagiarism, in part, as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others (whether attributed or anonymous) as one’s own in any work submitted whether or not for grading purposes” ...

The Vice-President Academic and Dean has the authority to assess instances of plagiarism and the resultant penalties that are raised by an instructor. An instructor can propose a grade penalty to the Vice-President Academic and Dean, who will decide whether to accept the penalty or initiate a formal inquiry.”

For additional information on how plagiarism is dealt with at Renison, review the policy from where the above text is copied: [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#).

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. See Waterloo's policy on [Fair Dealing](#). Violation of Canada's Copyright Act is a punishable academic offence under [Policy 71 – Student Discipline](#).

### **Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)**

This course includes the independent development and practice of specific skills, such as analyzing films, evaluating arguments, synthesizing interpretations, and developing writing skills. Therefore, the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text, images, music, or code, like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, is not permitted in this class. Unauthorized use in this course, such as running course materials through GenAI or using GenAI to complete a course assessment is considered a violation of [Policy 71](#) (plagiarism or unauthorized aids or assistance). Work produced with the assistance of AI tools does not represent the author's original work and is therefore in violation of the fundamental values of academic integrity including honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and courage ([ICAI](#), n.d.).

You should be prepared to show your work. To demonstrate your learning, you should keep your rough notes, including research notes, brainstorming, and drafting notes. You may be asked to submit these notes along with earlier drafts of their work, either through saved drafts or saved versions of a document. If the use of GenAI is suspected where not permitted, you may be asked to meet with your instructor or TA to provide explanations to support the submitted material as being your original work. Through this process, if you have not sufficiently supported your work, academic misconduct allegations may be brought to the Associate Dean.

### **Communication Policy**

If you are contacting me by email, please include the course code in the subject line. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. If you email me Friday afternoon/evening, or over the weekend, you can expect a response by Monday afternoon.

Email, using the uWaterloo provided email address, is the approved method of communication for Renison. The Office 365 email that you use to login using your WatIAM login and password is secure and confidential. Take caution when forwarding your WatIAM email to an external email service as confidential information forwarded to a third-party provider could be a data security breach and violation of FIPPA (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act) under which all students, staff, and faculty are bound by law.

Please note that once you have successfully completed this course, we may email you about subsequent courses in this subject offered in future terms. If you do not want to be notified about subsequent courses, please email [cls@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cls@uwaterloo.ca).

### **Final Examination Policy**

There is no final examination for 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 [Accommodation due to illness](#).

### **Accommodation Due to Religious Observances**

The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may seek accommodations on religious grounds. Accordingly, students must consult with their instructor(s) within two weeks of the announcement of the due date for which accommodation is being sought. Failure to provide a timely request will decrease the likelihood of providing an accommodation. [See Request for accommodation on religious grounds](#).

### **Academic Integrity, Grievance, Discipline, Appeals and Note for Students with Disabilities**

**Academic Integrity:** 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](#) and the [Arts Academic Integrity](#) websites for more information.

Renison University College is committed to the view that when a problem or disagreement arises between a faculty member and a student every effort should be made to resolve the problem through mutual and respectful negotiation. Most issues are resolved by a student/faculty meeting to discuss differences of opinion. It is only after this stage, when a common understanding or agreement is not obtained that further actions listed below could be taken.

**Discipline:** Every student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their own actions. [Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](#) website for more information.] 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 or academic advisor. 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 the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the Department’s administrative assistant, or Academic Advisor, 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 is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

**Academic Integrity Office (UWaterloo):** The website can be found at [uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/](http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/)

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

[AccessAbility Services](#) is located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, and 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Students are encouraged to register with AccessAbility Services (AAS) at the start of each term if they require accommodations due to a disability. However, some students not connected to AAS may require accommodations later in the term. In that case, you should immediately consult with your instructor and/or your Academic Advisor.

## 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.

## Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

### On Campus

- [Counselling Services](#): counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4096
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and Counselling Services
- [Health Services](#) – Student Medical Clinic: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

### Off Campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- [Empower Me](#): Confidential, multilingual, culturally sensitive, faith inclusive mental health and wellness service.
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 844-437-3247

- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning teens in Waterloo. Email: [ok2bme@caminowellbeing.ca](mailto:ok2bme@caminowellbeing.ca) Phone: 519-884-0000

Full details can be found online at the [Faculty of ARTS](#) website.

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe](#) app to your phone to quickly access mental health support information.

### **A Respectful Living and Learning Environment for All**

Everyone living, learning, and working at Renison University College is expected to contribute to creating a respectful environment free from harassment and discrimination.

Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of disrespectful comments, unwanted text messages or images, degrading jokes, rude gestures, unwanted touching, or other behaviours meant to intimidate.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination means unequal or different treatment causing harm, whether intentional or not, because of race, disability, citizenship, ethnic origin, colour, age, creed, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, or other personal characteristic.

If you feel that you are experiencing the above from any member of the Renison community (students, staff, or faculty), you may contact Melissa Knox, Renison's external anti-harassment and anti-discrimination officer, by email ([mnknox@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mnknox@uwaterloo.ca)) or by phone or text (226-753-5669). Melissa is an employment and human rights lawyer and part-time Assistant Crown Attorney for the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General. Melissa is experienced in case management, discipline and complaints processes, and works with organizations across Canada to foster safe, respectful, and inclusive work and learning environments through policy development, educational workshops, conflict mediation and dispute resolution, and organizational culture audits.

For additional information see Renison's [Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse](#) policy.