Religion 296: Special Topics in Religion
Fall 17 Topic: Science Fiction and Religion
3 credits, CRN 61255
MW 11:30-12:45

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Sarah Hadmack
OFFICE: Palanakila 140
OFFICE HOURS: Monday 9:45-11:15am
Tuesday 9:45-11:15am
and by appointment
EMAIL: minnis@hawaii.edu (preferred method of communication)
TELEPHONE: 236-9140
EFFECTIVE DATE: Fall 2017

WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION STATEMENT

Windward Community College offers innovative programs in the arts and sciences and opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of Hawai‘i and its unique heritage. With a special commitment to support the access and educational needs of Native Hawaiians, we provide O‘ahu’s Ko‘olau region and beyond with liberal arts, career and lifelong learning in a supportive and challenging environment — inspiring students to excellence.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

Students will investigate important topics in the study of religion.

Fall 2017 Special Topic Description: Science Fiction and Religion

In this course we will explore and critically reflect on the presence of religion and religious themes in science fiction films and television shows. We’ll also look at how science fiction itself can become a religion, such as the case of the Jedi Knight religion. Science fiction landmarks do more than refer to religious motifs; they constitute examples of contemporary religious myth-making. We will explore religious themes such as the messianic hero, immortality, free will and determinism, prophecy, evil, mysticism, and apocalypse in films and tv shows including Star Trek, Star Wars, the Matrix, Stargate, Superman, and more. So “live long and prosper” and “may the force be with you!”

WRITING INTENSIVE HALLMARKS

The hallmarks of a writing intensive course are:
W1. The class uses writing to promote the learning of course materials.
W2. The class provides interaction between the instructor and students while students do assigned writing.
W3. Written assignments contribute significantly to each student’s course grade.
W4. The class requires students to do a substantial amount of writing—a minimum of 4,000 words, or about 16 pages.
W5. To allow for meaningful professor-student interaction on each student’s writing, the class is restricted to 20 students.
One conference with the professor is required during the course.
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
The student learning outcomes for the course are:

1. Identify the important concepts and facts associated with the topic under examination.
2. Explain cause and effect relationships in connection to the topic discussed.
3. Compare and contrast various religions’ ideas of the topic.
4. Relate the topic to contemporary events.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION
This course is structured around the following methods of instruction:

- **Higher order thinking:** class time will be devoted mainly to discussion and activities, both of which focus on problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, and critical and creative thinking (the top parts of the pyramid.) Therefore, reading, understanding, and identifying the major terms and ideas must be done at home while reading the texts and the professor’s notes.

- **Collaborative learning:** this course is discussion based. Part of the philosophy behind this is that studies have shown that we learn more when exposed to diverse viewpoints, we challenge ourselves when we have to articulate and sometimes defend our knowledge, and group activities develop a sense of community and responsibility for one another. Three heads are better than one!

- **Film/show viewing:**
  - When watching the films/shows in this course, you need to understand the content while simultaneously analyzing the film for elements of religious motifs and evaluating it for what constitutes contemporary religious myth-making.
  - There is value in watching these films/shows collectively. As a group we may see different elements in the film/show than when we view the film/show alone. The films/shows in this course should be considered primary required texts for the course. Even if you have already watched some of the films/shows we will be viewing in this course before, you are still required to attend class for the viewing. When you watched the film/show before, I doubt you were looking for religious themes or the hero archetype so you will, very likely, see something new when viewing it in class.
  - Our class meets during lunchtime. I find snacking while watching a film to be a most enjoyable combination! Feel free to eat during the viewings.

COURSE TASKS
The course will be centered on the following tasks, which serve as both learning and assessment tools:
Complete two exams. Exams will be based on material covered in class, the course readings, and the course viewings. You are allowed to use a 4x6 note card during the exams. Exam two contains content from the group presentations.

Complete the writing assignments.

1. Supplemental Text Analysis Paper – 3 full, typed pages (12pt font, double spaced, one inch margins)
   Due 10/9 at the start of class
   Select one of the supplemental texts listed under the “Learning Resources” section of the syllabus
   Your paper should either engage with a major theme of the whole book or should be an analysis of a particular chapter or two.
   Only the first paragraph of the paper should contain a summary of the book/chapter(s). The rest of the paper should be an analysis. Write in terms of asking questions and solving problems. Use concrete examples from the book to demonstrate your argument or to support the solution to the problem you present.
   Some possible (but certainly not exhaustive!) topics to address in your paper:
   - How does the book/chapter(s) relate to in-class discussion on
     1. the monomyth?
     2. the role of imagination in the final frontiers of religious expression?
     3. contemporary religious myth-making?
     4. and/or religious themes of the messianic hero, immortality, free will and determinism, prophecy, evil, mysticism, and/or apocalypse?
   - What is the author’s main argument? Are you convinced? Why or why not?
   - What ethical issues are addressed in the film/show?
   - Is there a bias or agenda to the book/chapter(s)? Explain.

2. Film/Show Analysis Paper, Blog Post, OR Slam Poem – 3 full, typed pages (12pt font, double spaced, one inch margins)
   Due 11/27 at the start of class
   You may not use any of the films/shows used in class. This is your chance to write about other sci-fi films/shows you love that weren’t covered in the course!
   Obviously, select your film/show wisely (that is, it can’t be just any sci-fi show; it needs to engage with religion or moral/ethical issues).
   I encourage you to make your own personal selection. However, if you’re unsure of what to choose, here are some films/shows you could use: Wonder Woman, Avatar, Battlestar Galactica, The Avengers, Contact, Babylon 5, X-Men, Heroes, the Flash, Supergirl, A.I, etc.
   Some possible topics to consider if they are touched on by your film/show:
   - How does the film/show address ethical and moral dilemmas of modern society?
   - How does it reflect religious diversity?
• How do these ‘cultural texts’ constitute and influence religious reality?
• How do the writers view the line between rationalism, skepticism, belief, and religion?

- **If you choose the Analysis Paper:**
  • Only the first paragraph of the paper should contain a summary of the film/show. The rest of the paper should be an analysis. Write in terms of asking questions and solving problems. Use concrete examples from the film/show to demonstrate your argument or to support the solution to the problem you present.

- **If you choose the Blog Post:**
  • Write a blog post on a fan site about how the film/show corresponds to religious motifs discussed in class.

- **If you choose the Slam Poem:**
  • How does your science fiction film/show address ethical dilemmas and social justice issues?
  • How is it relevant to modern society?

3. **Reflection Paper:** *Star Wars Episode V: Empire Strikes Back* paper- 5 full, typed pages (12pt font, double spaced, one inch margins)
   **Due 9/25 at the start of class**
   • Write a reflection paper on *Empire Strikes Back*. Your paper should address all of the following, in addition to your own unique insights.
     o How is Obi-Wan able to communicate with Luke? How might this be interpreted in a religious context?
     o What spiritual/religious teachings does Yoda impart to Luke?
     o Is the Force a tool for divining the future? Explain.
     o Describe the presence of prophecy, mysticism, evil, immortality, and free will vs. determinism within the film.
     o Describe who fits the monomyth/hero archetype more closely in this film: Luke Skywalker or Han Solo.

4. **Reflection Paper:** *Star Trek The Next Generation Season 5 Episode 16 “Ethics”* paper- 3 full, typed pages (12pt font, double spaced, one inch margins)
   **Due 11/6 at the start of class**
   • Write a reflection paper on this episode. Your paper should address all of the following, in addition to your own unique insights.
     o Issues surrounding medical ethics and assisted suicide
     o Demonstrations of cultural relativism
     o Issues regarding racism and classism
     o Moral responsibilities vs. the ethics of friendship

5. **Reflection Paper:** Group Presentation paper- 2 full, typed pages (12pt font, double spaced, one inch margins)
   **Due 12/4 at the start of class**
   • Details for this paper will be provided after the topics for group presentations have been chosen.
6. A note on plagiarism: This is a WI course and plagiarism is treated seriously. You need to cite all of your sources in proper MLA format. Don’t know how to cite a film in MLA format? Google it, ask me, or go to the Writing Center for help! Ignorance is no excuse. If I find that you quoted someone else’s work verbatim without using quotation marks or giving the author credit immediately after the sentence then you will receive an automatic F grade on the assignment.

**Complete a group presentation.**
- You will be assigned to a group for a group presentation. Collectively you will choose a topic. You may not use any of the films/shows used in class. This is your chance to inform the class about other sci-fi films/shows that relate to our course topics. The presentation should include a visual aid and a handout for other students in the class.
- For the presentation topic deadline, please include a paragraph describing what you plan to present on as well as a bibliography citing at least three sources you’ve found to support your topic.
- Part of your own grade for the presentation entails responding to other groups’ presentations in writing. Content from the group presentations will appear on the final exam.
- Meet with your group members **early in the semester and often**, both in person and via email/text/social networking. In my experience from grading a plethora of group presentations, the groups that were most successful communicated **often** and rehearsed as a whole group at least **twice** before their actual presentation. Additional information on the presentation will be passed out during class.

**Complete reading/viewing quizzes and worksheets.** Some class periods will start with a quiz on the reading/viewing. For other class periods you will be asked to submit a worksheet on the reading/viewing via Laulima the night **before** the class period in which we will discuss that reading/viewing. Please note: the reading/viewing quizzes and worksheets are **not listed in the class schedule**. Please pay attention in class for due dates for the worksheets and come to class on time to complete the reading/viewing quizzes.

**ASSESSMENT TASKS AND GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades will be based on the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Two Exams (10% each).................................20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Supplemental Text Analysis Paper.........................15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Film/Show Analysis Paper/ Blog Post/ Slam Poem..............15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Group Presentation.....................................20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Reading/Viewing Quizzes &amp; Worksheets..................15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Reflection Papers (3)....................................15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 100%

Grades available:
A = 90% -100%
B = 80% -89%
C = 70% -79%
D = 60% -69%
F = 59% and below
N= The ‘N’ grade indicates that the student has worked conscientiously, attended regularly, finished all work, fulfilled course responsibilities, and has made measurable progress. However, either the student has not achieved the minimal student learning outcomes and is not prepared to succeed at the next level, or the student has made consistent progress in class but is unable to complete the class due to extenuating circumstances, such as major health, personal, or family emergencies.

**LEARNING RESOURCES**

- PDFs of the readings (available in the ‘Resources’ folder on Laulima)
- Please choose one of the following supplemental texts:
  - Sacred Space by Douglas E. Cowan
  - The Gospel According to Science Fiction by Gabriel McKee
  - The Dharma of Star Wars by Matthew Bortolin
- Amazon Prime (approximately $49/year for students; please go to amazon.com) OR Netflix membership (membership costs approximately $10/month; please go to netflix.com). Please note: as of June 29, 2017, Netflix streaming currently does NOT have Doctor Who or Stargate SG1.

**CLASS SCHEDULE***

*Note:
1. Assignments are due during the first 15 minutes of class to be considered on time. Any assignment submitted after the first 15 minutes of class must be turned in with one of your No Questions Asked late coupons.
2. Quizzes are given during the first 15 minutes of class.
3. Class schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Topics</th>
<th>Required Readings/Viewings and Assignments Due on that day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M 8/21</td>
<td>Welcome to the course!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introductions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Syllabus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time to peruse secondary text options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 8/23</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
<td>1. Read 1_SuperheroMythAndRestorationOfParadise.pdf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introducing the sci-fi genre</td>
<td>2. Select your additional reading and pick up from the library/ purchase it today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Difference between sci-fi and fantasy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describing the major religious motifs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introducing the hero archetype/monomyth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 8/28</td>
<td>Film: Superman</td>
<td>Read 2_SupermanPopularCultureMessiah.pdf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 8/30</td>
<td>1. Superman: film completion and discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M 9/4</strong></td>
<td>NO CLASSES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **W 9/6** | 1. Campbell’s monomyth  
2. Applying the monomyth to the *Superman* film  
1. Read 3_Monomyth.pdf  
2. Read 4_TheHeroAndTheGod.pdf |
| **M 9/11** | 1. Completion of *Superman* monomyth worksheet  
2. Film: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*  
Read 5_Departure.pdf |
| **W 9/13** | Film: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* continued                      |
| **M 9/18** | 1. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*: film completion and discussion  
   - Identifying features of the monomyth  
   - Problematizing the monomyth  
2. Religious Motifs in *Empire Strikes Back*  
3. Articles assigned for next class period  
   Watch *Star Wars V: Empire Strikes Back*. Note: unavailable on Netflix. Please plan in advance to borrow from a friend, check out of the WCC library, or rent online. |
| **W 9/20** | 1. Discussion of “The Mythology of Star Wars with George Lucas and Bill Moyers”  
2. Debate: Is *Star Wars* most akin to Daoism, Buddhism, or Christianity?  
1. View “The Mythology of Star Wars with George Lucas and Bill Moyers” (available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwJGsTIp1oI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwJGsTIp1oI))  
2. Read the article you were assigned to. |
| **M 9/25** | 1. The Jedi Knight religion  
2. Initial considerations of when, how, and why sci-fi becomes religion  
1. Read 6_StarWarsChosenAsReligionCzechRep.pdf  
2. Read 7_CzechRepublicSeesRiseOfJediKnights.pdf  
3. *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* paper due |
| **W 9/27** | 1. Buddha, Jesus, and the Hero Archetype discussion  
1. Read Christianity.pdf  
2. Read Buddhism.pdf |
| **M 10/2** | 1. Introducing *Doctor Who*  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| W 10/4 | Presentation topics due                                              | 1. View two back-to-back episodes of your choice in Doctor Who.  
2. Read 8_You’reThisDoctor’sCompanion.pdf |
| M 10/9 | 1. PBS Arts: Is Doctor Who a Religion?  
2. Whovians and Doctor Who as religion  
2. Read 9_WhyDoesDoctorWhoEscapeModernScepticism.pdf |
| W 10/11| 1. Review for Exam 1  
2. Sign up for your conference | 3. Supplemental Text Critical Analysis paper due |
| M 10/16| Exam 1                                                               | Conferences will be held in Palanakila 140. Only come for the day and time of your conference. |
| W 10/18| Conferences                                                          | Conferences will be held in Palanakila 140. Only come for the day and time of your conference. |
| M 10/23| Conferences                                                          | Same as above.                                                                                                   |
| W 10/25| 1. Varieties of Attitudes toward Religion in the Star Trek franchise  
| M 10/30| Discussion of Star Trek episodes and religious themes               | 1. View “Sacred Ground” in Star Trek Voyager Season 3 Episode 7  
2. View “Prophecy” in Star Trek Voyager Season 7 Episode 14  
3. Read 11_ReCoveringSacredGround.pdf  
4. Supplemental Text Critical Analysis paper revisions due, if necessary |
| W 11/1 | 1. Star Trek films and fandom  
2. Read 13_BiblicalInterpretationStarTrekUniverse.pdf |
<p>| M 11/6 | Group 1 Presentation                                                 | Star Trek Paper due                                                                                               |
| W 11/8 | Group 2 Presentation                                                 |                                                                                                                   |
| M      | Stargate: the Von Daniken paradox                                    | 1. Read                                                                                                          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>and the “Broca Divide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>2. View two episodes of Stargate SG1 (episodes to be announced in class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>Stargate: The Varieties of Religious Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>Group 3 Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/22</td>
<td>Group 4 Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>Film: <em>The Matrix</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/29</td>
<td>Film: <em>The Matrix</em> continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/29</td>
<td>Read 15_NeoMessianicSuperhero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4</td>
<td><em>The Matrix</em>: film completion and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>Review for Exam 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/13</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Attendance Policy:**
You are expected to arrive on time and remain for the entire class period. Students who miss class are responsible for material covered in their absence. Consult with peers or the professor to cover what you missed. For every three classes missed, the final grade is lowered by one letter grade.

**Make-up Policy:**
Students are provided with three ‘No Questions Asked’ (NQA) coupons that enable them to turn in an activity or paper or make up a quiz or exam, **up to one week past the due date.** Without the NQA coupon, late work will not be accepted. Coupons may not be shared or replicated. Unused coupons will be counted toward extra credit if the student submitted all assignments and completed all quizzes and exams on time. A coupon may also be used to make up an absence.

**Academic Honesty:**
Students are expected to act with personal integrity, to respect other students’ opinions and property, and to help create an academic environment in which discussion is encouraged. Students are expected not to engage or tolerate acts of plagiarism, cheating, copying, fabrication of citations, or other acts of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is treated seriously in this course. If you are quoting someone verbatim, then you must use quotation marks and cite the source immediately after the quotation in parenthetical form, (author’s last name, page number).
Students charged with academic dishonesty face serious consequences that range from an F grade for the assignment to a F grade for the course.

**Extra Credit:**
Extra credit can be earned by writing additional analysis papers to a science fiction book, game, film, or show that deals with religious themes. Please see the guidelines for writing an analysis paper under the “Course Tasks” section of the syllabus. Students may turn in up to four extra credit papers. Earning an A letter grade on all four extra credit papers entails raising your course grade by one letter grade. Extra credit papers can be turned in throughout the semester. However, no more than two extra credit papers per student will be accepted during the last two weeks of classes. All extra credit must be received by December 6, 2017.

**Cell Phones:**
Kindly do not answer phone calls, text message, or play games on your cell phone during class. The instructor urges you to turn off your cell phone during class. The consequence for cell phone use is ______________________________________________________________
(students will vote on a policy during the first week of classes).

**Disabilities Accommodation:**
If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to fully participate in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Specialist Counselor to discuss reasonable accommodations that will help you succeed in this class. Ann Lemke can be reached at 235-7448, lemke@hawaii.edu, or you may stop by Hale Akoakoa 213 for more information.

**RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WILL HELP YOU IN THIS CLASS**

1. **Keep up with the readings and viewings!** Since the course is set up to discuss the readings and viewings in class, if you do not complete the readings/viewings then you will feel completely lost in class and not have an enriching educational experience. Additionally, by doing the readings and viewings, you will be well prepared for the quizzes and exams.
2. **Stay organized.** Use a planner! Put important deadlines for assignments from all of your courses into the planner. Create a weekly schedule with your school and work hours. Schedule in blocks of time when you plan to study, read, and complete the assignments.
3. **Ask questions if you don’t understand.** Tell me to slow down if I am going too fast. Let me know if you’re having any problems. I am here to help you 😊 Let me know how I can make this the best educational experience for you!