

Prof. M. Gail Hamner: 443-5716; mghamner@syr.edu (Mondays after class, 1-2 p.m., and by appointment)

TA: Ms. Rebecca Moody, ramoody@syr.edu (Tuesdays, 3:30-5 p.m., and by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND APPROACH

Movies and religion are extremely powerful forms of social and personal expression.

In this course we will explore various understandings and functions of religion as we discuss films and articles in light of our experiences. You should know that, for this course, religion is less an 'object' of analysis than an 'occasion' for analysis. That is, I am invested in getting us to explore plural meanings and ambiguous images of religion in film. I am *not* interested in using film to *teach about* specific religions or faith traditions in any substantial or consistent manner. The twelve films we will screen do refer to Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity and indigenous religions, but I do not approach these films as sufficient or authoritative representations of these religions so much as texts that allow us to analyze and debate *how* and *why* the films are making religious references. (If you want a course to teach you about the traditions, texts, and practices of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity, I encourage you to take one of our Department's traditions courses. This semester we are offering "Religions of the World", "Judaism", "Islam", "Christianity", and "Native American Religions", among others.) I want to ask you questions such as the following: "When does a film *signal* the religious? Is it by a certain use of light? Is it in the music? Is it through a character's gaze? How are specific indices of religion (e.g., mosques, menorahs, crucifixes) filmed?"

By not giving religion one set definition, this class can use film as the *occasion* for interpreting, analyzing, and debating the meanings, cultural functions, and powerful affective responses generated by images of religion in film. Finally, this course will give you skills for interpreting film, and for analyzing how religion can be used to crystallize and reflect certain political, economic, social, and sexual parameters of human cultures.

I have arranged this semester's films in loose conjunction with the Humanities Center's 2010-2011 theme of "Conflict: Peace and War." The Units cover, 1) debates between religion and science; 2) personal conflict around religion and death; 3) documentaries that engage religion and social controversy; and 4) religious impulses in a violent—perhaps even a-religious—world.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:

1. Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 12th edition. This book is available in the Student Bookstore and online. Please use this most recent edition. If you use the 11th edition, just be aware that I will hold you responsible for the new material on animation and technology.
2. Articles and other class worksheets and handouts will be posted on Blackboard. Please print these out for class.

REQUIREMENTS

I. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 16%: It may be difficult for you to make the shift from watching movies as sheer entertainment to watching movies as a text to be examined, studied and discussed (albeit still entertaining!). You really will benefit from attending class regularly and from attending *to* class, both by not accessing cell phones, email, internet (etc.) during class, and by taking notes on the scenes, terms, and concepts we discuss. The readings we do will sometimes be dense and difficult. For some of you, even the Giannetti will be a dense thicket of new vocabulary and novel ways of looking at film. I strongly encourage you to create either a vocabulary journal or flashcards for yourselves. I also strongly encourage you to star passages or concepts that you don't understand and either raise them in class, or email (or come see) me about them. The grading criteria for Attendance and Participation is the following:

- A: 0-2 absences, focused attention in class, consistent and committed participation
- B: 3-4 absences, intermittently focused attention, and usually committed participation
- C: 5 absences, occasionally focused attention, and occasional committed participation
- D: more than 5 absences and clear difficulty attending to or participating in the class
- F: overt disrespect for the pedagogical process, including absences and frequent disruptions.

II. WEEKLY RESPONSES 24%: I will divide the class into three groups. Each week, one group will write responses that discusses the film in conjunction with Giannetti; a second group will write responses that discusses the religious themes and images in the film; and students in a third group will be responsible for each selecting the *one* scene or short sequence that s/he considers crucial for grasping the argument of the film *and how religion plays a central role in that argument*. These responses need to be emailed to Becky and me before class on Monday. Alternately, the class may also opt to post responses on Blackboard and discuss them with each other. In this case, if you experience *any* difficulty in posting, you are responsible for emailing your response to Becky and me so that your response counts as 'on time.' The grading criteria for the weekly responses is as follows:

- A: Paragraphs are packed with detail, cite Giannetti and articles correctly, and demonstrate intelligent and creative insights. These responses indicate extraordinary effort.
- B: Paragraphs have sufficient detail, usually correct citations, and intelligent and/or creative insights. These paragraphs indicate strong effort.
- C: Paragraphs have slim detail, frequent incorrect or missing citations, occasionally poor grammar or spelling, and insights that are relatively more obvious. These paragraphs indicate less effort.
- D: Paragraphs have slim detail, poor grammar or spelling, and few insights at all. These paragraphs indicate rather little effort. I also give D's to students who turn in responses late (regardless of the reason).
- F: I give F's only to students who fail to turn in a response before class. You may convert the "F" to a "D" by turning in a late response.

III. TWO IN-CLASS TESTS 2 x 10% = 20%: These tests are 55 minute tests that cover vocabulary from Giannetti, concepts from lectures and articles, and scene analysis from the films. I will go over the test format in class and give you sample questions. The best way to prepare for these tests is to keep a vocabulary journal or flashcards for Giannetti, and to take notes on what we go over in class.

IV. TWO TAKE-HOME EXAMS, 2 x 15% = 30%: For Units two and four, I will give you questions for a take-home exam by the end of the first week of the unit. The exam for Unit two is due the Monday we start Unit three; the exam for Unit four is due on the date scheduled for our final exam. I will give you more questions than I will require you to answer (e.g., I'll ask you to answer 3 of the 5, or 4 of the 7 questions). I want you to answer each question in no more than 2 paragraphs (250 words total per question). I expect these answers to be polished, carefully crafted paragraphs with detailed support drawn from Giannetti, the articles, lectures, and specific scenes in the films. Grading criteria here matches the criteria for weekly responses.

GROUND RULES:

- Speak with respect and care for those who might disagree with you.
- Respect the class process and your peers: come to class on time. If you must be late, enter quietly.
- Once in class please don't leave until class is over unless you have a medical emergency.
- If you must leave during class, I expect you not to return. Bring Kleenex and water to class, if you need it.
- Turn off your cell phones, blackberries, iphones and other identity extensions.
- The Professor reserves the right to change or substitute readings in light of in-class conversation and developments (but the Giannetti textbook readings will remain the same)

Note on DVDs: Bird Library's media center (on the 4th floor) can be unintentionally difficult. Each film will be on "reserve" up through the due date for the paper in which the film will be discussed. This means the DVDs will be in the "reserve drawer". I've included Bird's DVD number when available. The sign ^^ in the syllabus means I've put one of my personal copies on reserve.

OFFICIAL POLICIES:

Academic Integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The Policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>.

Disability Statement: Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309 (315) 443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodation and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance. For more information about services and policy, visit the Office of Disability Services website at <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/> or contact the office at the addresses below:

Syracuse University	Phone: (315) 443-4498
Office of Disability Services	TDD: (315) 443-1371
804 University Avenue Room 309	Email: odssched@syr.edu
Syracuse, NY 13244-2330	

Emergencies and Religious Holidays: Please inform me in writing (email) if you must miss class, a film screening, or a paper due date. In fairness to the other students, if you do not notify me *before* the class, screening or due date, I cannot allow you to make up the work. *This policy includes emergencies, deaths in the family, and medical conditions.* By university policy, if you will miss class or assignments because of a religious holiday, I need to be informed in writing *one week* before the holiday. Travel days around the holiday are not excused.

Syllabus

UNIT 1: RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Week 1: How do we See Religion?

Mon	Aug 30	Introductions
Wed	Sep 1	Read: selections from Blackboard: John Berger's <i>Ways of Seeing</i> , Chapter 1; Andre Bazin, "Evolution of the Language of Cinema"
Fri	Sep 3	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 1, "Photography" Intro. to Stanley Kramer's <i>Inherit the Wind</i> (1960, 128 min.)

Week 2: *Inherit the Wind*

Mon	Sep 6	Labor Day: No Class
Tue	Sep 7	Screen <i>Inherit the Wind</i> (VHS available in the Law Library)
Wed	Sep 8	Read: Randy Moore, "Creationism in the U.S." In-class Discussion of <i>Inherit the Wind</i> Introduction to K. Kieslowski's <i>Decalogue I</i> (1989, 55 min.)
Fri	Sep 10	Eid ul-Fitr: No Class

Week 3: *Decalogue I*

Sun	Sep 12	Screen <i>Decalogue I</i> , Bird DVD #9253
Mon	Sep 13	Discussion of <i>Decalogue I</i>
Wed	Sep 15	Read: Jesse Labov, "Kieslowski's <i>Dekalog</i> , Everyday Life, and the Art of Solidarity", Siegfried Kracauer, "The Establishment of Physical Existence"
Fri	Sep 17	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 2, " <i>Mise-en-scène</i> " Introduction to Robert Zemeckis' <i>Contact</i> (1997, 150 min.)

Week 4: *Contact*

Sun	Sep 19	Screen <i>Contact</i> , Bird DVD #12710
Mon	Sep 20	Discussion of <i>Contact</i>
Wed	Sep 22	Read: Gregory M. Sadlek, "Robert Zemeckis's <i>Contact</i> as a late 20 th Century <i>Paradiso</i> "; Antonio D. Sison, "Epiphany of the Throne-Chariot: Merkabah Mysticism and the Film <i>Contact</i> " In-class test preparation
Fri	Sep 24	55 minute <u>TEST</u> Please remember to pick up a handout on Ingmar Bergman

UNIT 2: RELIGION AND DEATH

Week 5: *The Seventh Seal*

Sun	Sep 26	Screen <i>The Seventh Seal</i> (Bergman, 1957: 92 min.) Bird DVD #9471
Mon	Sep 27	Discussion of <i>The Seventh Seal</i>
Wed	Sep 29	Read: Bragg, "Art and Religion" and "The Play's the Thing"
Fri	Oct 1	Read: Bergman, "Miscreance Credence" Giannetti, Chapter 3, "Movement" Introduction to Yoshiro Takito's <i>Departures</i> (2008, 130 min.)

Week 6: Coens or Takito

Sun	Oct 3	Screen <i>Departures</i> ^^
Mon	Oct 4	Discussion of <i>Departures</i>
Wed	Oct 6	Read: selections from S. Aoki's <i>Coffinman: Reflections of a Buddhist Mortician</i>
Fri	Oct 8	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 4, "Editing" Introduction to Kim Ki-duk

Week 7: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring

Sun	Oct 10	Screen <i>SSFW...and S</i> (Ki-duk, 2003: 103 min); Bird DVD # 12706
Mon	Oct 11	TAKE HOME #1 DUE ; Discussion of <i>SSFW...and S</i>
Wed	Oct 13	Read: Leslie Felperin, "The Temple on the Lake Within"
Fri	Oct 15	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 5, "Sound" Introduction to S. Dubowski's <i>Trembling Before G-d</i>

UNIT III: RELIGION AND SOCIAL CONTROVERSY

Week 8: Trembling Before G-d

Sun	Oct 17	Screen <i>Trembling Before G-d</i> (Dubowski/Smolowitz, 2003) Bird DVD # 11032
Mon	Oct 18	Discussion of <i>Trembling Before G-d</i>
Wed	Oct 20	Read: Rissover, "Being Gay and Godly"; Izod and Kilborn, "The Documentary"
Fri	Oct 22	In-class Review Read: Giannetti, Chapter 8, "Story" Intro to Zarqa Narwaz's <i>Me and the Mosque</i> (2005, 52 min.)

Week 9: Me and the Mosque

Sun	Oct 24	Screen <i>Me and the Mosque</i> , Bird DVD #12328
Mon	Oct 25	Discussion of <i>Me and the Mosque</i>
Wed	Oct 27	Read: article from <i>Islam for Today</i> , "Women in Mosques: No Curtains, No Walls, No Partitions!"; Joanne McEwan, "They Say this Mosque is a Jewel, but How Would I Know?"
Fri	Oct 29	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 9, "Writing" Introduction to Ewing and Grady's <i>Jesus Camp</i> (2006, 84 min.)

Week 10: Jesus Camp

Sun	Oct 31	Screen <i>Jesus Camp</i> , Bird DVD #12935
Mon	Nov 1	Discussion of <i>Jesus Camp</i> (I recommend scanning the film's website, http://www.jesuscampthemovie.com/)
Wed	Nov 3	Read: selections from Almond, G., Appleby, R. S., & Sivan, E., <i>Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World</i> .
Fri	Nov 5	Read: Giannetti, Chapter 7, "Drama"

Week 11: Review and Pause

Mon	Nov 8	In-class viewing and discussion of other documentaries
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Wed Nov 10 Read: Giannetti, Chapter 10, "Ideology"
Fri Nov 12 In-class **TEST #2**; pick up handout on Alfonso Cuarón

UNIT IV: RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

Week 12: Children of Men

Sun Nov 14 Screen *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006: 109 min.)
Bird DVD # 13115
Mon Nov 15 Discussion of *Children of Men*
Wed Nov 17 Read: Slavoj Zizek, "The Clash of Civilizations at the End of
History," at <http://www.childrenofmen.net/slavoj.html>
Fri Nov 19 Read: Giannetti, Chapter 6, "Acting"
Introduction to the Coen brothers

Week 13: Thanksgiving

Mon Nov 22 In-class scene analysis
Introduction to the Coen brothers
Wed Nov 24 **Thanksgiving: No Class**
Fri Nov 26 **Thanksgiving: No Class**

Week 14: No Country for Old Men

Sun Nov 28 Screen *No Country for Old Men* (Coen and Coen, 2007: 122 min.)
Bird DVD #13525
Mon Nov 29 Discuss *No Country for Old Men*
Wed Dec 1 Read: Nietzsche, "Parable of the Madman"; Kafka, "Before the
Law"
Fri Dec 3 Read: Giannetti, Chapter 11, "Critique"
Introduction to James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009: 162 min.)

Week 15: Avatar

Sun Dec 5 Screen *Avatar*, Bird DVD #15287
Mon Dec 6 Discuss *Avatar*
Wed Dec 8 Read: Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster"; newspaper
article(s) on the "real" Na'vi in India; selections from Hardt and
Negri, *Multitude*
Fri Dec 10 In-class scene analysis and course evaluations
TAKE HOME EXAM #2 DUE DURING EXAM WEEK