



Instructor: Prof. Garry Sparks
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Office: G607
Office Hours: M&W 3:30pm – 5pm
Class Days/Time: M&W 2pm – 3:15pm
Class location: G105

* If emailing after 5pm do not expect a reply until at least after 9am of the next work-day.

Course Description

Once upon a time, ancient song and ceremonies, carved and painted images, and eventually written texts became historically dominant means of conveying (religious) stories, ideas, and values. But since the turn of the twentieth century film (including digital) has increasingly emerged to join if not supersede these other (popular) media. And whether an audience or even filmmaker explicitly recognizes it or not, religious symbols, concepts, themes, and tensions continue to permeate much cinematic work.

This is a course about how religion has been explicitly as well as implicitly depicted and engaged in feature films (vs. documentaries and other genres). While it is *not* a “world religions” survey taught with movies nor a find-the-Christ-character in films, this course aims to build upon and further expand understandings of specific (un)familiar religions and aspects of religion as (un)willingly portrayed and creatively engaged in notable movies.

The movies selected for the course are considered significant with respect to director, script, music score, cinematography, and/or impact within the history of the development of film, influence in wider popular culture, etc., aside from any religious dimensions but then *also* because of how, why, and in what ways something is conveyed about a religion, a key religious aspect, or religion in general – either positively or negatively (or even simultaneously both). The first portion of the course will examine the presentation of particular religions, which will provide a general baseline knowledge of various religions and styles of (significant) feature films. The second portion of the course will explore particular aspects or concepts of religion(s), such as: love/grace/mercy, evil/sin, fate/law/justice, ethics/heroes, [extraordinary] power/freedom, etc.

Learning Objectives and Goals

Students who complete this course will:

- compare and consider diverse ways film engages (elements of (a)) religion;
- become familiar with analytical categories within religious studies and how the lenses of religious studies may analyze cultural phenomena like film;
- become aware of (ethical) challenges in cinematic portrayals of religious characters, places, practices, stories, etc.;
- think critically and analytically about (and, thus, closely “read” and “decode”) cinematic representations of religion or questions into, or critiques of, religion;
- critically evaluate the extent to which use of religious motifs, symbols, themes, etc. can enhance (or not) cinematic storytelling and inquiry into the human condition; and
- evaluate how religion and modern culture engage (e.g., critically, (de)constructively, creatively, etc.) in general.

Methods of Instruction

The core of this course will primarily consist of discussing, contextualizing, and analyzing a pair of movies each week. The juxtaposing movies have been selected because they are notable in their own right (i.e., as movies) *and* because they approach a common religion (e.g., Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) or religious element (e.g., evil, love, pilgrimage, commitment, etc.) but perhaps very differently. To this extent, the issue is not whether one (dis)likes a film, considers a film “good” (or not), or even if one thinks that it (in)correctly adheres to a religion (i.e., is “offensive” or not to that religion). Each of these films may be (or, in fact, has been or still is) considered controversial for various religious communities. While this should not be ignored, any such reaction should be included in specific considerations as to exactly how and why a film would (un)intentionally do so (e.g., to get at a deeper consideration of a specific religious question or the role and value of (a particular) religion in general in human life).

Therefore, it will be expected that the you will have watched (recently, at least once) and taken notes on both films in their *entirety before class* on Monday each week (note: movies will **not** be viewed during class sessions; rather, like assigned readings in other courses, everyone needs to come to class prepared to discuss in detail the material). Various readings related to some of the content “played with” in the films will also be assigned each week, which will also need to be read each week prior to class. Almost all readings can be found online via Fenwick Library (e.g., JSTOR, Hathi Trust Digital Library, etc.) or as PDFs via the course Blackboard site. However, only some of the movies will be as well (e.g., Kanopy, Swank, etc. via Fenwick Library). Thus, you will be responsible for finding and viewing the assigned movies well in advance of class and at your own expense as well as finding and reading well all assigned readings prior to class on Mondays.

Each class session will consist of discussing the particularities of each movie on its own terms as well as juxtaposed the other films. While no prior course work in either religious or film studies is required, you should include any prior knowledge or uncertainties related to the material within the comments and questions that you bring to each class. While each week will consist of student group presentations of each pairing of movies (for which you will sign-up) everyone will be expected to have viewed and read the assigned material to participate. Lack of active participation (including attendance) in class discussions will adversely affect your final grade.

Semester Schedule of Movies and Readings

Please note that I (the instructor) reserve the right to change the syllabus during the term if and/or when need arises (e.g., to meet the learning outcomes of the course). You are responsible for checking for such changes (checking Bboard often) and updating your copy of the syllabus.

Week 1 – Introduction to the course & For example: Christianity

Aug. 22 & 24

- Movie: *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) – via Swank (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Kazantzakis, Nikos. “Prologue,” *The Last Temptation of Christ*, P. A. Bien, trans. (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1960), 1-4. (PDF Blackboard)
- Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.), excerpt. (PDF Blackboard)
- Bordwell, David, and Kristen Thompson. “The Significance of Film Form,” *Film Art: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 23-43. (PDF)

Week 2 – Christianity for Reel (note: this will be the last pun permitted in this class)

Aug. 29 & 31

- Movies: *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (1979) – streaming service (e.g., Netflix, Amazon, etc.)
- Jésus de Montréal (Jesus of Montreal)*, 1989) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Gospel of Matthew 1:18-25; 5:3-12; 26:30-27:66 (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)
- Gospel of Luke 2:1-7; 6:20-22; 22:39-23:56 (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)
- Gospel of Mark 14:26-15:47 (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)
- Gospel of John 18:1-19:42 (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)
- Reinhartz, Adele. “Chapter 31: Jesus in Film,” *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, Delbert Burkett, ed. (New York: Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2011), 519-531. (PDF)

Week 3 – Judaism, part 1

Sept. 5

- Movies: *The Chosen* (1981) – via Primo (GMU Library login)
- Au revoir, les enfants (Goodbye, Children)*, 1987) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Kozlovsky Golan, Yvonne. “*Au revoir, les enfants*: The Jewish Child as a Microcosm of the Holocaust as Seen in World Cinema,” *Shofar (Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies)* 30, no. 1 (2011): 53-75. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 4 – Judaism, part 2

Sept. 14

- Movies: *The Chosen* (1981) – via Primo (GMU Library login)
- Au revoir, les enfants (Goodbye, Children)*, 1987) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Abrams, Nathan. “Chapter 6: Religion,” *The New Jew in Film : Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers 2012): 134-159. (PDF)

Week 5 – Islam

Sept. 19 & 21

Movies: *The Message (Mohammad, Messenger of God; 1976)* – streaming service (Flix Fling, etc.)

Malcolm X (1992) – via Swank (GMU Library login)

Readings: Mirza, Sarah. “*Dhimma* Agreements and Sanctuary Systems at Islamic Origins,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 77, no. 1 (April 2018): 99-117. (PDF Blackboard)

Curtis, Edward E., IV. “Chapter Two: First Americans to Convert to Islam,” *Muslims in America: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25-49. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 6 – Hinduism

Sept. 26 & 28

Movies: *Devi (Goddess; 1960)* – via Primo (GMU Library login)

Gandhi (1982) – via Swank (GMU Library login)

Readings: Gandhi, Mahatma. “Introduction,” *An Autobiography: Or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, ix-xii. (PDF Blackboard)

Sen, Mayukh. “Oh My God,” *Film Content* (November-December 2017): 16-17. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 7 – Buddhism

Oct. 4 & 5

Note: No class on Mon., Oct. 3 (National Foundation Day) but instead on Tue., Oct. 4.

Movies: *Kundun* (1997) – via Swank (GMU Library login)

Groundhog Day (1993) – via Swank (GMU Library login)

Reading: Barad, Judith. “The Ethical Underpinnings of *Kundun*,” in *The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese*, Judith Barad and Mark T. Conard, eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 211-229. (PDF Blackboard)

Glausser, Wayne. “Groundhog Day at 25: Conflict and Inspiration at the Tipping Point of Seasonal Genres,” *The Journal of Religion and Film* 23, no. 1 (April 2019): 1-21. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 8 – Native American / First Nation, part I

Oct. 12

Movie: *Skins* (2002) – streaming service (Tubi, Filmrise, Amazon, YouTube, etc.)

Reading: Erodes, Richard, and Alfonso Ortiz, eds. “Part Seven: Coyote Laughs and Cries, Trickster Tales,” *American Indian Myths and Legends* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). (PDF Blackboard)

Week 9 – Native American / First Nation**Oct. 17 & 19**

Essay Journal due on no later than Friday, Oct. 21 (submit via email as Doc, Docx, or PDF attachment).

- Movies: *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) – streaming service (iTunes, Apple TV, etc.)
Dean Man (1995) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Tedlock, Dennis, and Barbara Tedlock, eds. “The Career of a Medicine-Man,” and “A Shaman’s Journey to the Sea Spirit Takánakapsâluk” *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), 3-19. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 10 – Ethics, Community, and Saviors, part I**Oct. 24 & 26**

- Movies: *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
The Fisher King (1991) – via Swank (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Campbell, Joseph, with Bill Moyers. “V: The Hero’s Adventure,” in *The Power of Myth*, Betty Sue Flowers, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 123-163. (PDF)

Week 11 – a.k.a. the Hero’s Journey, part II**Oct. 31 & Nov. 2**

- Movies: *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) – via Swank (GMU Library login)
The Big Lebowski (1998) – via Swank (GMU Library login)

Week 12 – Scriptural Texts and Contexts**Nov. 7 & 9**

- Movies: *Dekalog* (1989-1990) – sign up for at least 1 of the 10 (Blackboard, menu bar)
The Ten Commandments (1956) – via Swank (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Exodus 20:1-17 (JPS preferred; PDF Blackboard)
Deuteronomy 5:4-21 (JPS preferred; PDF Blackboard)
Coats, Paul. “‘And So On’: Kiesłowski’s *Dekalog* and the Metaphysics of the Everyday.” Criterion.com (2016). (link on Blackboard)
Wright, Melanie J. “Coming in From the Cold (War): Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* (1956),” *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of a Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 89-127. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 13 – The Problem of Evil**Nov. 14 & 16**

- Movies: *Apocalypse Now* (1979) – streaming service (Amazon, Vudu, Google Play, etc.)
Crimes and Misdemeanors (1989) – streaming service (Amazon, etc.)
- Readings: Genesis 1:1-2:4a (JPS preferred; PDF Blackboard)
Exodus 3:14 (JPS preferred; PDF Blackboard)
Jonah (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)

Week 14 – Grace &/vs. Justice &/vs. (Human) Nature

Nov. 21 & 23

- Movies: *Dogville* (2003) – Blackboard Media Gallery (left-hand menu bar)
Manderlay (2005) – Blackboard Media Gallery (left-hand menu bar)
- Readings: Psalm 112 (NRSV preferred; Blackboard)
O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man is Hard to Find." (PDF Blackboard)

Week 15 – Ordinary Humans & Other Spiritual Characters

Nov. 28 & 30

- Movies (choose any two of the three with two of the three corresponding Readings):
Wings of Desire (1987) – via Kanopy (GMU Library login)
Pan's Labyrinth (2006) – streaming service (Amazon, Vudu, Google Play, etc.)
Spirited Away (2001) – streaming service (Amazon, Vudu, Google Play, etc.)
- Readings: Ehrlich, Linda C. "Meditations on Wim Wenders's 'Wings of Desire'," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1991): 242-246. (PDF Blackboard)
Lukasiewicz, Tracie D. "The Parallelism of the Fantastic and the Real: Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*/*El Laberinto del fauno* and Neomagical Realism," *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity*. Edited by Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010), 60-78. (PDF Blackboard)
Hall, Chris G. "Totoros, Boar Gods, and River Spirits: Nature Spirits as Intermediaries in the Animation of Hayao Miyazaki," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 158-165. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 16 – Reconciliation: Ebbing, Flowing, & Flourishing

Dec. 5

- Movies: *Babettes gæstebud* (*Babette's Feast*; 1987) – streaming service (Amazon, Vudu, etc.)
Magnolia (1999) – via Swank (GMU Library login)
- Readings: Edwards, Diane Tolomeo. "'Babette's Feast', Sacramental Grace, and the Saga of Redemption," *Christianity and Literature* (Special Issue on Myth, Religious Typology, and Recent Cinema) 42, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 420-432. (PDF Blackboard)
Silverman, Jason M. "'We May be Through with the Past...': *Magnolia*, the Exodus Plague Narrative, and Traditional History," *Religion and the Arts* 20 (2016): 459-490. (PDF Blackboard)

Week 17 – Final Essay Journal due by no later than...

5pm on Dec. 7, Friday

Note: Your essay journal should consist of revised and improved entries on the films from the first half of the course (e.g., based on comments you received when your mid-point journal was returned to you) and new entries on all of the films and readings from the latter half of the course. Your final essay journal should be submitted via email as a PDF, Word.doc, or Word.docx attachment.

Methods of Evaluation (a.k.a. Grading)

Your grade for the course will be based on the following:

- **Essay Journal** (50 points). This assignment is designed to sharpen your critical thinking and writing skills. In 2-3 pages (see formatting requirements on page 10) you will write a short essay for each week on both of the films and assigned readings. You are welcome to consult and bring in outside material but *all sources (e.g., articles, websites, etc.) must be properly cited*. Periodically, for some weeks, questions or prompts may be posted on Blackboard to direct your essay for particular movies. You should have your essay drafted by no later than prior to class each Wednesday but then revise and polish it after Wednesday's class incorporating insights from class lectures, discussions, and student presentations. Each essay will be graded for critical thinking, engagement with all of the assigned class material, originality of sights, and even creativity. In this respect, journal entries cannot merely consist of plot summaries of a movie or compare-and-contrast matchy-matchy between two movies but rather use the assigned readings and juxtapositions of the movies to analyze them as a whole or even concentratedly on a scene or common theme. Furthermore, journal entries do not have to merely consist of blocks of text but may include related images or your original charts, drawing, diagrams, etc. that illustrate your analysis (hint: major points awarded for creativity). Your journal will be submitted and graded twice during the semester: once during the midterm (on Friday, October 21 for 20 points) and again as your final project by no later than Friday, December 7 (for 30 points).
- **Class Presentation** of a pair of films (35 points). As part of a team of 2-3 classmates, you will choose a week in which to do a presentation on and lead the discussion of the two assigned films during a class period (e.g., Monday's class, but may instead consist of part of class on Monday and part of class on Wednesday). Your group's presentation will need to consist of additional research beyond the readings assigned for class, may include PowerPoint images and/or handouts, and be focused on helping the class as a whole to better understand the movies and the religious elements engaged. You will be evaluated first and foremost on the content of what you say, but also on your skill as a presenter; but as a team presentation you will also be graded as part of a group. You will need to select your group and sign up for one of the weeks in which to present by no later than Thursday, Aug. 25. Please also take advantage of office hours (even by appointment) to meet as a group and discuss with me the preparation of your presentation.
- **Class Participation**. (15 points). Your participation in every class is vital. In part, this grade will include weekly postings (minimum of 10) to the class Discussion Board in Blackboard. Each weekly Discussion Board post is due **before class on Mondays** (postings made after Monday's class session will *not* count).
Your weekly postings should not:
 - consist of merely a plot summary of the film(s);
 - consist of merely your opinion of the film(s), e.g., what you (dis)liked, (dis)agreed with, etc.
 - consist of merely a summary of what was already mentioned or discussed in class;but rather:
 - *needs to have been made prior to class* and covered information not yet discussed in class (i.e., simply regurgitating what was already said in class will not count as a posting);and rather should:
 - engage some key theme, topic, trope, issue, or question on the film(s) & readings assigned for that week;

- consist of your connections made between the film(s) and the assigned readings for that week if not also from the previous weeks (thus, as the semester unfolds you should be increasingly noting how the readings from the previous weeks also provide insight in the films of later weeks);
- consist of your insights between the films and/or readings for the week and other material from any of your other courses or even beyond your courses, if relevant;
- engage the postings made by your classmates (e.g., replies to them) and, thus, contribute to a dialogue on the Discussion Board;
- form the basis (but not the entirety) of your entry in your Essay Journal for that week;
- in other words, your Discussion Board postings may be integrated into your entries in your Essay Journal but your Essay Journal entries will need to consist of more than merely your Discussion Board postings;
 - a Discussion Board posting should be at least a healthy paragraph of a few sentences,
 - whereas your entries in your Essay Journal should be a couple of pages.
- Note that there is no mid-term or final exam for this course and, due to the nature of the material, your first major assignment is not due until relatively late in the semester. It is your responsibility to keep up with the movies and readings (have them completed prior to class), attend and actively participate (e.g., take notes during, engage in discussions, etc.) all class sessions, and attend to any changes made in the schedule of syllabus.
- Also note that as a college-level course it is assumed that students are both literate and numerate (can and will have thoroughly read the course syllabus and are able to track and calculate your own course grade based on the returned assignments). Graded work is returned to you with constructive comments, which you should read to know how to improve your work for the future; but grades are not posted to Blackboard. You are responsible for constantly tracking your learning (and the graded evaluation of it) in this course based on the formula breakdown (percentages) stated in this syllabus. To discuss your grade (or any particular aspect of the course material) please take advantage of office hours.
- Finally, as a college-level course, it is assumed that for every credit hour spent in class (either on campus or online; most courses are three credit hours) you are to dedicate on average three hours per week on a course (i.e., 1:3::3:9 – *three credit hours in class per week :: nine hours outside of class on a course per week*; though, this ratio may differ with lab courses and increases with graduate level courses). This is the standard average for all courses whether at a community college, private liberal arts college, or private or public university. Your time outside of class to maximize your learning should, therefore, consist of:
 - reading (at least twice), underlining (best done in pencil on the page), and taking notes (best if handwritten) on the assigned material *prior* to class sessions;
 - reading any related footnotes or endnotes in the readings;
 - looking up any unfamiliar terms or names found in the readings;
 - forming a study group with 2-3 other classmates that meets regularly (e.g., weekly) to:
 - review in-class lectures and discussions, handouts, and Blackboard course content,
 - collaboratively reading through and correcting class notes, and
 - exchanging drafts of assignments and papers for critically constructive and corrective comments *prior* to submitting them for a grade;
 - reading classmates' postings on the Blackboard Discussion Board and posting yours;
 - conducting research via Fenwick Library resources for papers;

- drafting and revising assignments and papers; and
- meeting with the course instructor to discuss course material and assignments.

In other words, please be sure to come to every class having read well that week's material with questions and/or comments to discuss.

- Finally, finally, reading a text on a screen (e.g., e-book, PDF, etc.) does not foster the same deep comprehension as reading a hardcopy and manually annotating it (e.g., underlining key parts, indexing the text in the margins with key words of a paragraph or section, noting your thoughts and questions about the text in the margins, etc.). Please do not hesitate to write, critically engage with, and appropriate your readings. Likewise, taking notes (e.g., in class) on a computer is not really "taking notes" but rather merely stenography; you will learn more and better by taking notes by hand during class whether it in in-person or online class sessions. For this reason, no electronic devices are allowed (minus a computer for online sessions) during class.

Privacy Policy

Students must use their MasonLive email account (aka @gmu.edu) to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Per university policy, unless your e-mail to faculty is from your MasonLive email account course instructors will not be able to reply. Please see <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Class Absences

Students are responsible for any assignments, announcements, or materials presented during class. Absence from class does not excuse that obligation. Notifying the professor of an absence does not excuse the absence. Students should find other students in the class from whom they can obtain reliable notes in the event of an absence. The professor is not obliged to provide information to students about what they missed in class.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason Korea's Deputy Title IX Coordinator pursuant to University Policy 1202 and 1412. If you would like to speak confidentially with the Mason Korea counselor, please see <https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/resources-and-services/counseling-and-wellness> for more information. For more information about what Title IX is, please see <https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/resources-and-services/title-ix>.

Policy on Expectations

All visual materials (such as charts, graphs, or pictures) used in lectures will be posted onto Bboard along with additional images and resource links. These are to be used for any missed classes as well as further exploration into the issues addressed as the course unfolds. However, lecture notes will not be posted; please secure notes for any missed classes from your cohort.

All written assignments prepared for this class should be:

- typed (no handwritten work will be accepted),
- in a 12 point (vs. 11 point or 10 point) and standard serif font (i.e. Garamond, Palantino, or Times New Roman vs. a sans serif font like Arial, Helvetica, or Gill Sans or a non-standard serif font like Papyrus or Cracked),
- double spaced (Note: if the default setting on a computer automatically inserts an additional half-spaced leading after a paragraph you will need to change on your document),
- 1" margins all around,
- left aligned (not full justification),
- with your full name and page number in either the header or footer on every page.

These should be well-crafted and revised written pieces,

- free of typos and grammatical errors;
- use only inclusive language unless you are writing about something that is a gender-specific topic (i.e. Catholic priesthood);
- contractions (i.e. “can’t,” “aren’t,” won’t,” etc.) are inappropriate for professional and academic writing (unless part of a direct quote from another source);
- use of the first person singular pronoun (e.g., “I”)—but also for the most part first person plural (“we”) and second person (“you”)—should be generally avoided with rare exceptions.

To achieve these standards please use the writing center, peer-reviewers, as well as discuss with me a drafts of your assignments during office hours (I’m more than happy to do so). **Major points (e.g., one letter grade) may be deducted from unprofessionally written assignments.**

To help understand what is meant by crafting a piece of argument-oriented writing and correctly documenting the literary evidence required in professional (including academic) genres, students should purchase and use the following *highly* recommended sources:

1. Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Eighth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) (older editions will also work);
2. Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein and Russel Durst. *“They Say / I Say”: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) (any edition);

as well as:

- Booth, Wayne C. *The Craft of Research*;
- Gould, Jon B. *How to Succeed in College (While Really Trying): A Professor’s Inside Advice*;
- Lipson, Charles. *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*; and
- Lipson, Charles. *Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada*.

Whether or not you read these specific books and are familiar with what they cover, as a college student you are expected to know, understand, and agree with these standards and expectations.

Academic Integrity

“I was thrown out of NYU my freshman year for cheating on the metaphysics final... I looked within the soul of the boy sitting next to me.” – Woody Allen¹

“Academic honesty boils down to three simple but powerful principles:

- When you say you did the work yourself, you actually did it.
- When you rely on someone else’s work, you cite it. When you use their words, you quote them openly and accurately, and you cite them, too.
- When you present research materials, you present them fairly and truthfully. That’s true whether the research involves data, documents, or the writings of other scholars.”²

Violation of the academic honor code (i.e. plagiarism or cheating on any course assignment) will not be tolerated in any degree and will be referred to the Office on Academic Integrity.

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. All written work is to be your original thoughts on the assigned texts with references and occasional cites from that text. The format and style rules of all of your assignments should be typed and conform to the *MLA Handbook* or *Chicago Manual of Style* (including *Turabian*). A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

While it is often quipped that “it is better to apologize afterwards than ask for permission before,” this does not hold in academia; please feel free to ask for clarification regarding any of the expectations for this course **before** due dates. It is expected that students adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code as it relates to integrity regarding coursework and grades. The Honor Code reads as follows: “To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this Honor Code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found on the Committee of Academic Integrity’s website at <https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/resources-and-services/cai/overview>.

¹ Charles Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8.

² Ibid., 3.

Regarding Diversity

The academic study of religion includes the analytical (dissecting in various ways) and critical (bringing various criteria to bear) reflection on a diversity of religions and cultures including, in particular, their diverse order of values – including one’s own. The question, therefore, is not whether or not you (dis)believe, (dis)like, of (dis)agree any particular religion or even some aspect of it (let alone “religion” all together) but rather whether you understand “religion.” This requires thick description along with respectful engagement with a diversity of peoples, thought, and values.

To this end...

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason’s commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

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