Religion and Disney:
Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course (Religious Studies 3812 F2015)

Slot: 32 (Wednesdays 7:00-9:30 pm)  
Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter
Room: A3017  
Office: A5009
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 10:30-12, Wed. 6-7pm  
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Course Description:

This course provides an in-depth examination of the religious themes and issues arising from and within the Disney franchise, including Disney Animated feature films, other Disney films and cartoons, and the Disney theme parks. The course will explore the impact of Walt Disney's philosophies on the Disney franchise, as well as the impact those who succeeded Disney in leadership of the Walt Disney Company. Theoretical models drawn from the field of Religion and Popular Culture will provide the lens through which the religious themes present within Disney films, the reaction of the religious right to Disney via a study of the Disney Boycott, and ideological controversies surrounding Disney will be explored.

Method of evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1 (A/V or written)</td>
<td>Due Oct. 7th</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Assignment 2 (A/V or written)</td>
<td>Due Oct. 28th</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Assignment 3 (A/V or written)</td>
<td>Due Nov. 18th</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Take-home Exam</td>
<td>Due: Dec. 9th (1st day of exam period)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Assignments (20% each): There are two types of assignments you may choose for this class: written assignments, and Audio/Visual (fan video) assignments. You may mix and match the type of assignment you choose to do (3 written, 3 video, or a combo of each). The first assignment is due October 7th, the second is due October 28th, and the third is due November 18th.

Option One – Video assignments:

If you choose the video option, must submit your video in one of the following three formats: .wmv, .mov, .m4v. You must also write a one-paragraph description of your video argument, and submit that along with the video.

imaginations? Etc. You may use any Disney films to make your argument, not just the ones discussed in this section of the course. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: Oct. 7th**

**Video Assignment 2 (20%)** – create a clear, strong video argument regarding the place and treatment of Christianity in Disney films – you may select a single Christian theme (salvation, sacrifice, forgiveness, redemption, heaven, hell, angels, demons, Christ figures, etc.), or you may select the broader question of whether Disney is pro-Christian, anti-Christian, non-Christian, etc. in its overarching religious framework. You may use any Disney films to make your argument, not just the ones discussed in this section of the course. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: Oct. 28th**

**Video Assignment 3 (20%)** – create a clear, strong video argument regarding the animistic, nature-spirituality emphasis in Disney. Is nature enchanted in Disney films? What is the proper relationship of humans to nature? Are humans part of nature, or separate from it? Does Disney have an “ecological agenda?” Etc. You may use any Disney films to make your argument, not just the ones discussed in this section of the course. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: Nov. 18th**

**Option Two – written assignments**

**Written Assignment 1**: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section One of our course (Sept. 16th – Sept. 23rd, 2015), plus the films covered during this section of the course, and taking into account the class discussions during this section of the course. Identify 1) what you consider to be the key point or points of dispute in the assigned readings; 2) which arguments you find most convincing, and 3) discuss your reasons for interpreting the issues in the way that you do. What evidence can you present to support your reading of the given issues? What religious dimensions do you see in the film or films, and does your analysis match or depart from those in the readings? What does your reading of the films and assigned readings reveal about an overall “Disney worldview,” what implications does it have for our understanding religion (and race, sex, and consumerism) in Disney? Your analysis of the films and readings must build upon the class discussions, not simply reiterate the points raised in class. **Due: October 7th**

**Written Assignment 2**: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Two of our course (Oct. 14th – 21st, 2015), plus the films covered during this section of the course, and taking into account the class discussions during this section of the course. Identify 1) what you consider to be the key point or points of dispute in the assigned readings; 2) what overarching themes occur in both films/sets of readings, and what themes/issues seem specific to a single film, and 3) discuss what the similarities/differences between films might mean for our understanding of Christianity and Disney. Is Disney anti-Christian? Pro-Christian? Or something else? **Due: October 28th**.
**Written Assignment 3**: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Three of our course (Oct. 28th – Nov. 18th, 2015), plus the films covered during this section of the course, and taking into account the class discussions during this section of the course. Identify 1) what you consider to be the key point or points of dispute in the assigned readings; 2) what overarching themes occur in both films/sets of readings, and what themes/issues seem specific to a single film, and 3) discuss what the similarities/differences between films might mean for our understanding of nature spirituality and Disney. Is Disney advocating a form of nature spirituality? Is it exploiting the world’s religions for profit? Does it misrepresent world religions, trivialize them, or embrace them? **Due: November 18th.**

**Take-home Exam (40%)**: This course will have a final take-home exam. This exam will be essay-style, with multiple questions, and with some choice of questions. The exam is designed to encourage you to show your understanding of the details and implications of the material we have been studying. You may draw upon outside sources to answer the questions on the exam; however, you are not required to do so. This exam is will be handed out on the last day of class, and will be due on the first day of the exam period. **Due: December 9th, 1st day of exam period, at 9 AM sharp!!!**

**Textbooks:**

Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse*
Mark Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney*
Plus other readings available on reserve in the Library

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**SECTION ONE: INTRO, THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS, SCHOLARLY CRITICISMS AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS**

**September 9th** - Introduction to the course content: Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.

Read: No readings.

**September 16th** - Scholarly criticisms of Disney: religion/ race/ gender/ colonialism/ corporate power


Watch: *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*
**September 23rd - Scholarly criticisms of Disney: fairytales/myth**


Grimm Brother’s fairy tales: Little Snow White, Cinderella, Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty), The Singing, Soaring Lark (Beauty and the Beast)

Watch: Snow White/Sleeping Beauty/Cinderella/The Little Mermaid/Beauty and the Beast – *Class pick*

**September 30th – Class cancelled**

**SECTION TWO: CHRISTIANITY AND DISNEY**

**October 7th - The Disney boycott and the “Gay Agenda”**


**NOTE: Assignment #1 Due October 7th!**

**October 14th - Implicit Christianity in Disney: race, sex, religion, and Christian myth: The Lion King (1994)**


Watch: *The Lion King*


Watch: The Hunchback of Notre Dame

SECTION THREE: OTHER RELIGIONS AND DISNEY


Watch: Pocahontas

NOTE: Assignment #2 Due October 28th!

November 4th - Indigenous Religions 2: The religion of Nature? Brother Bear


Watch: *Brother Bear*

**November 11th – Remembrance Day, classes cancelled**

**November 18th - World Religions: Gender, violence, and Ancestors: Mulan (1998)**


Watch: *Mulan*

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**NOTE: Assignment #3 Due Nov. 18th**

SECTION FOUR: LIVE-ACTION RELIGION

**November 25th - Live-Action religion? Wicca/Paganism in Bedknobs and Broomsticks / Mary Poppins / Three Lives of Thomasina**


Watch: *Mary Poppins / Bedknobs and Broomsticks / The Three Lives of Thomasina* – class pick

**December 2nd – Live-Action religion? Gender, Race, Colonialism and Corporate Power revisited: The Pirates of the Caribbean franchise**


NOTE:
Take-Home exams to be handed out! DUE DEC. 9TH AT 9 AM NO EXTENSIONS!