

## WRITING 20: ACADEMIC WRITING RELIGION & POPULAR CULTURE

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Art 102

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Art 116

Welcome to Writing 20! I'm excited to meet each of you and excited about our work together this semester. I look forward to seeing you grow as writers and intellectuals, and I also look forward to getting to know you better.

### **Purpose**

As the only course taken by all undergraduates, Writing 20 claims a unique importance in Duke's curriculum. This should tell you something about the value Duke places on academic writing. All Duke freshmen will take this course. While each section of Writing 20 is different, all instructors of Writing 20 uphold a common set of goals and practices (see below). Writing 20 offers you a set of academic tools that will prepare you for courses at Duke. It will introduce you to practices of reading, thinking, writing, and criticism that you will be expected to implement in other classes. And with any luck, Writing 20 will demonstrate to you the rewards of involving yourself in academic conversations.

### **Course Description**

This section of Writing 20 will examine the intersection of religion and popular culture. In particular, we will ask two major questions as we read, watch, listen to, and discuss the materials for this course. First, what do we mean by the term "religion?" Second, how does religion shape popular culture, and vice versa? Asking the first question allows us to explore different ways of writing about what makes something "religious." That exploration will give you the tools to assess the "religious" elements of popular culture, something scholars have been debating for the last few decades. Much of course reading will consist of scholarly articles about religion and popular culture. You'll be responding to and building on these scholars' work in your own writing projects. Indeed, the main goal of this course is for you to learn how to engage in academic conversations about religion and popular culture. You will read terms, concepts, and arguments from various authors and then use those terms, concepts, and arguments as building blocks for your own analysis.

### **Writing Projects and Course Trajectory**

Because this is a class in academic writing, it is organized around a series of writing assignments. I will give detailed assignment prompts for every essay, so you don't have to worry about memorizing all these details. But you should familiarize yourself with the rhythms of the course and the major due dates so that there won't be any major surprises along the way.

On most Wednesdays throughout the semester, we will use the course blog in class. You'll have a total of three blog posts to write over the course of the semester, and these will be due on Tuesdays (by noon). During weeks in which blog posts are scheduled, *everyone* should read the blog on Tuesday afternoon or evening. Please pick one post to comment on, and post your comment no later than 8:00 AM on Wednesday morning. The goals of the blog include learning to write for a public audience, beginning a discussion about course topics, and developing your ability to embed other materials (videos, pictures, music) on our course website. These skills will be important for other assignments, as you will see.

In addition to your blog posts, you will write three medium-length essays (3-4 pages); you'll choose one of these to revise and expand for your first major project (5-7 pages). The essays will ask you to respond and build upon academic essays we read about religion and popular culture. Our writing textbook, Joseph Harris's

*Rewriting*, will give you strategies for how to write these essays. After spring break, you will conduct research on a topic of your choosing and write a 8-10 page paper for your second major project. You will also collaborate on a group-authored webpage that will become part of the “Religion and Popular Culture” website. You’ll be expected to contribute your writing and audio-visual materials to this website.

By the end of the semester, you will have developed skills to engage academic conversations and to present your work in public forums online.

### Course Objectives

All Writing 20 courses share these common goals:

- *Engage with the work of others*
- *Articulate a position*
- *Situate writing within specific contexts*

And to help achieve those goals, all Writing 20 classes ask students to practice:

- *Researching*
- *Workshopping*
- *Revising*
- *Editing*

We’ll talk much more about what it means to “engage with the work of others” or how to “workshop” a draft. For now, you’re welcome to visit <http://uwp.duke.edu/courses/writing20/students/goals.html> to find out more about the common Writing 20 goals and practices. In addition to the universal Writing 20 goals outlined above, there are several specific objectives I would like to help each of you pursue in our class:

- Read texts and your peers’ writing with an eye toward response
- Respond critically to course texts *and* to your classmates’ writing
- Draft analytical essays (on the blog and elsewhere) that analyze religion’s role in popular culture
- Offer constructive critique your classmates’ drafts and blog posts
- Revise your writing for a public audience on the blog, on the website, and in your major projects

### Assignments and Grading

I give two types of grades in this course: check-grades (✓+, ✓, ✓-) and letter grades (A, B, C, D, F). The check grades denote work that is exemplary (✓+), satisfactory (✓), and unsatisfactory (✓-). In the portions of your grade controlled by check-grades, I will expect you to have a vast majority of ✓+ and ✓ grades. If you do that, you will be fine. If you have more than one or two ✓- grades, your grade will be lowered.

Letter grades follow this rubric:

- To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but without much support or analysis of the sources. C essays are clear, though they might display grammatical weakness.
- To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are usually clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.
- To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others. You must somehow forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its significance. A essays are clear and often eloquent.
- A **D** means that you have difficulty in writing clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously respond to the assignment.

#### Percentage Breakdown:

15%	Essays
15%	Blog Posts & comments
15%	Final Draft of MP1
20%	Final Draft of MP2
10%	Group Website Project
10%	Workshop Critiques (check-grades)
5%	Research Proposal & Annotated Bibliography (check-grades)
10%	Class Involvement (check-grades) – includes preparedness for class, participation in discussions & class activities, in-class writing, and timeliness with assignments

#### Format of Written Work

Essays and major projects should be typed in a standard word processing program (preferably MS Word) and double-spaced. I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work (even first drafts!). Drafts that contain excessive typos, misspellings, or grammar mistakes will be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments. Please give each piece of writing an **original title**, use **page numbers** on multi-page assignments, and include your name, assignment, and the due date in a **header** on the first page. Save the assignment using the following format: last name – due date.doc (e.g. Dowland – 8.24.09.doc). All work should be **emailed** to sad7@duke.edu by **5:00 PM on the due date** (unless otherwise noted).

#### Absence Policy

I expect you to attend all scheduled class meetings, but I understand that conflicts inevitably arise. I allow each student three absences without penalty. (One exception: absences on days when your writing is to be discussed in a seminar workshop or a peer-critique group will be penalized.) Each absence after the third—regardless of the reason—will result in a *partial-step drop* in your *final course grade* (e.g. an A- becomes a B+, a B becomes a B-, and so on). If severe illness or an emergency causes you to miss more than three class meetings, it is your responsibility to discuss the situation with me. Otherwise, you are wholly responsible for ensuring you miss no more than three class meetings (and preferably fewer!). Because of the stiff penalty for missing more than three classes, I suggest you reserve your absences for illness, nonnegotiable engagements away from campus, and true emergencies. Missing class does not excuse you from learning what happened that day, and all assignments must be submitted on time unless you have cleared an alternate due date with the instructor *in advance*. Two tardies (more than 5 minutes late to class) constitute an absence. Missing a scheduled conference with me or with an undergraduate writing tutor also counts as an absence.

Why the stringent attendance policy? It is important for you to be in class. Writing 20 operates as a seminar, where each participant's contributions help us learn together. Your peers depend on you for analysis of the texts we read, critiques of their writing, and development of an academic community.

#### Conferences

I love to meet with students outside of class, both for the chance to get to know you better and for the chance to work intensively on your writing. Often some of the best revision ideas emerge out of these conferences. Please feel free to schedule a conference with me *whenever* you want to discuss a writing project, course readings, or other academic matters. I plan to hold office hours on Thursdays from 1:00 – 3:00, but I am available to meet at other times. The best way to set up an appointment is to email me.

#### Expectations

I expect you to be considerate of others—other classmates, other historical figures, and other religious traditions—in both written work and class discussion. While I expect and encourage differences of opinion, intellectual disagreements should not provoke personal attacks. All of us should feel comfortable articulating our own points of view in this course. I expect you to take positions in this class, but I also expect you to respect—and learn from—the positions of others.

NOTE: Students with learning or other disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class should visit <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/t-reqs/ld.html> to learn about Duke's policies concerning academic accommodations. If you anticipate a need for accommodations due to disability, please contact me as early in the semester as possible. All communication about disabilities will be kept confidential.

### Plagiarism & Academic Honesty

Knowingly presenting someone else's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses in academia because it undermines the community of integrity that supports a scholarly community. As such, the penalties for plagiarism are harsh. All instances of cheating and plagiarism will be referred to the Duke University Undergraduate Judicial Board (minor, first-time offenses may be settled by faculty-student resolution), and serious plagiarism will result in failure of the course. See [http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy\\_list/academic\\_dishonesty.html](http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy_list/academic_dishonesty.html) for more details. If you have questions about citing sources or what constitutes plagiarism, visit <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> and <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>.

I expect each student to uphold the Duke Community Standard. You may read it here: <http://www.duke.edu/web/HonorCouncil/communitystandard.html>

### Writing Studio

The writing studio is a great resource offered to Duke students. You can schedule an appointment at *any stage* of the writing process, whether you're struggling to come up with an idea for a project or polishing a final draft. You can visit the Writing Studio in the Academic Advising Center during the day, at Lilly Library during the evenings, and at Perkins Library location at various hours. You may also make use of the Writing Studio's e-tutor program. Visit the Writing Studio's website (<http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/>) to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

### Required Textbooks

There are two required textbooks; both of them are available in the university bookstore.  
Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to Do Things With Texts*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006.  
Forbes, Bruce David and Jeffrey H. Mahan. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

**A Final Note:** Please don't hesitate to talk to me about *any* issues related to the course. If you have questions or concerns about readings, assignments, feedback, or class activities, I hope you'll ask me. That's what I'm here for! I look forward to getting to know each of you better over the course of this term, and I hope our conversations both in and out of class will facilitate our intellectual pursuits.

### Schedule

Note: This schedule may change somewhat during the semester. All changes will be mentioned in class, announced via email, and updated on the Google Calendar for the course. Readings marked (RPC) can be found in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Readings marked (W) can be found on our course website. All **essays** and **major projects** must be emailed to [sad7@duke.edu](mailto:sad7@duke.edu) by the time listed. All **blog posts** must be posted by 12:00 noon on **Tuesday**. Please bring hard copies of all assignments and reading materials to class.

### Defining Religion, Defining Popular Culture

Wed, 1/13 – Introductions

Mon, 1/18 – NO CLASS (MLK holiday)

Wed, 1/20 – Forbes, "Finding Religion in Unexpected Places" (RPC); Lynch, "Why Should Theologians and Scholars of Religion Study Popular Culture?" (W)

Mon, 1/25 – Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (W); McDannell, "Material Christianity" (W)

Wed, 1/27 – Harris, ch1; Graff & Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say* (W); **BP1 (Group A)**

**Fri, 1/29 – E1 Due, 5:00 PM**

## Music

Mon, 2/1 – Seales, “Burned Over Bono” (W); Hulsether, “Like a Sermon” (RPC); Pinn, “Rap Music & Its Message” (RPC)  
Wed, 2/3 – Harris, ch2; **BP1 (Group B)**

## Sports

Mon, 2/8 – Price, “An American Apotheosis” (RPC); Chidester, “Church, Fetish, Potlatch” (RPC); WATCH the Super Bowl on 2/7  
Wed, 2/10 – Harris, ch3; **BP1 (Group C)**  
**Fri, 2/12 – E2 Due, 5:00 PM**

## Television

Mon, 2/15 – Cowan, “South Park, Ridicule, and Religious Rivalry” (W); Butler and Winston, “A Vagina Ain’t a Halo” (W); WATCH *South Park* ep. 712  
Wed, 2/17 – E2 Workshops; **BP2 (Group A)**

## Film

Mon, 2/22 – NO CLASS (screening of *The Godfather* outside of class)  
Wed, 2/24 – Lyden, “Myths About Myth” (W); Lyden, “Gangster Films” (W); **BP2 (Group B)**  
**Thurs, 2/25 – E3 Due, 5:00 PM**

## Gender

Mon, 3/1 – E3 Workshops  
Wed, 3/3 – Byrne, “O God of Players” (W); Frykholm, “Gender Dynamics of Left Behind” (RPC); **BP2 (Grp. C)**  
**Fri, 3/5 – MP1.d1 Due, 5:00 PM**

## SPRING BREAK

### Pluralism & Race

Mon, 3/15 – Iwamura, “The Oriental Monk in American Popular Culture” (RPC)  
Wed, 3/17 – MP1 Workshops  
**Thurs, 3/18 – Research Proposals Due, 5:00 PM**  
Mon, 3/22 – NO CLASS (conferences with Seth F/M/Tu)  
Wed, 3/24 – Sylvan, “Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture, and ‘The Future Religion of the World’” (W)  
**Fri, 3/26 – MP1.d2 Due, 5:00 PM**

### Research & Website Work

Mon, 3/29 – Library Day  
Wed, 3/31 – Booth, *The Craft of Research*, selections (W); **BP3 (Group A)**  
**Fri, 4/2 – Annotated Bibliography Due, 5:00 PM**  
Mon, 4/5 – “Elevator Speeches”  
Wed, 4/7 – Group Website Work; **BP3 (Group B)**  
**Fri, 4/9 – MP2.d1 due, 5:00 PM**  
Mon, 4/12 – MP2 Workshops  
Wed, 4/14 – Harris, ch5; **BP3 (Group C)**  
**Fri, 4/16 – First Draft of Group Website Due, 5:00 PM**

### Politics of Religion & Popular Culture

Mon, 4/19 – Luhr, “An MTV Approach to Evangelism” (W)  
Wed, 4/21 – Presentations & Critique of Websites  
**Fri, 4/23 – MP2.d2 due, 5:00PM**  
Mon, 4/26 – Mazur and Koda, “The Happiest Place on Earth” (W); Mahan, “Conclusion” (RPC)  
**Wed, 4/28 – Final Group Website Due, 12:00 noon; wrap-up in class**  
**Wed, 5/5 – (No Class) MP2.d3 due, 5:00 PM**