

RELIGION OF DISNEY CORP

Professors Jodi Eichler-Levine and Khurram Hussain

Contacts

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Office Hours

Prof. Eichler-Levine: Tues. 2-3 pm *and by appointment*

Prof. Hussain: By appointment

Course Meets

Mon/Wed 10:45-12:00

Fairchild-Martindale 520



When you wish ...

In its vast scope, power, forms of consumer products, and enormous intellectual property holdings (including *Star Wars* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as well as its recent acquisition of 20th Century Fox), the Walt Disney Corporation has tremendous influence over modern American— and global— society. This course uses the rubric of “religion” to investigate both the fan culture surrounding Disney and its many properties, and the company’s corporate aspirations, structure, and ethos.

Learning Objectives

Students in this course will:

- 1) Acquire knowledge about how humans theorize life, the universe, and everything (aka basic “religious literacy”)
- 2) Develop core competencies in writing and speaking
- 3) Become adept at project-based learning, which will be the core of the course and will require a great deal of time, motivation, group work, and creativity



Required texts

- There are no books required for purchase for this course; there are, however, a LARGE number of daily class readings on Course Site.

We will communicate any changes or additions in class, so be sure to ALWAYS get notes from a friend if you miss a day.

It is extremely likely that we will add further readings throughout the semester— pay attention to in-class announcements and your e-mail!

FUN FACTS

Professor Eichler-Levine has been to Disney World eight times and Disneyland two times.

Professor Hussain's favorite superhero is Spider Man.

Assignments

What follows is a general summary of the assignments for this course. Further details about each task will be available on Course Site and, **most crucially, in class.**

Class Attendance and Participation: We expect you to be present in class and to respectfully engage in class activities and take part in discussions. We realize that not everyone is a social butterfly, but we do expect you to speak up now and then— the emphasis here is on quality, not quantity. Group work will also be a major part of our class time and we expect you to be *fully* present for your group. **Value: 10% of final grade**

Essay 1: A 3-4 page persuasive essay on a topic/text of your choice covered to this point in the class. **Value: 20%. Due: Monday, February 10.**

Essay 2: Op-ed style essay. Your second essay of the term will be in the style of a newspaper op-ed, or opinion essay. This is harder than it sounds. We will discuss qualities of a strong op-ed in class. **Value: 20%. Due: Monday, March 30.**



Major group project: This class is an experimental foray into project-based learning.

Throughout the course of the semester, you will work in groups to prepare a major group creative project where you produce something that is *not* a traditional paper or a powerpoint. The sky's the limit—design a website about Disney; Imagineer your own new attraction; make a documentary film. We will assign you to teams based on your interest and on the themes of the course early in the semester, probably 2-3 weeks into the term, and there will be *many* steps and sub-due dates for this process (project proposal; research; progress reports). There will be further details in class. Objects and a group written explanation will be due **before** the presentations: on or before **Wednesday, April 15**. Each group will then present their work to their colleagues during the final 1-2 weeks of the semester. A final, individual reflection (one from *every* student) will be due at our last class, on Wednesday, April 29. Your final grade on this project will be a combination of a group grade on each component/step *and* the quality of your individual reflection.

Total value: 50% of final grade.

Extra Credit: The study of religion intersects with a host of other fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the study of race, gender, history, sexuality, modern languages and literatures, sociology, and philosophy, to name just a few possibilities. Throughout the semester, we will be sharing mentions of events, typically sponsored by academic departments and programs in these fields, that can broaden your intellectual horizons while at Lehigh. You can also ask us about events you have learned about on your own. For extra credit, you may attend *up to 2* such events and write them up in a 2 page typed, double-spaced summary and reflection paper. *The final date on which you may turn in such papers is Friday, May 1*. The value of extra credit assignments and other details will be discussed in class.

Policies

Low-tech life: Try it. You'll like it. Although we do permit laptops and tablets in class, we will periodically ask you to close your computers and try writing things by hand and going screen free so there are no distractions, so always have paper and a writing implement handy. We are permitting devices because all of our readings are on Course Site. However, we strongly encourage you to try printing them out and going screen-free. It changes how you think. See, for example, the study discussed in this article: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>

Co-teaching and communication: Co-teaching is a lot of fun and gives you the opportunity to benefit from the insights of two different professors. It can also be logistically complicated. The best way to communicate with us is by checking in before or after class. If e-mailing, please be sure to **send all e-mails to both of your professors**. **Always indicate your name and what course you are taking in your e-mail! Your Lehigh university e-mail address is an official form of university communication; check it daily.**

Ch-ch-ch-changes: The instructors reserve the **right to alter readings, assignments, or the schedule below**

WE DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS. The only exceptions are extraordinary situations (i.e., hospitalizations, serious family emergencies) that are documented through the Dean of Students' office. This is the best way for us to be fair to everyone. Plan your time accordingly, and get started *early*.

Academic Integrity: Here is the Lehigh University Undergraduate Student Senate Statement on Academic Integrity: “We, the Lehigh University Student Senate, as the standing representative body of all undergraduates, reaffirm the duty and obligation of students to meet and uphold the highest principles and values of personal, moral and ethical conduct. As partners in our educational community, both students and faculty share the responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure an environment of academic integrity. As such, each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards set forth by the faculty and in compliance with the University's Code of Conduct.”

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, Williams Hall, Suite 301 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.



Lehigh University endorses the Principles of Our Equitable Community [http://www.lehigh.edu/-inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity_Sheet_v2_032212.pdf].

We expect each member of this class to acknowledge and practice these principles. Respect for each other and for differing viewpoints is a vital component of the learning environment inside and outside the classroom. At times, we will disagree. This is normal. However, we will not engage in mockery, the use of slurs, or other disrespectful behavior.

Schedule of Readings

Readings are to be completed *before* the date for which they are assigned; come to class with the readings in hand and key passages that you want to discuss flagged, bookmarked, underlined, or bedazzled. We will have some material prepared for you each day, but the more you enter the class with a sense of what you want to discuss, the more *you* can drive our discussions. All of the readings for the course are on Course Site in PDF form. When viewings are listed, we indicate in class whether they will take place in class or you are responsible for locating the film/show in question and watching it *before* class.

Jan 20 Welcome!

Intro: What do we talk about when we talk about Disney?

Jan 22 Brehm and Rees, “Mirror, Mirror, on Ourselves.” Wills, *Disney Culture*, Chapter 1.

Jan 27 Mazur and Koda, “The Happiest Place on Earth.” Bryman, “The Disneyization of Society.”

Jan 29 Croce, “‘A Clean and Separate Space’: Walt Disney in Person and Production.”

Unit 1: The Corporation

Feb 3 Sandlin and Garlen, “Magic Everywhere: Mapping the Disney Curriculum.”

Feb 5 Wills, “Disney Dollars” (from *Disney Culture*)

Feb 10 Bak, “Building Blocks of the Imagination: Children, Creativity, and the Limits of *Disney Infinity*.”

Unit 2: Films and Mythology

Feb 12 Watts, “Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the Twentieth Century.”

Suggested: Lyden, *Film as Religion*, excerpt

Feb 17 Wills, *Disney Culture*, Chapter 4: “Disney Values”

Feb 19 Artz, “The Righteousness of Self-Centered Royals.”

Feb 24 Forbes, “Building the Dark Side: *Star Wars* and Popular Understandings of Evil.”

Feb 26 McAteer, “The Gospel According to Marvel.”

Mar 2 Laderman, “The Disney Way of Death.”

Mar 4 *Catch up and in-class project work.*

MARCH 10-15: SPRING BREAK

Unit 3: Theme Parks and Imagineering

Mar 16 Marling, “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Anna Freeway to the American Dream.”

Mar 18 Moore, “Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and the Playful Pilgrimage Center.”

Mar 23 Rutherford, “Disney’s Animal Kingdom: The Wild That Never Was.”

Mar 25 Tellotte, “The ‘Inhabitable Text’ of the Parks,” in *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology*

Mar 30 Taylor, “Disney Worlds at War”

Unit 4: Disney Fandom

Apr 1 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, introduction (possible further readings TBA)





Apr 6 Utsler, “Owning a Private Piece of the Public Disney Rock.”

Listen to: Invisibilia, “Kraftland,” and check out the photos: <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/21/753114415/kraftland>

Apr 8 King, “Disneyland and Walt Disney World: Traditional Values in Futuristic Form”

One Provocative Thesis: Walt and the Counterculture

Apr 13 *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture*

Apr 15 GROUP PROJECTS DUE (Readings TBA)

Wrapping Up

Apr 20 Presentations

Apr 22 Presentations

Apr 27 Presentations

Apr 29 Presentation time if needed and final reflections