



**Religious Studies 2180f (670)  
Spiritual Quests and Pop Culture  
Summer 2026**

**Instructor:** C. Burnetts  
**Email:** [cburnet6@uwo.ca](mailto:cburnet6@uwo.ca)

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**Course Information**

**Calendar Description:**

Pop-culture is consumed for entertainment value but rarely explored for its spirituality. This course studies the human spiritual quest and how it is expressed in pop-culture through novels, music, and films such as "The Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter".

**Extra Information:** 3 lecture hours (screening time can be included in lecture hours).

**Course Weight:** 0.50  
**Breadth:** Category B  
**Subject Code:** RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

# Spiritual Quests and Popular Culture

## Course No: 2180F 670 (Summer 2026)

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts

Office:

Sessions: Asynchronous

Classrooms: Online

E-mail: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Office Hours: By appointment.

Pop-culture is consumed for entertainment value but rarely explored for its spirituality. This course studies the human spiritual quest and how it is expressed in pop-culture through music, dance culture, social media and film, particularly as it relates to identity, character development, and audiovisual poetics. We will look at a wide range of texts, examining how popular culture both reproduces longstanding models of spiritual struggle and redemption, while often re-constructing and re-orienting the questions posed by more conventionally spiritual approaches to life's problems, mysteries and joys.

### Course Requirements:

#### Preparation and Participation

Readings: Students should have read the applicable chapters or journal articles prior to engaging the course material for that week. The study guides and online discussions provided on OWL are intended to encourage students to think deeply about the material covered in the readings. All readings will be provided and available on our class Brightspace page, at no extra cost.



Films: Students should also ensure they have seen the applicable films and/or clips before the week's lecture. Link will be made available to films and excerpts on OWL.



### Class Format

#### Goals



Information, or ideas? Are we cramming more things into our brain, or are we rewiring our brain in different ways? At university, we should aim for the highest level learning we can achieve. Here is a commonly accepted (Bloom's) taxonomy of learning:



##### 1. Knowledge:

  Recall data or information

  Verbs: describe, identify, recall, arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, reproduce state.



#### 4.Comprehension:

  Understand the meaning of a problem, be able to translate into own words.

  Verbs: comprehend, give example, classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate,




#### 7.Application:

  Use a concept in a new situation




  Verbs: apply, change, construct, compute, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.




#### 10.Analysis:

11.Can split concepts into parts and understands the structure


   Verbs: analyze, break down, relate, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, make inferences, find evidence, test.




#### 13.Synthesis:

   Produce something from different elements (e.g a report).

   Verbs: summarize, arrange, combine, categorize, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

#### 16.Evaluation:

   Make judgments, justify a solution, etc.

   Verbs: appraise, interpret, argue, assess, attach, compare, defend, estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate, prove, deduce.

Do we want to get stuck at #1? I very much hope not. Unfortunately, #1 is all we can achieve if we're passive. Have you ever had the experience of thinking you understood something, only when you try to explain it to someone else you get a bit lost? As soon as we are forced to be active, like explaining an issue to someone else, we actually start heading towards a higher level of learning.

#### Late Paper Policy:

Late papers may be penalized at the rate of 5 marks for the first day, and 2 marks for every subsequent day late. If an assignment is late due to illness or other legitimate reasons, students must contact their tutorial leader as soon as possible with supporting documentation. If a student feels he or she has a reasonable request for an extension for an assignment, he or she must discuss this with the course lecturer.

#### Assessment:

Online Discussion Contributions (OWL): 40%

Each week, a discussion thread will be opened in advance of a lecture posting where students are encouraged to contribute their thoughts on the films, clips and/or readings assigned that week. Students will be graded on the timeliness and frequency of engagement with topic questions and others' responses, as well as the quality of responses. By "timeliness", we mean that student contributions should be ongoing and sustained through the course timeline.

### Content Test: short answer format: 30%

[Course Policy on use of generative AI: it is prohibited on this course as a valid method of approaching multiple choice and written assessments, most particularly where it is deemed to have misrepresented the appropriate level of study and effort students are expected to allocate to their success on this course.]

- Length: 2 hrs online
- Short- and Medium-length answer format; no essays.
- Will cover lectures and readings.
- *If there is a valid medical or other reason mid-term exam cannot be taken when administered, documentation must be provided to the appropriate Faculty Dean's Office. Students who receive medical or other accommodation will take a make-up exam. Students who do not receive a medical or other accommodation and miss the mid-term exam will receive a 0 as a mid-term exam mark. The Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)). The required Student Medical Certificate can be found at: [http://www.kings.uwo.ca/pt5/assets/File/SMC\\_Revised\\_March\\_2011.pdf](http://www.kings.uwo.ca/pt5/assets/File/SMC_Revised_March_2011.pdf) .*

### Essay: 30%

- Approximate length: 2000 words.
- Essays due 11:59pm, June 9th. For every day that it is late, you lose percentage points. Get it in on time!

### Readings

Compulsory: Available on OWL

## Schedule

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Date posted</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings/Viewings (available on OWL under Lessons)</b>
1	May 5	Introduction	Selected clips/passages.
2	May 7	<b>Unit 1: Awakenings</b>  Red Pill/Blue Pill	<u>MOVIE:</u> <i>The Matrix</i> (dir. Lily and Lana Wachowski, 1999, US)  <u>READING:</u> Hussain, Amjad Religion, Film and Post-modernism: The Matrix, a Case Study in Sinema ve Din (pp.1199-1210)
3	May 12	Postmodern Epiphany	<u>MOVIE:</u> <i>Pulp Fiction</i> (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1994, US)  <u>READING:</u> <a href="https://jungpage.org/learn/articles/film-reviews/668-pulp-">https://jungpage.org/learn/articles/film-reviews/668-pulp-</a>
4	May 14	Case study: Rave Culture	<u>READING:</u> Mckenzie Wark: selected writings  (on Wark: <a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/why-we-rave-mckenzie-wark-techno-raving-book/">https://www.vice.com/en/article/why-we-rave-mckenzie-wark-techno-raving-book/</a> )

5	May 19	<b>Unit 2: Purgation/Detachment</b>  Christ Figures and spiritual asceticism.	<i>Taxi Driver</i> (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1976, US)  Amy Taubin, <i>Taxi Driver</i> , London: BFI Film Classics, selected writings.
6	May 21	Male “sub-cultures” and transgression.	<b>MOVIE:</b> <i>Fight Club</i> (dir. David Fincher, 1999, US)  Michael Taussig, “Transgression” in (ed.), Mark C. Taylor, <i>Critical Terms for Religious Studies</i> , 349-364.
7	May 26	Case-study: Anime Dystopias	Deathnote”: Selected scenes.  Reading: Dennis Owen Frolich, Evil Must Be Punished: Apocalyptic Religion in the Television Series Death Note, <i>Journal of Media and Religion</i> , 2012-07, Vol.11 (3), p.141-155
8	May 28	<b><i>Content Test</i></b> <b>(2 hours on OWL)</b>  <b>Unit 3: Illumination/direct experience</b> Close Encounters of the Spiritual Kind	<b>MOVIE:</b> <i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i> (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1981, US)  <b>READING</b> Nigel Morris, <i>Empire of Light</i> , 2007, London: Wallflower Press, selections

		Case study: UFOlogy and SF Imaginaries	Selections from The X-Files, <i>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</i> ,  <u>READING:</u> Introduction; Christopher Partridge, <i>UFO Religions</i> , London: Routledge.,
9	June 2	<b>Unit 4: Union/Integration</b>  Living the good life and Buddhist principles.	<u>MOVIE:</u> <i>Groundhog Day</i> (Harold Ramis, 1993, USA)  <u>READING:</u> 'The American Dream' and 'Hollywood Narrative', in Dominic Strinati, <i>An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture</i> , pp. 26-33 (available on OWL under "Resources")
10	June 4	"Weird" Ecologies	<u>MOVIE:</u> <i>Annihilation</i> (dir. Alex Garland, 2018, US)  <u>READING:</u> Pansy Duncan, The Eco-material Posthuman in the Age of the Anthropocene in <i>Screening the Posthuman</i> , London: OUP, 2023
11	June 9	Case study: Taylor Swift and the Stadium experience  <b>Hand in Course Essay</b>	Selections from The New Yorker

12	June 11	Course review	

*Statement on Academic Offences:*

King's is committed to Academic Integrity.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.

**PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING ARE SERIOUS SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>). Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

*Additional Information:*

Support Services

The web site for Registrarial Service at King's University College is [www.kings.uwo.ca](http://www.kings.uwo.ca), and Counselling and Student Development Services are linked from <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/dos>.

**Tests/Examinations**

Students are responsible for seeking accommodation with appropriate documentation, prior to writing tests/examinations, if they are of the view that their performance may be affected by extenuating circumstances.

Faculty Office Hours: Faculty office hours can be found on the King's website at:

<http://www.kings.uwo.ca/files/file/OfficeHours.pdf>, and are also posted on the bulletin board across from the Faculty Secretaries' Office on the 2nd floor of Dante Lenardon Hall.

*Unless otherwise noted by your Professor, the following policy is in effect:*

Use of Electronic Devices:

You are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations.

July 2, 2009

# King's University College General Course Policies 2025-2026

## **1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences**

### **Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)**

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [here](#).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course. Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course. For further information, please see:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

### **Absences from Final Examinations**

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details [https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/exams/index.html](https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/exams/index.html).

## **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

## **2. Support Services**

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/personal-counselling>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>

## **GBSV Support:**

King’s is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/gender-and-sexual-violence>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing [Care@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:Care@kings.uwo.ca) or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western’s Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

See also [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

### **3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

**Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom:** King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/student-code-of-conduct>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

### **4. Statement on Academic Offences**

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at [here](#).

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/OriginalityReports-TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

## **5. Copyright of Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member.

Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

## **6. Use of Recordings**

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

## **7. Policy on Attendance**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.