



Religious Studies 1033A/B (570), (571)
The Meaning of Life at the Movies
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: Charles Burnetts

Email: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

An exploration of religious assumptions (including assumptions about how a person can live and die well) in contemporary films.

Extra Information: 2 lecture hours, 2 screening 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.

The Meaning of Life at the Movies
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 1033A (570)
2025-26 (Fall Semester)

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts

Office: NA

Sessions: Screenings: Wednesdays 2:30pm-4:30pm;

Lectures: Thursdays 6:30am-8:30pm.

E-mail: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Office Hours: By appointment (Zoom)

The work of the course will be the effort to analyze what, and how, and how well the stories are told, and to discern the “meaning of life” being offered. We will also attempt to assess the adequacy of these various meanings. The hoped for purpose of the course will be an enlargement of our understanding of many differing stories, with a view to a greater self awareness, and comprehension of ourselves and our world. The relevance of this course in a religious studies program will be fully laid out in the initial lectures of the course.

The course will cover five thematic units: faith, sin, apocalypse, sacrifice and love. Two or three films will be shown for each unit, with in-class discussion focusing on how such films express their respective themes. Discussion will also turn to film style and genre, and the particular devices filmmakers use to make such themes come alive.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will develop a rich, critical understanding of cinema as a social institution that fulfills quasi-religious functions.
- = Will develop knowledge of key motifs of religious practice and experience e.g. sacrifice.
- Will develop knowledge of the basic formal conventions of filmmaking.
- Will learn about films as a function of their cultural, sociopolitical and spiritual context.
- Will learn about how ‘meaning’ is created by film, for example, in terms of representation, symbolism and metaphor.
- Will make connections between themes presented by films and important elements in their own cultural and spiritual lives.

Course Requirements:

Screenings

It is very important that you see the course films projected on a large screen. You are thus required to attend weekly screenings on Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm (attendance will be taken), including screenings of films you may have already seen. Students are responsible for making up any screenings they may

miss. Study copies of most (but not all) films to be screened will be available on reserve at the library, but a video screening at a monitor does not substitute for full-screen projection. Please arrive on time for screenings and follow the screening etiquette (turn off cell phones, no talking, etc.). You should take notes, either during or shortly after the screening.

Attendance

All students are required to attend all screenings and lectures. Attendance will be taken at each session. **IMPORTANT: In accordance with college policy, attending less than 75% of sessions (lectures and screenings) can result in debarment from taking the final exam.**

Participation

Students must come prepared to participate in tutorial discussions based on the week's assigned readings and screenings. Notes should be taken immediately following screenings—films shown in this class are texts to be studied and analyzed; such examination cannot occur without appropriate records of information. Students should come to class with questions and/or comments that have arisen from readings and viewings. Students should make notes during lectures and tutorials, with a view to developing or challenging some of the points expressed.

Student behaviour during lectures, tutorials and screenings

Students are required to behave respectfully in all sessions. Sitting in an orderly manner is required (e.g. no legs up, no sleeping etc.) and no eating is permitted for any sessions.

Laptops – will be permitted in sessions EXCEPT for screenings. **Absolutely no use of laptops or handheld devices in screenings.** You are expected to attend to the screening only. Laptop use in any other session must be confined to note-taking – any use of internet browsers or other non note-taking applications during sessions may be noted and will adversely effect your participation grade.

Laptops may not be used in exams.

Use of **handheld devices** is not permitted at any time during any session of 1033. Please have them turned off. Any use of a handheld device during sessions will be noted and will adversely effect your participation grade.

Late Paper Policy:

Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 5% of marks for each 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.

Course Texts : Course Readings on OWL

Marking Scheme:

Two tests 20% (Test 1: 7.5%, Test 2: 12.5%)
Mid-term exam - 32.5%
Final exam - 42.5%
Professionalism and Attendance - 5%

MIDTERM EXAM – 60 minutes. (Short to medium answer format. Exam will aim to assess students' familiarity with films seen thus far, assigned readings and lecture notes).

TESTS: Multiple choice format, or short/medium answer format, or terminology match-up exercise.

FINAL EXAM: Multiple choice, short/medium answer format.

PROFESSIONALISM & ATTENDANCE : Attendance at all sessions is compulsory, and it is your responsibility to be a respectful and receptive participant in class (see notes on student behaviour requirements above).

Fall Schedule

Unit 1: Belief

Date	Film Screening	Lecture and Reading
Sep 4		Introduction Lecture READING: Richard Blake, "From Peepshow to Prayer: Toward a Spirituality of the Movies" https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1762&context=jrf
Sep 10	<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> (Frank Darabont, 1994, USA)	

Sep 11		Thinking about Belief
		Donald Lopez, "Belief" in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), <i>Critical Terms for Studies</i> , pp. 21-35 (available on OWL).
Sep 17	<i>Groundhog Day</i> (Harold Ramis, 1993, USA)	
Sep 18		Living the Good Life
		READING: 'The American Dream' and 'Hollywood Narrative', in Dominic Strinati, <i>An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture</i> , pp. 26-33 (available on OWL).
Sep 24	<i>Taxi Driver</i> (Martin Scorsese, 1976, USA)	
Sep 25		Lecture: Alienation, Sin and the City
		READING: "Transgression" in (ed.), Mark C. Taylor, <i>Critical Terms for Religious Studies</i> , 349-364. (available on OWL).
Oct 1	<i>The Exorcist</i> (William Friedkin, 1973, USA)	
Oct 2		Test #1 (20 mins)
		Followed by Sin and the Horror Genre
		READING: "Horror" in Susan Hayward, <i>Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts</i> , 4th ed, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 203-11. (available on OWL)
Oct 8	<i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998, US)	
Oct 9		Lecture: Apocalypse and Redemption
		READING: "Introduction" in (eds.), Kelly J. Murphy, Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, <i>Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Currents Through History</i> , Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 3-17. (available on OWL)

Oct 15 *The Birds* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1963, US)

Oct 16

Lecture: Apocalypse and Mystery

READING: Paul R. Eddy & James Beilby, 'The Atonement: An Introduction,' in Eddy & Beilby, (eds.), *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, (Intervarsity Press, 2006), 9-21. (available on OWL under "Resources")

Oct 22 *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994, USA)

Oct 23

MIDTERM EXAM (1hr)

Followed by:

Lecture: Sin and Atonement

No reading this week — study for the midterm exam!

Oct 29 *The Cabin In The Woods* (Joss Whedon, 2012, USA)

Oct 30

Lecture: The Nature of Sacrifice

READING: "Sacrifice" in (ed.), Mark C. Taylor, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 285-297. (available on OWL).

FALL READING WEEK - Nov 3 to Nov 7

Nov 12 *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, USA/Canada)

Nov 13

Lecture/Tutorial: Science-Fiction and Thinking About Animals

READING: Joan Gordon, "Animal Studies", in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. Ed. Mark Bould, Andrew. M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint. London: Routledge, 2009. 331-340. (available on OWL).

Nov 19 *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937, USA)

Nov 20

Test #2 (20 mins)

Followed by: **Lecture: Melodrama and Sacrificial Love**

READING: Edward Collins Vacek, 'Nature of Love' in *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics*, (Georgetown, DC: Georgetown UP, 1996), 34-41, 44-5, 57-61. (available on OWL).

Nov 26 *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982, USA)

Nov 27

Lecture: Androids in Love

READING: TBA

Dec 3 *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988, Italy)

Dec 4

Course review session

TBA

Final Exam

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 https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

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://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

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 (under [Special Examinations](#)).

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://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-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/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

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://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing 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.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also 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://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

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

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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 your 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/Originality Reports - 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.