



REL 3115: Religion, Spirituality, and Popular Music

Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo

Course Description:

Welcome to *Religion, Spirituality, and Popular Music*! In this course we will be examining popular music and its cultures through the frameworks of the academic study of religion and popular culture studies. In particular, we will begin by thinking about the issue of classification and the problem of defining religion in order to address the possibility of rethinking the "religious" and/or "cultic" function(s) of popular music cultures as proposed by two of the authors. This course will engage the student by means of a philosophical and theoretical exploration of popular music culture and its association with religion through a politics of differentiation involved in identity construction (i.e., religious or musical). It is an invitation to critical thinking about and questioning of the notion that music functions in ways similar to religions in an increasingly secular and postmodern culture.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to the academic study of religion and popular culture studies
- To engage students in critical thinking about the relationship between religion and popular music
- To address issues of classification and definition
- To present various theoretical perspectives on the religiosity of popular music

Required Texts:

White Soul: Country Music, the Church and Working Americans, Tex Sample (Abingdon Press, 1996)

Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music, Robin Sylvan (New York University Press, 2002)

Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music, Rupert Till (London: Continuum, 2010)

Gods and Guitars: Seeking the Sacred in Post-1960s Popular Music, Michael J. Gilmour (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009)

Course Introduction:

Hi, All.

My name is Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo (or Dr D to make things easier). I'm here to help facilitate your progression through this online course dealing with religion and spirituality in popular music and its cultures, as well as any questions or issues that may arise as you're completing the readings and the assignments. Since my academic background is primarily in philosophy of religion, you can expect that a close reading of each thinker's perspective in a critical fashion will be our main focus (btw, thinking critically does not mean thinking negatively about the perspectives provided). We will do our best to try to understand each perspective; that is, read it in the best possible light before thinking about the consistency, implications, and value of the argument, proposition, position, or perspective being proposed about the potential relationship between religion, spirituality, and popular music. What unites each of the perspectives through their often diametrically opposed differences is that each proposes a way of thinking about religion as somehow related to or located in popular music and its cultures.

If you hope to do well in the course, make sure you keep up with the readings, assessments, and assignments.

Overview of Assignments, Point Distribution, & Grade Scale

Point Distribution:

I. Writing Assignments (44% of total possible points): Participation in the course will be determined by different writing assignments (i.e., posts) in each of the modules. These may consist of discussion questions/responses, essays, short answer, or video posts. Directions for these written assignments will be provided under the "Assignments" heading in each module. Writing assignments may have different closing dates during a module; it is the student's responsibility to be aware of the closing dates listed in each module. Do not wait until the due day to respond. Writing assignments **will not** be reopened once closed. If you have a documented medical emergency, you must provide a note from your doctor in order for me to consider allowing a missed writing assignment to be completed.

II. Quizzes/Final (56% of total possible points): There will be a quiz in each of the modules as well as a final exam in the last module to assess your comprehension of the material. Quizzes and the final exam will consist of responding to multiple-choice questions based on the readings. Given the (default) open book nature of the course, **quizzes and the final will be timed**. So, make sure you have read and comprehended the chapters before taking the quizzes/final. I would also suggest making a handy reference guide with names, theoretical positions, beliefs, etc. along with page numbers to reduce page-flipping during the timed assessments.

Missed Assignment or Resubmission Option: Rather than dropping the lowest grade (which would reduce the total points from the standard 500 point total upon which your final grade will be based) or offering some extra credit assignment at the end of the semester, I have decided to allow students to request one of the following without a penalty or question (i.e., for reasons due to medical issues, missing books, technical glitches, or just forgetting to do the assignment/assessment) in order to earn points that otherwise would have been lost :

1. Submit a missed writing assignment or take a missed quiz.
2. Resubmit a writing assignment or quiz.

Any other accommodations above and beyond this will require a signed doctor's note documenting a medical emergency. If you would like to exercise one of these two options, you must email me through Canvas with your request. All requests must be made prior to module 8.

Note: The above percentages are approximations, since assignments and corresponding point totals may change in any given semester. Final grades will be based on the **number of points earned** by the student out of a total of 500 possible points. Canvas has a habit of breaking down different types of assignments in terms of percentages. One of the problems with this feature is that it doesn't count missed assignments in its calculation (which yields a false percentage). This feature cannot be turned off; do not let those percentages confuse you. Final grades will be based on the **total number of points earned** as reflected in the grade scale below. If you want to get an idea of your current average at any point during the semester, divide the total number of points available at that time into your actual point total (e.g., 150 out of 200 points = 75%).

Regarding the Comments Box in Grading Rubrics:

Any questions about written assignments or quizzes should be addressed through course mail. Since the comments box in assignment and assessment rubrics (as it is currently structured in Canvas) does not alert the instructor on her/his dashboard, and because it is important to keep all student-instructor correspondence archived in one "place," all questions related to writing assignments, quizzes, and course material should be sent to the instructor through course mail (located in your Inbox to the left of the screen).

Final grades will be based on the **number of points earned** by the student out of a total of 500 possible points. Canvas has a habit of breaking down different types of assignments in terms of percentages. One of the problems with this feature is that it doesn't count missed assignments in its calculation (which yields a false percentage). This feature cannot be turned off; do not let those percentages confuse you. See the Grade Scale in this module for points/letter grid.

Grade Scale

A = 448-500 pts.

C = 348-372 pts.

B+ = 423-447 pts.

D+ = 323-347 pts.

B = 398-422 pts.

D = 298-322 pts.

C+ = 373-397 pts.

F = 297 pts. and below

Academic/Personal Conduct

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the

entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Personal Conduct

You are expected to conduct yourself in a manner that is conducive to the academic ends that we are attempting to achieve (see University standards for personal conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule). This course is an educational safe zone. It welcomes the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, ethnicities, religions, philosophies, and abilities. Consequently, all members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity and to refrain from offensive posts. It is expected that each student will be sensitive to the beliefs/values of others in the course. **Critical thinking should not be understood as “belief bashing.”** In the case that this advice is not followed you should expect a lowering of your final grade or, in the event of continuous serious violations, removal from the course.

Student Accessibility Statement

The University of Central Florida considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be a strength and critical to its educational mission. UCF expects every member of the university community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture for all in its classrooms, work environments, and at campus events. Dimensions of diversity can include sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith and non-faith perspectives, socio-economic class, political ideology, education, primary language, family status, military experience, political beliefs, cognitive style, and communication style. The individual intersection of these experiences and characteristics must be valued in our community.

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at www.shield.ucf.edu

If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible and/or contact Student Accessibility Services.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:

Title IX – EO/AA - <http://www.eo.ucf.edu/> & askanadvocate@ucf.edu

Disability Accommodation – Student Accessibility Services - <http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/> & sas@ucf.edu

Diversity and Inclusion Training and Events – www.diversity.ucf.edu
Student Bias Grievances – Just Knights response team - <http://jkrt.sdes.ucf.edu/>
UCF Compliance and Ethics Office - <http://compliance.ucf.edu/> &
complianceandethics@ucf.edu
Ombuds Office - <http://www.ombuds.ucf.edu>

Copyright

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Protocols

Classroom Expectations

The following ground rules will help your work in this course to go more smoothly. Please carefully review these expectations and follow them.

1. Academic integrity will be appraised according to the student academic behavior standards outlined in *The Golden Rule of the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook*. See <http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/> for further details.
2. Keep up with the reading. You have quite a few chapters, modules, discussion postings, and e-mail messages to read for the class. Please keep up with the reading. Students who keep up with the reading tend to do much better in this kind of class than those who do not.

Messaging

Make sure you:

1. Check your inbox at least twice per week (more often is better).
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message. Generally, two days is considered reasonable amount of time to receive a reply.
3. Be courteous and considerate. Being honest and expressing yourself freely is very important but being considerate of others online is just as important as in the classroom.

4. Make every effort to be clear. Online communication lacks the nonverbal cues that fill in much of the meaning in face-to-face communication.
5. Do not use all caps. This makes the message very hard to read and is considered "shouting." Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation (you may want to compose in a word processor, then cut and paste the message into the discussion).
6. Break up large blocks of text into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.
7. Never assume that your messages can be read by no one except yourself; others may be able to read or access your mail. Never send or keep anything that you would not mind seeing on the evening news.

Discussion Topics

General "rules of the road" or protocols that apply to messages also apply to the use of discussions. Use the following conventions when composing a discussion posting:

1. During a Discussion assignment, deadlines for posting to and replying will be specified with each assignment. It is a good practice to always check the Discussions multiple times during the week.
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message.
3. Everyone should feel free to participate in class and online discussions. Regular and meaningful discussion postings constitute a substantial portion of your grade.
4. Respect each other's ideas, feelings and experiences.
5. Be courteous and considerate. It is important to be honest and to express yourself freely, but being considerate of others is just as important and expected online as it is in the classroom.
6. Explore disagreements and support assertions with data and evidence.
7. Do not use postings such as "I agree," "I don't know either," "Who cares," or "ditto." They do not add to the discussion, take up space on the Discussions, and will not be counted for assignment credit.
8. Avoid posting large blocks of text. If you must, break them into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.

Word of Caution

Since this course is predominantly self-paced, my **very strong recommendation** is that you keep up with the readings, discussion posts, and quizzes in order to stay on track. It has been my experience that self-paced courses are a double-edged sword. The flexibility that makes online courses popular also brings with it the temptation to procrastinate in the absence of weekly F2F meetings. As a result, withdrawals and "F's" due to the inability to complete work are very high in online courses. **Given this flexibility as well as the open-book nature of this course, the final, quizzes, and posts will not be re-opened; no "Incomplete" will be granted without a documented medical emergency. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all deadlines.** If you find that you have forgotten, misread, misunderstood, misconstrued the deadlines, and/or have "misplaced" your cyber-calendar, are the victim of a computer crash, have fallen prey to cyber-gremlins, and/or your cyber-dog ate your cyber-paper, and/or just plain procrastinated, **do not e-mail the instructor requesting any of the aforementioned.**

The moral of the story is this: if you want to avoid undue stress, anxiety, and do well in the course, make sure you take the time to read on a consistent basis and check in on the discussion messages regularly; **do not wait until the last possible day/minute to take quizzes and post discussions.** Keep in mind those students that are actively engaged in the course will fare better at the end of the semester. If you have any questions concerning the course, feel free to send me

a message. If you encounter material in the readings that you do not understand, contact me and I will gladly assist you.

Federal Financial Aid Regulation

All faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the **Student Information for Instructor** assignment included in this module by the date listed in the module (or, if adding the course late, as soon as possible after adding the course). This assignment should be turned in no later than the end of the first (introductory) module. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Support Services

The following services/resources are available to assist students:

Review the [Academic Engagement for Financial Aid FAQ](#) web page for a list of frequently asked questions.

Online@UCF Support – Provides technical assistance to students who use Webcourses@UCF.

- Live support 8:30 to 4:30
 - 407-823-0407
 - Live Chat and online document search: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/>
- Email: onlinesupport@ucf.edu
- Support form: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/contact-online-support/>
- Weekend and evening hours: Messages are answered by email.

Service Desk – Students should contact the Service Desk for issues regarding NID passwords or access to university systems.

- Hours: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday-Friday
- Call: 407-823-5117
- Website: <http://www.cst.ucf.edu/service-desk/>

Module Schedule

Module	Topics	Text & Readings	Module Opens/Closes
1	Course Introduction	Course and Canvas Material	Mon. 8/21 @ 9:00 am - Wed. 8/30 @ 4:00 pm
2	Part One: Politics of Taste Part Two: Music as Traditions	<i>White Soul</i> Introduction & Chapters 1-4	Wed. 8/30 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 9/13 @ 4:00 pm

3	Part Three: The Contradictions and the Politics of Resistance in Country Music	<i>White Soul</i> Chapters 5-8	Wed. 9/13 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 19/27 @ 4:00 pm
4	Part One: Theoretical, Structural, and Historical Background The Connection between Music and Religion West African Possession Religion and American Popular Music	<i>Traces of the Spirit</i> Introduction & Chapters 1 & 2	Wed. 9/27 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 10/11 @ 4:00 pm
5	Part Two: Popular Music Subcultures as Religion The Grateful Dead Electronic Dance Music Heavy Metal Rap and Hip Hop	<i>Traces of the Spirit</i> Chapters 3-6, and Conclusion	Wed. 10/11 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 10/25 @ 4:00 pm
6	Pop Cults and New Religious Movements Sex Cults of Popular Music Drug Cults of Popular Music Cults of the Sacred Popular Local Cults of Popular Music	<i>Pop Cult</i> Introduction & Chapters 1-5	Wed. 10/25 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 11/8 @ 4:00 pm
7	Virtual Cults of Popular Music Death Cults of Popular Music Trance Cults of Electronic Dance Music Musical Cults of the Sacred Popular	<i>Pop Cult</i> Chapters 6-9	Wed. 11/8 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 11/22 @ 4:00 pm
8	Religion on Record Church in a Guitar Case Outrageous Religion Looking beyond the Steeple and the Menorah Fading Out	<i>Gods and Guitars</i> <i>Preface, Intro, and Tracks 1-5</i>	Wed. 11/22 @ 4:00 pm - Wed. 12/6 @ 4:00 pm

Note: This module schedule provides an overview of the topics, readings, and opening/closing schedule for the modules. However, specific readings, assignments, and deadlines are found in each of the modules. Since these may change due to different circumstances, you are to **follow the specific directions for readings and assignments in each of the modules accessed through the modules link.**