Mission Statement:
Our mission is to serve as a leading center of Christian thought and action providing an excellent education from a biblical perspective and global context in pivotal professions to equip Christian leaders to change the world.

COURSE SYLLABUS

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & THE ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

COM 685
SEMINAR: TRANSCENDENCE AND FILM
SUMMER 2012

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION
Instructor: Marc T. Newman, Ph.D.
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E-mail: marcnew@regent.edu
Office Hours: by appointment
Office Location: Southern California

All students are required to read and have a thorough understanding of the syllabus. Any questions or concerns need to be addressed to the instructor.

Please initial here to indicate that you have read and understood the requirements outlined in this syllabus

____________________
Student initials
**Course Description**

Neil Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that humans have moved from the Age of Print (or literacy) to the Age of Entertainment. He was right. Postman used Las Vegas as the iconic city of this age, but just as easily he could have identified Hollywood. Film represents the language of this generation. People are more likely to discuss films they have recently seen than books they have recently read. Robert Johnston, in *Reel Spirituality*, notes that conversations on religious topics are more likely to break out after a movie than after a sermon.

This class is specifically designed to examine the spiritual side of film. In particular, we will be examining the idea of transcendence, explicated in Otto, Eliade, and Tolkien (and others), and worked out in a wide variety of dramatic, comedy, horror, science fiction, and fantasy films. Communication scholar Roderick Hart noted that people are at their most persuadable when they are having a good time. Therefore it is not surprising that in an era in which many in the west are unaffiliated with a particular church, and where, as William Rockett reveals, even the church does not seem interested in the transcendent side of its own doctrines, that Hollywood would step in to fill the gap. As you might imagine, certainly from an orthodox Christian viewpoint, it does not always get it right.

In this class, I am more interested in your ability to explain than your ability to merely describe or evaluate. As Wayne Brockreide notes in “Rhetorical Criticism as Argument:” “Whereas an evaluative critic is primarily concerned with passing judgment on the experience, the critic who explains is primarily trying to account for how an aspect of the rhetorical experience worked by relating it to something more general than itself.” Our job, in this course, will be to learn to use the tools of rhetorical criticism to explain how films “work” to communicate the religious idea of transcendence.

**Rationale/Course Overview**

**Course Description**

During this course you will learn to integrate principles of rhetorical criticism into your understanding of the nexus of transcendence and film. We will begin by examining the early arguments concerning images as hallmarks of transcendence as articulated by St. John of Damascus in his response to the iconoclasts. Then we will look at more recent explications of transcendence offered by Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Rounding out the theoretical side of the course will be a thorough overview of constructs of transcendence from pre-modern, modern, post-modern, and transcultural perspectives. The course then shifts to application as we view different ways in which Hollywood has attempted to communicate transcendence through a variety of genres with special attention to films created over the past four decades.

This course is designed to help students to gain an academic and pragmatic understanding of the persuasive power of film. Students will examine, critique, and explain certain scholarly theories concerning the rhetoric of film (one of the best ways to learn is to teach). During informal sessions, students will make applications of theory to concrete instances of film. Each student will defend a potential research proposal. Additionally, it
is expected that at the conclusion of this class students will be able to write and present a thoroughly researched and argumentatively sound critical analysis paper examining the rhetoric of transcendence as communicated by a particular film, group of films, genre, or auteur.

Integration of Faith and Learning

C.S. Lewis, in his landmark essay, “Learning in War Time,” noted: “If all the world were Christian, it might not matter if all the world were uneducated. But, as it is, a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple now – not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground – would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered. The cool intellect must work not only against cool intellect on the other side, but against the muddy heathen mysticism which deny intellect altogether…The learned life then is, for some, a duty.”

Faith informs knowledge as premises inform conclusions. All thought is founded on sets of presuppositions that will lead, inevitably to ends. The psalmist says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” The soundness of our conclusions will be determined by the veracity of our presuppositions. Therefore, it is important that Christian scholars not think that they must abandon presuppositions in order to achieve some chimerical objectivity and advance in the academy. Worse, it is a lie. The scholar will not abandon presuppositions in any case, instead one set will merely be substituted for another. G.K. Chesterton, in All is Grist, explained, “The whole point of education is that it should give a man abstract and eternal standards by which he can judge material and fugitive conditions.” By integrating faith and learning we can bring the eternal into the temporal, allowing us to “test the spirits” and to “hold fast to what is true.”

Communication Studies Program Outcomes

- Christian Worldview - Doctoral students will critique the worldviews commonly held by communication scholars and will formulate their own Christian worldview as a developing communication scholar.
- Academics - Doctoral students will summarize and explain common ontological, epistemological and axiological approaches to the study of communication and will compose their own definition of communication based on their approach to the field.
- Christian Community - Doctoral students will contribute to the academic Christian community of communication scholars through their participation in on-line or on-campus doctoral colloquiums and academic conference gatherings with other Christian scholars.
- Mission Impact - Doctoral students will identify the major international organizations in the field of communication study and will explain their contributions to the field.
TRANSCENDENCE AND FILM

In this course, students will:

- gain an academic and pragmatic understanding of how films rhetorically communicate spiritual ideas – in particular the construct of transcendence.
  - Demonstrated through participation and leadership in discussion.

- understand the criterion for selecting significant films as appropriate rhetorical artifacts.
  - Demonstrated through discussion and in written assignments.

- construct targeted methodologies for rhetorical analysis of film.
  - Demonstrated in discussion and final paper.

- analyze a variety of films by applying various rhetorical methodologies
  - Demonstrated through in-class presentation and final paper.

- understand the connection between the academic and popular realms of analysis.
  - Demonstrated in discussion.

- craft conference-level responses to student scholarship.
  - Demonstrated through written blind peer evaluations of other student’s work and discussion boards.

- construct an argumentatively sound rhetorical critical analysis of a significant film, set of films, film genre, or auteur.
  - Demonstrated through final paper.

COURSE MATERIALS

REQUIRED TEXTS

REQUIRED JOURNAL ARTICLES:


Other articles will be provided at the beginning of class to serve as reference material.

FILMS

I will be referencing a number of films during class. Minimally you should be familiar with *The Matrix Trilogy*, and the first three *Star Wars* films (*A New Hope, The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*). We will also be examining a number of non-science-fiction films, so if you are not a fan, know that we will also examine other genres.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS


COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. Readings and Class Participation

Students will be expected to have read the assigned materials before the modular week begins. It is important that everyone participate, but also that none of us become completely overwhelmed. Once discussions begin, I expect the kind of robust analysis and debate that might accompany a conference panel. In fact, you will all be presenting some preliminary research, so the analogy is particularly apt.

Another reason to make sure that you have kept your end of the reading bargain is that your classmates will be counting on you. Each of you will lead a discussion section over assigned chapters from Screening the Sacred and/or Sacred Terror. You will have to provide a synopsis, extend on the ideas in the chapter, and pose questions to the class for discussion. If class members have not read the chapters, discussion is going to be bleak. We will be co-learning in this class (even if we can’t all co-grade :-) Do unto others…

B. Late Policy

All scheduled written assignments are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on dates indicated on the syllabus. All assignments turned in after that time will be considered late. All late assignments will receive a deduction of one letter grade. Late assignments will be graded without comment – if you are looking for feedback, please submit your work on time.

C. Extensions

All assignments are due on the date stated in the syllabus. Except in cases of emergency, requests for extensions must be made to the instructor, at least twenty-four hours before the assignment is due. Be prepared to defend your reason why you need the extension.

D. Incomplete Grades

In an effort to spur you to complete any missed assignments in a timely fashion, I will not assign incomplete grades. In extreme circumstances, when extensions are provided to students, outstanding assignments may be completed early in the following semester and a grade change, if warranted, will be issued at that time. The only students who will be considered for extensions on end of semester assignments will be those who have completed all of the other work for the semester, and who have been active participants in the class discussions.

E. Academic Integrity

The Regent University Graduate Catalogue notes: “A community of teachers and scholars recognizes the principles of truth and honesty as absolutely essential. The expectation at Regent University is that these principles will be rigorously followed in all academic endeavors, including the preparation of class reports and papers, giving and
taking of examinations, and in protecting the validity of assigned grades. This assumes that all work will be done by the person who purports to do the work without unauthorized aids. Instructors will exercise due diligence in planning and supervising the academic program so that the principles of truth and honesty are encouraged.”

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism occurs when a student utilizes the ideas or words of another author without appropriate citation. Plagiarism is a severe academic violation, and will not be tolerated. The university’s policy on plagiarism is that a first instance will result in a failure of the assignment in which it occurs. We will notify the dean of any act of plagiarism in our classes. A second instance will result in failure of the class, and a third instance may result in expulsion from the university.

**Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism**

In an electronic, cut-and-paste age, plagiarism is easy to do, even if you do not intend to do so. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to adopt a research regime that keeps quoted material separate from your original writing until such time as you need it. When doing research on the computer, open a separate file for every article or book you examine. At the top of the page, write in all bibliographic information, then, under that heading, type or paste quotations or paraphrases along with the page number associated with the quotation or paraphrase. Then, when you craft your paper, each time you paste a quotation or paraphrase, insert the parenthetical citation in text, and copy and paste the bibliographic information immediately into the “Works Cited” or “References” page.

**F. Assignments**

All essays written for this class must be turned in using Times New Roman, 12 point font (this assures uniformity in guidelines).

**Class Participation – 20% of grade**
As noted above, class participation in a seminar is a must. Like Santa, I’ll know “if you’ve been bad or good”…you know the rest.

**Discussion Leadership – 20% of grade**
We are co-learners in this class. Therefore each of you will lead a session (each session will be approximately 45 minutes). You will briefly lecture on your assigned chapter, providing a synopsis, extending or critiquing the arguments, and facilitating discussion by asking provocative questions.

**Oral Paper Proposal – 20% of grade**
In class, each student will present an informal oral research proposal to the class. Each proposal should contain a brief introduction, a description of the artifact(s) the student intends to study and its significance, a detailed description of the intended methodology
including why it is an appropriate methodology for the artifact. These proposals should be 10-15 minutes in length. No papers will be required for the proposal, so students may feel free to speak from an outline.

Final Paper – 40% of grade

Each student will write an original research paper rhetorically analyzing a film, group of films, film genre, or auteur. The paper must have the construct of transcendence as a central focus. The paper will consist of the following parts:

1) Introduction
2) Brief review of literature
3) Methodology (be detailed and explicit)
4) Description of the artifact(s)
5) Rhetorical analysis of the artifact through the lens of the stated methodology
6) Summarize the conclusions of your critique and provide implications for future research into this (or similar) films, or for this area of rhetorical theory, or both.

Your research paper must utilize the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.)*. APA is **not** acceptable for this assignment.

Ph.D. Students – 18-20 pages inclusive of bibliography. No fewer than 15 academic sources (books or journal articles). Film reviews and general periodicals should be cited (obviously) but do not count toward the required number of academic sources.

M.A. Students – 14-15 pages inclusive of bibliography. No fewer than 10 academic sources (books or journal articles. Film reviews and general periodicals should be cited (obviously) but do not count toward the required number of academic sources.

Class Peer Review: An Act of Grace

Each student will be assigned another student’s paper for the purpose of a blind peer review. Getting someone else to read through your paper before final submission is an important preparation step. Make sure that the draft you turn in for peer review is the paper you would intend to turn in to me for final grading. You should have already proofread your paper thoroughly – do not place a burden on your classmates by submitting a rough draft.

As a peer reviewer, you want to comment on how well the paper fits the assignment, the depth of the arguments made, and the soundness of the conclusions drawn. While you are not required to thoroughly proof your peer review paper, any noticeable problems should be addressed. The best way to perform the peer review is by using “Track Changes” in Word. To maintain anonymity during the process, go to Tools, Options, User Information, and under “Name” type in Referee.
EVALUATION AND GRADING

In assigning grades to each of the graded sections of this class, I will use the following standards.

Discussion and Discussion Leadership:

A = Robust. Student shows insight into the reading, often going beyond the text to incorporate ideas, theories, and constructs from other works. Student drives discussion by asking probing questions for follow up.

B = Regular. Student demonstrates comprehension of the reading and the ability to apply it. Student interacts consistently with other class members.

C = Responds on most reading assignments. Demonstrates a grasp of the content. Responds to other class members.

Proposal Assignment:

A = Well prepared. Student is able to argue for the significance of the chosen artifact(s). Student demonstrates good grasp of methodology and is able to argue for its propriety. Presentation is well-organized and clearly presented.

B = Prepared. Student can articulate reasons for choosing the artifact(s). Student demonstrates a reasonable grasp of the methodology – at least enough to warrant utilizing it for the chosen artifact. Presentation is thorough.

All presentations must be at least at “B” level before permission to move forward on the paper is granted. All students whose presentations fall below a “B” level will be required to submit their research proposal as a separate paper. Guidelines will be provided if necessary.

Writing Assignment:

A = Strict adherence to appropriate style sheet. Assignments thoroughly proofed. The student establishes significance for the film(s) under analysis. The analysis is exceptionally well-organized and arguments are well-substantiated. Student demonstrates insight in conclusions and implications of the analysis. Writing style is strong.

B = Adheres well to appropriate style sheet. Assignments reveal few spelling, grammatical, or style errors. The student chooses appropriate film(s) for analysis. The analysis is organized and easy to follow. Student demonstrates an understanding of conclusions and implications in the analysis. Writing style is acceptable.

C = Paper meets the minimum standards for the assignment.

NOTE: Any paper written for this class that is accepted for publication in a scholarly journal or for presentation at a regional or national scholarly convention will be assigned
an A as long as the acceptance for publication or presentation occurs within the time limits for grade changes for this course.

Numerical Assessments: I hate using these, but they are required. You are all more than numbers to me…

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96–100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-95</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>85-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>81-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-80</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>75-77</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>74 or less</td>
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**COURSE SCHEDULE (WEEK-BY-WEEK)**

**TRANSCENDENCE AND FILM CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Prologue:** Read all required texts and journal articles before the first meeting day of class on June 9.

Recommended reading order of texts: St. John of Damascus, Otto, Eliade, Tolkien (only need to read the essay “On Fairy Stories”), Martin and Ostwalt, Cowan, and Vogler (just make sure you understand Vogler’s heroic quest).

Recommended reading order of journal articles: While you can read in any order you like, I would suggest that you read Brockreide first, then the Frentz Van Zelst lecture. Most of the other articles are primarily examples. I will refer to them in the class and they will serve as good models for your papers.

Assigned chapters for class leadership discussions, assigned order of oral proposal presentations: As soon as I have a clear idea about the number of students taking this class, I will assign chapters and proposal orders. All proposals will be given on the last day of class. Please remember that you are not bound by your proposal to use that methodology or to examine that film. The purpose of the assignment is to demonstrate that you know what it takes to move forward on a rhetorical criticism of film. Of course, it will help you a lot of the proposal leads to the paper.

**In-Class Schedule:** This calendar is highly tentative until I know how many students will be in class:
Monday
1: Introductions and introducing the class
2: Brockreide’s idea of rhetorical criticism
3: An overview of transcendence theory
4: Otto’s conception of The Holy

Tuesday
1: Eliade’s conception of the Sacred and the Profane
2: Transcendence: Toward a Critical Construct
3: The Spiritual/Materialist Divide
4: The Occult/ Technological Divide

Wednesday
1: The Love/Sex Divide
2: Approximations of Transcendence
3: Cowan, Martin and Ostwalt – Student discussion leadership
4: Cowan, Martin and Ostwalt – Student discussion leadership

Thursday
1: The Polar Express and the problem of transcendence and faith
2: Jacob’s Ladder, Big Fish, and the problem of transcendence and death
3: The Golden Compass, His Dark Materials, and the Perversion of Transcendence
4: The Wrestler as Postmodern Transcendent Dystopia.

Friday
1. Student Research Proposals
2. Student Research Proposals
3. Student Research Proposals
4. Wrap-up

Final Papers are due in for blind peer review on Wednesday, June 27 at 10 PM Eastern time. Peer review critiques are due on Friday, June 29 at 10 PM Eastern time. Final Paper Submissions are due on Friday, July 6 at 10 PM Eastern time.

All written work will be submitted by email. Please use marcnew@regent.edu AND copy marc@movieministry.com.

DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

Useful links:
National Communication Association: http://www.natcom.org/
American Rhetoric (a good catch-all source): http://www.americanrhetoric.com/
UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Please review the following links for important information on University policies:

- Academic Calendar/Registrar Information
- Bookstore
- Honor/Plagiarism Policy
- Regent Library
- Student Services (includes links to student handbook, disability services, University calendar, University Writing Center, etc.)
- Technical Support – University Helpdesk
- Disability Statement – the student is responsible for contacting the assistant director of Student Services at 757.352.4486 to request accommodations, provide necessary documentation, and make arrangement with each instructor. The following website is designed to help our disabled students learn of their rights and responsibilities with regard to disability services. The site also has resources for faculty to become better informed of their responsibilities toward the disabled students in their classes.
  www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/student_life/disabilities.cfm

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

Becoming Christian leaders includes learning how to evaluate others by providing honest evaluations that include positive affirmation and constructive feedback, as appropriate. Consequently, university policy requires that all students submit a formal student evaluation of teaching form at the end of the academic term. This mandatory requirement must be completed before students will be able to access their final course grade. This form is only available in an online format. Prior to the end of the course, students will receive an e-mail indicating that the form is available. Instructions on accessing the evaluation will be included. Since these evaluations are only available for a limited time, students should complete the evaluation as soon as they receive the e-mail notification that the evaluation form is available. Instructors will not have access to course evaluations until after grades have been submitted and will only have access to anonymous summary data. Students are also encouraged at any point during the term to offer comments that may be helpful to the improvement or refinement of the course. Students can access the online evaluation system at: http://eval.regent.edu/regentsurvey/students.cfm. If you have questions about the online evaluation please contact evaluation@regent.edu.

Last Updated: 3/6/2012

At times, due to unforeseen circumstances, course content may be subject to change. Please check with your professor to insure you have the most recently updated Syllabus for this course.