

RLSC 583: Digital Religions

Drew Theological School

Fall 2021

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Class Meeting Time: Tuesdays 1:15 – 3:45 pm EST

Class Location: Zoom - <https://drew.zoom.us/j/94410084754>

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom

Course Description

This course explores the ways religious communities partake in and contribute to digital culture. What are the points of contestation for adopting new media technologies for religious communities? How do religious communities frame the purpose, benefit, and concerns of media use in ways that align with their respective ethical visions? Takes a historically contextual approach to ground current practices in broader histories of religious mediation. The seminar will be organized around guiding concepts and case studies that enable students to analyze the structures of power that frame media practices, its production, as well as the narrations regarding their use in society today.

What We Seek to Understand and Do: Our Goals

- Critically assess contemporary discussions on religion and digital media
- Apply the various approaches and tools of the study of religion to analyze current practices
- Explore how narratives regarding religion and technology inform one another
- Frame and investigate research questions in order to exercise participant's familiarity with key concerns explored in the course through the presentation of a multimedia project (podcast, video, website, app, among others)

Texts

- Articles and chapter excerpts provided on Moodle or accessible online via Library

Commitments and Expectations

Course Requirements

A. Class Attendance

Punctuality and attendance at all class sessions is required. Please notify the instructor in advance of absence. You are allowed **two absences** during the semester. Students are responsible for all information given in class whether present or absent for whatever reason.

B. Preparation and Participation

This course is designed in a seminar format. We are all responsible for the learning that occurs during our time together. Completion of required readings *by* the date assigned is necessary and will enhance the student's developing understanding and participation in the course. Come prepared to provide thoughtful, informed, coherent, and pertinent contributions for every class session.

Participation includes outside preparation (reading, writing, researching, etc) prior to class, selective verbal contributions, attentive listening, and facilitating the participation of other learners in the course.

Course Assessment

Assessment Category	Description	%
Participation	-Thoughtful, informed, coherent, pertinent engagement with discussion -Attentive listening -Presence of body and mind	20
Living Museum*	-Participants will upload an artifact to an online living museum and be prepared to provide a 5 min description of its significance in the development of digital media.	5
Seminar Facilitator*	-Participants will facilitate class discussion for two sessions during the semester.	10
Critical Reading Responses*	-Participants will write 500 words that critically analyze the set of readings for five sessions during the semester. These five sessions are not to overlap with their seminar facilitator weeks.	25
Final Project*	-Thought Work 1200 words	10
	-Presentation 15 min (max)	5
	-Media Artifact	25

*Assignment instructions and rubrics will be made available on the course Moodle site.

Deadlines and Late Assignments

All written work should be in Word document and posted in the appropriate folder on the Moodle site. Full credit is possible only when postings are made on time. For ESOL students, initial drafts should be posted by the due date. Proofed versions can be posted a few days after.

Late Work. Work is considered late if it is not delivered/submitted at the time it is due. Every day major assignments are late will result in a half letter deduction from that assignment's grade (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). *Students seeking an extension should contact the instructor at least 24 hours before the deadline for the assignment.*

Incompletes. Incompletes are almost always not an option. They are granted only in cases where extenuating circumstances prevent a student from completing the required assignments before the end of the semester. Please see the *Drew Student Handbook* for the Theological School's policy on Incompletes. Requests for Incompletes must be signed by the instructor and filed with the Registrar's Office by the last day of the semester. Incompletes are granted at the professor's discretion. If you perceive that you need to request an Incomplete, please speak with the instructor as soon as possible.

Academic Accommodations Statement

In keeping with the school's commitments, it is crucial that the course be open to full participation from every member.

Requesting Accommodations for the First Time: Students are instructed to contact Accessibility Resources, Brothers College, 119B; (973) 408-3962. Although disclosure may take place at any time during the semester, students are encouraged to do so early in the semester, because, in general, accommodations are not implemented retroactively. For additional information, [visit the webpage for Drew's Office of Accessibility Resources](#).

Returning Students with Approved Accommodations: Requests for previously approved accommodations for the current semester should be sent to Accessibility Resources ideally within the first two weeks of class. This allows the office sufficient lead time to process the request. Please call (973) 408-3962, email disabilityserv@drew.edu, or [complete the accommodations request online](#).

Academic Integrity

All work for this class, spoken or written, must conform to Drew University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Please note especially the section on plagiarism, "Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the act of appropriating or imitating the language, ideas, or thoughts of another and presenting them as one's own or without proper acknowledgment. This includes submitting as one's own a thesis, a paper, or part of a paper written by another person, whether that material was stolen, purchased, or shared freely. It also includes submitting a paper containing insufficient citation or misuse of source material."

For a rich discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, see [this site](#) from Purdue University's writing center. While the Purdue site is helpful, it does not displace Drew University's standards as the standard for this class.

Non-Discriminatory and Inclusive Language Policy

The Drew University Theological School affirms the full equality of all persons in God's all-inclusive love, regardless of gender, race, nation, class, age, ability, religion, or sexual orientation (*Galatians 3:28*). This theological conviction finds social expression in spoken and written language. In order to live out a crucial practical dimension of our equality in Christ and to avoid marginalizing members of our community, the Theological School expects students to use non-discriminatory and mindfully inclusive language for humanity both in the classroom (that is, in writing assignments, presentations, and classroom discussions) and in the chapel liturgy (that is, in prayers and sermons). Students are also encouraged to use a variety of metaphors when referring to God. While students will not receive grade deductions on specific assignments, they will be evaluated on their overall efforts to engage the theological and social problems of discriminatory and exclusive language. This policy thus encourages students to work to integrate a theology of God's love and justice with the everyday practice of leadership.

ESOL/Language Support

Good communication skills are among the most important things we need for responsible ministry and citizenship. For those students whose primary language is not English, you are encouraged to have your written assignments reviewed either by Katherine Brown or by the Drew University Writing Center: <https://www.drew.edu/academics/academic-resources/center-for-academic-excellence/writing-center/>.

Course Moodle Site

This class will make extensive use of Drew's course management system, Moodle (<http://moodle.drew.edu>). Course readings will be located on this site in PDF format. Students are expected to upload written assignments here (in .docx format) unless otherwise instructed.

Optimizing Our Collective Learning

Zoom Guidelines

The faculty of the Theo School has adopted a shared set of guidelines for the use of Zoom as a classroom environment. Presence and participation are expected in the Drew Zoom room just as in the physical classroom. There are several expectations for making the synchronous Drew Zoom room a productive learning experience for everyone:

- All participants are expected to have their cameras turned on so that the class is a face-to-face experience for everyone.
- Join the Zoom class from a computer (with a video camera), one participant per computer. As you will need to open documents, participate in chat, and join breakout groups, it is not possible for you to participate in class fully from a phone or tablet alone. If joining via phone or tablet, you will need an additional device to simultaneously access class documents.
- Join the Zoom class from a quiet, adequately-lit room without distractions. Do not Zoom while in transit or driving. If you are uncomfortable Zooming into class from your home, please find a safe, private space from which to join the Zoom classroom.
- When in the Zoom room, students will need to learn and utilize features that manage classroom participation. For example, you may need to mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Use the chat and raise your hand features of zoom to join the conversation when others are speaking.
- Consider using headphones that have a microphone built into the cord as this will maximize your listening and speaking participation.
- For further information on Zoom usage, consult the Zoom tutorials available on the Zoom website.

Please note: the syllabus may change throughout the semester to better meet the learning needs of our class or respond to other contingencies.

Class Schedule

Week/Date	Lesson Plan	Assignments
1 Aug 31	<u>Course Introduction</u> -Syllabus Review	
2 Sept 7	<u>Gathering our Thinking Tools</u> Mahan, <i>Media, Religion, and Culture: An Introduction</i> (2014) Ch 1 "Relating Media, Religion, and Culture" Ch 4 "Old and New Media"; Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"	Facilitator: 1.Sarah Williams

Week/Date	Lesson Plan	Assignments
3 Sept 14	<p><u>Digital Media in Context</u></p> <p>A Brief History of Digital Media: <i>Digital Leisure, the Internet and Popular Culture</i>, Spracklen (pp11-31) Benjamin, Ch 2 "Default Discrimination" <i>Race After Technology</i> (2019)</p>	<p>Living Museum Due</p> <p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Sarah Williams 2.Sebastian Kalmbach 3. Saebuek Lee
4 Sept 21	<p><u>Surveying the Digital Religion Landscape</u></p> <p>Campbell + Evolvi (2019), "Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies"</p> <p>Kiamu + Musa (2021), "Theorizing the Communication of Digital Religion as Popular Culture in Africa: The Case for Alternative Epistemological Models"</p> <p><u>Research Tutorial</u></p>	<p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jack Tironi 2.Olivia Busby
5 Sept 28	<p><u>Interpretive Themes for Conceptualizing Digital Religions Part I</u></p> <p>Campbell, <i>Digital Religion</i> (2013) Ch 2 "Ritual" Christopher Helland Ch 3 "Identity" Mia Lövheim</p> <p><u>Research Tutorial</u></p>	<p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dani Hobbs 2.Sebastian Kalmbach
6 Oct 5	<p><u>Interpretive Themes for Conceptualizing Digital Religions Part 2</u></p> <p>Campbell, <i>Digital Religion</i> (2013) Ch 4 "Community" Heidi A. Campbell Ch 5 "Authority" Pauline Hope Cheong Ch 6 "Authenticity" Kerstin Radde-Antweider</p>	<p>Brainstorm for Project</p> <p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jack Tironi 2. Saebuek Lee 3. Mark Jung(Min Goo)
7 Oct 12	Fall Break – No Class	

<p>8 Oct 19</p>	<p><u>Research Methods and Ethics</u> Tsuria, Ruth, Aya Yadlin-Segal, Alessandra Vitullo, and Heidi A. Campbell. "Approaches to Digital Methods in Studies of Digital Religion." <i>The Communication Review</i> 20, no. 2 (2017): 73-97.</p> <p>Campbell, <i>Digital Religion</i> (2013) Johns, Ch 21 "Ethical Issues in the Study of Religion and New Media"</p> <p>Arda.com https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/</p>	<p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Dani Hobbs 2.David Gaitàn
<p>9 Oct 26</p>	<p><u>Case Studies 1:</u> <u>Social Media and Social Movements</u></p> <p>Benjamin, Ch 5: "Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice" <i>Race After Technology</i></p> <p>Camilla Orjuela (2020) Countering Buddhist Radicalisation: Emerging Peace Movements in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, <i>Third World Quarterly</i>, 41:1, 133-150</p> <p>Caranto Morford, A., & Ansloos, J. (2021). Indigenous sovereignty in digital territory: a qualitative study on land-based relations with #NativeTwitter. <i>AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples</i>, 17(2), 293–305.</p>	<p>Thought Work Due</p> <p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Mark Hamann 2. G. Anthony Flowers 3.Olivia Busby
<p>10 Nov 2</p>	<p><u>Case Studies 2:</u> <u>Digital Media and Religions during COVID</u></p> <p>Capponi, G. (2020), Overlapping values: religious and scientific conflicts during the COVID-19 crisis in Brazil. <i>Soc Anthropol</i>, 28: 236-237.</p> <p>Lorea, C. (2020) Religious Returns, Ritual Changes, and Divinations on COVID-19. <i>Soc Anthropol.</i>, 28: 307-208.</p> <p>...cont.</p>	<p>Facilitator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.David Gaitàn 2. G. Anthony Flowers 3. Mark Jung(Min Goo)

	<p>Calida Chu (2021) Theology of the pain of God in the era of COVID-19: the reflections on sufferings by three Hong Kong churches through online services, <i>Practical Theology</i>, 14:1-2, 22-34.</p> <p>Vekemans, Tine (2021) "Crisis and Continuation: The Digital Relocation of Jain Socio-Religious Praxis during the COVID-19 Pandemic" <i>Religions</i> 12, no. 5: 342.</p>	
11 Nov 9	<p><u>Case Studies 3:</u> <u>Agency, Authority, Community</u></p> <p>Fakhruroji, M. (2019) Digitalizing Islamic lectures: Islamic apps and religious engagement in contemporary Indonesia. <i>Cont Islam</i> 13, 201–215.</p> <p>Mark McLeister (2019) Worship, Technology and Identity: A Deaf Protestant Congregation in Urban China <i>Studies in World Christianity</i> 25:2, 220-237.</p> <p>Áine Warren (2020) Altars for the Morrigan: the legitimizing agency of a goddess in the networked flow of authority of a YouTube sub-culture, <i>Journal of Contemporary Religion</i>, 35:2, 287-305.</p> <p>Aysha Agbarya & Nicholas John (2021): Online tie and content management and changing religious identity among Muslim Arab women in Israel, <i>Information, Communication & Society</i>, 1-16.</p>	<p>Facilitator:</p> <p>1.Mark Hamann</p>
12 Nov 16	<p><u>Case Studies 4:</u> <u>Authenticity and Ritual</u></p> <p>Servais, O. (2015). Funerals in the 'World of Warcraft': Religion, polemic, and styles of play in a videogame universe. <i>Social Compass</i>, 62(3), 362–378.</p> <p>...cont.</p>	

	<p>Oren Golan & Michele Martini (2019) Religious live-streaming: constructing the authentic in real time, <i>Information, Communication & Society</i>, 22:3, 437-454</p> <p>Bramlett, B., & Burge, R. (2021). God Talk in a Digital Age: How Members of Congress Use Religious Language on Twitter. <i>Politics and Religion</i>, 14(2), 316-338.</p>	
13 Nov 23	Thanksgiving Week – No Class	
14 Nov 30	Presentations	Presentations
15 Dec 7	Presentations Course Conclusion + Evaluation	Presentations Media Artifacts Due