

Self, Society, & Religions: Authenticity

REL 237 | Spring 2022

T/TH 11:00 AM-12:15 PM | 207 Presidents Hall

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Office: Presidents Hall 205

Office Hours: Tues. 9am-11am, by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will analyze “authenticity discourses,” that is, the ways different people claim that something is authentic, real, or genuine. The course will draw on a variety of examples from popular culture (e.g. professional wrestling) and religious history (e.g. yoga).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will recall key terms in the study of religion
- Students will analyze media representations of religion
- Students will demonstrate oral and written communication skills
- Students will investigate claims of authenticity in society

BOOK

Fake by Kati Stevens (Bloomsbury, 2019)

This book is available as an ebook through the library and is on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings

Readings are listed underneath each date on the schedule. They can be found under the folder for each day on the course Blackboard site. Complete the readings before you come to class that day (e.g. the readings in the “Jan 18” folder should be read before coming to class on January 18).

(25%) Reading Questions

Along with most of the readings, there is an assignment of a set of brief open-ended questions for you to answer. These should be answered thoroughly and thoughtfully. They can be found in the same folder for the class day as the readings. These must be completed before 9am on that day of class (e.g. the assignment in the “Jan 18” folder should be completed by 9 am on January 18).

(25%) Film/TV Assignments

We will watch 3 documentary films and one television episode this semester (see schedule). For each of these media there will be a short assignment to guide your viewing found on Blackboard. Read through the assignment before you watch the film/episode (so you know what to look for), take notes as you watch, then return to answer the questions. These are due on the days we will discuss the film/episode. More instructions and details will be on Blackboard in the folder for that class session.

(25%) Show and Tell Assignments

There are 3 Show and Tell days on the schedule. On these class days you will present a short example of an “authenticity claim” that you find in the world around you. More details and instructions will be given as we get closer to the first one.

(25%) Final Essay

For the final capstone assignment in the course, you will write a brief essay (800-1000 words). It will be **due Friday, May 6** at 12:30pm. Feel free to turn it in earlier. That would be great. More details and an assignment sheet to come.

GRADEBOOK

I will use the gradebook on Blackboard to record your grades on assignments so you can keep up with your progress in the course.

GRADING SCALE

| | | | |
|----|---------|----|----------|
| A+ | 95-100% | C | 70-74 |
| A | 90-94 | D+ | 65-69 |
| B+ | 85-89 | D | 60-64 |
| B | 80-84 | D- | 50-59 |
| C+ | 75-79 | F | below 50 |

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Regular attendance and adequate preparation are expected in this course. **You have to be here to do well.** You will need the context I provide in class to make sense of the readings you do on your own. If you don't come to class you will probably do very poorly. However, things happen (especially right now) so please communicate with me if you have to miss class. All of our readings and assignments are on Blackboard so you can stay caught easily up if you have to miss class. ***Please communicate.***

UA SAFE ZONE ALLY

I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Notification of Changes

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

Statement On Disability Accommodations

Contact the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

Pregnant Student Accommodations

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

Religious Observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).

UAct Statement

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

Statement on COVID-19

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and

that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at studentaccounts.ua.edu and financialaid.ua.edu.

UA students, faculty and staff are required to comply with University Spring 2022 Operations (<https://healthinfo.ua.edu/news/university-spring-2022-operations/>) guidance regarding face coverings and other measures.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to Protect Our Herd. COVID-19 vaccines are being administered by the University Medical Center, the Student Health Center and various businesses and healthcare providers.

Wellness Resources

College can be a stressful time

If you or someone you know is facing a challenging time or dealing with academic or personal stress, anxiety, depression, or other concerns, we strongly encourage and support you to seek assistance or to help friends find the care that they may need.

Also, If you are experiencing a personal crisis and need urgent assistance, you can also contact the following resources:

Counseling Center

Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-3863).

Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak with the on-call counselor).

You may also text BAMA to 741-741 to text with a trained volunteer.

Women and Gender Resource Center

Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-5040).

Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak to the on-call advocate for the WGRC).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Jan 13 What Makes Something Authentic?

Introductions

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS RELIGION?

"The most common form of classifying religions...[is] 'theirs' and 'ours'" – Jonathan Z. Smith

Jan 18 The Essence of Religion

The Idea of the Holy, Rudolf Otto

"The Essentials of Religion," Russell McCutcheon

Jan 20 The Function of Religion

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

"The Functions of Religion," Russell McCutcheon

Jan 25 What Counts as Religion?

"The Resemblances Among Religions," Russell McCutcheon

"What does it take for something to be classified as 'religion'?", Robyn Faith Walsh

"What is the difference between religion and a cult?", Jason N. Blum

Jan 27 Documenting a Fake Religion

Watch *Kumare*

PART I. KAYFABE AND THE JARGON OF AUTHENTICITY

"It's still real to me, DAMMIT!" – [David Wills the crying wrestling fan](#)

Feb 1 Professional Wrestling

Watch "Bret Hart vs. 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin" from Wrestlemania 13 (1997)

Feb 3 The Language of Kayfabe

"Managing Doubt: Professional Wrestling Jargon and the Making of 'Smart Fans'", Marion Wrenn

Feb 8 Everything is Kayfabe

"Kayfabe: Optimism, Cynicism, Critique," Eero Laine

Feb 10 The Politics of Kayfabe or the Kayfabe of Politics

"Kayfabe, Smartdom and Marking Out: Can Pro-wrestling Help Us Understand Donald Trump?", David Moon

Feb 15 Work or Shoot?

Watch "Hitman Hart: Wrestling with Shadows"

After you watch the movie read:

“The ‘Montreal Screwjob’ is One of Pro Wrestling’s Most Famous Incidents, But Was It All a Hoax?”, Dan Greene

<https://www.si.com/wrestling/2017/11/07/ww-e-montreal-screw-job-conspiracy>

Feb 17. Show and Tell #1

PART II. IS RELIGION A WORK OR A SHOOT?

“What counts as religion, therefore, is the focus of the problem of authenticity in religion and American popular culture.” – David Chidester

Feb 22 Shamanism

“Shamanic Religion,” from *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*, David Chidester

Feb 24 Appropriation or Appreciation?

Watch “White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men”

Mar 1 Yoga

“Anxieties over Authenticity: American Yoga and the Problem of Whiteness,” Amanda J. Lucia

Mar 3 Fake Religions

“Virtual Religions” from *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*, David Chidester

Mar 8 Working the Revival Circuit

Watch *Marjoe*

Mar 10 Show and Tell #2

SPRING BREAK

PART III. EVERYDAY AUTHENTICITY AND FAKERY

“Goodnight HULKAMANIACS and jabronie marks without a life that don’t know it a work when you work a work and work yourself into a shoot,marks” – [Hulk Hogan tweet](#)

Mar 22 Everything is Fake, Everything is Authentic

Fake Chapter 1

“Authenticity,” Aaron Hughes and Russell McCutcheon

Mar 24 Faux Fur, Authentic Carpets

Fake Chapter 2

“Weavers and Dealers: Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet”, Brian Spooner

Mar 29 Fake Chicken Nuggets, Fake Cheese, Authentic Tacos and Authentic Croissants

Fake Chapter 3

“Real Cheese and the Eucharist: On the Rhetoric of Dietary Restrictions”

<https://edge.ua.edu/andie-alexander/real-cheese-and-the-eucharist-on-the-rhetoric-of-dietary-restrictions/>

“Marketing the Authentic Taco”

<https://edge.ua.edu/ellsworth/marketing-the-authentic-taco/>

“Always Historicize”

<https://edge.ua.edu/russell-mccutcheon/always-historicize/>

Mar 31 Fake Museums, Authentic Villages

Fake Chapter 4

“Traditioning Acts of Identification: The Case of Greek ‘Traditional’ Villages,” Vaia Touna

Apr 5 Fake Bodies, Authentic Gender

Fake Chapter 5

“Whose Sex Change was it?: Caitlyn Jenner and the Boundaries of Public Identity”

<https://edge.ua.edu/leslie-dorough-smith/whose-sex-change-was-it-caitlyn-jenner-and-the-ironies-of-public-controversy/>

Apr 7 Fake Impersonators, Authentic Identities

Fake Chapter 6

“Who We Truly Are,” Russell McCutcheon

<https://edge.ua.edu/russell-mccutcheon/who-we-truly-are/>

“The Moves We Make,” Merinda Simmons

<https://edge.ua.edu/k-merinda-simmons/the-moves-we-make/>

Apr 12 Fake Orgasms, Authentic Love

Fake Chapter 7

“Method to the Madness” from *Bachelor Nation*, Amy Kaufman

Apr 14 Here for the Wrong Reasons

Watch Season 18, Episode 1 of *The Bachelorette*

“Here for the Right Reasons’ (Couples)” from *True Story*, Danielle J. Lindemann

Apr 19 Show and Tell #3

CONCLUSION: AUTHENTIC RELIGION GOOD, FAKE RELIGION BAD

“Like any social group, they believe their beliefs and actions to be true and authentic.”—Aaron Hughes

Apr 21 Good Religion, Bad Religion on CNN

Watch “Believer”

Apr 26 The Authority of Authentic Religion

“The Strange and Familiar Spiritual Journey of Reza Aslan,” Martha Smith Roberts

“Scopophilia and the Manufacture of ‘Good’ Religion,” Leslie Dorrough Smith

“Authentic Religion—or, How to Be a Good Citizen,” Steffen Fühding

Apr 28 Everything is Fake, Everything is Authentic (Reprise)

Essay workshop