

Religion in Communication: Religion & Technology

REL 370-001 | Sp-2023 | 3 Credit Hours

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Digital Syllabus and Course Page: <https://bit.ly/REL370-S2023>

Contact Information:

You can reach me by email at any point - I will respond within 24 hours M-F and within 48 hours over the weekend.

I will also be in my office from **1-3pm on Wednesdays and 10:30am - 12:30 on Thursdays**, and you are welcome to stop by to chat about class, navigating the university, about most anything.

You can make an appointment for a guaranteed block of time using Microsoft Bookings - <https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/OfficeHoursforJeriWieringa@ua.edu/bookings/>

Course Description

In this seminar, we will examine the relationship between religion and communication technologies, from print to podcasting. Working with historical and contemporary data, we will undertake a series of case studies to explore how the preferred communication mediums of different religious groups connect to and shape cultural norms and practices.

We will explore three types of media in our case studies: print, audio, and web. Our class examples will be based in American Christianity. Our research question for the course is: How do changes in media connect to negotiations of authority and authenticity within religious communities?

This will be a research-based course - you are joining me in investigating whether a pattern that I have observed in early Seventh-day Adventism has broader applicability across religious movements and forms of media. We will be examining 5 case studies across 3 technologies in class, and you will propose your own case study for the final project, applying the methods we discuss to a new movement or technology.

Required Texts

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. FitzGerald. *The Craft of Research, Fourth Edition*. Fourth edition. Chicago: Chicago Distribution Center, 2016.

You can purchase the book as an ebook or physical book through Amazon or your favorite book seller. Please get the 4th edition.

(<https://www.amazon.com/Research-Chicago-Writing-Editing-Publishing/dp/022623973X>). I did not submit this title in time to the UA bookstore, so we are on our own.

All other readings will be available through Zotero - <https://www.zotero.org/groups/4914757/rel370-s2023>. Once you have an account on Zotero (see below), please request access to the group.

Technology

As you prepare to complete your degree programs, it is time to start moving out from the controlled environment of Blackboard and start thinking about how to own and manage your digital content. To that end, my focus in this class is for you to maintain control of your digital files, so our system will be little different than you may be used to.

We will be using **Zotero** for course readings and for organizing your research projects.

- Go to : <https://www.zotero.org/>
- You will need to create an account
- You will also need to download and install the software (<https://www.zotero.org/download/>)
 - You will need the desktop app and the browser connector

We will also use **Box** for sharing files. You have access to Box through UA.

- You will need to create a folder for this class (include your UA username in the folder name) and share that folder with me (jewieringa@ua.edu).
- To submit assignments, upload them to your Box folder. I will comment on them there.
- I will add a spreadsheet to your folder where I will put your grade information.

Course Objectives

This course will focus on the following:

- American religious movements and their uses of different media technologies
- Methods for studying religion and media

Student Learning Outcomes

Students are expected to be able to do the following by the end of the course:

1. Describe the key features of the religious movements covered in class
2. Describe the ways those movements utilized different communications technologies
3. Identify and apply methods of content analysis, historical, and digital research
4. Conduct research on a media and religion and present findings

Assignments and Grading

You will write two short papers and complete a final project for your grade in this course.

1. Response Papers (2)

For each of the two modules of the course, you will write a short response paper that demonstrates your understanding of the groups in the module and their use of technology, as well as offers an assessment of the role of the medium in the creation and negotiation of authority or authenticity. You will receive a prompt for the paper on the last Tuesday of the module.

Your papers should be 3-4 pages long and include references to the course readings to support your claims.

These will be due by midnight the Tuesday after you receive the prompt.

- **February 21: Module 1 (Print)**
- **April 4: Module 2 (Digital)**

2. Final Project

For your final project, you will conduct your own research and analysis of the relationship between a particular movement and their communications technologies. This can be current or historical, but should be different from the case studies in the course. You will need to use the methods we discuss during the semester to identify and analyze sources (data), construct an argument or interpretation, and present your findings.

Your final output can be in the form of a standard research paper (8-10 pages) but you can also produce an “unessay” - a creative scholarly project that presents your findings in another way.

For example, you might create:

- A digital, multimodal essay
- A podcast episode
- A video or other multi-media creation
- An op-ed or other persuasive essay
- Infographic or Zine
- A dance, song, or piece of art

If you choose to do a more abstract project, such as a song or piece of art, you will need to also submit a 2-page process statement where you describe your creative process and speak to how your research (sources and secondary materials) informed your creative decisions.

You should choose a format that you are comfortable working in - I will not be teaching you how to use different technologies in this class. Lean on the skills you already have if you choose to do a creative project.

Regardless of format, your project needs to use primary source materials as well as relevant secondary (scholarly) materials. You should present a scholarly argument that is informed by your sources and is well reasoned. You should analyze (not just describe) your sources, with attention to the words used, the meanings, and the context. You should cite your sources, using Chicago style.

To help keep you on track over the semester, I've broken the project into the following components:

- **February 17: Research Proposal**
 - Submit a word document that identifies your topic area and initial research question for your final project. Consider what sorts of sources you might need in order to answer your research question and what format your final project might take. Your research proposal should be at least one page in length and written in formal prose.
- **March 24: Annotated Bibliography**
 - Submit an annotated bibliography that identifies the key primary and secondary materials you are using in your research, as well as how they contribute to your argument. Each annotation should be one paragraph in length. Annotate at least 5 primary sources and 3 secondary sources.
- **April 14: Outline and Project Consultation**
 - In preparation for a research consultation with me, create an outline of your argument that shows the major claims and evidence that you plan on using.
- **April 25: In Class Presentation**
 - Present your research topic and findings to the class. You should use slides or visual aids and walk the group through your question, your claims and evidence, and your conclusion.
- **May 4: Final submission of project**

Grading Scale

For each assignment, I will give a letter grades that indicate the following:

A: Excellent performance. Display detailed and accurate understanding of groups and dynamics described and makes connections beyond the course materials.

B: Good performance. Displays understanding of the groups and dynamics described with minimal factual errors and makes good connections within the course materials.

C: Acceptable performance. Displays basic understanding of the groups and dynamics described with some need for further clarification. Connections to larger course concepts are attempted though need work.

D: Performance needs improvement. Displays an inaccurate understanding of the groups and dynamics described with significant need for revision. Does not make connection to larger course concepts.

F: Did not complete

You are welcome to revise and resubmit any assignment within 1 week of the date graded for a revised grade.

Final Grading Scale

Your final grade will be based on the grades you accumulate over the course of the semester. Depending on class performance, your final grade may be higher, but I will start with the following scale:

Letter Grade	
A+	7 A or higher
A	7 A- or higher
A-	6 A- or higher
B+	6 B or higher

B	5 B- or higher
B-	5 B- or higher
C+	4 C or higher
C	4 C- or higher
C-	3 C- or higher
D+	3 D or higher
D	2 D- or higher
D-	2 D- or higher
F	1 or fewer assignments completed.

Elasticity Statement

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

Course Expectations and University Policies

Respect for Material, Subjects, and Peers

We will be discussing topics related that may present viewpoints that are counter to your personal beliefs or that ask you to consider alternative explanations for things you value. This may be difficult and uncomfortable. I ask that you accept that tension and allow yourself to be challenged.

Additionally, our topics of study may result in some uncomfortable conversations. I expect you to be civil and polite in your communication, both in class and outside of it. Treat all those you interact with, both historical actors and your peers, with respect.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation in the course discussion is a central component of the learning experience of this course. You have 1 free pass to miss class for any reason, but beyond that, your grade will drop by a half step (from an A to A-) for every 2 unexcused absences.

Your learning in this course depends on your participation. Please let me know in advance if you cannot make class. If your semester goes sideways, please talk to me early and often so that I can best support you.

Late Work

The course work is designed to help you prepare for class and to keep you on track for the final project. As a general rule, I do not accept late work unless arrangements are made with me in advance.

University and College Policies

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

The University of Alabama is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and need reasonable accommodation(s) to participate in this class, contact the Office of Disability Services (or ODS; 205-348-4285, ods@ua.edu, Houser Hall 1000, www.ods.ua.edu) as soon as possible. If you have been approved to receive accommodations through ODS, please meet with me during office hours or by appointment to submit your accommodation letter and discuss how accommodations can be implemented in this course.

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.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please see the latest Severe Weather Guidelines in the Online Catalog.

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.

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).

Schedule

January 11

Spring 2023 Semester Begins

January 17

Introduction to course

January 24

Media Studies and REL

Due at start of class:

- **Create Zotero account and request access to course folder**
- **Create Box folder for your work and add jewieringa@ua.edu**
- **Readings in Zotero**

Module 1: Print

January 31

Methods: Content Analysis and Historical Research

Due at start of class:

- **Readings in Zotero**

February 7

Case Study: The American Bible Society

Due at start of class:

- **Readings in Zotero**

February 14

Case Study: Seventh-day Adventism

Due at start of class:

- **Readings in Zotero**

February 17

Due at midnight:

- **Research Proposal (upload to Box)**

Module 2: Digital

February 21

Methods for studying digital and social media

Due at start of class:

- Readings in Zotero
- Create a Zotero folder for your project and add jewieringa@ua.edu

Due at midnight:

- Module 1 Paper Due (upload to Box)

February 28

Case Study: Podcasts and Asian American Christian Collaborative

Due at start of class:

- Readings in Zotero

March 7

Research Day (Dr. Wieringa at conference)

March 14 - Spring Break

March 21

Case Study: Social Media and Mormon Instagram

Due at start of class:

- Readings in Zotero

March 24

Due at midnight:

- Annotated Bibliography (upload to Box)

March 28

Case Study: Discussion Boards and QAnon

Due at start of class:

- Readings in Zotero

Module 3: Research

April 4

Research Consultations (individual meetings - no class)

Due at Midnight:

- **Module 2 Paper Due (upload to Box)**

April 11

Flex day - TBD

April 14

Due at midnight:

- **Project outline (upload to Box)**

April 18

Final discussion: Religion and Technology

Due at start of class:

- **Readings in Zotero**

April 25

In Class Presentations

Due at start of class:

- **Upload presentation file to Box**

May 4: Final Projects Due

Due at midnight (upload to Box)