

# REL Goes to the Movies

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 310-001 • Spring 2023

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Office: Presidents Hall 211

Email: russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu  
Office Hour: by appointment

Tues 6:00-9:00 pm • ten Hoor 116  
Jan 17, Feb 14, Mar 7, Apr 4, Apr 25  
<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-310-001-rel-goes-to-the-movies-8/>

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## DESCRIPTION

This is a 1 credit course, with monthly films and discussions (offered each semester, with different films), in which students learn to apply the skills necessary to understand the analysis of wider cultural practices and issues that can be carried out by a scholar of religion using social theory. The films selected are possibly known to students but likely old enough that they have not been seen or studied by them in any detail. Students will consider them as each works of their time, asking whether their themes and cinematic styles stand up to a contemporary viewing or if they cannot be seen today as anything but historical artifacts.

This semester's movies are all American films dedicated to politics—whether running for office, recruited to office, contested while in office, or being held accountable for actions taken in office.

## OBJECTIVES

Among this course's many objectives are the following goals:

1. Introduce a new generation to once well-known and influential films
2. Introduce students to the Department of Religious Studies and the work of a scholar of religion
3. Learn to apply social theory to analyze cultural productions, such as films
4. Practice the skills of public discussion and debate

## BOOKS

There are no required or recommended books to purchase in this course; any readings will be distributed as PDFs prior to each film.

## FILMS

- Citizen Kane (1941)
- The Manchurian Candidate (1962)
- All the Presidents Men (1976)
- Being There (1979)
- Election (1999)

Visit the Course page on the Department's website (listed at the top of this page) to see trailers for each film.

## **EXCUSED ABSENCES**

As a monthly 1 credit hour course, students are expected to be in class for each meeting; notify the Instructor well in advance of, or immediately after, class if you are unable to attend and alternate methods for viewing the film may be arranged and student will need to submit their own written commentary on the film (500 words), in which they compare it to a film already seen in class, as evidence of having viewed it.

## **QUIZZES, TESTS & EXAMS**

There are no quizzes, tests, or a final exam in this course; assessment will be based on attendance and (2) class participation (described below).

## **REQUIREMENTS**

1. Regular attendance and adequate participation in the discussion following each film, demonstrating sufficient preparation. This is worth a total of **100%** of the course's final grade (i.e., 15% for attending each monthly film viewing + 25% for overall preparation).
2. As part of their preparation, and prior to viewing each film, all students will find online and read at least 2 reviews or commentaries on the movie to be shown that evening (ideally one that was contemporary to the film's original date of release and one that is more recent), to acquaint themselves with how the movie was received and how it is viewed today. Students will come to class prepared to briefly discuss these readings. Shortly before each movie night the instructor will likely distribute to everyone, via email, a sample article on the upcoming film, which can count as one of the two reviews.

## **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 |

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

REL 310 is designed to be informative but also fun, introducing students to a variety of once notable movies with which they may not now be familiar. But there are still a few serious items to keep in mind:

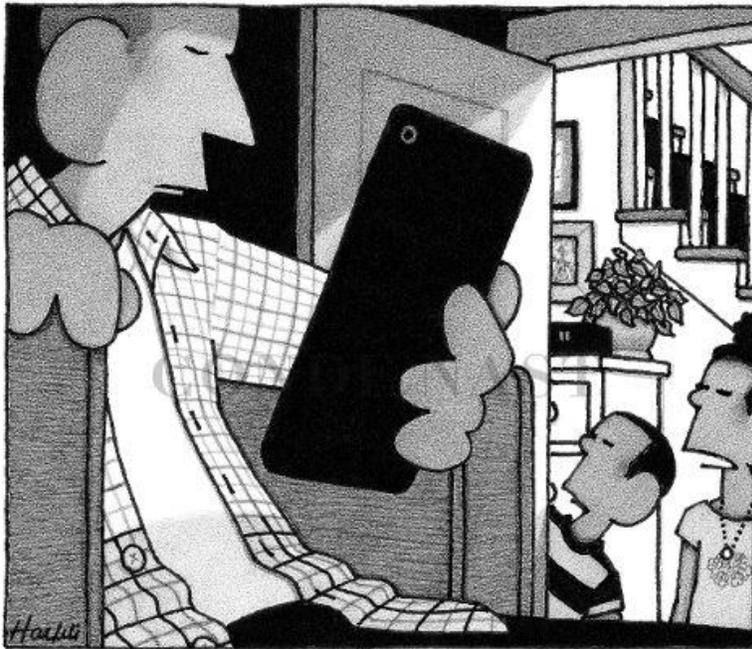
1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offense and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author as if it is one's own, doing so without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructor suspects that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a friend, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
2. No grades of "I" (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course. In my experience, when awarded at the 100-level a grade of "I" rarely leads to the completion of course requirements. So please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate your absence from class becoming routine and thus a problem. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made for all occasions that may arise, speaking with your professors before a problem arises will greatly enhance their ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

3. Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities are advised to contact the Instructor outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment to see me at my office), as soon as possible, to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodation(s) that can be made to meet their needs. However, prior to contacting the professor, ensure that you first contact the Office of Disability Services (visit their web site: <http://ods.ua.edu/> or visit Houser Hall 1000).

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

|        |                                 |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| Jan 17 | Citizen Kane (1941)             |
| Feb 14 | The Manchurian Candidate (1962) |
| Mar 7  | All the Presidents Men (1976)   |
| Apr 4  | Being There (1979)              |
| Apr 25 | Election (1999)                 |

There is no Final Exam



*"If it's horizontal, he's watching a movie. If it's vertical, he's watching a book."*