

THEO 216-01

RELIGION,
MEDIA,
AND
POP-CULTURE

FISHER HALL 716
12:15-1:30PM

FACULTY

Gregory D. Jones, Ph.D.

Department of Theology

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Zoom Hours for Students: M - F, by request

Gregory D. Jones, Jr., Ph.D. is an Adjunct Professor in the Theology Department at Duquesne University. He holds a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University, an M.A. in Theology from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and a B.A. in Broadcast Journalism/English from Virginia Tech. Greg has nearly two decades of experience in Broadcasting/Digital Communications and Christian Education for all ages. He also presents papers for "Religion and Culture" and related panels at various regional and national Pop-Culture Association Conferences. Greg also contributed a chapter to *The World of Final Fantasy VII* published by McFarland & Company. His top research interests involve exploring the theological value and meaning of play experiences, the interplay of religion, media, and popular culture, and interreligious relationality.

Mask Professor

Who knows what insights lurk in the hearts of students? The Mask Professor knows! Who...or what...is this avatar of ASCII...braver of bandwidth...citizen of cyberspace...denizen of digitization...educator of electronica...friend of filenames...gentleman of gigabytes...and more?! The Mask Professor cannot be defined, but only experienced -- hopefully as the digital professor for your awesome class, with a mask!

Scan this QR
Code to watch the
Video Syllabus!



COURSE INTRO

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is life enhanced or entranced by media and popular culture? In today's world, faith experiences are increasingly sought after and discovered outside of institutions, and in surprising media contexts. This puzzling development is balanced against another surprise of modern life – one can no longer remain focused on one's own beliefs! We must acknowledge the existence and validity of differing traditions! This sense of balance involves popular culture, which influences belief systems through the technology we use, the visuals we watch, the music we listen to, the comic books we read, the social media we create, and even the video games that we play. This course examines the interplay of media, pop culture, and religion, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of this interplay in society.

2. COURSE PROCESS

Should we study the influence of technology to resist and reject it, or embrace and adapt it for ethical and spiritual purposes? This is the question that we will think, read, watch, and talk through! Each class session involves a brief lecture and group discussions of the daily topic. There are four Units: Media Consciousness, Media Resistance, Media Mindfulness, and Media Spirituality.

3. COURSE GOALS

This course does not presume a religious background. Those with and without personal religious faith will become informed, equipped, inspired, and engaged regarding the interplay of media, pop culture, and religion in society!

- 🎓 **Informed:** Learn how one's own view of God, humanity, and the universe is shaped by pop-culture and media.
- 🎓 **Equipped:** Adapt theological insights for recognizing the roles that popular culture and religion play in media.
- 🎓 **Inspired:** Discern how media and pop culture convey powerful faith narratives, rituals, and symbols.
- 🎓 **Engaged:** Examine racism, religious bigotry, violence, materialism, idolatry, etc. in popular culture and religion.

In addition to these learning goals, this course provides a foundation for students to gradually develop four skills:

- ⚡ **Media Consciousness:** awareness of the structure and effects of information and demystification of media
- ⚡ **Media Resistance:** using big and small step practices for recognizing and countering the subtle ways in which technology shapes our thoughts and actions
- ⚡ **Media Mindfulness:** balancing media environments so that they serve us, rather than the other way around
- ⚡ **Media Spirituality:** making pop-culture expressions which convey our desire, design, and destiny

COURSE INFO



4. COURSE TEXTS / MEDIA

(access to these and other readings are all found on Canvas, in the "Books and Readings" Module)

- Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. England: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Jacob Shatzer. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2019.
- William Indick, *Media Mindfulness: Building a Balanced Diet for the Brain*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2024.
- Christopher West, *Fill these Hearts: God, Sex, and the Universal Longing*. New York: Image, 2012.



5. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

You need certain hardware/software for this course. Please reach out to your Advisor or contact Gumberg Library if you need help accessing...

- Devices for recording audio and video in MOV, MP4, M4V, WEBM format (tablet, computer, laptop, smartphone).
- Apps for creating and recording presentations (PowerPoint, Keynote, VoiceThread, Canva, Prezi, etc.).
- A reliable Internet connection for accessing Canvas and successfully uploading Weekly Learning Logs on Canvas.

Technical difficulties do not excuse you from completing Paths/Exams on time (see Course Conduct). If tech difficulties occur while turning in Paths, please contact the IT Service Department first, and include my email address to the ticket as well.

Gumberg Library Phone: (412) 396-6130

Gumberg Library Email: ask@duq.libanswers.com

IT Service Desk Contacts: <https://www.duq.edu/about/departments-and-offices/cts/contact-the-it-service-desk.php>

Please do not wait until the last minute to complete assignments!

- Once the due date passes, assignments are locked in Canvas
- Contributions sent through the comment box, through links (no Google Drive files!) or email are not accepted.

GRADING

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



6. COURSE ACTIVITIES

All students start at zero and build points toward their grade, rather than start with a perfect score and lose points for mistakes. This approach emphasizes the paths to improving and learning, rather than emphasizing perfection or mistakes.

Here is the list of the activities that you can do to earn points towards your ultimate grade. *Please note that the point totals shown for each activity are the maximum points possible; you don't automatically get all the points just for turning something in or "giving a good effort;" please read through the "Paths" section to see how to earn the maximum points!*

Attendance	28 pts (28 classes x 1pt)
Weekly Learning Log	216 pts (12 entries x 10-18pts)
Proposals & Final Project	99 pts (3 proposals x 8pts + 75pts Project)
GOAL	325 points

The following is the Grading Scale, with the Grades Explained:

Student exceeded expectations:

325+ points	A
324-300 points	A-

Student met expectations skillfully and carefully:

299-275 points	B+
274-250 points	B
249-225 points	B-

Student met some expectations, needs to improve in some areas.

224-200 points	C+
199-175 points	C

Student met few expectations / Minimum Points needed to pass

174-160 points	D
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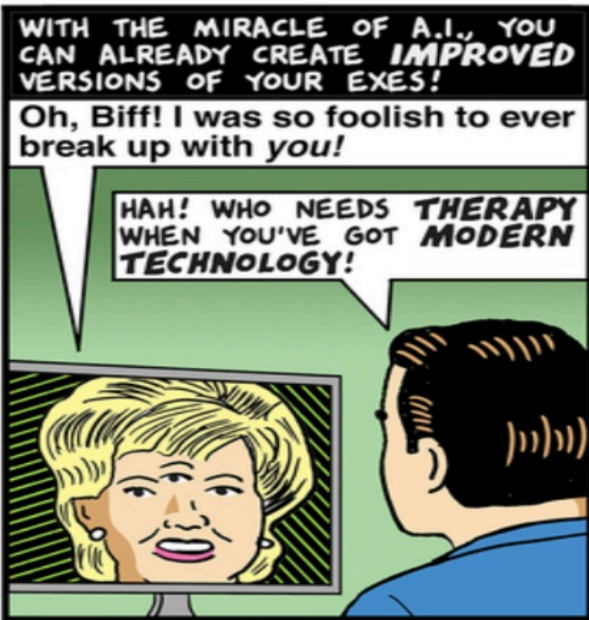
Student did not meet expectations.

159-0 points	F
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⚠ **Crucial detail: When looking at your grade on Canvas, please only look at your Total Points, NOT the calculated grade.** ⚠

6.1 ATTENDANCE

Each time you attend class, you earn 1 point. You can earn 28 Attendance Points. You are expected to attend all classes. You will maximize your learning by attending every class. Yet, it is understood that there can be things outside of one's control or extracurricular commitments which keep you from coming to class. If you have to miss class due to a university-sponsored activity (sports, band, etc.), serious family emergency, and serious illnesses/injuries which require long-term hospitalization, please let me know via email. Meanwhile, if you need to miss class due to short-term episodes (allergies, digestion issues, temporary pains, traffic issues, tiredness due to lack of sleep, personal/family travel plans, routine dentist/medical appointments, home repairs, rent/job issues, etc.), please try not to be too discouraged about not being able to earn Attendance Points. Please prioritize your health and well-being, and take care of yourselves. **Be careful: you want to do everything possible to avoid falling into the habit of missing classes!** These Attendance points are the way that your overall Point Total is "rounded up" at the end of the course.



6.2 WEEKLY LEARNING LOG

The purpose of contributing the Weekly Learning Log is to consistently guide and express how you are learning the course content. Each week, you will make an audio-video recording in which you will:

- 1) talk out your understanding of the key ideas of the current week's Reading Material and Class Discussion, and
- 2) explain how the current week's Reading Material and Class Discussion inform your developing understanding of the key topic of the Unit we are in, whether it is Media Consciousness (Unit 1), Media Resistance (Unit 2), or Media Mindfulness (Unit 3).

For example, in Week 2, you can:

- 1) talk out what you think Postman means when he claims that "Media is the Metaphor."
- 2) explain how Postman's claim that "Media is the Message" helps you to develop your own version of Media Consciousness.

Please turn each Learning Log as a MOV, .MP4, .M4V, or .WEBM by Sunday 11:59pm in each week's "Learning Log" Module.

One learning log = up to 18 points max.

12 Weeks of Learning-Logging = up to 216 points over the semester.

Please note: each Learning Log must be between 1m 45s - 4m 45s to earn a standard score (10 points). Yet, recording a 2+ minute answer allows you to earn the standard score AND extra points, as listed below, for up to 18 points:

+1 time bonus: keeping your audio-visual answer approximately between 2-3 minutes.

+1 reading bonus: making 3+ strong and accurate quotations of Reading Material and Class Content, and displaying these connections on-screen, with citations in the author-page number format (examples: McLaren, 70; Lovin, 123).

+1 humanity bonus: recording your audio-visual answer by appearing on-screen, with highly energetic, non-machine/AI-like narration, with plenty of moments of spontaneity and using your own words, without reading all or a majority of your on-screen text or off-screen script in a monotone/AI-like voice.

+1 creativity bonus: recording your audio-visual answer as a presentation (PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, Canva, etc.) with multiple slides containing pictures/graphics, movie clips, music, etc.

+4 media bonus: watching/reading the course movie of the week, displaying and narrating some background information about the media (who made it, the intended message or key themes, what makes you interested in it, how was it received by the public, etc), talk about how a few scenes or a few key visuals from this media relate to or express what you are learning about the topic of the week from the Reading Material and Class Content.

RMAP FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS (3 proposals x 8pts = 24 Points)

The purpose of these proposals are to get you started in organizing and putting together your RMAP Final Project in a gradual and manageable way. The guides to create your Proposals are available on Canvas, in the "Proposal" Module.

Proposal Part 1 Due 12:15pm Feb 25

Proposal Part 2 Due 12:15pm Mar 25

Proposal Part 3 Due 12:15pm Apr 15

RMAP FINAL PROJECT (75 points)

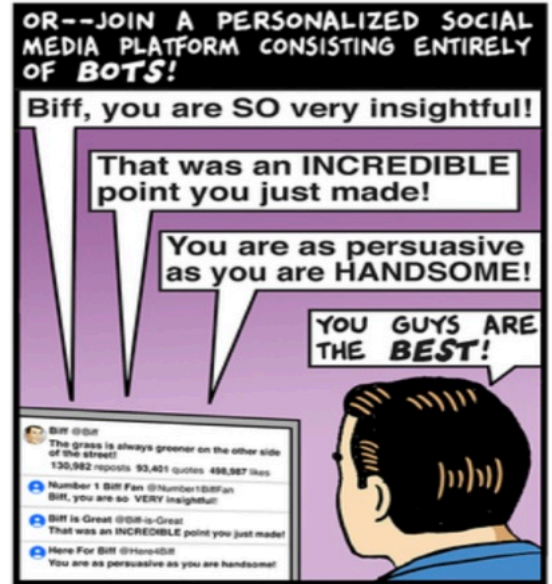
The Final Exam in this class is a Final Project -- an individually-designed 5-8 minute, audio-visual, recorded presentation in which you talk out your own ways of Media Consciousness, Media Resistance, Media Mindfulness, and Media Spirituality using what you've learned in this class as building blocks to build your own framework for responding to modern media. The guide to create your RMAP Final Project is available on Canvas, in the "Final Project" Module. Due during the University Scheduled Final Exam time, May 5, 11-1pm.

Again, please do not wait until the last minute to complete Activities!

- Once the due date passes, assignments are locked in Canvas
- Contributions sent through the comment box, through links (no Google Drive files!) or email are not accepted.

REDEMPTION LOG: If you mess up on one Learning Log, fully complete the Redemption Log by the end of the semester. This will replace the lowest score you earned on a previous Log with 18 points. For example, if you earned a "0" on a previous Log, the 18 points will replace the 0. Likewise, if your lowest score is 17, the 18 points will replace the 17. The guide to completing the Redemption Log is available on Canvas, in the "Redemption Log" Module. Due by May 4, 11:59pm.

LEARNING



COURSE CONDUCT

7. COURSE POLICIES

Please pursue befitting class behaviors. Avoid behaviors unbefitting for the classroom environment.

Befitting for a University Academic Environment

- 😊 Respect the subject matter and the beliefs of others
- 😊 Complete the readings and assignments for each class
- 😊 Pay attention to anyone speaking (professor or student)
- 😊 Thoughtfully participate in class discussion
- 😊 Arrive in class on time

Unbefitting for a University Academic Environment

- 😊 Disrupting class by being disrespectful, distracting, or late
- 😊 Using electronic devices for non-educational purposes in class
- 😊 Cheating on assignments, quizzes, and exams
- 😊 Being non-responsive in class
- 😊 Texting in class

“Blank” File Policy: If a student turns in a blank/corrupted file, a video that has no audio, a video that is an audio-only blank screen, the wrong file in the wrong place, an "unreadable file type," a Google Drive link (especially one that does not provide immediate access to the file) or does not succeed in successfully uploading a difficult or slow-to-load file on Canvas or an email that was scheduled to send but did not actually get delivered, and the right file isn't turned in before the due time, the student earns a "0" as a result.

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy: Students are required to adhere to the Duquesne University Academic Integrity Policy, as explained [here](#). If you plagiarize on a paper, submit material completed for a different course, or are caught cheating on a quiz or exam, you will receive a "0" for that grade. Offenders may also be reported to appropriate University personnel, such as the Office of the Dean or the Office of Student Conduct, who may take further disciplinary action. This includes:

- Plagiarism (copying someone else's work) or asking someone else to do your work for you is prohibited.
- Using AI text generators (such as ChatGPT) to produce text/video counts as plagiarism by the standards of this course.
- "Spinning" existing text by running it through translation or thesaurus software also counts as plagiarism.

Communication: Please use the [Student Question Form](#) to send me your questions or concerns. If you have to email me directly, I gently request that you follow the Email Guide on Canvas.

Grade Grubbing: Please do not do this, as explained [here](#) (from Dr. Mark Tomforde, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs).

Late Policy: Any Path turned in past the due time earns 0 points. Yet, everyone has one extension request to use when you cannot complete a Path before the due time. This one extension request grants 24 hours to turn in a Path past the due time. Please email the request to jonesg3@duq.edu before – and not after -- the due time. Extension requests are for Normal Paths ONLY, not Projects or Redemption Path. Please read the Project Guides on Canvas for more information on their Late Policies. Please feel free to use the format below for your own extension request, with the Subject Line: "FITER25 Extension Request."

Dear Dr. Jones,

I am using my one extension request for 24 more hours to complete this week's [insert Path here]. I understand that it is now due at 11:59pm on Monday. I also understand that after this, I can only ask for an extension due to important college sports events (with supporting official request from the athlete's college supervisor), very serious health conditions (with official report from a doctor) or death in my family. I will communicate any of these reasons to you before that due time.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Student Concerns: Students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations if needed. Please contact the Office of Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412.396.6658) to register for such accommodations. Once I receive official notification from that university office, the accommodations will be arranged. These accommodations will not be granted retrospectively.

Tying it All Together: Read through each week's Reading Material, so that you are prepared to make good contributions to the Group Discussions during our class sessions. Keep regularly attending to the class lectures and learning from your fellow classmates, so that you can engage the weekly Learning Logs skillfully and creatively, with your unique words and ideas. The Learning Logs will help you build experience in audibly and visually presenting your knowledge in an organized way, to prepare you for your Final Project. The Logs and the Final Project ensure that you will have content (which you built for yourselves) from this class to carry with you, beyond this semester, across college, and throughout your lives.

8. COURSE SCHEDULE

Our class sessions occur over 14 Tuesdays and 14 Thursdays, 12:15-1:30pm, from January 9 until April 29. This covers 17 weeks and 28 class sessions (including Final Exam).

UNIT 1: POSTMAN'S MEDIA CONSCIOUSNESS

Week	Date	Topic(s)	Preparation	Activities
1	Thu, Jan 9	Syllabus Explained / Amusing Ourselves to Death Intro	Read SYLLABUS; Read Postman, pp. vii-xx	No Logs Due – they start Week 2!
2	Tue, Jan 14	Amusing Ourselves to Death, Intro/Foreword	Read Postman, pp. vii-xx	Movie: The Truman Show Week 2 Log Due Jan 19 11:59pm
	Thu, Jan 16	Media is the Metaphor	Read Postman, chapter 1	
3	Tue, Jan 21	Media as Epistemology	Read Postman, chapter 2	Movie: The Book of Eli Week 3 Log Due Jan 26 11:59pm
	Thu, Jan 23	Typographic America	Read Postman, chapter 3	
4	Tue, Jan 28	Typographic Mind	Read Postman, chapter 4	Movie: The Great Debaters Week 4 Log Due Feb 2 11:59pm
	Thu, Jan 30	Peek-a-Boo World	Read Postman, chapter 5	
5	Tue, Feb 4	The Age of Show Business	Read Postman, chapter 6	Movie: PK Week 5 Log Due Feb 9 11:59pm
	Thu, Feb 6	"Now...This"	Read Postman, chapter 7	
6	Tue, Feb 11	Shuffle Off to Bethlehem	Read Postman, chapter 8	Movie: OMG - Oh My God Week 6 Log Due Feb 16 11:59pm
	Thu, Feb 13	Reach Out and Elect Someone	Read Postman, chapter 9	
7	Tue, Feb 18	Teaching as an Amusing Activity	Read Postman, chapter 10	Movie: Don't Look Up Week 7 Log Due Feb 23 11:59pm
	Thu, Feb 20	****Pre-Recorded: The Huxleyan Warning (no in-Person class)	Read Postman, chapter 11	

UNIT 2: SHATZER'S MEDIA RESISTANCE

8	Tue, Feb 25	Technology and Moral Formation	Read Shatzer, Intro-chapter 1	Movie: Avatar Proposal Part 1 Due 12:15pm Feb 25 Week 8 Log Due Mar 2 11:59pm
	Thu, Feb 27	Defining Transhumanism and "My Body, My Choice"	Read Shatzer, chapters 2-3	
9	Mar 3-8	SPRING BREAK (No Classes)	ENJOY SPRING BREAK!	No Paths Due
10	Tue, Mar 11	Hybronauts and Mind Clones	Read Shatzer, chapters 4-5	Movie: Free Guy Week 10 Log Due Mar 16 11:59pm
	Thu, Mar 13	Changing Notions of Experience and Place	Read Shatzer, chapters 6-7	
11	Tue, Mar 18	Changing Notions of Relationships and the Self	Read Shatzer, chapters 8-9	Movie: Ready Player One Week 11 Log Due Mar 23 11:59pm
	Thu, Mar 20	The Table	Read Shatzer, chapter 10	

UNIT 3: INDICK'S MEDIA MINDFULNESS

12	Tue, Mar 25	Preface to Media Mindfulness	Read Indick, Preface - chapter 1	Movie: Kumare Proposal Part 2 Due 12:15pm Mar 25 Week 12 Log Due Mar 30 11:59pm
	Thu, Mar 27	Media Engagement and Linguistic Media	Read Indick, chapters 2-3	
13	Tue, Apr 1	Logical-Mathematical Media and Nature	Read Indick, chapters 4-5	Movie: Sita Sings the Blues Week 13 Log Due Apr 6 11:59pm
	Thu, Apr 3	Music Therapy and Visual-Spatial Media	Read Indick, chapters 6 and 8	
14	Tue, Apr 8	Interpersonal Media	Read Indick, chapter 9	Movie: Life of Pi Week 14 Log Due Apr 13 11:59pm
	Thu, Apr 10	Intrapersonal Media	Read Indick, chapter 10 - Epilogue	

UNIT 4: WEST'S MEDIA SPIRITUALITY

15	Tue, Apr 15	Desire: The Banquet and The Living Hope of Satisfaction	Read West, "What This Book Is About" and chs 4-5	No Logs Due Proposal Part 3 Due 12:15pm Apr 15
	Thu, Apr 17	EASTER BREAK (No Classes)	ENJOY EASTER BREAK!	
16	Tue, Apr 22	NO CLASS - Classes meet according to Monday class schedule.		No Logs Due
	Thu, Apr 24	Design: Trusting God's Designs of Redemption	Read West, chapters 9-10	
17	Tue, Apr 29	Destiny: Freedom, Love, Infinity and Beyond	Read West, chapters 12-14	Redemption Log Due May 4 11:59pm

FINAL PROJECT DUE ON MONDAY, MAY 5, 11AM-1PM

CONCLUSION

SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE THE
BONUS SYLLABUS QUIZ!!!



9. I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITIES!

Overall, this course is a launchpad for your unfolding ethical stance. You will also cultivate good habits that are good to have in any area of life – earning and keeping track of the “points” (money) that you earn, refining your abilities to undertake some projects while avoiding others, discerning what you can and cannot realistically accomplish due to time constraints, and finding ways to accomplish tasks despite unfamiliar instructions or an overwhelming amount of information.

Generally, being a student is about showing up, participation, effort, and distinguishing oneself in excellence. Many will show up for class, which is a good start. Some will participate by engaging the course material and discussions. A good amount of students will put forth a valiant effort by doing everything realistically and healthily possible to earn points toward a desired grade. The key is to understand that showing up, participation, and effort comprise the path toward earning the grade you desire, but not the guarantee. “A” students are the particular few who are willing and able to distinguish themselves by putting their personalized stamp of excellence (not perfection) on quizzes, reflections, presentations, etc. To be sure, everyone does not arrive at excellence at the same time, because everyone holds diverse strengths and weaknesses – and this is okay! As you progress through this course, please advance with this assurance – I have confidence in your abilities!