In this course, we will study and write about ways in which film, television, advertising, music, sports, and the news media present, negotiate, and affect religious issues, and, conversely, how religion changes popular culture. But to say that American popular culture and religious belief and practice influence, imitate, or borrow from each other is just the beginning of understanding their level of interrelatedness. Whether we are talking about the Star Wars-influenced pyrotechnics of an evangelical crusade, the theological impact of Mel Gibson’s Passion or Noah, or religious debates within fan communities of South Park, True Blood, and The Walking Dead, we will study how the popular and the religious have become linked and are often indistinguishable within contemporary American society. We will “read” primary texts of popular religion and popular culture (sermons, TV shows, video games, music videos) as well as theoretical and analytical essays.

Much of the work in this course will focus on the practice of developing and writing a research paper. I will encourage you to explore topics of their own interest, and assignments will include informal writing, reaction papers, various essay forms, and multiple research strategies. While developing your own writing process, we will work on building an argument, referring to other texts, using secondary material effectively, mastering the mechanics of quoting, citing, and documenting sources, and understanding the practice of incorporating your voice into existing intellectual discussions. The course will conclude with individual research projects developed in small working groups.

**Learning Goals**
- To continue to develop college level research and writing skills
- To develop your own writing voice in conversation with other thinkers/writers
- To work together collaboratively in writing and learning communities
- To deepen your understanding of the intersection of religion and popular culture
- To develop your own expertise on a chosen research topic

**Evaluation and Course Requirements**

**Essays and papers:** In the first half of the semester you will write two essays as part of our initial exploration of the different aspects of these topics. The following three papers are intended to facilitate the process of writing the final research papers. You are required to complete all writing assignments on time, and papers must be legibly typed and printed in order.
to receive a grade. For each project you will be expected to work out your own topic, to write multiple drafts, and to work with other students on their papers. We will work on the drafts in class so it is just as important to be on time with your drafts as with your final projects. Please proofread your papers carefully for spelling errors, grammar, etc.

**Informal writing** will be short writings done both in and outside of class and on the course Blackboard site. These are intended to allow you to work out some of your thoughts to class readings and discussion, and to allow your classmates and I to see what you are thinking about. Although I will assign a grade to your informal writings, they should be free and unpolished. I am only looking for effort and thought and not for organization, mechanics, or “correctness.”

**The final research paper** will be on a topic of your choice, approved by me, that focuses on a primary text and that also addresses the critical literature on that text. The last five or six weeks of the semester will be devoted primarily to working on this paper. I will divide the class up into groups that will work together on each stage of the process.

The course will be graded on the following basis:
- Two essays (4-5 pages): 30% (15% each)
- Final research essay (8-10 pages): 30%
- Informal writing: 30%
- Participation/Attendance: 10%

**Required Texts:**
Most of the readings will come from the following two texts available in the NYU bookstore, Shakespeare and Co, or from Amazon.

- Santana, Richard W. and Gregory Erickson. *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* (RS)

Other short reading assignments will be available through NYU Classes. There may also be assigned viewing of television and film as well as music listening.

**Academic Integrity:**
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html).
Course Schedule

Part I: Popular Culture and Popular Religion

Week one: Sept. 2, 4
  Introductions

Week two: Sept. 9, 11
  Definitions
            “Preface,” RS: 1-7

Week three: Sept. 16, 18
  Contextualization
  Reading:  “Popular Culture and Popular Religion in America,” RS: 9-32
            “The Crisis of Authority in Popular Culture” Hatch 17-48 (PDF)

Week four: Sept. 23, 25
  Writing about popular culture and religion: issues, language, tone, etc.
  Essay #1—rough draft due (9/25)
  Essay workshop (bring four copies of your draft)

Part II: Texts of Popular Culture and Popular Religion

Week five: Sept. 30, Oct 2
  Sports
  Reading:  “Rituals of the African American Domus: Church, Community, Sport, and LeBron James,” GD: 120-139.
            “Baseball and American Christianity,” RS: 33-49
  Essay #1 due (10/2)

Week six: Oct. 7, 9
  Film
            “The Gods of Film,” RS: 89-112

Week seven: Oct. 16
  Television
            “Television Drama, Fan Communities, and Theology,” RS: 113-137
            “Blood Bodies and Divine Absence in True Blood,” Erickson (PDF)
Week eight: Oct. 21, 23
Popular Music
“Absolute Contradictions,” RS: 67-88
Essay #2—rough draft due (10/23)

Week nine: Oct. 28, 30
Virtual Worlds
Reading: “Our Lady of Persistent Liminality: Virtual Church, Cyberspace, and Second Life,” GD 258-270.
“Evil Reloaded,” RS: 169-200
Essay #2 due (10/30)
[Choosing a research paper topic and organizing working groups]

Part III: Steps to the Research Paper
Week ten: Nov. 4, [6 no class]
Doing research on popular culture and popular religion
Research techniques

Week eleven: Nov. 11, 13
Due: description of your selected text (11/11)
Group work: discuss the outline or sketch of your final project (11/13)

Week twelve: Nov. 18, 20
Due: literature review and annotated bibliography of your topic (11/18)
Group work: discussion of literature review and sources
Due: position paper (11/20)

[11/25 no class]

Week thirteen: Dec 2, 4
Group work: presentations and discussion
Due: rough draft of final research paper (12/4)

Week fourteen: Dec 9, 11
Presentations
Final research paper due (12/12)