

## **Religious Studies 365 (D): Religion and Comics**

2024/2025

Instructor: Dr. Kirkegaard

The class could be taught in a variety of formats: traditional face to face format either once or twice a week, as a hybrid, or as a fully online class.

Office Hours: TBA

Course Webpage: [canvas.sdsu.edu](https://canvas.sdsu.edu)

email : [bkirkega@sdsu.edu](mailto:bkirkega@sdsu.edu)

### **Course Description:**

This course explores the intersection between Comics and Religion in its many facets. Religion has long recognized the power of artistic expression. Sequential art in particular has a long and rich history in many religious traditions. As a medium, Comics offer fascinating new possibilities and challenges for religious expression and storytelling.

Struggles with anti-Semitism, immigrants finding their place in the world while holding on to their traditions, the weight of responsibility for impossible actions, the outcry for justice in horrific situations – all of these find rich expression in comics grappling with religion. This popular medium also offers new opportunities and challenges for religious traditions. How can comics be used to explore important religious ideas and to educate a new generation? How best should the divine be depicted in this form, if at all? How does religion factor in the imagination of people today? How does religion shape the complex decisions that people face? Is there a place for religion in a redrawn and reimagined world such as that reflected in comics?

This course will provide an opportunity for students to explore central topics of concern within diverse religious traditions and to think critically about how we make sense of the world around us. The course will also explore the possibilities of the Comics medium to express religion. Capturing religious thought in comic form presents comic creators with new challenges and possibilities. For religious traditions, comics provide a new opportunity to struggle with fascinating and important questions while engaging diverse audiences.

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Analyze comics dealing with religious topics with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments.
2. Interpret the religious aesthetic and value systems as expressed in comics across time and cultures.
3. Evaluate how comics deal with important religious themes of global and personal relevance, such as identity, justice, moral responsibility, death, loss, and evil.
4. Apply Religious Studies theoretical methods to engage religious ideas in comics.

### **General Education (Explorations of Human Experience: Humanities; Area C):**

This class fulfills the 3 units requirement by the GE for Area C

The Humanities and Fine Arts encompass works of the imagination, such as art, literature, film, drama, dance, and music, and related scholarship. Students better understand human problems, responsibilities, and possibilities in changing historical contexts and diverse cultures, and in relation to the natural environment. Students acquire new languages and familiarize themselves with related cultures. They gain the ability to recognize and assess various aesthetic principles, belief systems, and constructions of identity. Students acquire capacities for reflection, critique, communication, cultural understanding, creativity, and problem solving in an increasingly globalized world.

**Goals for GE Courses in the Humanities and Fine Arts**

- Goal 1: Analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments.
- Goal 2: Develop a familiarity with various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures.
- Goal 3: Argue from multiple perspectives about issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance.
- Goal 4: Demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

For Religious Studies Majors and Minors, this course is part of Area D: “Critical Issues in Religion.”

**Required Books:**

The only required text is *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, eds. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer (Continuum, 2010)

All other readings will be short articles from journals and books that will be available on Canvas.

Selections from Comics will be available as pdfs from the Library SCUA

**Grading:**

Discussion Posts/Replies	20%
Participation	15%
Unit Quizzes	20%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	15%
Final Reflection	15%

**Grade breakdown:** A (100-93); A- (92-90); B+ (89-88); B (87-83); B- (82-80); C+ (79-78); C (77-73); C- (72-70); D+ (69-68); D (67-63); D- (62-60); F (59 and below)

**Description of Assignments:**

**Discussion Posts/Replies (20%)** is where we will articulate our own understandings and listen to others as we explore complex topics. It is vital as we explore these areas of inquiry that we listen to one another respectfully and that we allow for a diversity of perspectives. Please be gracious and respectful of others as we work through these topics together. These Discussion Posts and Replies are where you will be closely engaging scholarly articles and the comics we are reading as you formulate your responses to the discussion prompts. Discussion Posts and Replies are due before we our class discussions examining the material. The discussion prompts will help to focus our initial discussion and examination of each week’s material.

**Participation** (15%) will be a vital part of our examination of comics each week. Come to class having read the material and ready to engage in class discussion.

**Quizzes** (20%) at the end of each of the Units will evaluate your knowledge of essential information. The focus will be on our major themes, essential concepts, and placing the material in context.

**Papers** (1 and 2) (15% each) (5-7 pages each) at the end of units will provide an opportunity to explore a topic of interest in greater depth. Students can choose to write papers at the end of any two Units (from Units 2-4) The focus will be on exploring a single area of interest in greater depth. This is an opportunity to work more closely with individual comics that we have been studying, to explore a theme across comics in greater depth, or to apply what you have been learning to additional comics of interest (suggested comics will be provided and you are welcome to consult with the professor with others that you want to explore).

**Final Reflection** (15%) (4-6 pages) focus on personal and global relevance. Integration of thinking about Comics and Religion. Consideration of diverse religious experiences and their expression. Appreciation for aesthetic issues and religious topics. Closer examination of our major thematic topics.

In your written work and in your classroom involvement (on-line) you will be expected to adhere to "acceptable standards of conduct" as discussed on the web page for the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities (<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/>). As a general rule, extensions on due dates will not be granted. PLAN AHEAD.

#### **Students with Disabilities:**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact the Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact the Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from the Student Disability Services.

#### **Success in an On-line Class and Hybrid Class: (These sections will be dropped if it is a face-to-face class)**

In terms of technology, you will need all of the following:

- A computer - PC or Macintosh- with a stable Internet connection. Higher speed Internet connections (cable modem, DSL) are highly recommended. (Some parts of the class can be accessed with a cell phone or tablet but not every feature).
- Basic computer skills
- A reliable email address (registered via webportal as your email address of record). With Canvas this now needs to be your sdsu gmail address (note that this is a recent change).
- A "technology back-up" plan. Ideally, you should plan out an alternative location to do assignments and quizzes in case your computer or Internet connection is not working!

To complete all of the assignments you will need to:

- Make use of the online course materials available via Canvas.
- Participate in asynchronous online activities (all available via canvas) – for this class these are in the form of mini-lectures, videos, and the discussion post/reply option.
- Participate in quizzes and tests (these are asynchronous but available within a more limited time window). All of these will use Respondus Lockdown Browser.
- Submit a personal introduction and final reflection to canvas (the final reflection will be submitted via turn-it-in).
- Complete readings each week – all of the readings are available on Canvas.
- Participate in discussion post and reply on canvas.
- Check email on a regular basis.

**Academic Honesty:**

I am sure this will not apply to any of you but let me emphasize from the beginning that the University adheres to a strict [policy regarding cheating and plagiarism](#). In the unlikely event that any of you do choose to cheat or plagiarize, you would fail the class and are subject to a disciplinary review by Student Affairs.

Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and representing it as your own work
- Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
- Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class

If you have questions on what is plagiarism, please consult the [policy](http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html) (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html) and this [helpful guide from the Library](http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf):(http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard\_5/plagiarism.pdf)

**Contacting me:**

I will try to respond within 24-48 hours to emails. For quick questions, the turnaround time may be much shorter. If I do not, for any reason, respond within 48 hours please feel free to email a second time (It is rare, but occasionally I can miss an email if I get a lot all at once). For more complex questions you may wish to come to office hours online where we can discuss topics at greater length.

I look forward to getting to know you over the semester and to exploring these fascinating topics together!

**Calendar of Readings and Assignments:**

Most weeks will include an academic article to contextualize our examination as well as short comics and selections from larger works. Lecture will provide additional context for our topics, religious background, and the larger context of comics we are reading. Discussion Posts and Replies are due before discussion each week with your insights helping to inform and focus our discussion. Each of the Units will conclude with a Quiz. For two of the Units you will be writing papers. You are also required to write a final reflection at the end of the semester. More detail on each of these assignments can be found in their description above as well as full details on Canvas. You will find the deadlines in the syllabus below and on Canvas.

***Unit 1: Introducing our Topics*****Week One****How to Read Comics**

The Syllabus and Syllabus Quiz will orient you to our class

Read selections from McCloud, Understanding Comics

1<sup>st</sup> Discussion Post is due before in-class discussion (you will find the prompt on Canvas to focus your post). Replies are due by the end of the day Friday and should continue and deepen the conversation.

**Week Two****How to Read Religion in Comics**

*Graven Images* – Forward and Introduction











Additional Items of Note:

*Student Resources:*

A complete list of all academic support services--including the [Writing Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#) and [Math Learning Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#)--is available on the Student Affairs' [Academic Success \(Links to an external site.\)](#) website. [Counseling and Psychological Services \(Links to an external site.\)](#) (619-594-5220) offers confidential counseling services by licensed therapists; you can Live Chat with a counselor at [http://go.sdsu.edu/student\\_affairs/cps/therapist-consultation.aspx](http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/cps/therapist-consultation.aspx) (Links to an external site.) between 4:00pm and 10:00pm, or call San Diego Access and Crisis 24-hour Hotline at (888) 724-7240.

*Student Privacy and Intellectual Property:*

The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(Links to an external site.\)](#) (FERPA) mandates the protection of student information, including contact information, grades, and graded assignments. I will use [Canvas / Blackboard] to communicate with you, and I will not post grades or leave graded assignments in public places. Students will be notified at the time of an assignment if copies of student work will be retained beyond the end of the semester or used as examples for future students or the wider public. Students maintain intellectual property rights to work products they create as part of this course unless they are formally notified otherwise.

*Religious observances:*

According to the University Policy File, students should notify the instructors of affected courses of planned absences for religious observances by the end of the second week of classes.

*Sexual violence / Title IX mandated reporting:*

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I am a mandated reporter in my role as an SDSU employee. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep the information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, I am required to share information regarding sexual violence on SDSU's campus with the Title IX coordinator, Jessica Rentto 619-594-6017. She (or her designee) will contact you to let you know about accommodations and support services at SDSU and possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Know that you will not be forced to share information you do not wish to disclose and your level of involvement will be your choice. If you do not want the Title IX Officer notified, instead of disclosing this information to your instructor, you can speak confidentially with the following people on campus and in the community. They can connect you with support services and discuss options for pursuing a University or criminal investigation. Sexual Violence Victim Advocate 619-594-0210 or Counseling and Psychological Services 619-594-5220, [psycserv@sdsu.edu](mailto:psycserv@sdsu.edu). For more information regarding your university rights and options as a survivor of sexual misconduct or sexual violence, please visit [titleix.sdsu.edu](http://titleix.sdsu.edu) (Links to an external site.) or [sdsutalks.sdsu.edu](http://sdsutalks.sdsu.edu) (Links to an external site.).

*Classroom Conduct Standards:*

SDSU students are expected to abide by the terms of the Student Conduct Code in classrooms and other instructional settings. Prohibited conduct includes:

- Willful, material and substantial disruption or obstruction of a University-related activity, or any on-campus activity.
- Participating in an activity that substantially and materially disrupts the normal operations of the University or infringes on the rights of members of the University community.

- Unauthorized recording, dissemination, or publication (including on websites or social media) of lectures or other course materials.
- Conduct that threatens or endangers the health or safety of any person within or related to the University community, including
  1. physical abuse, threats, intimidation, or harassment.
  2. sexual misconduct.

Violation of these standards will result in referral to appropriate campus authorities.

#### *Medical-related absences:*

Students are instructed to contact their professor/instructor/coach in the event they need to miss class, etc. due to an illness, injury or emergency. All decisions about the impact of an absence, as well as any arrangements for making up work, rest with the instructors. [Student Health Services \(Links to an external site.\)](#) (SHS) does not provide medical excuses for short-term absences due to illness or injury. When a medical-related absence persists beyond five days, SHS will work with students to provide appropriate documentation. When a student is hospitalized or has a serious, ongoing illness or injury, SHS will, at the student's request and with the student's consent, communicate with the student's instructors via the Vice President for Student Affairs and may communicate with the student's Assistant Dean and/or the [Student Ability Success Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

#### *SDSU Economic Crisis Response Team:*

If you or a friend are experiencing food or housing insecurity, or any unforeseen financial crisis, visit [sdsu.edu/ecrt](https://sdsu.edu/ecrt) ([Links to an external site.](#)), email [ecrt@sdsu.edu](mailto:ecrt@sdsu.edu), or walk-in to Well-being & Health Promotion on the 3rd floor of Calpulli Center.

#### *Land Acknowledgment:*

For millennia, the Kumeyaay people have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. As members of the San Diego State University community we acknowledge this legacy. We promote this balance and harmony. We find inspiration from this land; the land of the Kumeyaay.