



Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - 2024-2025

Exchange

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam offers many English-taught courses in a variety of subjects, ranging from arts & culture and social sciences, neurosciences and computer science, to economics and business administration.

The International Office is responsible for course approval and course registration for exchange students. For details about course registration, requirements, credits, semesters and so on, please [visit the exchange programmes webpages](#).

Religions, Media and Popular Culture

Course Code	G_BATRSPC214
Credits	6
Period	P6
Course Level	200
Language Of Tuition	English
Faculty	Faculty of Religion and Theology
Course Coordinator	dr. J.H. Roeland
Examiner	dr. J.H. Roeland
Teaching Staff	dr. J.H. Roeland
Teaching method(s)	Lecture, Seminar

Course Objective

After finishing this course, the student:

- has developed an understanding of the intersections between popular culture and religion;
- is able to distinguish between four different types of relations between religion and popular culture: religion in popular culture, popular culture in religion, popular culture as religion and religion and popular culture in dialogue;
- has defined and distinguished the main concepts being used in these theoretical debates (in particular 'religion' and 'popular culture');
- is able to differentiate between religious studies and empirical approaches to the topic of religion and popular culture on the one hand, and concerned/engaged (ethical, theological) approaches on the other;
- can apply these two different approaches to a case study of one's own choice;
- can connect one's personal (ir-)religious perspectives, principles and sources to popular cultural texts and practices, and can develop and discuss arguments for an ethical or theological engaged position in a multi-religious context;
- is able to communicate clearly and precisely, on a journalistic level, in order to reach both academics and a broad interested, non-specialized public.

Course Content

Popular culture is frequently perceived to be artificial, superficial and secular. However, research suggests that popular culture may function as a repertoire from which people draw in their search for (religious) meaning and a cultural site where religious practices are played out and religious feelings can be experienced. Movies, games, dance events, pop music, music festivals, media events, virtual worlds and other forms of popular culture seem to be not only entertaining, but may also be important in people's search for (religious) meaning.

At the same time, traditional and post-traditional religions increasingly embrace popular culture, a process often described as the popularisation of religion. Relipop, for instance, is a popular phenomenon among evangelicals (and some Muslim communities also developed Islamic forms of 'relipop'). Another example is evangelical worship, a blending of 'secular' poprock music and Christian worship texts. Religious people use popular media and new media technologies (including social network sites as Facebook and Twitter) to establish new religious communities. There is a growth in religious meetings that follow the format of a festival or event. Finally, a commercial 'relimarket' has been developed in recent years, offering an enormously amount of religious consumer products: books, clothes, music, movies, lifestyle gadgets, etc.

A sharp distinction between religion and popular culture thus becomes increasingly problematic. This process evokes a number of sociological and religious studies questions, which will be addressed in this course, namely: which religious dimensions can be distinguished in popular culture? And conversely: to what extent do religious practices, identities, communication styles and communities transform under the influence of popular culture? In addition to a sociological/religious studies approach to the topic of this course, a concerned approach, defined by an engaged stance towards popular culture on the basis of ethical or theological normativity, is discussed as well. While in sociological research ethical and theological normativity is supposed to be bracketed, a concerned approach involves an ethical and/or theological concern. Hence, the student is offered a set of tools to define,

analyze and evaluate the 'truthfulness, meaningfulness, goodness, justice, and beauty of popular cultural texts and practices' (Lynch 2005, ix).

Additional Information Teaching Methods

Instructions classes, research activities, lectures.

Method of Assessment

A final essay (100%).

Literature

Selected articles and book chapters, partly based on the individual projects.