

RELI3023: Digital Religion

Analyzing, Digitizing, and Mapping

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Office Hours: M 3-4, T 4-5, and by appointment	File repository: https://github.com/hrashid-doc/3023DigitalReligion/

Course Description

This course engages the interdisciplinary study of religion online and provides practical training to students on developing digital humanities projects, in partnership with the Digital Humanities Center and the Empirical Reasoning Center, and will incorporate analysis and critical reflection into their research on religious communities. The first portion of the course focuses on understanding methodologies in studying digital religion and exploring religious communities online. Case studies focus on ascriptive and affirmative identifications of religious communities, including how religious communities use online space to redefine their public perceptions. The latter part of the course utilizes tools of digital humanities to develop projects responsive to student interests and that allows them to analyze digital expressions of religion. A great deal of information for this course (<https://tinyurl.com/3023required>) will be presented online, as befits a course on digital religion.

Learning Objectives

- Identify power dynamics in online religious communities.
- Articulate how technology impacts expressions of religious identities.
- Analyze how religious communities express identities through different media.
- Construct and visualize placement and network of religious communities off- and on-line.



Image Source: <https://www.pickpik.com/bible-iphone-mobile-phone-read-read-online-holy-scripture-41242>

Learning and Education

As a professor, it is my task to create an environment of learning and to teach and guide you. However, your education is your responsibility. You must decide what you want to get out of a course and how it will shape you.

I offer evaluations that I am comfortable with, but you may not think are suited to your skills. I am interested in evaluating your learning. I am personally someone who thinks better through reading and writing. However, I recognize that not everyone operates in the same mode. I am always willing to entertain proposals that allow me to understand your learning and that play to your strengths. Such projects can be creative, collaborative, or anything you can suggest. We will work on your suggestions cooperatively before any approval is given.

You should treat this class as a collaborative effort, so you must be willing to take ownership and express your ideas. As a result, the following are my expectations from you.

You will be expected to do all the work on time, to miss no classes,¹ and to allow yourself to be challenged, and to allow yourself to challenge each other (and me).

The reading may not be easy. Please be prepared to study hard, and to learn vast amounts. Some of what I assign will need to be read twice, so bear that in mind. Take notes. Be prepared to discuss the readings. Come with questions.



Image source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/heycoach/1197947341/sizes/l/>

¹ It's COVID. Be smart. Be absent if you need to.

Generative A.I.

I ask that you do not use generative AI, LLMs, or other similar technologies without prior permission for this course. My goal in this course is to help develop skills of critical reading, improve your writing, and engage in generative discussion. As they currently stand, these technological tools interfere with these goals.

You can find more of my thinking on this topic here: <https://islamoyankee.medium.com/extended-ai-policy-661379761fc2>

Recording

In order to create an environment of trust and open discourse, I do not allow recording of any sort of our class. If recordings may be needed for accessibility reasons, we can have a conversation with CARDS about how best to meet your needs.

Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent. Late papers, failure to complete the readings assigned for class discussion, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

Participation

Class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, and coming to class regularly and on time.

Canvas

Use of Canvas is an important resource for this class. Students should check it for announcements before coming to class each week.

Late Assignments

Short papers will not be accepted late.

Projects will be penalized 2 points every day they are late, and will not be accepted a week after the due date.

Regrades

I am open to regrades. You must submit your work with comments, along with a new, unedited copy of your paper. In addition, you must submit a page describing where you think I misread the paper. You must argue based on what you have written, not on what your intent was. Remember, this is a regrade, so your grade can go up, it can stay the same, or it may go down. You have one week from the date of return of the paper to ask for a regrade.

In the event of a regrade request based on a computational error, please submit a written request detailing what you believe the error to be and copies of any supporting documents.

Regrades are governed by university policy.

Emails

I try to remain as accessible as possible over email. However, you should not rely on email for urgent matters. Please remember that email is a tool for professional communication, and is not a chat client.

You should always feel free to speak to me, and speaking to me first is always your best approach to any concern about the course. However, for your benefit, we should always document our mutual understandings via email. The responsibility of writing an email of understanding, or formalizing a request, rests on you. The email record makes sure that we have something to refer back to, if we need to do so.

Academic Freedom

Knowledge flourishes when inquiry is free and respectful. This class, which has been approved as part of the Barnard and Columbia curriculum by appropriate faculty bodies, aims to advance knowledge through discussion, debate, and carefully selected readings and assignments. In accordance with principles of academic freedom promulgated by the American Association of University Professors and affirmed by many colleges and universities, including Barnard and Columbia, the instructor has the authority to set the class syllabus, which may include controversial material relevant to topics being studied. While all participants and their views will be treated respectfully, no one should expect to be shielded from challenging or even upsetting ideas, since thoughtfully engaging such ideas is crucial to free inquiry and intellectual growth.

Evaluation

Note to students on projects

This course has been designed in cooperation with Barnard's Digital Humanities Center (DHC) and Empirical Reasoning Center (ERC). All project work is workshop based and with technical trainings, tutorials, and guidance provided by DHC in Milstein 103. They have their own office hours and you are encouraged to take advantage of them.

Short Papers - 30 Points Total

Weekly short papers of 250 words. Each submitted paper will receive 1-3 points. The top 10 paper scores will be counted towards the final grade.

The short papers are to be on the readings of the week. Due at the beginning of the first class of the week on Canvas.

Mapping Assignment - 10 Points

Students will contribute to a class map of a history of religious communities in New York City.

Using tools like Google My Maps and StoryMapsJS students will learn to cite media sources and explore digital spatial storytelling by comparing a linear storymap method versus a layered map and choosing the appropriate tool for their goal.

Religion Hashtag Tracing - 15 Points

Students will trace a hashtag on a social media platform (eg. #SideEntrance, #TradWives, etc.) and create a critical presentation placing the discourse into broader patterns of religion or the specific religion, and why the campaign is an effective digital tool.

Students will manually collect a small dataset in a CSV file with results from a hashtag on selected social media platform(s). (example: #TradWives on Bluesky, Mastodon, Instagram, and/or TikTok). They will then use this dataset to visualize and explore the data using a tool such as Miro.

Religious Community Social Network Mapping - 15 Points

Students will choose one specific religious community and map how people of different interpretations of that tradition do or do not connect on the student's chosen social network.

Building on the previous workshop, students will create or expand a dataset on chosen religious community conversations with the goal of better understanding how power works in religious communities.

Students will create/expand a dataset in a CSV file, and then explore the results through data visualization using a digital tool such as Voyant and Palladio.

Cumulative Portfolio - 30 Points Total

Students will create their own pages in a class Wordpress site in order to reflect on the process, products, and overall learnings of the course.

The project will incorporate previous work and a narrative self-reflection. Students will learn writing for the web/public scholarship, information architecture, content management and citing media sources in Wordpress.

Attendance

You are expected to attend all class sessions. Since attending class is a basic element of successful class completion, you will not receive a grade for it. You are expected to demonstrate engagement with class material, either through in-class discussion and/or integration into your written assignments. Please be mindful of your health and the health of your colleagues. If you need to be absent for reasons of illness, caretaking, or other unavoidable circumstances, please be in communication with us.

Grading Rubrics

Short papers

3 = shows engagement with week's readings. Very few, if any, grammatical/spelling errors.

2 = needs some work, but that substantively reflects engagement with the material.

1 = offers summary and does not demonstrate a thoughtful approach to the readings. In addition, the paper may also exhibit several and/or severe grammatical/spelling errors.

0 = work that was not handed in, work that was plagiarized, or work that exhibits multiple severe flaws.

RD = Re-Do. The short papers are meant to be a way for us to track your progress and to identify and work with you on problem areas before your longer papers are due. Occasionally, we may see a pattern of writing that requires you to work on certain skills. In such an event, we may return a paper to you with a RD to get you to focus on that skill. In the event of an RD paper, you have a week from the return of the paper to you to resubmit your work.

On grammar and spelling: We do not deduct points for minor spelling/grammar errors as long as the paper is readable, thoughtful, and demonstrates effort and coherency. Because of this, we discourage students from running papers through AI tools for grammar. It tends to reshape your voice.

Short Writing Assignments

- They should not be summaries.
- They should tell me what interests you about the reading.
 - It can be something that excites you.
 - It can be something that makes you think about material in a new way.
 - It can be something that raises big questions for you.
 - It can be something that you do not understand.
- They should focus on one point, at most two points.
- They should serve as a basis of discussion in class.
- They should be something that helps you.
 - Helps you organize your thoughts.
 - Helps you think through material.
 - Helps you make connections.
 - Helps you say to me that you are learning.

We are looking to see you struggle, to see you think. We are not looking for perfection, but we are looking for rigorous engagement that goes *beyond* what you have read.



Image generated from: <https://homes.luddy.indiana.edu/ccshan/for/for.html>

Extra Credit

Assignments and bonuses will be determined on a case-by-case basis. You may not receive extra-credit unless you have a minimum of a “C” average for the course. You may only earn up to a maximum of 5 points of extra-credit. Any extra-credit option must be available to all students in the course and be relevant to the content of the course. Please feel free to suggest ideas.

NB: Grades reflect your achievement on a particular assignment(s), and do not indicate how intelligent you are, or your worth as a human being.

Final Grade	
Points	Letter
95-100	A
90-94	A-
85-89	B+
80-84	B
75-79	B-
70-74	C+
65-69	C
60-64	C-
50-59	D
less than 50	F



Image Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/terryhart/3197898013/sizes/m/>

University Policies

Barnard Honor Code

Approved by the student body in 1912 and updated in 2016, the Code states:

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources.

We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

The Barnard Honor Code includes relevant language for the proper use of electronic class material. “We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources.. ” To be clear, this means that recorded class content — from lectures, labs, seminars, office hours and discussion groups — is the intellectual property of your professor and your fellow students, and should not be distributed or shared outside of class.

Wellness Statement

It is important for undergraduates to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. We as a community urge you to make health, sanity, and wellness--your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several areas of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them.

Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

Primary Care at Barnard: <http://barnard.edu/primarycare>

Counseling: <https://barnard.edu/about-counseling>

Wellness: <http://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about>

Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS)

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS). Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854-4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

Affordable Access to Course Texts and Materials

All students deserve to be able to study and make use of course texts and materials regardless of cost. Barnard librarians have partnered with students, faculty, and staff to find ways to increase student access to textbooks. By the first day of advance registration for each term, faculty will have provided information about required texts for each course on CourseWorks (including ISBN or author, title, publisher, copyright date, and price), which can be viewed by

students. A number of cost-free or low-cost methods for accessing some types of courses texts are detailed on the Barnard Library Textbook Affordability guide. Undergraduate students who identify as first-generation and/or low-income students may check out items from the FLI lending libraries in the Barnard Library and in Butler Library for an entire semester. Students may also consult with their professors, the Dean of Studies, and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for having access to course texts. Visit the guide and talk to your professors and your librarian for more details.

Course Outline

I reserve the right to make changes to the outline during the course of the semester.

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 1 Introduction; Syllabus Review; Religious Literacy Thinking about Media and Arts Jan. 20 and 22	<p>Diane Moore. "Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach" https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/4.1/moore.html</p> <p>Diane Moore. "Religion and Just Peacebuilding." On Course Website</p> <p>Marshall McLuhan. <i>Understanding Media</i>. • Ch. 1, pg. 7-21 • https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=120ec934-45dd-3e80-b4dd-ab01f8a8e26b</p> <p>Sarah Sharma & Rianka Singh (eds.). <i>Re-Understanding Media</i>. • Introduction, pg. 1-21 • Ch. 1, pg. 23-35 • https://read-dukeupress-edu.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/book/3030/Re-Understanding-MediaFeminist-Extensions-of</p> <p>Stuart Hall. <i>Popular Arts</i>. • Ch. 2, pg. 45-65 • Ch. 3, pg. 66-85 • https://read-dukeupress-edu.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/book/2490/The-Popular-Arts</p>	

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 2 Digital Religion Jan. 27 and 29	<p>Chris D. Cantwell and Hussein Rashid. "Religion and the Digital Turn." https://www.ssrc.org/publications/religion-media-and-the-digital-turn/</p> <p>Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria. <i>Digital Religion</i> (eds.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 1-21 • Ch. 2, pg. 25-39 • https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9780429295683/digital-religion-heidi-campbell-ruth-tsuria <p>Heidi Campbell and Pauline Cheong (eds.). <i>The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 1-14 • Ch. 30, pg. 509-526 • Ch. 31, pg. 527-543 • https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.001.0001. 	<p>Short Paper #1 (Week 1)</p> <p>Short Paper #2 (Week 2)</p>
Week 3 Digital Humanities and Religion Feb. 3 and 5	<p>Chris D. Cantwell and Kristian Petersen (eds.). <i>Digital Humanities and Research Methods in Religious Studies</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, pg. • Ch. 2, pg. 31-52 • Ch. 3, pg. 53-70 • Ch. 5, pg. 97-118 • Ch. 7, pg. 143-166 • TBA 	<p>Short Paper #3</p>
Week 4 Mapping Religion Feb. 10 and 12 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	<p>Najha Zigby-Johnson (ed.). <i>Mapping Malcolm</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 8-37 • Ch. 2, pg. 38-59 • Ch. 5, pg. 110-131 • Ch. 10, pg. 212-235 • Ch. 11, pg. 236-245 • On Reserve <p>Kayla Renée Wheeler. "Mapping Malcolm's Boston." https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymaps/42456917e8670925737edb4e45a5127b/mapping-malcolms-boston-exploring-the-city-that-made-malcolm-x/index.html</p> <p>NB: Thursday's class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103</p>	<p>Short Paper #4</p>

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 5 Case Study: Christian Women Feb. 17 and 19	Kristin Peterson. <i>Unruly Souls</i> . • Introduction, pg. 1-18 • Ch. 1, pg. 20-32 • Ch. 2, pg. 33-56 • Ch. 4, pg. 81-100 • https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=5a5135fd-378e-356b-9cb9-5f8c23442ba8	Short Paper #5 Mapping Outline Due
Week 6 Surfacing Voices Feb. 24 and 26	Margarita Guillory. <i>Africana Religions in the Digital Age</i> . • Introduction, pg. 1-7 • Ch. 3, pg. 57-94 • https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/mono/10.4324/9780429351440/africana-religion-digital-age-margarita-simon-guillory Guilia Evolvi. "Digital Minority Religions." <i>Journal of Religion in Europe</i> 17, no. 4 (2024): 373-387. • https://brill-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/journals/jre/17/4/article-p373_1.xml Ruth Tusria. "Digital Religion and the Negotiation of Gender/Sex Norms," in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Media and Social Justice</i> . • Pg. 87-96 • https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197744345.013.10 Heidi Campbell and Pauline Cheong (eds.). <i>The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion</i> . • Ch. 16, pg. 254-271 • https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.001.0001	Short Paper #6 Mapping Project Due

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 7 Hashtag Community Mar. 3 and 5 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, Brooke Foucault Welles (eds.). <i>#HashtagActivism</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, pg. xxv-xliv • Ch. 2, 31-64 • Ch. 4, 97-122 • Ch. 6, 153-185 • https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=cd0f2bce-936c-39ac-abf4-e85e82d53de0 Aeschbach, Mirjam and Dorothea Lüddeckens. “Religion on Twitter: Communalization in Event-Based Hashtag Discourses.” <i>Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet</i> 14 (2019): 108–30. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/23950 NB: Thursday’s class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103	Short Paper #7
Week 8 Case Study: Muslims Mar. 10 and 12	Robert Rozehnal (ed.). <i>Cyber Muslims</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 7, pg. 114-128 • Ch. 9, pg. 145-160 • Ch. 10, pg. 161-175 • Ch. 11, pg. 176-188 • https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=2b697077-05a9-39ab-b80c-76b08bafd6e7 	Short Paper #8 Hashtag Outline Due
Spring Break		
Week 9 (Re)Imagining Religious Narrative Mar. 24 and 26	G. Willow Wilson. <i>Alif the Unseen</i> . All <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On reserve (also check your local library) 	Short Paper #9 Hashtag Project Due

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 10 Networks and Data Mar. 31 and Apr. 2 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	<p>Firuzbakht, Sina, and Mohammad Khansari. "Twittertagnet: An Extensive Graph Dataset for Node Classification in Co-Occurring Hashtag Networks." <i>Social Network Analysis and Mining</i> 15, no. 1 (2025): 1-14.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13278-025-01415-0 <p>Tony Roberts and George Hamandishe Karekwaivanane (eds.). <i>Digital Disinformation in Africa</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 1-24 • Ch. 9, pg. 173-192 • https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph?docid=b-9781350319240 <p>Steven Engler, Michael Stausberg (eds). <i>The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion</i> (2nd ed.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1.5, pg. 72-87 • Ch. 2.17, pg. 375-386 • https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9780203154281/routledge-handbook-research-methods-study-religion-michael-stausberg-steven-engler <p>Recommended: https://www.csohate.org/2025/11/03/islamophobia-and-new-york-city-mayoral-election/</p> <p>NB: Thursday's class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103</p>	<p>Short Paper #10</p>
Week 11 Digital Humanities and Material Culture Apr. 7 and 9	<p>Emily Clark and Rachel Lindsey (eds.). <i>Digital Humanities and Material Religion</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 1-24 • Ch. 3, pg. 49-90 • Ch. 5, pg. 111-136 • Ch. 7, pg. 159-176 • TBA 	<p>Short Paper #11</p> <p>Network Outline Due</p>

Date(s) and Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments
Week 12 Archives Apr. 14 and 16 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	<p>Steven Engler, Michael Stausberg (eds). <i>The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion</i> (2nd ed.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 2.3, pg. 164-179 • Ch. 2.4. pg. 180-193 • Ch. 2.9, pg. 245-255 • https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9780203154281/routledge-handbook-research-methods-study-religion-michael-stausberg-steven-engler <p>Clifford B. Anderson (ed.). <i>Digital Humanities and Libraries and Archives in Religious Studies</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1, pg. 13-30 • Ch. 4, pg. 79-94 • Ch. 8, pg. 147-164 • https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110536539/html <p>NB: Thursday's class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103 (continue network analysis)</p>	Short Paper #12
Week 13 Technology as Religion? Apr. 21 and 23 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	<p>Tara Burton. <i>Strange Rites</i>. Pg. 1-90</p> <p>NB: Thursday's class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103</p>	Short Paper #13 Network Project Due
Week 14 Student Presentations and Summation Apr. 28 and 30 DHC/ERC Workshop (Thurs.)	<p>Final Project Showcase</p> <p>NB: Thursday's class will be a DHC/ERC workshop in Milstein 103 (continue cumulative project work)</p>	Final Projects Due