

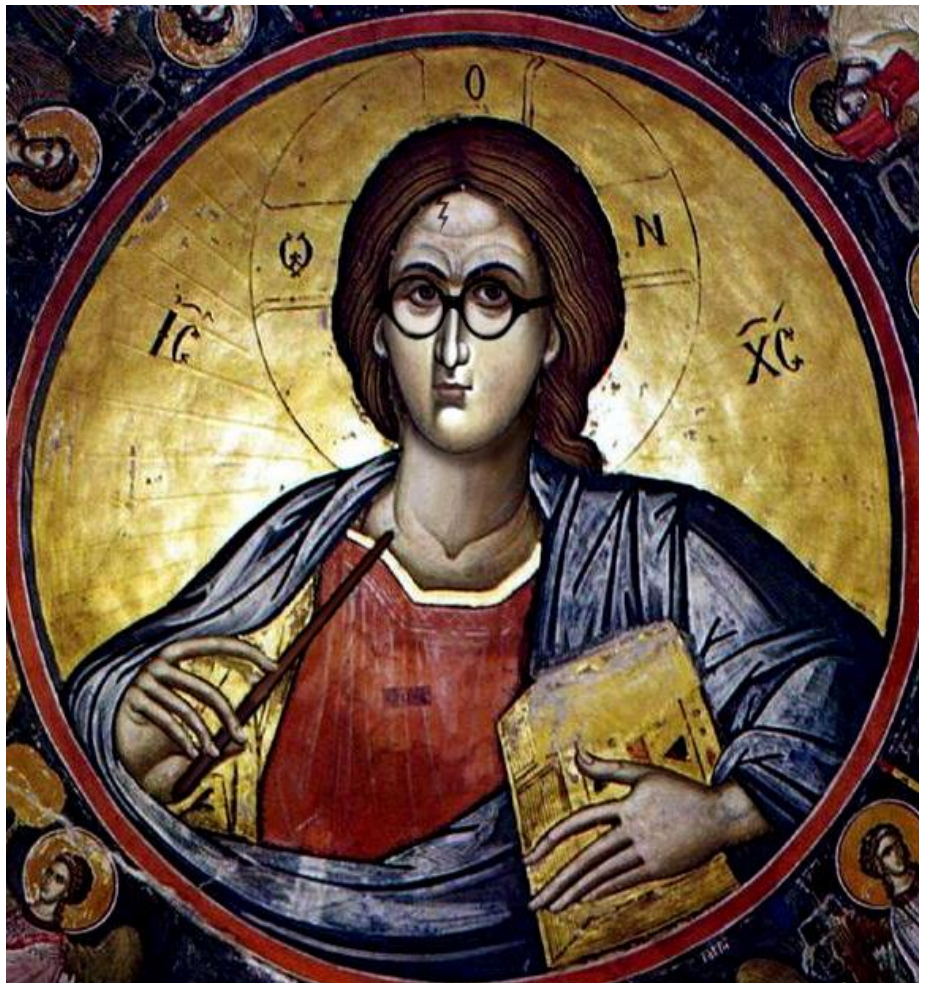
# Harry Potter Religion

REL 186S

Summer

Online

Randolph  
College



## Course Description

In this course, we explore the intersection and history of religion, magic, and science.

What exactly is magical thinking? What are magical practices? How do such activities relate to religious thought and practices? Using the *Harry Potter* book series as our guide, we will read, discuss, and write about a variety of scholarly approaches to such questions (e.g., historical, sociological, anthropological, theological). We will analyze the history and presence of ghosts, cursed objects, potions, and wizardry, as well as the power of *Harry Potter* in the popular imagination.

In addition, this course explores the response of many Christians to *Harry Potter*. Some theologically conservative Protestants have claimed that the Potter books contain satanic messages, promote witchcraft, and celebrate practices of the occult. By contrast, many supporters of the books insist they positively convey Christian messages.

We will critically scrutinize the claims that the books contain satanic, neo-Pagan, or Christian subtexts. We will examine the history of thought between what is “magic” and “religion.” And we will challenge the boundaries between what is understood as scientific procedure

and ritualistic performances for magic and witchcraft.

## What's in this syllabus

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**Course Structure** The course is divided into five units: “Introduction,” “Harry Potter and Christianity,” “Magic, Religion, and Science,” “Witches and Wizardry,” and “Welcome to Hogwarts.”

## Course Objectives

1. Analyze the history and blurred boundaries between religion, science, and magic
2. Recognize and discuss how religions and religious practices shape and are shaped by their cultural contexts
3. Identify and evaluate religious responses to the *Harry Potter* book series
4. Conceive and implement a final research project tracing the movement of an object, practice or belief from the different registers of religion, science, and magic

## Course Requirements

This course has three non-negotiable requirements: 1) reading/watching the assigned texts, clips, and slides, 2) participation in the Moodle discussion, and 3) respect for deadlines. You must complete all assigned homework in order to be prepared for class and to be able to accomplish assignments. Participation in discussion is not an option, but an important part of the final grade. All class activities and online forum discussions (Moodle) are required. Throughout every week, I will post videos or slides to help provide context and historical background—watching these is required and you will often have short **online quizzes** to confirm that you understand the material. As the professor, I have the ability to see who has and has not watched the videos or read responses. I will make note of students who make consistent and substantial comments, and those who do not. Finally, students must manage their time properly in order to submit assignments upon deadline.

## Using Moodle

Our course is hosted by a learning management system called Moodle. All course readings, videos, and discussions will be available on this site. The syllabus and discussion threads are available at the top of the page. As we progress throughout the course, the topic and week of assignments will be highlighted as you scroll down. You will upload all discussion contributions to Moodle and your grade will constantly be available under navigation (found on the left sidebar). As the professor, I have the ability to see who has opened assigned readings and watched videos, as well as read and commented on discussion threads. Students who do not complete assigned tasks will be marked down.

### Course Assignments

Forum posts and discussion	300 pts.
Response Papers	400 pts.
Final Paper & Slideshow	300 pts.

### Reading Guide

It is very important that you not only **read the assigned material**, but also that **you critically examine and interrogate it**. You should take note of the issues and questions



that you want to bring to the discussion. All members of the class, students and instructors alike, are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.

The following questions should help you do so:

1. What is the major argument of the text? What is the author's point?
2. To what extent does this information and/or approach allow me to understand or illuminate the relationship between science, magic, and religion?
3. What doesn't make sense to me? What is not clear? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument?

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## #Forum Posts and Online Discussion (300)

To ensure that you complete and are critically evaluating the readings, you will be required to regularly contribute to the Moodle discussion. We learn best when we learn together. I will regularly pose questions to three pre-established Moodle Forum Threads, but later in the course, you will be encouraged to create your own threads. All discussion posts must follow the **3CQ method**: 1. Compliment (acknowledge the discussion before your post, what do you agree with and why? What insight from another student struck you as particularly useful or surprising?) 2. Comment, 3. Connect (What other reading or discussion does the current discussion connect to?) 4. Question (what are you left wondering?). You may respond in different ways: a typed discussion post, a video, a google slideshow, or a concept map.

**Grading criteria:** You will be graded on how well you **advance the discussion**, that is, you must add a new insight, critique, or complication. Your discussion post must not stand alone nor simply restate or affirm another

student's post. To receive full-credit, you must post **at least three times every week by Friday at 11:59pm**. Post throughout the week, not at the last minute every Friday—this will help you and your classmates. Each post will be graded on a 20-point scale (20 = A, 16 = B, 14 = C, etc.). If you post fewer than **15 times** over the course of the semester, I will subtract 20 points per post you missed.

## #Response Papers (400 points)

**Task:** Every week, you will be asked to analyze and evaluate readings, class discussions, classroom exercises, and any other materials that we encountered in a **one to two-page, double-spaced paper, due by Friday at 11:59pm**. These papers will serve as building blocks for your final paper.

**Paper 1:** What is your relationship to *Harry Potter*? Have you ever considered the series as religious or scientific? Do the claims of our authors this week surprise you? How? Why? Do you agree or disagree that the series contains more than simply “magic”? **Due Friday, July 12 at 11:59pm.**

**Paper 2:** Some theologically conservative Protestants have claimed that the *Potter* books contain satanic messages, promote witchcraft, and celebrate practices of the occult. By contrast, many supporters of the books insist they positively convey Christian messages. What argument do you find most persuasive? This is not a theological exercise, that is, do not treat this paper as an opportunity to argue for your own religious beliefs or against another tradition. Rather, using evidence from the readings, support the claim that the *Harry Potter* series contains either satanic or pro-Christian messages. Engage and properly cite (Chicago, APA, or MLA) at least two of the sources encountered in class. **Due Friday, July 19.**

**Paper 3:** What is magic? How does it (or does it not) differ from religion? Using at least two of the readings we have encountered in class, argue for or against a distinction between the two. **Due Friday, July 26.**

**Paper 4:** How do this week's examples of witchcraft and wizardry use the terms magic and religion? Can religion and magic be separated in these examples? Is there a difference between religion and magic in these examples? Why or why not? **Due Friday, August 2.**

**Grading Criteria (100 Points Each):** *25 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *35 Points:* Engagement with sources and course material (Does the paper use at least two sources from the course to answer the prompt? Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Does the paper use the sources to develop and support a larger argument?) *40 Points:* Development of a thesis/argument (Is there a clear thesis statement? Was the thesis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does the thesis answer the prompt? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage with the material?)

## #Final Paper: “Cultural Metamorphosis” and Visual Presentation (300 points)

**Task:** The objective of this assignment is to investigate how religious objects, beliefs, and practices change meaning according to different cultural contexts and historical moments. The major goal is to explore the idea that what is understood as magic, religion, or even science is not eternal truth but changes throughout history.

**Paper (200 points):** The final paper is the major academic enterprise of this course. It involves research and reading new material besides the assigned texts for this class. Choose a religious, magical, or scientific object, belief, or practice that has changed meaning throughout history or in different cultural contexts. For example, it is not unusual to find a practice or belief that was once considered science or religious and now is dismissed as sheer superstition. Also, some practices considered magical/superstitious by one culture may be regarded as religious by another. How has the object/practice/belief changed over time? What accounts for this change?

**Length:** The paper must contain between 1,500-2,000 words (6-8 pages), with citations and footnotes included. Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. (You may use Chicago, MLA, or APA references)

**Visual Presentation (100 points):** You must create a visual representation of your final project to be shared with the class via Moodle. This may take a number of forms, either a google slideshow with verbal commentary, a short film with visual aids, or a professor approved alternative creative project.





## Course Schedule

#	Topic	What to read/watch	What's Due
1	Introduction	<b>Read:</b> 1. Syllabus; 2. Hitchens, "The Boy Who Lived," <i>New York Times</i> ; and <b>Watch:</b> Professor Keegan's "Introduction to the Course"	1. Post an image or short clip to portray your favorite aspect of <i>Harry Potter</i> – it can be a character, a spell, a scene, or an enchanted object from either the books or films. As part of the post, tell us a bit about why it's interesting, important, or entertaining to you. Include your name, institution, year, and major. 2. If you are confused about any aspect of the course, please also pose your question to the thread: "Questions for Keegan" on Moodle.
2	Potter and Popular Culture	McKenna, 3. "Harry Potter and the Modern Age" 355-364.	Post to the discussion forum at least three times this week
3	Religion, Magic, and Science	Malinowski, "The Role of Magic and Religion," 37-46	
4	Magic for Muggles	Albas, "Modern Magic: The Case of Examinations," 603-613	Response Paper due at 11:59pm
5	Christian or Not?	Slides; Neal, Chp. 1, "Mad about Harry!" 11-30. Abanes, "Introduction" 1-8, Walker, "Harry Potter among books burned by priests in Poland," <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/01/harry-potter-among-books-burned-by-priests-in-poland">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/01/harry-potter-among-books-burned-by-priests-in-poland</a>	Take slide quiz
6	Christian Literature	Abanes, Chp. 12, "Beyond Fantasy," 229-246. Neal, Chp. 3, "Classic Fantasy or Blatant Witchcraft?" 37-62	
7	Christian Critique	Abanes, Chps. 2 & 4, "Sorcery in a Stone: A Closer Look," 21-46 and "Enter the Chamber: A Closer Look," 57-80.	
8	Christian Celebration	Neal, Chp. 9, "Harry Potter and the Judeo-Christian Ethic," 165-180.	
9	Harry Potter as Sacred Text	Watch, "Harry Potter and the Sacred Text." Check out their web site at: <a href="https://www.harrypottersacredtext.com/">https://www.harrypottersacredtext.com/</a>	Response Paper 2 due

		Bulton, "How the Harry Potter books are replacing the Bible as millennials foundational text," <a href="https://religionnews.com/2019/04/25/how-the-harry-potter-books-are-replacing-the-bible-as-millennials-foundational-text/">https://religionnews.com/2019/04/25/how-the-harry-potter-books-are-replacing-the-bible-as-millennials-foundational-text/</a>	
10	Believing in Magic	Vyse, <i>Believing in Magic</i> , p.3-29.	
11	Primitive Religion	Watch clip; Edward Tylor, <i>Primitive Culture</i> , on occult sciences, pp. 112-159. (1871)	Take video quiz
12	Functional Religion	Emile Durkheim, <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> , pp.21-44. (1912)	
13	West African Witchcraft	Evans-Pritchard, <i>Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande</i> , (1937).	
14	Magic, Science, and Religion	Stark, "Reconceptualizing Religion, Science, and Magic," 101-120. (2001)	Response Paper 3 Due
15	Colonial Magic	Butler, "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage," 317-346.	
16	Black Magic	Yvonne Chireau, "Our Religion and Superstition Was All Mixed Up," 11-34.	
17	Magic and Pop Culture	Neumann, "Pop Goes Religion: Harry Potter meets Clifford Geertz," 81-100.	
18	Wicca Today	Sabina Magliocco, "Beyond Experience: Religion & Identity" in <i>Witching Culture</i> , 185-204.	
19	Magic and Technology	Bruxvoort, "Magic, Science, and the Ethics of Technology," 108-131.	Response Paper 4 Due
20	Potions	Watch clip; read Liu, "Of Flying Brooms and Sorcerers: Spell-castings, Love Potions, and Supernatural Plants."	
21	Divination and Alchemy	Watch clip; read Moore, "Divination – a new perspective," and Levere, "From Alchemy to Chemistry?"	
22	Ghosts in the Halls	Watch clip; read Bader, "The Thrill of the Haunt," in <i>Paranormal America</i> , 81-106.	
23	Care of Magical Creatures	Watch clip; read Bader, "Paranormal Subcultures," 129-161.	
24	Harry Potter: A History of Magic	Watch, <i>Harry Potter: A History of Magic</i> <a href="https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x676zap">https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x676zap</a>	

**The Fine Print** Regarding plagiarism: In accordance with the Honor Code, no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to: failure to acknowledge group collaborations, cheating, handing in duplicate papers, plagiarism, and improper citation. If you are unsure about how to properly credit someone else's work, please ask! Diversity Statement: Consistent with Randolph's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus. Accommodation of Disabilities: Randolph College is committed to providing learning experiences that are accessible for all students, and will make reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities. If you have a learning difference or a disability – mental health, medical, or physical impairment – please contact Diane Roy, Coordinator of Disability Services, in the Academic Services Center, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Lipscomb Library; at (434) 947-8132; or at [droy@randolphcollege.edu](mailto:droy@randolphcollege.edu). Email etiquette: I am happy to communicate with you via email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours during the week. If it's 3 AM and you're feeling panicked, angry, frustrated, or annoyed, that most likely is NOT a good time to send an email. Ever. To me or anyone else. Take this as an important life lesson. It will serve you well. If you are sure that your questions or comments are professional and appropriate, be sure to include these professional courtesies: 1. In the subject line please indicate the content of the email (not the single word URGENT or anything related) and 2. Begin your message in the following manner: Dear Professor Keegan... And finish with sincerely, best, thanks, etc. followed by your full name. Do the same for every professor you're in contact with! Professionalism goes a long way.