I. Course Description

By exploring topics such as video gaming, comic books/graphic novels, pop music, cinema, television, science fiction and technology this course will examine the relationship between Christian faith and popular culture, with a goal of providing students with an interpretative framework for Biblical and pastoral engagement with popular culture, to encourage appreciation for the role of the popular arts in ministry and community, and to improve preaching effectiveness.

Karen Swallow Prior (Liberty University) has noted that, “The word “culture” refers not only to the productions of a civilization but also to the conditions which cultivate the assumptions, beliefs, and actions of a people. Popular culture has never been more powerful or so formative in the lives of believers and nonbelievers alike. Thus the task of cultural exegesis—reading and interpreting cultural artifacts and trends—has never been more crucial to equipping the church leader or lay person in reaching, serving, and discipling within a faith community and beyond.”

Graduate Seminar Format

The course blends classroom, conference & live streaming modalities, with outside course content and assignments. *It facilitates distance students taking the course by limiting time on campus to only 1.5 days (May 31-June 1).* The remaining graduate seminars (June 8 & June 15) may be attended in person or by live streaming.

Pre-assignments to grade entry:
May 31 - August 23
Christian Faith & Popular Culture Conference June 1, 2018
Our plenary speaker will be Craig Detweiler, Ph.D., author of numerous books on the relationship between media, movies, technology and the Christian faith. He is currently president of the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. Craig’s most recent book is *Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age* (Brazos, 2018).

Conference registration: No cost to students registered in THS 691 for full credit.

II. Objectives
This course will help participants preach, counsel and witness more effectively by demonstrating a deeper understanding and Christian engagement with popular culture as it shapes our lives.

Specifically, this course will help students to:
1. Develop a personal theological model of approaching interpreting cultural trends and artifacts as a Christian leader.
2. Improve their preaching/teaching by critically interacting with theological/biblical issues or themes often embedded in the popular arts.
3. Cultivate an appreciation for the contribution and influence of pop culture on Church and society.

Disclaimer:
Assigned cultural materials for discussion/evaluation are carefully selected for the goals of the course. All are influential mainstream cultural artifacts, and some inclusion of visual and written material that may offend readers. Please note:
1. Cultural sources inclusion in course readings does not equal endorsement by the instructor. They are objects of study for aesthetic, critical and theological evaluation.
2. Some materials for this course may include viewing or reading influential cultural sources such as graphic novels (comics), music videos/lyrics, video games, contemporary fiction, television shows, online animation or movies, that portray contemporary morality, sexuality, and violence at variance with Christian beliefs. As the point is to engage with popular culture, this is inevitable.
3. Individuals with a history of pornography addiction, gaming addiction, or internet addiction, could feel “triggered” exploring some materials, and are advised to have in place appropriate supports and accountability, or consider not taking this course.

III. Required Materials
A. Theology and Popular Culture Interpretation


B. Cultural Materials

**Graphic Novel:**

**Popular Music of 2017:**
- *Scars to your beautiful*. Alessia Cara. Album: “Know it all,” Def Jam/UMG.

**Video Game** (Available at [http://store.steampowered.com/](http://store.steampowered.com/) )

**Young Adult Lit and Film:**

### IV. Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topics Explored</th>
<th>Assigned reading/listening/watching/playing</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Seminar I      | Biblical theology of Culture
Pop Culture Analysis Methods | *Popolgetics*
*Biblical Theology of Culture* | Theological Interpretation of Culture paper | 20 |
| May 31         |                                             |                                             |                                       |    |
| Conference     | Christian Faith & Popular Culture Conference
With Craig Detweiler |                                             |                                       |    |
| June 1         |                                             |                                             |                                       |    |
| Seminar II     | Social Media and Imago Dei
Pop Music | *Selfies*  
Selected pop songs | *Selfies* book review
Song interpretation | 15  
15 |
| June 8         |                                             |                                             |                                       |    |
| Seminar III    | Video Gaming
Graphic Novels | *That Dragon, Cancer or Firewatch Blankets* (graphic novel) | Video game analysis
*Blankets* interpretation | 15  
15 |
| June 15        |                                             |                                             |                                       |    |
| July 15        | Final Paper                                 | *Ready Player One* (novel & film)           | *Ready Player One* Interpretation     | 20 |
V. Course Assignments

**Pre-Assignments for Seminar One**  Thursday May 31, 6 pm – 9 pm

1. Theological Interpretation of Culture paper: Using key ideas from Turner and Edgar, describe how to theologically engage with popular culture. The last page should be a concise summary of your interpretive questions when exploring popular culture, identifying the core issues for both appreciation and discernment. 8-10 pages.  20 points.

**Christian Faith & Popular Culture Conference**  Friday June 1, 8:30 am -5:30 pm

2. Conference: Attend all five conference sessions taking notes on speakers and attend the class debrief at 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm.

**Seminar Two**  Friday June 8, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm  (live streaming available)

3. Read Detweiler’s *Selfies* and write a book review. Write a critical review of Detweiler’s book, noting his main ideas, points you disagree with, and how it relates to your own approach to cultural interpretation from your earlier paper. 6-8 pages.  15 points.


**Seminar Three**  June 15, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm  (live streaming available)

5. Game reaction/interpretation: Play the award winning indie game *That Dragon, Cancer* (approximately 2.5 hours) which deals with a family dealing with the crisis of pediatric cancer. Write a brief reflective paper on your gaming experience, bringing in course concepts. Reflective questions will be provided. 6-8 pages.  15 points.

Note: Students who have already played TDC may play *Firewatch* instead, and write a theological interpretation using their methodology instead.

6. Comic interpretation: Read Craig Thompson’s acclaimed graphic novel *Blankets* and using your theological interpretation method and course materials analyze the book’s themes about coming of age, identity, belonging and loss of faith. 6-8 pages.  15 points.

7. Interpretation of *Ready Player One*: Using your theological interpretation method and course materials, interpret Ernest Cline’s young adult novel *Ready Player One* and Speilberg’s film. 8-10 pages. 20 points.
COURSE EVALUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Class: Theological Interpretation of Popular Culture paper</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfies book review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop Song Analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic novel <em>Blankets</em> Analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videogame Analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Class: <em>Ready Player One</em> Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students wishing written material to be returned to them will provide a self-addressed stamped, large manila envelope to the instructor.

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 70</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix: Recommended Materials of Interest

Graphic Novels

*The Sandman, Vol. 4: Season of the Mists*, by Neil Gaiman. This is a story cycle from about ten issues of the comic in the mid-1990s with strong echoes of Milton’s Paradise Lost. Gaiman has become one of the most acclaimed fiction writers in the world, with award-winning comics, short stories and novels.


Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi. Pantheon, 2000. A moving autobiographical account of life in and escape from Iran. It has also been made into an animated film, which was nominated for an academy award (2007).

Music

Online discussion of the work of Christian rapper, Lacrae:

Survey of major Christian rappers:
http://christianmusic.about.com/od/rapandhiphop/tp/Christian-Rappers.htm

Best albums of 2015:

Recommended Books:


Supplement: Important Academic Notes from ACTS

Web Support – Student Portal  https://students.twu.ca

All students at TWU have a TWUPass username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application or can be managed through the computing services help desk or the link on the student portal. Your student email account is also available through this student portal and is vital for communication about grades, account statements, lost passwords, sign-up instructions, etc. If you do not know your account or password, there is a link at the login area called “I forgot my password.” When you click on that link, you will be walked through the process of retrieving your account information.

Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to the following radio stations: CKNW (980 AM), CKWX (1130 AM), STAR FM (107.1 FM), PRAISE (106.5 FM) and KARI (550 AM). As well, an announcement will be placed on the University’s campus closure notification message box (604.513.2147) and on the front page of the University’s website (http://www.twu.ca – also see http://www.twu.ca/conditions for more details).

An initial announcement regarding the status of the campus and cancellation of classes will be made at 6:00 a.m. and will cover all classes that begin before 1:00 p.m. A second announcement pertaining to classes that begin between 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. will be made at 11:00 a.m. A third announcement pertaining to classes that begin after 5:00 p.m. will be made at 3:00 p.m.

Paper Formatting

Students need to adhere to Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format except in counselling courses, for which APA format is used, and in CanIL courses.

Students are strongly encouraged to use EndNote Basic/Web (available through the library home page www.twu.ca/library - lower left) as their bibliographical manager and as a tool for formatting bibliographies. It is free. The link to EndNote from the library home page provides detailed instructions. Students will need to be aware that it is necessary to “clean up” most bibliographies generated by this program. Students are encouraged to view the documents on the following websites for format samples:

http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html or
www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/. In EndNote Basic/Web the available formatting styles are those of Turabian Bibliography, and APA 6th edition. For Turabian, there are two formats – Notes (Bibliography) and Reference List (a short format citation style). ACTS uses the Notes (Bibliography) format, not Reference List.

Counselling students are expected to purchase the APA Publications Manual. More information may be found at the following website:

For free online programs that will enable students to create properly formatted bibliography citations, they should go to http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/ (“Chicago” stands for “Turabian”) or http://www.sourceaid.com/citationbuilder/
CANIL students can locate this on the CANIL intranet, under the “student” side. More information is given to incoming students in the fall. **Please check with your professor to find out which style he/she recommends you use!!**

**Course Evaluations**
Course evaluations are important for improving teaching outcomes, faculty professional development, and the student learning context. Completion of course evaluations is, therefore, considered to be a course expectation. Professors will schedule time for students to fill out online course evaluations (20-30 minutes) on their personal laptops or a collegium computer during the last scheduled class of the semester. Students who are absent that day or who are otherwise unable to complete the online course evaluation during the last class will be expected to make every effort to do so by the last day of exams. Information about how to access online evaluation forms will be provided to the faculty and students prior to the last week of classes by the ACTS Administration.

**Research Ethics**
Please note that all research projects involving human participants undertaken by members of the TWU university community (including projects done by ACTS students to satisfy course or degree requirements) **MUST** be approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board. Information and forms may be found at [http://www.twu.ca/research/research/research-ethics/default.html](http://www.twu.ca/research/research/research-ethics/default.html). Those needing additional clarification may contact the ACTS Academic Dean’s office. Please allow at least three (3) weeks from the date of submission for a review of the application.

**Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU**
Christian scholars at TWU regard academic integrity to be a core value. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and are required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship. This means that all members of the TWU academic community must avoid all forms of plagiarism and cheating in scholarly work. TWU has a strict policy on plagiarism (see academic calendar 2008-09, pp. 37-38). Further details on this subject are contained in the ACTS Student Handbook in section 4.12. The handbook is available online on the ACTS webpage ([www.acts.twu.ca](http://www.acts.twu.ca)) at the following link: [http://acts.twu.ca/community/student-handbook-2011-12.pdf](http://acts.twu.ca/community/student-handbook-2011-12.pdf).

Learning what constitutes plagiarism and avoiding it is the student’s responsibility. An excellent resource in this regard has been prepared by TWU Librarian William Badke and is freely available for download (PPT file) or can be viewed in flash (self-running) tutorials of different lengths:

- [http://acts.twu.ca/library/plagiarism.ppt](http://acts.twu.ca/library/plagiarism.ppt)
- [http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism.swf](http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism.swf) (14 minute flash tutorial)
- [http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism_Short.swf](http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism_Short.swf) (8 minute flash tutorial)

**Equity of Access**
Students with disabilities who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Equity of Access Office upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All disabilities must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and such documentation should include a statement regarding the educational impact of the disability along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Equity of Access Office outlined on the TWU