

# **REL 200: Harry Potter and Religion**

**Summer 2015**

**Chris Ghan**

**Office Hours:**

1-2pm, Tuesday and Thursday, WH 203 or contact by e-mail any time,

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## **Course Readings**

*Harry Potter* series 1, 4, and 7 by J. K. Rowling

*How Harry Cast his Spell* by John Granger

## **Course Description**

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is one of the most significant literary phenomena of the past century, enjoying massive sales and success among readers of all ages. However, there is more to the series than merely the adventures of a boy wizard; the *Harry Potter* books contain numerous themes, motifs and references which draw on a rich history of religion, myth, and folklore.

The purpose of this course is to explore those ideas and the ways in which J. K. Rowling wove them into and used them to enrich her storytelling. This course will provide students with not only a greater understanding of a beloved novel series, but also with a broad grounding in numerous religious and mythological traditions and the ways in which they have influenced literature and our own thinking. While we will focus primarily on the first, fourth, and seventh *Harry Potter* books, the entire series' plotline will be discussed and analyzed, so be aware if you haven't read them already!

## **Teaching Philosophy**

I believe that the classroom/online setting should promote, encourage and support an environment conducive to the sharing of knowledge and various experiences. Teachers should facilitate a learning process that encompasses a

variety of methods to ensure that all students gain knowledge and insight into the subject matter explored. This course offers a combination of techniques, including discussion and written reflection, to help students gain a broader understanding of important religious, mythological, and cultural concepts through the lense of a popular literary series. It is my intention to help guide students to a better understanding of multiculturalism and human diversity through the promotion of a collaborative community.

### **Assessments and Assignments**

2 essays; Essay #1 to discuss religious themes and ideas as depicted in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Essay #2 to discuss the depiction of Arthurian themes and the quest for the Holy Grail in the series in general and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* in particular. Essays will be expected to be between 3-5 pages in length. 50 points each.

Message board discussion participation via Moodle; students must post (?) *meaningful* comments on the week's topics. 50 points possible.

Final exam, seven essay questions covering the entire course. 70 points possible.

220 points total.

### **Goals**

*To explore the ways in which the world's religious and mythological traditions are reflected within the Harry Potter novels.*

*To understand the ways in which religious ideas may be found and analyzed within popular literature.*

### **Objectives**

Compare the content of the *Harry Potter* series with ideas present in the world's religious traditions.

Apply an understanding of religious ideas to identify and explain their presence within the novels and their meaning.

Evaluate how a writer such as J. K. Rowling may use religious or mythological ideas and/or motifs to enrich and add depth to storytelling.

To develop the skills necessary to recognize and interpret religious ideas present in literature in general.

**Week 1:** Introduction to the *Harry Potter* series, introduction to the course, discussion of books 1-2, what is “magic”, essay 1 assigned (end of week). Begin reading *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

**Week 2:** Discussion of book 3, discussion of classical and Egyptian mythology, discussion of alchemy, essay 1 due.

**Week 3:** Discussion of book 4, discussion of Arthurian mythos, discussion of divination. Begin reading *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

**Week 4:** Discussion of book 5, discussion of Norse/Celtic mythology, discussion of Christianity and Judaism, essay 2 assigned

**Week 5:** Discussion of books 6-7, discussion of Buddhism and Hinduism (and Zoroastrianism?), discussion of good and evil, essay 2 due. Begin reading *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

**Week 6:** Discussion of religious reactions to the books, discussion of death/immortality, overall conclusions, review for final.

### **Note**

Any student who feels he or she may need an accomodation based on a disability should contact me at their earliest convenience to discuss their needs and potential accomodations.

### **Class Netiquette**

It is important to maintain a safe and positive learning environment. All students must show tolerance and respect for one another while interacting on the

discussion forums in order to maintain an environment in which we will be most capable of learning from one another.