



UNCO 1301.07E

STAR WARS: THE COURSE AWAKENS

SPRING 2019



Instructor: Professor John Howard Smith

Class Time / Location: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 10:00-10:50 a.m./Hall of Languages 203

Office Location: Ferguson Social Sciences 117

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., or by appointment

University Email Address: John.Smith@tamuc.edu

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Prerequisite/Co-requisite: None

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Textbooks Required:

Joseph Campbell (with Bill Moyers), *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.
ISBN10 0-385-41886-8

Cass R. Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.
ISBN13 978-0-06-248422-2

The Movies:

Students will need to have access to copies of all eight canonical *Star Wars* films, or otherwise be familiar with the plot and certain details about them, as there will only be time to view short excerpts during class meetings. However, lectures and discussions will largely be limited to material from episodes IV, V, and VI, with some discussion of episodes VII and VIII.

Course Description:

Signature Courses at Texas A&M University-Commerce connect first-year students with distinguished faculty members in unique and engagement learning environments. By way of this rigorous intellectual experience, students will develop college-level skills in communication, critical thinking, and social responsibility.

Star Wars: The Course Awakens takes students on a journey to explore the philosophical, religious, historical and mythological material found in the *Star Wars* universe, particularly the sources of such concepts as the Force, the Jedi and Sith orders, and themes of enlightenment, morality, depravity, and redemption as depicted in the films and in some of the literature. The status of *Star Wars* as an American myth will also be explored, as well as the development of belief in the Force as an emerging religious belief in the twenty-first century.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. In written, oral, and/or visual communication, students will communicate in a manner appropriate to audience and occasion, with an evident message and organizational structure.
2. Students will be able to analyze, evaluate, or solve problems when given a set of circumstances, data, texts, or art.
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of societal and/or civic issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS**Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments**

This course consists of a series of activities and assessments to assist students in achieving the outcomes/objectives for the course and instructional units/modules. Each week students will work on various combinations of readings, discussions, and research.

Attendance & Participation: (100 pts., 40% of course grade)

Student Learning Outcomes nos. 1, 2, & 3:

Students are required to attend all class meetings, except in cases of circumstances beyond a student's control that will be excused by the instructor when the absence can be documented and verified. Participation in class discussions is intended to allow students to discuss issues pertaining to the topics at hand, and will serve to inform the Instructor about how well students are absorbing course content. Students will be divided into four or five alphabetically determined discussion groups, which will meet with a graduate assistant on designated Friday class meetings for conversation about the readings and lecture materials (see Course Schedule below). A significant portion of the participation grade will derive from engagement in these sessions.

Quizzes: (10 pts. each, 30% of course grade)

Student Learning Outcomes nos. 1, 2, & 3:

The quizzes will be randomly administered throughout the course—usually once per week—and each will cover some aspect of the course lecture from the previous meeting, or readings assigned for that day. They will take approximately five minutes or less to take.

Final Project: (100 pts., 30% of course grade, except as noted below)

Student Learning Outcomes nos. 1, 2, & 3:

The final project will be the undertaking of an endeavor chosen from the options listed below.

Option 1: Original composition of a “sacred text” that could plausibly exist in the *Star Wars* universe, from which either the Jedi, Sith, or Grey Jedi (Revanite) theologies could be derived. Being at least 3,000 words, but no more than 5,000 words in length, this text must show influences from one or more of the actual mythological and/or religious systems discussed in the course readings and class lectures, in addition to any others of the student’s choosing (pending approval by the Instructor beforehand).

Option 2: The composition of a scholarly analysis of some aspect of the *Star Wars* mythos as it correlates to one or more of the actual mythological and/or religious systems discussed in the course readings and class lectures. This essay must range in length from 3,000 to 5,000 words, and include direct references to the course readings, the *Star Wars films*, class lectures (if and when relevant), and additional materials (see below).

Option 3: The composition of an in-depth analytical review of **one** of the following films—Episodes IV through VII—that proves how it succeeds or fails at replicating a mythic cycle, or some major part of a mythic cycle (i.e., *The Iliad*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Norse Eddas*, etc.), as well as the saga’s own “cycle”. This essay must range in length from 3,000 to 5,000 words, and include direct references to the course readings, the *Star Wars films*, class lectures (if and when relevant), and additional materials (see below).

Option 4: Participation in a three-way theological/philosophical debate between teams of Jedi, Sith, and Neutral (Revanite) Force users, over which best encompasses the true nature of the Force. Each team will be comprised of 5 students, who will meet outside of class to discuss strategy and assemble their arguments. Specific instructions for the debates will be issued at a later date in the semester. The debate will take place during the “Lionizing” event held during Finals Week at the Rayburn Student Center, at a date later to be determined. Each team will also submit a 3,000-to-5,000-word essay detailing their theological/philosophical position, the grade for which will be shared be all members. **This project is limited to no more than 15 students, and participation in this option is strictly on a first-come, first-served basis.**

Note: Submission of a Final Project is an absolute course requirement. Failure to submit a Final Project in the absence of insurmountable, and documented, circumstances beyond a student’s control will result in failure of the course.

Grading

Grading will be calculated using a standard 10-point scale, with course elements weighted accordingly:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

Attendance & Participation (100 pts.) = 40% of course grade

Quizzes (10 pts. each) = 30% of course grade

Final Project (100 pts.) = 30% of course grade

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are links to the technical requirements:

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

Interaction with Instructor Statement:

Office hours are given at the top of this syllabus, and are posted outside of my door. Arrangements can be made if a student cannot meet with me during regular office hours for consultations. Email is the most reliable method of reaching me outside of my office. Expect a reply within 24 to 36 hours. Students may also be able to reach me by phone during office hours. In the event that a student leaves a voicemail, do not leave a callback number, but rather send an email or wait to see me during office hours.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Academic Honesty

It is the policy of the University, the History Department, and the instructor that no form of plagiarism or cheating will be tolerated. Plagiarism is defined as the deliberate use of another's work and claiming it as one's own. This means ideas as well as text, whether paraphrased or presented verbatim (word-for-word). **Anyone caught cheating or plagiarizing will automatically fail the assignment in question, may summarily fail the course, and could be subject to disciplinary action by the University.**

*The instructor's evaluative judgment of tests and examinations is **final**, and will not be subject to revision except in cases of mathematical error. **Grades are not subject to negotiation.***

Class Decorum

All students must show respect toward the Instructor and the Instructor's syllabus, presentations, assignments, and point of view. Students should also respect each others' differences. If the Instructor determines that a student is not being respectful toward other students or the Instructor, or is otherwise behaving in an inappropriate manner, or in any way poses a threat to the Instructor's or classmates' safety, it is the Instructor's prerogative to remove the student from the class either temporarily or permanently, as the case requires. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail in the [Student Guidebook](#).

Note: Failure to comply with any of the Instructor's policies will result in immediate deregistration from the course.

"Campus Carry" Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. **Pursuant to Penal Code 46.035 and Texas A&M University-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.** For a list of locations, please refer to (<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>) and/or consult your event organizer. **Pursuant to Penal Code 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses.** Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

University Specific Procedures:

Texas A&M-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

PART I: A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY. . . .**Jan. 14-18 Introductions / The Cultural Background of *Star Wars*, 1935-1977**

Jan. 14: Getting Acquainted

Jan. 16: From Buck Rogers to Luke Skywalker

Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, Introduction and chap. 1

Jan. 19: *Star Wars* (1977)

Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, chap. 2

Jan. 21-25 The Original Trilogy, 1977-1983

Jan. 21: MLK Holiday—No Class

Jan. 23: *Star Wars—The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)

Jan. 25: *Star Wars—Return of the Jedi* (1983)

PART II: HISTORY**Jan. 28-Feb. 1 Empires and Rebellions**

Jan. 28: Rome from Republic to Empire, 509 BCE-450 CE

Jan. 30: The “Dark Ages” in Europe and the Quest for a New Rome, 450-1250

Feb. 1: A New Rome in the West: The American Revolution, 1775-1815

Feb. 4-8 The United States from Republic to Empire, 1815-1975

Feb. 4: From the Civil War to the “War to End All Wars”, 1861-1918

Feb. 6: World War II, 1939-1945

Feb. 8: The Cold War, Korea, and Vietnam, 1945-1975

PART III: MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION**Feb. 11-15 Myth and the Modern World**

Feb. 11: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, Introduction and chap. 1 (pp. 1-28 [stop at “brotherhood of all of these beings”])

Feb. 13: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 1 (pp. 28-43)

Feb. 15: Group Discussions

Feb. 18-22 The Journey Inward

Feb. 18: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 2 (pp. 44-69 [stop at “the Thomas gospel”])

Feb. 20: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 2 (pp. 69-85)

Feb. 22: Group Discussions

Feb.25-Mar. 1 Storytellers

Feb. 25: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 3 (pp. 86-100 [stop at “That is the big question”])

Feb. 27: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 3 (pp. 100-112)

Mar. 1: Group Discussions

Mar. 4-8 Sacrifice and Bliss

Mar. 4: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 4 (pp. 113-134 [stop at “to be the goods of our life”])

Mar. 6: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 4 (pp. 134-150)

Mar. 8: Group Discussions

Mar. 11-15 The Hero’s Adventure

Mar. 11: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 5 (pp. 151-188 [stop at “selfhood already achieved”])

Mar. 13: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 5 (pp. 188-206)

Mar. 15: Group Discussions

Mar. 18-22: SPRING BREAK**Mar. 25-29 The Gift of the Goddess**

Mar. 25: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 6 (pp. 207-220 [stop at “servant to the heart”])

Mar. 27: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 6 (pp. 220-230)

Mar. 29: Group Discussions

Apr. 1-5 Love and Marriage

Apr. 1: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 7 (pp. 231-248 [stop at “What was the matter with them?”])

Apr. 3: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 7 (pp. 248-257)

Apr. 5: Group Discussions

Apr. 8-12 Masks of Eternity

Apr. 8: Part I

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 8 (pp. 258-276 [stop at “doing a perfect job”])

Apr. 9: Part II

Readings: Campbell, *Power of Myth*, chap. 8 (pp. 276-287)

Apr. 12: Group Discussions

Apr. 15-19 Star Wars as American Myth, Part IApr. 15: What Makes *Star Wars* Great?Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, chaps. 3-4

Apr. 17: A Question of Fate

Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, chaps. 5-6

Apr. 19: Group Discussions

Apr. 22-26 Star Wars as American Myth, Part II

Apr. 22: Government, Coercion, and Rebellion

Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, chaps. 7-8

Apr. 24: A Mythos for Our Time

Readings: Sunstein, *The World According to Star Wars*, chaps. 9-10

Apr. 26: Group Discussions

Apr. 29-May 3 The Fandom Menace: Star Wars as Religion and PoliticsApr. 29: Loving and Hating *The Force Awakens*May 1: Loving and Hating *The Last Jedi*

May 3: Course Evaluations

May TBD Lionizing Event—Rayburn Student Center**May 10 All Writing Assignments Due**

Instructions for All Writing Assignments

The papers must conform to the following physical parameters:

Processed using MS Word in 12 pt. Times New Roman font
 1-inch margins all around, and double-spacing of the text
 3,000 to 5,000 words in length (*not* including the bibliography)
 All sources must be cited using in-text (parenthetical) citation, MLA, APA style
 There must be a bibliography of works cited at the end of the paper
 No title page(s)
 All pages must be numbered somewhere in the top header

Concerning Turnitin

All students will be required to submit their Final Project to a D2L dropbox, which will automatically run it through Turnitin (www.turnitin.com), a web-based plagiarism detection program. It scours the Worldwide Web and its database of all submissions (over 135 million so far) for evidence of “lifted” material indicative of plagiarism. It generates a report that notes the percentage of material that appears in other places, and highlights all examples along with the sources from which they came. I do not employ this service based on a prior assumption of guilt or nefariousness on the student's part, but rather as an aid to students learning how to avoid committing overt and incidental plagiarism, and students are asked to trust me to know how to use this service wisely and without prejudice. Please see Turnitin's FAQ page for answers to how the service works, after which you may consult with me for further information and assurances.

Further Reading and Viewing Material for the Particularly Nerdy and Obsessed (great for writing the papers, too!)

Books

Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching* (any version will do)

Various, *The Upanishads* (any version will do)

Various, *The Holy Bible* (any version will do)

Mohammed, *The Holy Qur'an* (any version will do)

Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (1957)

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (1968)

Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (updated ed., 1999)

Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl, eds., *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful than You Can Possibly Imagine* (2005)

Films

Kevin Burns (dir.), *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy* (2004)

Alexandre O. Philippe (dir.), *The People vs. George Lucas* (2011)