

**TEACHING STATEMENT**  
**SHEILA F. WINBORNE**

*“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence.”*

*-bell hooks*

I am committed to interdisciplinary education in religion, philosophy, race, and film. My goals include gathering and presenting materials in a different light to provoke critical analyses, insights, and new creations to aid students in contemplating how individuals and the wider human collective may develop more conscious, compassionate, and ethical interactions. This includes exploring how popular films reflect and influence viewers’ worldviews.

Since 2015 I have contributed to the Religious Studies curriculum in the Department of Philosophy and Religion by offering courses on film, race, and social justice. I created new courses and significantly revised an existing course (“Apocalypticism in Film”) that is one of the most popular courses at Northeastern. Each fall and spring, I teach this course both in the classroom and online. In addition, I also teach “The Problem of Evil in Film,” “Science Fiction and Film: Moral Dilemmas and Ethical Analysis,” and as an affiliated member in the Africana Studies Program, the cross-listed course “Race and Religion in Film.” I have consistently received excellent scores on my annual merit reviews for teaching as well as student evaluations.

Of the Department of Philosophy and Religion’s religious studies faculty, I teach the largest number of students each year. I have introduced over 2800 Northeastern undergraduates to religious studies as it relates to philosophy, race, and film. The majority of the students I teach are engineering and computer science majors. I consistently teach over 100 students during each fall and spring and continually exceed my required course load by teaching over 60 students in two summer courses. My courses consistently have waitlists.

I embrace what I refer to as a pedagogy of “the Other.” This involves exploring with students questions such as: *What does it mean to be human with god-like powers to create systems that support defining and representing some humans as “the Other”? What does it mean to be defined as a fully valued human versus as a less valued human or disposable body? Is slavery less of a moral concern when the slaves are represented as machines, animals such as apes, extraterrestrial aliens, or zombies? Why are the ways we believe we should live often counter to the ways we do live?*

The courses I teach focus on human tragedy during times of destructive change and how history relates to contemporary ways of believing and acting. While analyzing films of the apocalyptic, science fiction, horror, and historical period genres, I invite students to see the familiar through a new lens. During first classes, I guide students in using a critical lens to interpret normative messages about

religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and sexuality as represented in a sample set of clips from Disney films. I highlight how the film industry as a for profit business presents messages embedded within films for children that are not so different from the normative messages represented about “the Other” in films intended for more mature audiences. We critically analyze how American and European filmmakers represent the West in relation to other regions of the world. This is done within an understanding that there is a specific type of interpretative literacy involved in viewing and analyzing films.

I embrace a pluralistic religious studies framework that interrelates with philosophy, African-American studies, and film studies. I present a sample selection of scholarly theories, while giving attention to film as a medium and language form in its own right that is not necessarily secondary to the written and oral. In that students have different life experiences and worldviews, I stress that within a pluralistic approach all voices are welcome, with respect for cultural and intellectual differences. Students and I work together as inclusive communities, while exploring how the following are addressed in course materials: good versus evil, social justice, and systemic inequalities supported by stereotypical representations. Students support their critical analyses of visual, written, and oral texts with informed, thoughtful, and organized evidence-based research.

Goals include providing students with opportunities to improve their abilities to complete argumentative papers, discussion board postings, close deconstructive readings of scholarly writings, critical analyzes of films, group work, and formal presentations. I share reasons why argumentative writing can help students carefully examine and support their own and others’ ideas.

With awareness that students have preferred ways of learning and communicating, I present written, visual, auditory, and multimedia texts. Students have the option of creating individual or group final projects in a medium of their choice. A few of the types of original final projects completed are short films, graphic novels, illustrated children’s books, screenplays, poetry, music, video games, fine art paintings, surveys and interviews about the diversity within the religious landscape at Northeastern and beyond. Specific examples include: (1) an apocalyptic themed figure skating performance; (2) the writing and performance of an original play based on the book of Revelation.

In the course “Science Fiction and Film,” students in small groups design and present their concepts of future societies that may be on earth or beyond while considering questions such as: *How and why will they design the look of your envisioned society? What will be the structures of major institutionalized systems? What will be the ethical and moral justifications for each agreed upon choice?* Completed examples include: (1) design majors who created images of a future federation of planets with different major institutional systems located on each planet connected by teletransportation portals; (2) linguistics majors who used their collective knowledge of linguistics to create a new inclusive societal language. These projects reflect my commitment to empowering students to create new visions of human inter-relating in the context of the divine and “the Other.”