

**Special Topics in Religious Studies: Studies in Witchcraft and the Occult**  
University of Texas at El Paso  
Department of Religious Studies  
Spring 2023

**Instructor:** Dr. Glen J. Fairen

**Time:** N/A

**Room:** N/A

**Office:** Somewhere in the wilds of Oklahoma....

**Office Hours:** N/A...just email me. I am always around.

**E-Mail:** gjfairen@utep.edu

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**Course Description:**

It is your responsibility as a student to ensure that you have the appropriate prerequisite for the course.

**Course Objectives and Expected Learning Outcomes:**

This course will NOT teach you how to use magic, or about the hidden history of the Earth Goddess or how to spot “Satanism” or the “Occult”...as fun as that may all be. What this course WILL try to do is--from a methodologically atheistic and skeptical position--explore the category of “witchcraft” and the “occult” on two general levels. One, what kinds of people, ideas and human productions are associated with witchcraft and the occult? How do these activities fit into their broader historical, social, and cultural contexts, and why are people interested in them? In other words, what makes a witch a witch and what makes what they do witchy or occultish? Two, how do people (including scholars) use the terms “witchcraft” and “occult” to classify people and human activities in various contexts? What conceptual work--either positive or negative--do these terms do for them? How useful are concepts like witchcraft and occult for those of us interested in understanding religion as a human production (i.e., those of us engaging in Religious Studies)?

In order to address these questions, we will be looking at several historical periods and geographical locations--such as ancient Greece, medieval Europe, contemporary North America, and contemporary Africa--to see how these terms are used, and what discursive tidbits are being smuggled in by people when they use them. By the end of the course, students should:

1. Be able to describe, compare, and assess various scholarly and non-scholarly definitions of those social constructions that have been classed as “witchcraft” and the “occult.”
2. Be able to discuss these constructions within their historical, social, cultural and discursive context.
3. Be able to discuss witchcraft and occult practices as ordinary aspects of human culture, i.e., utilize methods common to Religious Studies.
4. Develop a critical and scholarly attitude in discussions of witchcraft and the occult.

**Course Format** The objective of the course will be learned from a combination of formal lectures, assigned readings and audiovisual materials.

**Textbooks: None.** I will provide all material.

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Jan 17-22</b>	Introduction: Witches and Priests, Magic and Religion, the Occult and Piety: General Concerns, Questions and issues of Classification		
<b>Jan 23-Feb5</b>	The Ancient World: Greco-Roman Magic and Simon Magus	Russell "Witchcraft" Smith "Trading Places"	
<b>Feb 6-19</b>	Middle Ages Magic.	Stein and Stein "Magic" Kleckhefer. "Common Traditions of Medieval Magic"	
<b>Feb 20-March 5</b>	The Witch Hunts / Salem		<b>Midterm 1 (Feb 27-March 3)</b>
<b>March 6-12</b>	Witchcraft in Africa	Jackson "The Witch as a Category and a Person"	
<b>March 20-26</b>	19th Century Occult	Truzzi "Definitions and Dimensions of the Occult" von Struckrad "19th Century Occult"	
<b>March 27-April 9</b>	Modern Pagans and the Nostalgic past. Wicca	Lincoln "Myth, Sentiment and the Construction of Social Forms." Luhmann "Goat and Gazelle" Lewis.	<b>Midterm 2 (April 3-7)</b>
<b>April 10-23</b>	Nazism and the Construction of the "Occult."		
<b>April 24-May 7</b>	Harry Potter and Dungeons and Dragons	Cockrell "Harry Potter and the Witch Hunters." Berger and Ezzy "Mass Media and Religious Identity." Hjelm "Between Satan and Harry Potter: Legitimizing Wicca in Finland." Laycock "Dangerous games: what the moral panic over role-playing games says about play, religion, and imagined worlds." (Selected Readings that I will upload)	<b>Final Exam (May 8-12)</b>

Please also note. There is no text book(s) for this class. All the readings will be provided for you. So it shouldn't be a problem to have had read each assigned reading BEFORE the beginning of the class in which its topic is being covered. So for example, the readings for Topic 2 NEED to be done before the class in which we will be covering "The Ancient World: Greco-Roman Magic and Simon Magus."

**Assignment / Test Breakdown.**

Midterm 1	Feb 27 (12:01 AM)-March 3 (11:59 PM)	30%
Midterm 2	April 3 (12:01 AM)April 7 (11:59 PM)	30%
Final Exam	May 8 (12:01 AM)- May 12 (11:59 PM)	40%

**Grading:**

Marks for tests and exams are given in percentages, to which letter grades are also assigned, according to the table below. The percentage mark resulting from the entire term work and examination then produces the final letter grade for the course.

**Grading Scale**

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Points
90-100%	A	4.0
80-89%	B	3.0
70-79%	C	2.0
60-69%	D	1.0
0-59%	F	0.0

**Academic Standing and Integrity:**

**“Academic Integrity**

The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards.

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#) (HOP) (available through the [Dean of Students Office](#)) may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.” (“Academic Standing,” for more information, please visit <http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=61879&submenuheader=1>)

### **Policy for Late Assignments:**

Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Otherwise, if you miss an exam window there is very little I can do...

### **Special Needs**

If you have a disability and require special needs classroom accommodations, please contact *The Center for Accommodations and Support Services* Monday through Friday 8:00a.m. – 5:00p.m. at the Union East Room 106. You can also reach the center by phone at (915) 747-5148 or by email: [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu)