

SCAR 2SG3 – SPIRITS, GHOSTS, AND DEMONS Fall 2021

Instructor: Jeremy Cohen

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Office Hours: By Appointment via Teams

Lecture: Asynchronous + Optional live lecture via Teams

Course: Course materials and assignments via Avenue



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Course Overview

■ Land Acknowledgement

I recognize and acknowledge that McMaster University is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement.

■ Course Information

This course offers an introductory examination of spirits, ghosts, and demons. Some questions we explore together include:

- What explains the widespread belief in the paranormal?
- How can we make sense of claims of paranormal experiences (hauntings, possessions, psychics)?
- How does gender, sexuality, race, and religion relate to the paranormal?

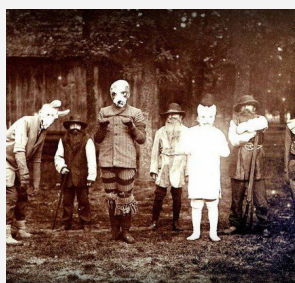
Some topics we cover include: hauntings, spirit and demon possession, witch trials, the Satanic Panic phenomenon, Jewish and Muslim folklore, Queer ghost hunters, spirit channeling, and android (robot) ghosts.

You will learn to evaluate the paranormal, including attempts to explain paranormal phenomena, from a critical, social-scientific perspective.



Course Objectives

This is an introductory course on spirits, ghosts, and demons, offered by the Department of Religious Studies. I do not assume you have any prior knowledge of the topics discussed or any background in the social scientific study of religion. All are welcome!



■ Introductory Survey

To provide you with an introductory survey of selected aspects of the cultural, historical, political, and religious considerations related to spirits, ghosts, and demons.

■ Interdisciplinarity

To unpack the complex power dynamics around gender, class, race, and religion with respect to the paranormal and paranormal experiences.

■ Critical Thinking

To cultivate your analytical, reflective, and critical thinking skills. This includes re-evaluating your assumptions about explanations for paranormal experiences.

■ Empathy

To articulate the power of empathy by focusing on our shared collective humanity.

Course Delivery

You are responsible for completing all the assigned weekly readings and watching the posted video lectures and films. These prepare you for the course assignments.

PowerPoint slides are made available with the video lectures each week.

■ Course Delivery

- Asynchronous + Optional Live Lecture
- Lectures recorded using Microsoft Teams
- Assignments and readings on Avenue
- **Tutorials:** Optional monthly Q&A and writing workshop

■ Required Texts

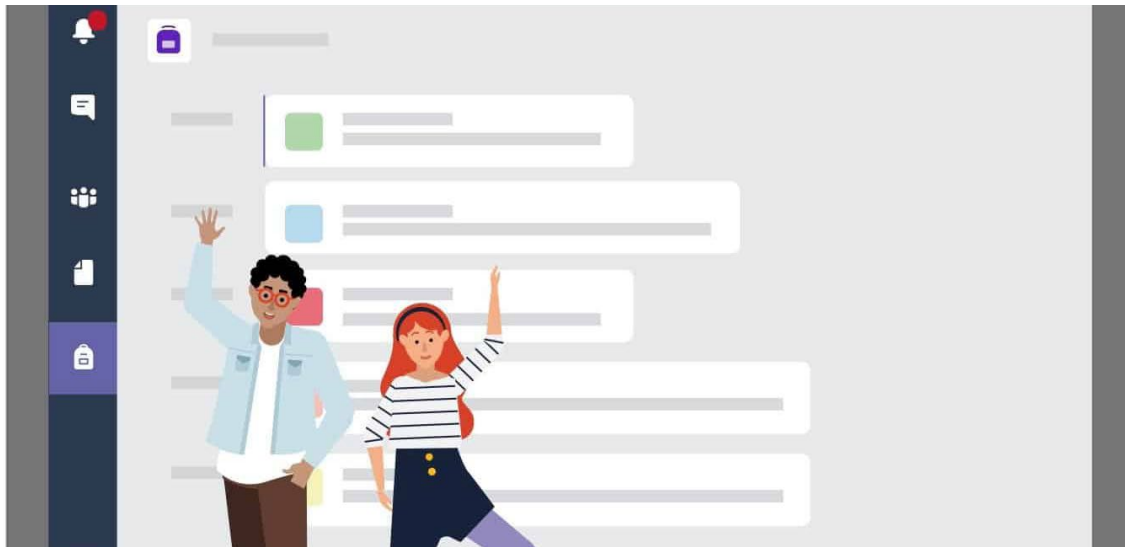
- Journal Articles via McMaster Library
- Book chapters are on Avenue
- Videos are all publically available



Folk tales, fairy tales, religion, the occult - these are the things I'm most passionate about, even more than cinema. And I'm very passionate about cinema. - Robert Eggers



Lecture Information



■ Asynchronous Through Teams

This course is offered asynchronously. The lectures are recorded using Microsoft Teams, and can be watched at any time through Avenue or Teams.

Students will be automatically enrolled in Teams.

- **Quick start PDF:** [Click Here](#)

■ Meetings & Workshops

Teams allows us to communicate, run workshops, view and participate in lectures, and stay in touch in one location.

All meetings with myself and TAs are scheduled through Microsoft Teams (accessible through Avenue).

■ Optional Live Lectures

The lectures are recorded live most weeks through Teams, and you are encouraged to join. The live lectures are opportunities to meet other students, ask me questions, and engage with the course material. The live lecture is completely optional.

Once recorded, the lectures are accessible through the Teams app, and on Avenue.

The schedule for live lectures is on the Teams and Avenue calendars.

Course Assignments



■ Introduction & Midterm Check-In (10%)

Introduce yourself to the class and answer some questions about yourself and your learning objectives. Details on Avenue.

Due Date: September 20th, 2021 (5%)

With your Introduction and course material in mind, write a short reflection about your learning progress so far, unclear concepts, challenging readings, and your goals moving forward.

Due Date: October 18th, 2021 (5%)



■ Experience Assignment (15%)

At the beginning of the course, I will anonymously poll students about their beliefs in the paranormal, ghosts, angels, spirits, and demons. Write a short reflection based on the results of the poll, and on your own experiences.

Due Date: October 3rd, 2021



■ Q & A Reflection (35%)

On November 8th, we will meet an expert on the study of Satanism in North America! Come up with 3 questions for our guest based on what you have learned in the course so far. Write a short reflection based on the interview and course material.

Q&A Questions Due (10%): November 1st

Reflection Due (25%): November 26th



■ Moral Panics - Final Assignment (40%)

Choose and research a “moral panic” case study. This can include witch trials, mass spirit possession, the Satanic Panic, or even the Q-Anon phenomenon. Write a response that offers a brief explanation of your chosen ‘case,’ and outlines your perspective on how the ‘case’ can be examined from a social scientific perspective.

Creative proposals are welcome! (podcasts, videos, etc).

Details and Due Date: TBD

2SG3 VIRTUAL HAPPY HOUR



■ Virtual Happy Hour(s)

During the semester, we will hold Virtual Happy Hours where we can discuss anything related to the course, religion, the paranormal, and life generally.

The Happy Hours are informal opportunities for us to connect with each other over video, and to talk about the weird, the occult, and the paranormal in a safe and welcoming environment.

Snacking highly encouraged!

This is an optional, extracurricular event. It will not be recorded!

Weekly Schedule

MODULE 1: FRAMINGS

■ Week One: September 6th – 12th Introduction

- Overview of the course.
- Overview of the assignments and learning objectives.
- Microsoft Teams and Avenue to Learn run-through.
- Learning strategy tips and tricks.

■ Week Two: September 13th – 19th Who Believes in Ghosts, Spirits, and Demons?

- Waskul, Dennis, and Michele Waskul. 2016. "The Trouble with Ghosts." In *Ghostly Encounters: The Hauntings of Everyday Life*. 5-22 ONLY. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Josephson-Storm, Jason Ānanda. 2017. "Enchanted (Post) Modernity" In *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. 22-37. London: The University of Chicago Press.
- "What Canadians Believe: From Science and Spirituality to Conspiracies and the Supernatural." *Pollara.com, Pollara Strategic Insights*, 2019. www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Pollara-Beliefs2019-RptF2.pdf

■ Week Three: September 20st – 26th Introductions due Debunking and Debunkers – Is it all in our heads?

- Sagan, Carl. 1995. "The Most Precious Thing." In *The Demon-haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. 13-22. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Guilherme Brambatti Guzzo, 2019. "Houdini Among the Spirits: A Lesson in Critical Thinking," *Think* 18: 47-58.
- Stierwalt, Sabrina. "6 Possible Scientific Reasons for Ghosts." *Quick and Dirty Tips*. October 30, 2018. www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/science/6-possible-scientific-reasons-for-ghosts (5 min read).

Weekly Schedule

■ Week Four: September 27th – October 3rd

Experience Assignment Due

How do we Study Spirits, Ghosts, and Demons?

- Laycock, Joseph P. 2014. "Approaching the Paranormal." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18: 5-15.
- Marina Warner, 2006. "Introduction: The Logic of the Imaginary," in *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*. 9-21. Oxford University Press.

MODULE 2: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

■ Week Five: October 4th – 10th

A Dybbuk and a Jinn Walk Into a Bar...

- Rothenberg, Celia. 2004. "Chapter Two: The Jinn." In *Spirits of Palestine: Gender, Society, and Stories of the Jinn*. 29-53. Lanham: Lexington Press.
- Faiierstein, Morris M. 2017. "The Dybbuk: The Origins and History of a Concept." In *Olam He-zeh V'olam Ha-ba: This World and the World to Come in Jewish Belief and Practice*. Edited by Greenspoon Leonard J., 135-50. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

■ Week Six - FALL BREAK!

- Self-Care / Mental Health module available on course Avenue! Includes resources, music playlists, meditation guides, hobby suggestions and more.

■ Week Seven: October 18th – 24th

Cross-Cultural Encounters Continued

- Ramírez Plascencia, David. 2017. "The Role of the Internet in the Endurance of 'La Llorona' As a Liminal Archetypal Monster in Modern Latin American Society". *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 16: 1-12.
- Harvey, Paul. 2016. "New History Finally Recognizes Afro-Creole Spiritualists." religiondispatches.org/black-spirits-matter-a-spiritual-history-of-new-orleans-that-recognizes-afro-creoles/ (7 min read).

Weekly Schedule

MODULE 3: POSSESSION AND POWER

■ Week Eight: October 25th – 31st Gender, Sexuality, and Ghosts

- Chabot, Kevin. 2019. "Queer Spectralities and Untimely Subjects: Queer Ghost Hunters and Paranormal Reality Television." *Revue Canadienne D'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 28: 1-22.
- Nwokocha, Eziaku. 2019. "The "Queerness" of Ceremony: Possession and Sacred Space in Haitian Religion." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 25: 71-90.
- Zeisler, Andi. 2017. "The Feminist Power of Female Ghosts" www.bitchmedia.org/post/the-feminist-power-of-female-ghosts (12 min read).
- **Optional:** Brunton, Ruby. 2018. "Something Wraithlike This Way Comes" www.topic.com/something-wraithlike-this-way-comes

■ Week Nine: November 1st – 7th Q&A Questions Due Race, Identity, and Ghosts

- Wehmeyer, Stephen C. 2015. "Conjurational Contraptions: Techno-Hermeneutics, Mechanical Wizardry, and the Material Culture of African American Folk Magic". In *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*. 246-261. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Cameron, Emilie. 2008. "Indigenous Spectrality and the Politics of Postcolonial Ghost Stories." *Cultural Geographies* 15: 383-93.

MODULE 4: EXPERIENCES

■ Week Ten: November 8th – 14th Guest Interview Moral Panic

- Dyrendal, Asbjorn, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen. 2015. "Anthropology of Evil: The Folklore of Satanism" In *The Invention of Satanism*. 13-27. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, Jeremy. "History of the Salem Witch Trials: Was it Mass Hysteria?" www.talkdeath.com/history-of-salem-witch-trials-history-mass-hysteria/ (10min read).

Weekly Schedule

■ Week Eleven: Nov 15th – 21st Satanic Panic

- Matthews, Chris. 2009. "In the Company of Killers: Satanic Ritual Abuse and Satanic Social Politics" In *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture*. 121-135. Westport, Conn. London Praeger.
- Goodwin, Megan. 2020. "Michelle Remembers and the Satanic Panic" therevealer.org/michelle-remembers-and-the-satanic-panic/ (20 min read).

■ Week Twelve: Nov 22nd – 28th Q&A Reflection Due Science and Spirit

- Sarah Juliet Lauro & Catherine Paul. 2013. "'Make Me Believe!': Ghost-Hunting Technology and the Postmodern Fantastic," *Horror Studies* 4: 221-239.
- Delgado, L. Anne. 2017. "Psychical Research and the Fantastic Science of Spirits." In *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age*. Edited by Karpenko Lara and Claggett Shalyn, by Beer Dame Gillian, 236-53. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

■ Week Thirteen: Nov 29th – Dec 5th Spirits, Ghosts and Demons in the Modern World

- McCloud, Sean. 2018. "Conjuring Spirits in a Neoliberal Era: Ghost Reality Television, Third Wave Spiritual Warfare, and Haunting Pasts." In *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism*. Edited by Mara Einstein and Diane Winston. 137-149. New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, Tok. 2019. "Ghost Stories from the Uncanny Valley: Androids, Souls, and the Future of Being Haunted." *Western Folklore* 78: 39-66.

■ December 8th – Last Day of Class No Lecture. Final Review / Q&A

Student Resources

CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Food Collective Centre: www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/14-mac-bread-bin
- Indigenous Student Services: indigenous.mcmaster.ca/
- Sexual Violence Response Coordinator: svpro.mcmaster.ca/contact/
- Equity and Inclusion: equity.mcmaster.ca/
- Online Learning Support: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/online-learning/
- Writing Support: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-skills/writing-support/
- Student Success Centre: studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/
- Ontario Crisis Resources and Helplines: www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources
- Canada Suicide Prevention Service: www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/

HOW TO CITE

- MLA: owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html
- Chicago: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html
- APA: guides.libraries.psu.edu/apaquickguide/intext

HOW TO AVOID UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

- www.lakeforest.edu/academics/resources/writingcenter/plagiarism.php

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY & PUNCTUATION RULES

- How to Write an Essay: www.utoronto.ca/ccds/how-write-essay
- 13 Rules for Using Commas: www.businessinsider.com/a-guide-to-proper-comma-use-2013-9
- How to use the Semi-Colon: theoatmeal.com/comics/semicolon

Course Policies

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All written assignments must be uploaded to Teams in .docx or .pdf format (NO .pages).

GRADES

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK GRADE

90-100 A+

85-90 A

80-84 A-

77-79 B+

73-76 B

70-72 B-

67-69 C+

63-66 C

60-62 C-

57-59 D+

53-56 D

50-52 D-

0-49 F

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Students should contact their TA or professor if they plan on handing in an assignment late.

Students will lose 1 point a day for every day the final take-home essay is late.

AVENUE TO LEARN

Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure.

If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.).

For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy](#).

University Policies

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.