



## **Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit**

**Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit - 2020-2021**

## Religions, Media and Popular Culture

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Course Code	G_BATRSPC214
Credits	6
Period	P6
Course Level	200
Language Of Tuition	English
Faculty	Faculty of Religion and Theology
Course Coordinator	dr. J.H. Roeland
Examiner	dr. J.H. Roeland
Teaching Staff	dr. M. Klaver, dr. J.H. Roeland
Teaching method(s)	Seminar, Lecture

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### Course Objective

In this course, students work collaboratively on a particular (predefined) societal challenge related to the research field of religions, media and popular culture. This year's challenge is related to the 2020 COVID-19 crisis: How can people create meaningful online gatherings in times of social untact? At the end of the course, teams of students organize, on the basis of a design developed during the course, an online gathering which they perceive to be meaningful for a specific group. In this gathering, all students, teachers and invited guests with particular expertise, will participate.

### Course Content

Among the most defining processes of modern life are the processes of digitalization and mediatization. Digital infrastructures of communication and technologically mediated processes of interaction increasingly shape contemporary everyday life. These digitalized modes of interaction affect the way people construct their selves, their collective arrangements, their communities, their culture orders, and their religious perceptions, sensibilities and gatherings. Processes of digitalization and the development of technological applications are often positively valuated, since they create connections over time and place that were not possible in former times, as has been demonstrated with the COVID-19 crisis. Yet, many critical concerns are raised in relation to digital media technology as well; concerns regarding privacy, impoverished social connections, lack of physical contact, miscommunication, lack of attention, lack of power and agency, social inequality, psychological drawbacks, and loneliness.

This course taps into both the worries and promises of digital technology, by addressing an urgent societal challenge that has become visible since the COVID-19 crisis. Being aware of the fact that physical social contact might increasingly become problematic, contested, or simply impossible or undesirable, and future forms of sociality might be

more and more defined by absence of physical proximity (the situation of 'untact'), in this course students design meaningful online gatherings that in potential generate meaningful forms of contact between and for the participants. The course offers conceptual, theoretical, methodological and design tools (including repertoires and tools inspired by religious and spiritual traditions) that enable students to organize these gatherings and to reflect on the design and development of the gatherings. In terms of theory, the course is strongly inspired by the disciplines of media anthropology and the sociology of religion. In terms of methodology, the course firmly invest in the method of auto-ethnography, related to media use and media practices.

### **Teaching Methods**

A mix of instruction classes, research activities, design workshops, and team meetings.

### **Method of Assessment**

A number of selected assignments (30%); the organization of an online gathering (40%); and a reflection report (30%). These are all team products; grades may differ among individuals working within one team on the basis of differences in individual performance.

### **Literature**

Selected articles and book chapters, partly based on the team projects.