



REL 3490

Behind the Da Vinci Code

Section: RVC

Internet/Fully Online

Fall Term 2026

Course Time Zone | Eastern Time (ET). Course due dates are according to this time zone.

Professor Information

Erik Larson

Roles: Primary Instructor

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Response Time: 48 hours

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Office Hours: T 2-3:15, R 12:30-1:45, and by appointment

Office Location: SIPA I 504

Department or Academic Unit: Religious Studies

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

The Da Vinci Code was a runaway bestseller from the moment of its publication. While a work of fiction, it raises questions that many readers have about the real origins and history of Christianity. It even claims that although the story may be fictional, all the documents and historical events mentioned in the book are real. But is this really so? Using the book as our starting point, we will examine many of the issues it raises, such as whether there really is a secret history behind what is usually taught. More importantly, you will learn how to evaluate such claims by carefully looking at the original sources and learning how to evaluate both what is said and what is not. In our study we will look at the Da Vinci Code from the aspects of literature, history and art.

Textbook and Course Materials

The Da Vinci Code, New York: Doubleday, 2003. ISBN-13: 978-1400079179

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Dan Brown

Publisher: Doubleday

Publication Date: 2003

Copyright Date: 2003

ISBN 10: 978-1400079179

ISBN 13: 978-1400079179

Chapters/Pages: All

The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy.

978-0300082531

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Yuri Stoyanov

Publisher: Yale University Press

Publication Date: 2000

Copyright Date: 2000

ISBN 10: 978-0300082531

ISBN 13: 978-0300082531

Chapters/Pages: All

The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Richard Barber

Publisher: Harvard University Press

Publication Date: 2004

Copyright Date: 2004

ISBN 10: 978-0674018150

ISBN 13: 978-0674018150

Chapters/Pages: All

Discoveries: Leonardo da Vinci

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Alessandro Vezzosi

Publisher: Abrams

Publication Date: 1997

Copyright Date: 1997

ISBN 10: 978-0810928091

ISBN 13: 978-0810928091

Chapters/Pages: All

The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Jasper Ridley

Publisher: Arcade Publishing

Publication Date: 2001

Copyright Date: 2001

ISBN 10: 978-1559706544

ISBN 13: 978-1559706544

Chapters/Pages: All

Opus Dei: An Investigation into the Powerful Secretive Society within the Catholic Church

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Michael Walsh

Publisher: Harper SanFrancisco

Publication Date: 2004

Copyright Date: 2004

ISBN 10: 978-0060750688

ISBN 13: 978-0060750688

Chapters/Pages: All

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for \$22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the [Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop](#).

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

Learn how to apply multidisciplinary approaches to academic study

Recognize the importance of looking at primary sources in historical work

Develop the ability to evaluate contrasting scholarly claims

Understand the importance of context when examining literature, art, and historical sources

Improve academic and technical writing skills

Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, which means most (if not all) of the course work will be conducted online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same as a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

Students are expected to:

- **review the getting started** page located in the course modules;
- **introduce yourself to the class** during the first week by posting a self-introduction in the appropriate discussion;
- **take the practice quiz** to ensure that your computer is compatible with the learning management system, Canvas;
- **interact** online with instructor and peers;
- **review** and follow the course calendar and weekly outlines;
- **log in** to the course at least **2 times** per week;
- **respond** to discussions by the due date specified. **No late work will be accepted;**
- **respond** to **emails** within **2 days**;
- **submit** assignments by the corresponding deadline.

Course Communication

Communication in this course will take place via the Canvas Inbox. Check out the [Canvas Conversations Tutorial](#) or [Canvas Guide](#) to learn how to communicate with your instructor and peers using Announcements, Discussions, and the Inbox. I will respond to all correspondences within 24 hours.

Policies & Resources

Before starting this course, please review the Policies & Resources Page in Canvas which includes comprehensive information on various University and Course Level Policies such as:

- University Policies
- Accessibility and Accommodations
- Online Etiquette
- Technical Requirements and Skills
- Computer & Digital Literacy Skills
- Course Technology Accessibility Statements and Privacy Policies
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright Statement
- Core Principles of This Course
- Nondiscrimination Statement
- Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Fair Use Policy

Assignments & Assessments

Discussion Forums

Keep in mind that your discussion forum postings will likely be seen by other

members of the course. Care should be taken when determining what to post.

Discussion Forum Expectations:

- Provide clear guidance on the expectations and requirements
- Available dates (unlimited or for a specific time)
- Criteria for evaluating the originality and quality of students' comments and grade credit expected
(Rubric is highly encouraged)
- The expected turn-around time for feedback or grades.

Assignments

- Provide clear guidance on the expectations and requirements
- Provide due dates and late assignment policies
- Define if it is an individual or group assignment (groups: Let the students know how the groups will be formed)
- Specify and describe how to submit assignments
- State the criteria for evaluation (Rubric or list of criteria)
- The expected turn-around time for feedback or grades

Quizzes

In order to mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is very important that you take the Practice Quiz from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams. Assessments in this course are not compatible with mobile devices and should not be taken through a mobile phone or a tablet.

- List all assessments (i.e. graded or practice)
- Provide the dates and times when assessments will become available (i.e.

From Monday 10:00 am – Tuesday 11:59 pm)

- Provide assessment duration (i.e. 30 minutes, 1 hour)
- Provide details for results
- When will students be able to see the results (i.e. Immediately after the exam, after the availability period has ended, or not at all)
- What will they be able to see the results (i.e. Total score only, all of the questions and answers, etc.)
- The expected turn-around time for feedback or grades

Zoom Video Conference

Zoom is a video conference tool that you can use to interact with your professor and fellow students by sharing screens, chatting, broadcasting live video/audio, and taking part in other interactive online activities.

Zoom meetings can be accessed via the Zoom link in the course navigation menu. Once you click on the Zoom link, it will route you to join the meeting for the respective class session. You will also be able to view upcoming meetings, previous meetings that you have already joined, and meeting recordings. Before joining an actual class session:

Reference the [Zoom Student Tutorials](#) to learn about the tool, how to access your meeting room, and share your screen.

Access the [Zoom Test Meeting Room](#) to test out the software before joining an actual session.

If you encounter any technical difficulties, please contact the [FIU Canvas Help Team](#). Please ensure you contact support immediately upon the issue occurring.

Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the following components:

Midterm 20%

Final 20%

Literary Comparison (3-5 pages) 10%

Factoid Paper (2-3 pages) 10%

Research Paper (5-7 pages) 20%

Discussion Participation 20%

Examinations: The first and second examinations will be based on both the readings and the weekly lessons. The exams will consist of multiple choice questions. Examination 2 is not cumulative—it covers only material from the second half of the semester.

Literary Paper: Write a comparison of the story in The Da Vinci Code with the movie Conspiracy Theory. Analyze them from the aspect of the nature of the conspiracy, the major characters involved and how their figures are developed in the course of the story's unfolding, and the overall coherency of the story line. At each stage you should make some determination as to which of the two you find to be more compelling and effective and why. Length should be 3-5 double-spaced pages.

Factoid Paper: Check out one of Brown's explanations (such as the origin of the cornucopia, the number phi, the Fibonacci sequence, the significance of the rose, Baphomet) and research how accurate it is. Length should be 2-3 double-spaced pages. Make sure to use good resources since you can't check someone else's accuracy unless your own information is correct. Include your bibliography.

Research Paper: Write a term paper on some topic relating to the course that particularly interests you. The topic should not coincide with one of the segments of our course (such as Gnosticism), but it may further develop an aspect of one of them (such as a particular Gnostic group that we didn't have time fully to explore, or one of the Gnostic texts that we didn't read). The topic must receive the approval of the instructor before it is handed in. Paper length should be 5-7 double-spaced pages, excluding bibliography. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to some standard such as MLA or

the Chicago Manual of Style. In the body of the paper you may use either footnotes or endnotes.

Discussion Participation: Each week there will be discussion questions posted for you to respond to. The responses don't have to be long, but should be well thought out and written in standard American English (that is to say, use correct spelling and proper punctuation and capitalization).

You will participate in 10 topics out of the 15 weeks of the course. This gives you some flexibility during weeks that are especially busy for you. In addition to posting your own answers, you should respond to the postings from your fellow classmates or the instructor. Each week that you participate, you should respond to at least 2 postings of your classmates. At the end of the course, you discussion thread will be graded based on the quantity and the quality of what you have written.

Note: Everyone is required to submit the Student Bio Activity before **Thursday, September 3, 2026 by 11:55 pm** U.S. Eastern Time. Provide a brief biographical overview on the Student Bio Forum under Discussion Forum on Blackboard. You are encouraged to include following in your bio:

Name, status in your current program, educational background to date, the reason you take this course, your expectation of this course, your experience with any aspect of online learning, work experience, career plans, and personal plans. (No longer than 500 words).

In responding to others, it is important to be courteous and respectful. If you disagree with something that has been said, that is fine. But be sure to explain why and where appropriate support your own view with evidence. Also, it is fine to ask questions that are related to our topic to extend the discussion. But please make sure the questions are relevant.

Drop Box: Discussion responses will be placed in the drop boxes that you will be given each week. After one week (you will have from Monday to Monday), the drop boxes will be locked so that nothing new may be added. You can, however, go back and view what has already been written.

Letter Grade Distribution Table

A	95 - 100
A-	90 – 94.99
B+	87 – 89.99
B	83 – 86.99
B-	80 – 82.99
C+	77 – 79.99
C	70 – 76.99
D	60 – 69.99
F	0 – 59.99

Schedule of Topics

1. [Week 1] Introduction and Orientation to Basic Issues.

Read: The Da Vinci Code, chaps. 1-52

Be sure to submit Student Bio Activity from Week 1 Discussion Questions.

2. [Week 2] Da Vinci Code as Literature. Conspiracy Theory

Read: The Da Vinci Code, chaps. 53-end.

Watch the movie Conspiracy Theory.

3. [Week 3] Women in the Life of Jesus. Mary Magdalene.

Read: Matthew 26:1-35; 27:32-28:20; Mark 14:1-31; 15:21-16:8; Luke 7:36-8:3; 22:1-38; 23:26-24:12; John 12:1-11; 19:16-20:31.

Raymond F. Collins, "Mary" The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. D. N. Freedman, vol. 4. New York: Doubleday, 1992, pp. 579-582 (online course materials).

Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Constructing 'Real' Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene," Women and Christian Origins, eds. R. S. Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 105-128 (online course materials).

4. [Week 4] Gnosticism: Definition and Issues.

Read: Yuri Stoyanov, The Other God, pp. 1-123.

5. [Week 5] Gnostic Sex and View of Women.

Read: Erik Larson, "Gnosticism and Sexuality" forthcoming Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality (online course materials)

Gospel of Thomas (online course materials).

Gospel of Philip (online course materials).

Gospel of Mary (online course materials).

Wednesday, September 23: Literary Comparison Due.

6. [Week 6] Constantine.

Read: Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History and Life of Constantine (library reserve).

W. H. C. Frend, "The Constantinian Revolution" The Rise of Christianity.
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 474-498 (online course materials).

7. [Week 7] Constantine continued.

Read: W. H. C. Frend, "The Constantinian Revolution" The Rise of Christianity.
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 498-517 (online course materials).

October 7-11: Midterm Examination.

8. [Week 8] The Grail.

Read: Richard Barber, The Holy Grail, pp. 1-87.

9. [Week 9] Knights Templar.

Read: Richard Barber, The Holy Grail, pp. 91-134, 290-320, 356-370.

10. [Week 10] Life of Leonardo da Vinci.

Read: Alessandro Vezzosi, Leonardo da Vinci, pp. 1-80.

Wednesday, October 28: Factoid Paper Due.

11. [Week 11] da Vinci's Art.

Read: Alessandro Vezzosi, Leonardo da Vinci, pp. 81-159.

12. [Week 12] Freemasons

Read: Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons*, pp. 1-58, 90-137.

13. [Week 13] Freemasons

Read: Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons*, pp. 191-204, 264-296.

Wednesday, November 18: Research Paper Due.

14. [Week 14] Opus Dei.

Read: Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei*, pp. 1-102.

15. [Week 15] Opus Dei.

Read: Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei*, pp. 105-207.

December 7-12: Second Examination.

Nondiscrimination Statement

The **Office of Civil Rights** (OCR) is responsible for ensuring that FIU maintains a workplace and learning environment free from discrimination, where current and prospective faculty, staff, and students are treated equitably. If any student, employee, or applicant has a sincere and reasonable belief that they have been discriminated against or harassed based on age, color, disability, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, retaliation, sex, or any other protected category, they can report their concerns to the OCR team through report.fiu.edu.

