In this course we will explore magic philosophically. We will have three broad sections. First, we will explore the metaphysics of magic as it is presented in popular culture media - books, films, games, and series. There are always rules about using magic and restrictions; we will think through these limits, while also thinking through limits on possibilities placed by science and (possibly) religion. Second, we will turn to magic as it was understood in the early modern period (roughly 1500-1650), since there we see people trying to figure out magic’s place in the natural order. Finally, we will turn to theatrical magic, or our willingness to pay good money to be deceived in an atmosphere of mystery we know to be an illusion.

**Contact:** I can be reached by email at charlie.huenemann@usu.edu. I also will have office hour conference sessions for drop-in chats. Office hours will be Wednesdays, 10-11, on our recurring zoom link, and also by appointment.

**Books:** no books. All readings will be available on Canvas.

**Papers:** There will be two short papers (about 3 pages) and two mid-length papers (about 5 pages). Papers will be graded in terms of *philosophical depth* and *mechanics.* *Mechanics* means complete sentences, correct spelling, organization, etc. *Philosophical depth* means how earnest and intelligent is your attempt to get to the bottom of whatever you are discussing. It requires pushing your inquiry to the very limits of what you understand. There will be further details in the assignments, and we will spend time in class discussing what this means.

Papers can be rewritten in response to corrections/criticisms for an improved grade.
Here is the rubric I use in assigning grades to papers:

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<th>Quality of Philosophical Treatment (accuracy, fairness, dialectic, articulation of deeper principles and ideas)</th>
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<th>10-12</th>
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**Tests:** No tests or exams.

**Quizzes:** I am experimenting with some quizzes. They are meant to help you get more out of the assigned readings, but they do not factor into your grade. They are purely optional.

**Attendance and participation:** With all of the uncertainties and safety measures due to COVID-19, this will be an unusual semester for everyone. My general plan is for us all to meet each class day over Zoom and discuss the material. If this is not working out for you - if your life becomes unexpectedly complicated, or you become ill, or you simply are burning out from too much Zooming - please communicate with me, and we will see what we can work out. Don't disappear. Don't give up, or start to slide. Talk to me (or your other instructors); you will find we all want to help.

I. Introduction to magic (2 weeks: 9/1 - 9/10)

What is magic, in comparison with science and religion?

"Is it real magic?" - what does this mean? Can we use the term to mean "control of nature in nonscientific ways"?

**Short paper:** “What is magic?”

(Open discussion, with some readings)

Egil Asprem, “Science and the Occult”

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Magic”
II. Pop magic (5 weeks: 9/15 - 10/15)

Select a book/graphic novel/film/series/game that involves “real magic”, and explore how it works: who can do magic? What does it cost them (how is the magic limited or constrained)? Are there laws governing magic? In the fictional world, how does magic relate to science or religion?

**Mid-length paper: “The metaphysics of magic in X”**

(Individual/group work, with students leading class discussions on different popular presentations of magic)


III. Historical magic (4 weeks: 10/20 - 11/12)

How has magic been understood in different historical periods? What was the relation between magic and natural knowledge in the early decades of the modern period (roughly 1500-1650)?

(Readings and discussion)

David Collins, “Magic in the Middle Ages”

Dennis William Hauck, “The Philosophers’ Stone”

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism”

Jennifer M. Rampling, “Alchemy as ‘Practical Exegesis’”

**Mid-length reflection paper on historical magic**

IV. Theatrical magic (3 weeks: 11/17 - 12/3)

How do we understand magic as entertainment? Why is it popular? What do audiences pay for? What is the job of a theatrical magician? Why should magicians keep secrets?

(Readings, discussion, visit by professional magician and historian of theatrical magic Richard Hatch)

V. Conclusions (1 week: 12/8, 12/10)

(Open discussion)

**Short reflection paper on theatrical magic**