

The Washington Post

Morning Mix

Whovians can get their fix with a 'Doctor Who' class at Syracuse University

By **Soraya Nadia McDonald** November 4, 2014

A Syracuse professor of digital and social media is offering a class based on the long-running British science fiction series "Doctor Who." Professor Anthony Rotolo plans to take an exhaustive look at the wildly popular British series, which started in 1963 as a children's show and was relaunched in 2005.

How's this hypothetical incentive for class participation: At Syracuse, if you answer a trivia question about "Doctor Who" correctly, you could net yourself a 3-D printed TARDIS or a miniature Dalek (one that won't destroy everything in its path, of course).

For non-Whovians: The Dalek are a particularly pernicious alien race set on destroying everything. They hate Doctor Who. The TARDIS is the vehicle, disguised as a 1960s London police call box, the Doctor uses to travel through space and time. Also worth knowing: The Doctor is able to die and regenerate himself in a different body, a detail that's allowed 12 actors to play him in a 50-year span. The show is currently on its 12th Doctor, Peter Capaldi.

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According to Rotolo's course description:

Students will consider and reflect on how Doctor Who has reached audiences from children and families to young adults and lifelong viewers through a wide array of broadcast, print and digital media, as well as describe how Doctor Who has applied elements of many media genres — sci-fi, horror, action, comedy and many others — to form a style that is unique to the series. The class will also learn about the series original producer, Verity Lambert, and director, Waris Hussein, and their impact on the show, including the circumstance of a woman showrunner and a British-Indian director at the helm of a television series in the early 1960s. The contributions of Lambert, Hussein and other early influencers will be analyzed, along with the auteur of each successive showrunner, writer or director from Terry Nation to Philip Hinchcliffe and later Russell T. Davies and Steven Moffat. Along the way, students will also learn to identify and discuss cultural, social and political issues that have been addressed in the series over five decades, and how Doctor Who, like many science fiction series, applies futuristic and alien concepts to deliver social commentary on current affairs.

This puts “Doctor Who” in pretty good academic company. While she was a professor at

Whitman College, author [Anne Helen Petersen](#) taught a course based on “Mad Men.” Beyoncé is the subject of a [course at Rutgers](#). Rotolo also teaches an official course on “[Star Trek](#).”

Because Rotolo’s class is an unofficial one — and also free — it’s open not just to the Syracuse community, but to the world at large. Rotolo plans to make the course and lectures available as a massive online open course (MOOC). There’s no tuition, but a [sonic screwdriver](#) might come in handy.

“I was inspired to put this course together because it is my belief that learning can and should be fun, and while not all courses can be about television series, some can!”

Rotolo [told the Syracuse Post-Standard](#). “My ‘Star Trek’ course has been a tremendous success, and I am proud to say that it has inspired countless students to find their path in media and even science and technology fields. As a teacher, there is nothing more important than that, and nothing more rewarding than hearing from a student that your course has had an impact in his or her life.”

As of Oct. 29, more than 220 students had signed up for the live course, Rotolo [tweeted](#). There’s a waitlist.

h/t [Nerdist](#)

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