***California State University***

***RS 204: Religion, Logic, and the Media***

### *Spring 2015*

## *Instructor:* Mary Jane O'Donnell, Ph.D.

## *Ticket Number:* 13789

# *Course Day/Time:* T-TH: 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

***Classroom:* Sierra Hall, Room 192**

***Office Hours:* T-TH: 8:20-9:20 a.m.**

***Office:* Room 233, Santa Susana Hall**

***Telephone:* 818-677-2742 (Office hours only)**

## *Email:* mjod@csun.edu

***Course Description:*** This course introduces and encourages students in the use of the basic concepts of logic and critical reasoning. Using these concepts, students will gather, discuss, analyze, and critique material from broadcast, print, or Internet news sources on matters pertaining to religion. Our concern in analysis is not the truth of the statement or personal opinions about it, but rather the analysis of the formal structure of the example itself. This course satisfies the “Critical Thinking” requirement in General Education.

***Student Learning Outcomes for RS 204:*** This course is intended to enable the student to attain the following outcomes:

* Explain and apply the basic concepts of deductive logic as a dimension of critical reasoning;
* Apply the principles of deductive logic to the critical analysis of statements made about religion in the news and entertainment media;
* Understand the historical and social contexts in which media misunderstand or distort statements made by or about religious groups or spokespersons.

***Student Learning Outcomes for General Education Requirement/Critical Thinking:***

1. Explain and apply the basic concepts essential to a critical examination and evaluation of argumentative discourse;

2. Use investigative and analytical thinking skills to examine alternatives, explore complex questions and solve challenging problems;

3. Synthesize information in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions;

4. Evaluate the logic and validity of arguments, and the relevance of data and information.

5. Recognize and avoid common logical and rhetorical fallacies.

***Goal:*** Students will analyze information and ideas carefully and logically from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

***Texts:***

* Sherry Diestler, *Becoming a Critical Thinker: A User Friendly Manual*. 6th Edition. Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2012
* Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking*, Pearson/Prentice Hall
* Student-selected hard copies of current media examples from mainstream sources for the assignments and the portfolio. These various media examples must be from a wide variety of religions traditions.

***Information online:***

* **Elements and Standards of Critical Thinking Online Model:**

[**http://www.criticalthinking.org/courses/Elements\_standards\_model.cfm**](http://www.criticalthinking.org/courses/Elements_standards_model.cfm)

(Go to “Click to Open”)

**Possible Websites to use for research:**

**\*Los Angeles Times:** [**http://www.latimes.com/**](http://www.latimes.com/)

**\*New York Times:** [**http://www.nytimes.com/**](http://www.nytimes.com/)

**\*Washington Post:** [**http://www.washingtonpost.com/**](http://www.washingtonpost.com/)

**\*Newsweek:** [**http://www.newsweek.com/**](http://www.newsweek.com/)

**\*Time:** [**http://www.time.com/time/**](http://www.time.com/time/)

***\*****These websites now allow only limited access without a subscription. For example, you may read 10 articles a month on the LA Times’ site, 20 on the Washington Post’s, and 10 on the NY Times’. However, there is good news for students. The Washington Post has a free student subscription. I urge you to sign up. It has a very good “Religion” section. One way to make up for the other above publications is to use LexisNexis Academic on the Oviatt Library’s Website. This database allows you access to the most recent articles from major world publications, including newspapers, magazines, wire services, broadcast transcripts, and blogs. It also allows you to filter articles according to subject.*

**LexisNexis Academic:** [**http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.csun.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/**](http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.csun.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/)

**Huffington Post:** [**http://www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/)

**Reuters:** [**http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/**](http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/)

**Religion News Service:** [**http://www.religionnews.com**](http://www.religionnews.com)

**Patheos:** [**www.patheos.com**](http://www.patheos.com)

**Religion and Politics:** [**http://religionandpolitics.org**](http://religionandpolitics.org)

**Religion, Politics, and Law:** [**http://religionpoliticsandlaw.blogspot.com**](http://religionpoliticsandlaw.blogspot.com)

**The Evangelical Outpost: Reflections on Culture, Politics, and religion from an Evangelical Viewpoint:** [**http://evangelicaloutpost.com**](http://evangelicaloutpost.com)

**The Atlantic:** [**http://www.theatlantic.com**](http://www.theatlantic.com)

**Unreasonable Faith (Atheism):** [**http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unreasonablefaith/**](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unreasonablefaith/)

**USA Today:** [**http://www.usatoday.com/**](http://www.usatoday.com/)

**CNN:** [**http://religion.blogs.cnn.com**](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com)

**Fox News:** [**http://www.foxnews.com/us/religion/index.html**](http://www.foxnews.com/us/religion/index.html)

**National Review Online:** [**http://www.nationalreview.com**](http://www.nationalreview.com)

**NPR:** [**http://www.npr.org/**](http://www.npr.org/)

**Colbert Nation:** [**http://www.colbertnation.com/home**](http://www.colbertnation.com/home)

**The Daily Show with Jon Stewart:** [**http://www.thedailyshow.com/**](http://www.thedailyshow.com/)

**The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life:** [**http://pewforum.org/**](http://pewforum.org/)

**The Barna Group:** [**http://www.barna.org/**](http://www.barna.org/)

**And many more…**

***Instructor’s Office Hours:*** My office hours are posted above. I look forward to working with each of you in class and on an individual basis. Therefore, I urge you to take advantage of my office hours. I am happy to discuss any aspect of this course with you, and help you with the assignments. I especially urge you to see me if you are confused about the course or an assignment. Really successful students ask questions!

***Communication with Instructor:*** Please contact me by email, in class, or during office hours with your questions, comments, or requests. Although I have a phone in my office, I will only be available by phone during office hours (except if I am meeting with a student), and I am not assured of getting any messages left on the phone’s answering system. Again, I will be delighted to speak with you about your work in this class.

***Technological Information:*** This class will employ Moodle for both student assignments and presentations and to provide students with access to media examples that will be presented in the course. It is your responsibility to learn how to use Moodle. For information and instructions about Moodle, go to: <http://www.csun.edu/it/student-moodle-help/>

***Course Assignments:***

* **Reading:** Students will read assigned portions of the textbook for each class. All assignments must be read ***BEFORE*** class. The reading selections are listed in the Course Schedule;
* **Quizzes:** There will be twelve (12) quizzes, SO YOU MUST BRING A SMALL SCANTRON FOR EACH. (If you do not have a Scantron, you will not be allowed to take the exam);
* **Postings** **on Moodle:** Students will be assigned to find articles, editorials, essays, and such from current media sources and a write a brief analysis of the article based on the assignment’s focus. Each student assignment will be posted on Moodle. Each submission must include a page that contains the information required with your name on the top and the web address of the media example referred to in hypertext;
* **Midterm and Final Exam**

***Course Requirements:***

* Attendance is mandatory. Any absence must be excused in advance, or if that is not possible, must be accompanied by a documented explanation. If a student has two or more unexcused absences, the student’s grade will be lowered by 10%.
* If you miss a quiz, you may write a three pages paper analyzing the key concepts in the week’s material and giving specific examples that reflect your knowledge of the ideas being discussed. However, you may only make up one (1) exam in this manner. If you miss more exams you will receive a 0 for the quiz.
* You must be fully prepared for each class. All assignments must be read prior to the class they are assigned, and all readings must be brought to class.
* You must fully participate in the class by asking/answering questions, fully participating in discussions, and fully engaging in any other activity of the class.
* Please make sure you attend to your personal needs before or after the class. You may not leave during class. No cell phones, texting, or Internet use for anything other than class work.
* All assignments must be written according to basic scholarly standards appropriate for university level work. Not only does this include proper grammar, punctuation, and syntax, but also serious reflection on your topic. There are many sources to help you with your writing assignments. The most important is the Writing Program at CSUN’s Learning Resource Center, Oviatt Library, 3rd Floor, East Wing, 818-677-2033 or go to: <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center>
* All assignments must be turned in or posted on Moodle on the date listed. Unless students present a written and documented reason by a person of authority why an assignment is late or will be late, which is accepted by the instructor, the grade will be deducted one letter grade per day.
* Any evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade, certainly for the item plagiarized, but also for the course.

***Grading: Plus-Minus System will be used***

* Class participation and attendance: 10%
* Seven Moodle Assignments: 25%
* Twelve quizzes: 25%
* Mid-term and final exam: 40% (20% each)

***Letter Grades:***

* 95-100 A
* 90-94 A-
* 87-89 B+
* 83-86 B
* 80-82 B-
* 77-79 C+
* 73-76 C
* 70-72 C-
* 60-69 D

***Course Schedule:***

***Week 1:***

* **January 20:** Introduction
* **January 22:** Read: “Introduction” and “How the Mind Can Discover Itself” by Paul and Elder, xiii-xxvi-9.
  + ***Quiz #1: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 2:***

* **January 27:** Read: “The Stages of Critical Thinking Development: At what stage are you?” by Paul and Elder, 257-273.
* **January 29:** Religion and Media: **Assignment:** Look for three recent articles in the media about religion. **Post them by 10 a.m. on Moodle for the class to discuss**. Watch video on Moodle site about the different types of articles.
  + ***Quiz #2: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 3:***

* **February 3:** **Read** Diestler: Foundations of Arguments, 2-21;
* **February 5: Assignment:** Each student will post on Moodle by **11 p.m.** one example of an argument in a news article about a religious issue and present the following: 1.) Summarize the argument(s) being made in your own words, and 2.) identify the three parts of each argument: the issue, the conclusion(s), and the reasons. Give the web address of the media example used in hypertext.
  + ***Quiz #3: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 4:***

* **February 10:** **Read** Diestler: Value Assumptions (Values and Ethics), 36-59; Download and read: “Toulmin’s Analysis” on Moodle site for this week.
* **February 12**: Continued: **Assignment:** Post an article by 11 p.m. with an argument(s) involving religion. 1. Summarize the argument(s) being made in your own words; 2.) Identify the three parts of the argument(s); 3.) Using the Toulmin Model, identify the underlying value assumption(s) of the various sides of the argument(s). Give the web address of the media example used in hypertext.
  + ***Quiz #4: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 5:***

* **February 17:** **Read** Diestler: Reality Assumptions, 74-88
* **February 19: Assignment:** Post an article by 11 p.m. with an argument(s) involving religion. 1. Summarize the argument(s) being made in your own words; 2.) Identify the three parts of the argument(s). 3.) Using the Toulmin Model, identify the underlying reality assumption(s) of the various sides of the argument(s). Give the web address of the media example used in hypertext.
  + ***Quiz #5: You must bring a Small Scantron***

## *Week 6:*

* **February 24:** Deductive Reasoning/Syllogisms, Diestler, 88-117
* **February 26:**Continued
  + ***Quiz #6: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 7:***

* **March 3:** Mid-Term Preparation
* **March 5:** Mid-Term Exam
* ***March 5: Mid-Term Exam: Bring Large Scantron***

***Week 8:***

* **March 10:** Read: Inductive Arguments: Statistical and Causal Generalizations, Diestler, 120-147:
* **March 12:** Post an article by 11 p.m. that contains an inductive argument involving an issue regarding religion. 1.) Summarize the argument(s) in your own words; 2.) Identify the three components of the argument(s); 3.) explain how inductive reasoning was used in the argument(s). Give the web address of the media example used in hypertext.
  + ***Quiz #7: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 9:***

* **March 17:** **Read:** Reasoning Errors: Inadequate Reasons, Diestler, 225-240
* **March 19:** **Assignment:** Post on Moodle an article about an issue involving religion that contains an argument(s) with a reasoning error(s) that provides an inadequate reason. 1.) Summarize the argument(s) in your own words. 2.) Identify the three components of the argument(s). 3.) Identify the reasoning error, and explain *why and how* you think it was used in the argument.
  + ***Quiz #8: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 10:***

* **March 24:** Read:Reasoning Errors: Fallacies that Mislead, Diestler, 241-272;
* **Mach 26:** Post on Moodle an article about an issue involving religion with an argument(s) that contains a reasoning error(s) that misleads. 1.) Summarize the argument(s) in your own words. 2.) Identify the three components of the argument(s). 3.) Identify the reasoning error(s), and explain *why and how* you think it was used in the argument(s).
  + ***Quiz #9: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 11:***

* **March 31:** ***No Class/Cesar Chavez Day***
* **April 2:** Review

***Week 12:***

* ***April 7-9: Spring Break***

***Week 13:***

* **April 14**: “Discover the Parts of Thinking” by Paul and Elder, 11-42
* **April 16:** Continued
  + ***Quiz #10: You must bring a Small Scantron***

## *Week 14:*

* **April 21:** “Discover Universal Standards for Thinking” by Paul and Elder, 43-71
* **April 23:** Continued
  + ***Quiz #11: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 15:***

* **April 28:** “Become a Fair–Minded Thinker” by Paul and Elder, 189-212
* **April 30:** Continued
  + ***Quiz #12: You must bring a Small Scantron***

***Week 16:***

* **May 5:** Final Exam Prep
* **May 7:** Final Exam Prep
* ***Final Exam: May 12 at 10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., Sierra Hall, Room 192***
* ***You must bring a large Scantron (The final exam is cumulative.)***

***Important to note:*** This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to notify you in advance about any changes.

***DRES:*** If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at 818.677.2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at 818.677.2611. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.