

RS 204: Religion, Logic, and the Media
Fall 2017 – California State University, Northridge
Online – Syllabus (08/17/2017)
Section 20595

Instructor: Timothy Kuns

Email: timothy.kuns@csun.edu

Office Hours: Friday, 11:00 – 11:50 am in SN418 – Please make and confirm appointments by email.

Religious Studies Department Office – SN 224

Course Description: This course introduces and guides students in the practical use of the basic concepts of deductive logic as a dimension of critical reasoning. Using these concepts, students will discuss, analyze and critique statements that appear in the media (in the United States and elsewhere) that have been expressed by religious people and by the media itself. Satisfies the Critical Thinking requirement in General Education.

RS 204 (Course) Student Learning Objectives – Upon completion of the course students will be able to:

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

General Education (Critical Thinking) Student Learning Objectives – Upon completion of the course students will be able to:

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.

Religious Studies Department Student Learning Objectives: This course will address many of the following learning objectives. Upon completion of the course students will be able to:

1. Recognize and to articulate (orally and in writing) the difference between an academic approach to religion and a personal, devotional approach.
2. Demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in recognizing the major contributors to the modern study of religion and their models/theories from philosophy, theology, the history of religions, and the social sciences.
3. Understand the following terms in their conventional, popular usage, and then discuss the variety of ways that religious studies scholars have critiqued, expanded, or problematized these: religion, religious, myth, ritual, symbol, philosophy, subjectivity, objectivity, secular/secularization, cult, sect, mysticism, theism, atheism, polytheism, monotheism, spirituality, magic, paganism, animism, canon, religious violence, post-colonialism, individualistic compared to community-based religions.
4. Explain and give basic examples of the social function of religion with regard to gender, ethnicity, and nationality.
5. Recognize religiosity in an aspect of modern culture such as different forms of media, art, music, films, politics, sports, and the public discourse on science.
6. Demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in describing several specific religious traditions, including their historical development, major beliefs and practices, and demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in interpreting religious texts and rituals from each religious tradition.

Required Textbooks:

Critical Thinking: A Student's Introduction, 5th edition, Gregory Bassham, et. al., McGraw Hill, 2013

Additional material (articles, video, and media) will be assigned from online sources throughout the semester and will be available via Moodle or from the following websites:

- *Los Angeles Times: <http://www.latimes.com/>
- *New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- *BBC <http://www.bbc.com>
- *Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- *Newsweek: <http://www.newsweek.com/>
- *Time: <http://www.time.com/time/>

*These websites allow only limited access without a subscription, but may be accessed by using LexisNexis Academic on the Oviatt Library's Website:

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.csun.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?>

Additional media websites on religion include:

- Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/>
- Reuters: <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/>
- Religion News Service: <http://www.religionnews.com>
- Patheos: www.patheos.com
- Religion, Politics, and Law: <http://religionpoliticsandlaw.blogspot.com>
- The Atlantic: <http://www.theatlantic.com>
- Unreasonable Faith (Atheism): <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unreasonablefaith/>
- USA Today: <http://www.usatoday.com/>
- CNN: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com>
- Fox News: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/religion/index.html>
- National Review Online: <http://www.nationalreview.com>
- NPR: <http://www.npr.org/>
- The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: <http://pewforum.org/>
- The Barna Group: <http://www.barna.org/>
- <https://twitter.com/tkethics>
- <https://twitter.com/tkethics/lists/religion-and-the-media>

Preparation: Preparation for the course is accomplished by means of viewing course lectures posted on Moodle, reading all assigned course material and performing all course assignments.

Course Work: Once you have read the material and viewed the online lecture you must complete the assigned exercises during the course of the semester. This is a must. In this way the critical thinking part of the course is like a math class. These exercises will form the foundation for your mastery of critical thinking skills. You will not pass this course without completion of this work.

Evaluation: Students will receive reading quizzes, a midterm, and a final.

34% coursework, quizzes and online participation

22% Midterm 1

22% Midterm 2

22% Final Exam

Grading: Grading will be based on the following scale

94-100 = A	77-79 = C+
90-93 = A-	74-76 = C
87-89 = B+	70-73 = C-
84-86 = B	60-69 = D
80-83 = B-	<60 = F

Plagiarism and cheating: Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated and will result in failing the class. Additionally, faculty members are required to report incidents of academic dishonesty to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Refer to the most recent addition of the Student Handbook for a more complete discussion of Cheating and Plagiarism.

Accommodation for Disabilities: If you require special accommodation for a disability, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (DCOD). 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.

Personal Difficulties: If you are having personal difficulties (e.g. health, emotional issues, or family problems) during the semester which interfere with your ability to perform the necessary assignments or attend classes, please notify me as soon as possible.

Religious Observances: If an assignment due date or a test conflicts with a religious observance, then please complete and turn in the assignment early.

Participation: It is expected that students will participate in online class discussions via Moodle. This will be incorporated into your grade.

Email Communications: Please use the following convention in the Subject Line when communicating with me by email: RS204 – <your name as registered for the class> - <brief reason for the email>
An example:
Subject: RS204 – John Doe – Schedule an Appointment

Moodle: Please consult Moodle regularly for course updates, news, and handouts. Class materials, lecture notes, discussion posts, articles, etc will normally be posted on Monday and Wednesday afternoon.

Weekly Class Schedule (tentative)

WEEK		READING/TOPIC/ASSIGNMENTS	Chap.	OTHER
1	8/28-9/3	Introduction to the course and the study of religion Introduction to critical thinking Towards a Definition of Religion (on Moodle)	1	Quiz or Assignment
2	9/4-9/10	Critical thinking and the media, pages 418-442	14	Quiz or Assignment
3	9/11-17	Critical thinking and the media, pages 418-442	14	Quiz or Assignment
4	9/18-24	Recognizing arguments	2	Quiz or Assignment
5	9/25-10/1	Recognizing arguments	2	Quiz or Assignment
6	10/2-8	Basic logical concepts – deductive arguments	3	Midterm 1
7	10/9-15	Basic logical concepts – inductive arguments	3	Quiz or Assignment
8	10/16-22	Logical fallacies—I	5	Quiz or Assignment
9	10/23-29	Logical fallacies—II	6	Quiz or Assignment
10	10/30-11/5	Analyzing arguments	7	Quiz or Assignment
11	11/6-12	Analyzing arguments	7	Midterm 2
12	11/13-19	Evaluating arguments and truth claims	8	Quiz or Assignment
13	11/20-26	Inductive Reasoning	11	Quiz or Assignment
14	11/27-12/3	Inductive Reasoning	11	Quiz or Assignment
15	12/4-10	Science and Pseudoscience	15	
FINALS	12/11-17	Final Exam: Online exam time is subject to a 2 hour time limit at a specific time to be determined.		Final

End of Syllabus