

California State University
RS 204: Religion, Logic, and the Media
Fall 2017

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

Ticket Number: 15807

Course Day/Time: F/8:00 am to 10:45 a.m.

Classroom: Sierra Hall, Room 384

Office Hours: F/2:00-4:00 p.m.

Office: Santa Susana Hall, Room 419

Telephone: 818-677-6879 (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 and inductive logic as a dimension of critical reasoning;
- Apply the principles of deductive and inductive 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
- Assorted texts posted on Canvas
- Selected hard copies of current media examples involving issues in religion from mainstream sources for the assignments posted on Canvas

Information online:

- **Elements and Standards of Critical Thinking Online Model:**
http://www.criticalthinking.org/courses/Elements_standards_model.cfm
(Go to "Click to Open")

Possible Websites to use for presentations:

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

Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/>

Religion News Service: <http://www.religionnews.com>

Patheos: www.patheos.com

The Immanent Frame: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/>

Religion and Politics: <http://religionandpolitics.org>

Religion, Politics, and Law: <http://religionpoliticsandlaw.blogspot.com>

The Atlantic: <http://www.theatlantic.com>

Feminism and Religion: <https://feminismandreligion.com>

World Religion News: <http://www.worldreligionnews.com>

Religion Dispatches: <http://religiondispatches.org>

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/>

PRRI: <http://www.prii.org/spotlight-home/>

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.

Course Assignments:

- **Reading:** Students will read assigned portions of the textbook for each class. In addition, you must bring **hard copies** of any articles in the news that are assigned for the week, which will be posted on Canvas. All assigned material must be read ***BEFORE*** class. Bring all reading assignments—both texts and articles—to class. The reading selections are listed in the Course Schedule and the assigned articles will be available on Canvas.
- **Quizzes:** There will be ten (10) 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.) *40% of your grade.*
- **Presentations:** Students will be put into groups. Each week a group will make a presentation regarding a religious issue in the news and analyze it according to the focus of the week's assignment. Instructions on Canvas *10% of your grade.*
- **Midterm and Final Exams:** *50% of your grade (25% each exam).*

Course Requirements:

- You must attend each and 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.
- If you miss a quiz because of a missed class you will not be able to make it up unless you have a serious (hospitalization, family crisis, etc.) and documented reason for missing the class. However, you must contact me preferably before you will miss a quiz or—in case of an unforeseen emergency—within three days of missing the quiz.
- I will not entertain any requests to make up missed assignments (other than quizzes) unless the request is made and the assignment completed within three days of the missed due date.
- In other words, do not wait until the end of the semester to ask to make up a missed assignment. Your request will not be granted.
- 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.
- Every member of each group must work on and be present for the presentation. If you do not participate in the preparation and/or are not present for the presentation, you will not be able to make it up.
- Any evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade, certainly for the item plagiarized, but also for the course.

Technological Information:

- This course will employ Canvas. You are responsible for learning how to use this format.

Educational Support:

- **CSUN's Learning Resource Center:** <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center/university-writing-center-and-freshman-tutor-lab%29> (I urge you to take advantage of the center's resources, which include the Writing Center and Writing Workshops as well as Online Resources to help hone your critical reading skills.) They are located at the Oviatt Library 3rd Floor, East Wing.
- **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. For more information, go to: <https://www.csun.edu/dres>

Grading: Plus-Minus System will be used

- **Ten quizzes:** 40%
- **Mid-term and final exam:** 50% (25% each)
- **Presentations:** 10%

Letter Grades:

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| ▪ 94-100 A | ▪ 83-86 B | ▪ 73-76 C |
| ▪ 90-93 A- | ▪ 80-82 B- | ▪ 70-72 C- |
| ▪ 87-89 B+ | ▪ 77-79 C+ | ▪ 60-69 D |

Course Schedule:

Week 1: September 1

- Introduction to the Class
- **Read:** “Introduction” and “How the Mind Can Discover Itself” by Paul and Elder, xiii-9. (On Canvas)
- **Read:** “How to Overcome Failure” and “You Can Grow Your Intelligence” (On Canvas)
- **Read:** “Bosses Seek “Critical Thinking” (On Canvas)
 - Quiz #1: You must bring a Small Scantron

Week 2: September 8

- **Read:** “What is Critical Thinking?” by Gerald M. Nosich (On Canvas)
 - **Quiz #2: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 3: September 15

- **Read:** Diestler: Foundations of Arguments, 2-21;
 - **Quiz #3: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 4: September 22

- **Read:** Diestler: Value Assumptions, 36-59;
- **Read:** “Toulmin’s Analysis” (on Canvas)
 - **Quiz #4: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 5: September 29

- **Read:** Diestler: Reality Assumptions, 74-88
 - **Quiz #5: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 6: October 6

- **Read:** Deductive Reasoning/Syllogisms, Diestler, 88-117
 - **Quiz #6: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 7: October 13

- **Read:** Inductive Arguments: Statistical and Causal Generalizations, Diestler, 120-147:
 - **Quiz #7: You must bring a Small Scantron**

Week 8: October 20

- **Review**

Week 9: October 27

- **Mid-Term Exam**

Week 10: November 3

- ***Read:*** Reasoning Errors: Inadequate Reasons, Diestler, 225-240
 - ***Quiz #8: You must bring a Small Scantron***

Week 11: November 10

- ***No Class: Veterans' Day***

Week 12: November 17

- ***Read:*** Reasoning Errors: Fallacies that Mislead, Diestler, 241-272
 - ***Quiz #9: You must bring a Small Scantron***

Week 13: November 24

- ***No Class: Thanksgiving***

Week 14: December 1

- ***Read:*** Suggestion in Media, Diestler, 320-345
 - ***Quiz #10: You must bring a Small Scantron***

Week 15: December 8

- ***Review***

Week 16: December 15

- ***Final Exam: Friday, May 19 at 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.***

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| <p><i>Important to note:</i> This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to notify you in advance about any changes.</p> |
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