**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE**

**COURSE SYLLABUS: RST 204**

**RELIGION, LOGIC, AND THE MEDIA**

**Fall 2015**

COURSE SECTION: 13755, Mon & Weds. 12:30-1:45pm in Sierra Hall 192

PROFESSOR: R. C. Rodman, PhD

EMAIL: rrodman@csun.edu

CAMPUS OFFICE HOURS: Santa Susanna 419, x6878 on Mondays and Wednesdays 10:50a-12:20pm and by appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION and SLOs

**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**:

* Explain and apply the basic concepts essential to a critical examination and evaluation of argumentative discourse;
* Use investigative and analytical thinking skills to examine alternatives, explore complex questions and solve challenging problems;
* Synthesize information in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions;
* Evaluate the logic and validity of arguments, and the relevance of data and information.
* Recognize and avoid common logical and rhetorical fallacies.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

**Goal:** Students will analyze information and ideas carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, develop reasoned solutions to problems, and gain critical thinking skills

III. TEXTBOOKS AND REQUIRED MATERIALS

**Text for Purchase**

* Sherry Diestler, *Becoming a Critical Thinker: A User Friendly Manual, 6th Ed*. (Boston: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2012).
* Other materials made available for download on Moodle.
* 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. See below for some sources, also posted on Moodle.

**Possible Websites to use for research:**

* \*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 now allow only limited access without a subscription. For example, you may read 15 stories a month on the LA Times’ site, 20 on the Washington Post’s, and 10 on the NY Times’.

One way to make up for this 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/

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/

And many more…

IV. COURSE POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS

**Familiarity with Moodle**: Since this is a fully online class, you must be able to access all course materials and technologies. Everything will be available through Moodle. It is your responsibility to learn how to use Moodle. For information and instructions about Moodle, go to: http://www.csun.edu/it/studentmoodle-help/

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is mandatory. I make no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Four consecutive absences AND/OR eight absences over the semester will result in your being dropped from the course. The more absences you have, the lower your grade. Leaving during class and being tardy will also lower this portion of your grade.

* Showing up isn’t enough. 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.

**Written Work:** Your writing must meet 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, Room 408, Bayramian Hall, 818-677-2033 or go to: <http://www.csun.edu/lrc/writing.html>.

**Deadlines:** Because due dates are stated at the outset, all papers/assignments must be turned in or posted on Moodle on the date listed. No late work will be accepted.

**Plagiarism/Cheating:** Any evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade, certainly for the item plagiarized, but also for the course.Plagiarism is one form of cheating, but not the only one. Other examples include “borrowing” stealing, buying or otherwise procuring papers and exams, or having someone else take an exam or write an essay for which you take credit. All instances of cheating will result no credit for the assignment and follow up with the Dean’s office.

**Special Accommodations**: If you have a documented learning disability and/or a physical disability and need special accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please make sure the instructor is informed.

**Contact with the Professor:** 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 contact me if you are confused about the course or an assignment. Really successful students ask questions! Please contact me by email, in class, or during office hours with your questions, comments, or requests.

**OUR CLASS CONTRACT**

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| **What I Expect From You** | **What You Can Expect From Me** |
| You will treat everyone in class, including the professor, with respect and courtesy due all human beings. | I will treat you with the respect and courtesy due all human beings. |
| You will attend every class, give your full attention to the material, and conduct yourself in an appropriate manner. | I will attend every class, give my full attention to the material and conduct myself in an appropriate manner.  |
| You will agree to do the work outlined in the syllabus on time. | I will return your work in a timely fashion.  |
| You can ask for help. | I will assist you in any way I can, and make myself available to you via office hours. You can expect a response to email within 24 hours except in rare cases. |
| You will acknowledge that your perception of effort, by itself, is not enough to justify a distinguished grade. | I will not discriminate against you on the basis of your identity or your well-informed viewpoints. |
| You will prepare carefully for every class. | I will prepare carefully for every class. |
| You will not plagiarize, cheat, copy, double-dip, or steal the work of others. | I will pursue the maximum punishment for plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity. |
| You will not make excuses for your failure to do what you ought; you will accept the consequences – good and bad – of your actions. | I will keep careful records of your attendance, performance, and progress.  |

V. ASSESSMENT

Point system

* Attendance & participation: 15 (.56 x 27) (You lose partial points for: every absence; being late/leaving early; texting in class and not contributing in class)
* Assignments: 60 (15 points each x 4)
* Group Presentation: 10
* Final Exam: 15

TOTAL = 100 points

**Letter Grade Allocation**

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

VI. SCHEDULE

*You should have the week’s reading and assignments done on Monday of each week; you can finesse and correct your work as we discuss the materials in class. Warning: you will be asked about your reading/work! BRING ALL MATERIALS TO CLASS!!!*

***Week of August 24 Course Introduction***

* Logic, Its Types and Uses
* Religion Bootcamp

***Week of August 31*  *What Is An Argument?***

* Read Diestler, Chap. 1

***Week of September 7 What Is An Argument?, cont’d***

* **NO CLASS** Monday September 7 (Labor Day)
* Assignment prompt given, due in class Monday, Sep. 14

***Week of September 14 Value Assumptions & Ethics***

* Read Diestler Chap. 2

***Week of September 21 Reality Assumptions & Deductive Reasoning***

* Read Diestler Chap. 3, pp. 74-93

***Week of September 28 Toulmin’s Method***

* Read Diestler Chap 3, pp. 93-113
* Assignment prompt given, due in class Monday, October 5

***Week of October 5 Statistics and Causes in arguments***

* Read Diestler Chap. 4

***Week of October 12 Generalizations***

* Read Diestler Chap. 5

***Week of October 19 Fallacies***

* Read Diestler Chap 6
* Assignment prompt given, due in class Monday October 26

***Week of October 26*** ***Stereotypes***

* Read Diestler Chap. 7

***Week of November 2 Suggestion in Media (Televised)***

* Read Diestler Chap. 8, pp. 320-332

***Week of November 9 Suggestion in the Media (Print)***

* Read Diestler, Chap. 8, pp. 333-345
* Assignment prompt given, due in class on Monday November 16
* NO CLASS Wednesday, Nov. 11 (Veterans Day)

***Week of November 16 Thinking about Your Thinking***

* Read Diestler, Chap. 9, pp. 400-422

***Week of November 23 Communicating Your Thinking***

* Read Diestler, Chap 10, pp. 443-463
* Group assignments

***Week of November 30***

* Group work
* Presentations begin on Wednesday (Groups 1-4)

***Week of December 7***

* Presentations finish on Monday (Groups 5-8)
* Monday, Dec. 7 is Last day of class

***December 9-15 Final Exams***

* Final exam TBA