

RST 204
RELIGION, LOGIC, AND THE MEDIA
Fall 2017

WHEN & WHERE: Mon & Weds 12:30-1:45pm in Sierra Hall 192

PROFESSOR: R. C. Rodman, PhD

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OFFICE HOURS: Mon & Weds 8:45-9:15am and 11:00am-12:15pm in Santa Susanna Hall 219

What is this class about?

At first it doesn't really seem like "religion," "logic," and "the media" go together. But in an era of fake news and alternate facts, of sharp cultural divides and mis-education about religion, it is really important to be able to think better (i.e., more logically and analytically) about the way religion is represented in the media. By examining stories about religion in print, video, film, and social media, you will learn to:

- Distinguish between an opinion and an argument;
- Understand the components of an argument;
- Recognize and avoid mistakes in critical thinking;
- Discern bias and spin in the presentation of ideas;
- Avoid stereotyping;
- Analyze complex concepts;
- Adopt other perspectives;
- Evaluate the validity of information;
- Cultivate sensitivity about the choice of images and words used in the presentation of material.

How will this course help you succeed in college and beyond?

What you learn to do in this class is to think, read, and write better and more critically – about anything, not just religion and the media. Those are transferable skills that you can take with you and use in other college courses. Later, after you graduate, you will find these same skills put you head and shoulders above other job applicants. Plus, *this course satisfies the "Critical Thinking" requirement of your General Education requirements.*

How will I succeed in this course?

It's pretty simple, really.

1. Engagement (15 points): Come to each class having read the assigned materials and actively engage the material in every class session. Learning – real learning – often requires that you step out of your comfort zone. You will have a variety of opportunities to share what you think in small groups, and to have debates and discussions. Deep engagement looks like this:

- Remaining consistently engaged in each class session (not texting or checking Facebook).
- Actively practicing new skills and ideas using a range of materials and in a variety of exercises; taking a constructively critically approach.
- Being collegial with your colleagues in the course by offering helpful and constructive feedback.

At least once, usually around the mid-point of the semester, I will ask you for a self-assessment of your engagement and I will offer you feedback. Since this is a part of your grade, this is an opportunity to consider how to improve or tweak your efforts.

2. Presentations (30 points): Find and present analysis of materials appropriate to each module. Therefore, you will present once for each module (three times over the course of the semester), either alone or with partners. There will be a prompt and a rubric that explains what is expected in due course. *Missed deadlines will reduce your grade so it is best to avoid this scenario.*

3. Papers (45 points): Research and write three analytical essays (one for each module) that demonstrate your facility with the skills of critical thinking applied to well-chosen and appropriate materials. Again, you will be responding to a clear prompt with a rubric that explains the expectations for your writing. *Missed deadlines will reduce your grade so it is best to avoid this scenario. Writing is hard.* It is always wise to get some help on your papers BEFORE turning them in. You can get help from the Writing Center at [CSUN's Learning Resource Center](#), which is on the third floor of Oviatt Library.

4. Final Exam (10 points): A one- or two-question final exam that will allow you to reveal your facility with the skills you learned throughout the course.

Right on. Let's get going.

8.28-30 INTRODUCTION to THE COURSE: Introduction to the syllabus and the course; homework

8.30 Bring your homework to class; professor's remarks on religion

MODULE ONE: PRINT MEDIA 9.4-10.8

DATE	BIG QUESTIONS & THEMES	WHAT TO PREPARE FOR CLASS – ALL READING ON CANVAS	REMINDERS/DUE DATES
9.4 Labor Day, No Class			
9.6	Headlines and Language	Read Diestler Read Female Genital Cutting Stories	
9.11	Spin & Photos	Read Diestler Read Colorado Baker stories	
9.13		Find a newspaper story on religion	Sign up to present; peer reviews
9.18	Balance, Bias	Read Diestler Read Ark Encounter Museum & view Nye v. Hamm	
9.20		Find a newspaper story on religion	Sign up to present; peer reviews
9.25	What is an Argument?	Read: Should Religion Be Taught in Public Schools?	
9.27		Find and present an Op-Ed	Sign up to present; peer reviews
10.2	What is an Argument?	Read: Op Ed on Religion	
10.4		Find and present an Op-Ed	Sign up to present; peer reviews
10.8	Critical Thinking Skills: Observation, description, restatement, comparison, analysis, synthesis, arguments.		Diagram and summarize an argument DUE to CANVAS BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON OCT 8

MODULE TWO: Broadcast, Video and Film 10.9-11.8

10.9	Television Panels	In class viewing of materials; discussion	
10.11		Read Diestler selections	
10.16		Bring clips to class	Sign up to present; peer reviews
10.18	Documentary: the role of the narrator, camera, what questions get asked; by whom?	In class viewing of CNN <i>Believer</i> Read BOTH 1. Muhanna “The Contradictions of Reza Aslan’s ‘Believer’” http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-contradictions-of-reza-aslans-believer 2. and “Reza Aslan’s <i>Believer</i> is Unbelievably Condescending About Religion” http://thefederalist.com/2017/03/19/reza-aslans-believer-unbelievably-condescending-religion/	
10.23		Bring film clips to class	Sign up to present; peer

			reviews
10.25	It's all in how you spin it	Read YouTube Article Love Jesus, Hate Religion	
10.30		Bring YouTube clips	Sign up to present; peer reviews
11.1	How to read a film	Read: "How to Read a Film"	
11.6		In class film screening	
		In class film screening	
11.12	Critical Thinking Skills: analysis, description, spin, framing, camera work, staging, staffing, non- verbal elements; lighting, mise-en-scene; interrupting stereotypes (or not).		Critical film analysis paper DUE to CANVAS before midnight on Nov. 12th

MODULE THREE Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) 11.13-12.6

11.13	Thinking about Facebook	Read and discuss article about religion and Facebook, Mona Fatil, "Feeling So Emotional: Why We Rage About Religion on Facebook," (RNS) and Facebook religion statistics" https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/community/religion/	
		Bring your own Facebook examples	Sign up to present; peer reviews
11.20	To Tweet or Not to Tweet	Read Henry Brinton, "How Facebook and Twitter Undermine Religion," Huffington Post http://www.huffingtonpost.com/henry-g-brinton/how-facebook-and-twitter-1_b_5044631.html and Amy O'Leary "Christian Leaders are Powerhouses on Twitter" NYT http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/technology/christian-leaders-are-powerhouses-on-twitter.html	
11.22		Bring your own Tweets to present	Sign up to present; peer reviews
11.27	Fake News	Read Hannah Ritchie, "Read All About It: The Biggest Fake News Stories of 2016 (CNBC) Jay Michaelman, "Trump's Religious Liberty Order is a Triumph of Fake News" (Daily Beast)	
12.4	Opinion or Argument – when it gets hot in the kitchen	The difference between opinion and argument: euthanasia (little Charlie in England)*** Read: http://skillsforlearning.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/prview/content/critical_thinking/02.shtml	

		Bring your own examples of social media	Sign up to present; peer reviews
12.10			Critical comparative analysis of social media v. print media.

FINAL EXAM Monday Dec. 11 12:45-2:45pm

THE FINE PRINT

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.

Reading Materials

All materials made available for download through Canvas. THESE ARE REQUIRED READINGS, which you must print and bring with you to class.

Familiarity with Canvas: You must be able to access all course materials and technologies. I will be in touch with you about readings and assignments by email and you are expected to access them on Canvas. All work will be turned in on Canvas. For information and instructions about Canvas, go to: <http://www.csun.edu/it/studentCanvas-help/>

Attendance: The more absences you have, the lower your grade. Please make sure you attend to your personal needs before or after the class. Please do 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 one on the third floor of the library.

Late Work: Will be penalized for being late.

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 I am informed. I will happily work with you on suitable accommodations through [DRES](#).

Letter Grade Allocation

- 93-100 A
- 90-92.99 A-
- 87-89.99 B+
- 83-86.99 B
- 80-82.99 B-
- 77-79.99 C+
- 73-76.99 C
- 70-72.99 C-
- 67-69.99 D+
- 60-66.99 D

Possible Issues

- **First Amendment** (i.e., teaching religion in public schools, prayer, monuments in public spaces)
- **Relevance** (i.e., is religion relevant in an age of science? Decline of mainline churches, increase of SBNR)
- **Violence** (i.e., does religion cause violence/war?)
- **Gender** (i.e., why are gods and clerics only male? Why can't women be religious leaders – or are they?)
- **Political Activism** (how does religion influence people's politics? Must US presidents be Christian?)
- **Religious Liberty** (can employers deny employees/customers rights on the basis of their religious beliefs? Hobby Lobby, Colorado cake maker, etc.)
- **Religion in the Public Sphere: monuments, public schools.**

Print Outlets

LAT
NYT
The Chicago Tribune
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Washington Post

Broadcast Outlets

CNN
ABC, CBS, NBC
Fox (Right)
MSNBC (Left)