**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE**

**COURSE SYLLABUS: RST 204 (13923)**

**RELIGION, LOGIC, AND THE MEDIA**

**Fall 2016**

MEETINGS: M & W 12:30P-1:45P in SH 192

PROFESSOR: R. C. Rodman, PhD

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CAMPUS OFFICE HOURS: M W & F in Santa Susanna 229 (x3940), 11am-12n

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION and SLOs

**Course Description:** At first, it doesn’t really seem like the words “religion” “logic” and “the media” go together. But you will be pleasantly surprised. The media offers plenty of test cases and interesting problems for thinking critically about religion – and the media too will become a subject of critical inquiry in this class, because spin and bias occur in reporting. This course is really a course on critical thinking – critical thinking about religion, about the media, and even about thinking. 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 critically analyze complex concepts and ideas from multiple perspectives, gain skills in evaluating information, 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). Find this in the CSUN bookstore or Amazon for purchase or rent.
* Other materials made available for download on Moodle.

IV. COURSE POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS

**Familiarity with Moodle**: Because this is a fully online course, you must be able to access all course materials through our Moodle course page. I will be in touch with you about readings and assignments by email and you are expected to access the on Moodle. All work will be turned in on Moodle.

Moodle. Moodle. 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:** Attendance is mandatory. I make no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. The more absences you have, the lower your grade. Leaving during class, texting, 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 and engaging your colleagues
* 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. I take off points if I see you texting in class.

**Written Work:** Your writing must meet basic scholarly standards appropriate for university level work. This includes discussion board postings. Anything you turn in should be rendered in proper grammar, using correct spelling, punctuation, and syntax, and all your writing should reflect your serious engagement of the course materials. 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 without prior authorization, and then it will be subject to losing a full point or grade for every day late, beginning immediately after the due date.

**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. I will happily work with you on suitable accommodations.

**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.

V. ASSESSMENT

Point system

* Quizzes (10 points each x 3) = 30
* Assignments (12 points each x 5) = 60
* Attendance (.38 x 26 class meetings) = 10

**TOTAL = 100**

**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. HOW THE COURSE IS ORGANIZED

The course is organized into **five “modules”** or subject areas of three weeks each. In each module, you will read the textbook and other assignments, attend class and participate in class activities, and listen to the instructor’s presentations. This will help you to command the appropriate vocabulary and methodology, subjects and questions. After the modules, you will have **a quiz** that tests your familiarity with the contents of the module, and then you will turn in an assignment that will require you to find your materials and write an approximately one to two-page essay (1-2) that provides a summary and analysis of the material you have chosen. Detailed instructions for both discussion boards and assignments will be made available in due course.

VII. SCHEDULE

**August 29-Sept. 18**

**MODULE I: ARGUMENTS & CRITICAL THINKING**

* What an argument is not
* What an argument is
* Component parts of an argument
* Methods for distinguishing between component parts
  + “Because trick”
  + Indicator words

**Module Schedule & Reading Assignment**

* Sep. 29: First day, course intro
* Sep. 31: What an argument is not
* Sep. 5: No class, Labor Day
* Sep. 7: What an argument is
  + Read Diestler pp. 2-11 and bring book to class
* Sep. 12: Component parts of an argument & methods for recognizing them
  + Read Diestler pp. 2-11
  + Assignment #1 instructions
* Sep. 14: Assignment day – work independently or come for consult
  + Assignment due beginning of class on Monday, Sep. 19th

**Sept. 19-Oct. 9**

**MODULE II: ASSUMPTIONS**

* Value-based and ethical assumptions
* Reality assumptions

**Module Schedule & Reading Assignments**

* Sep. 19 & 21: Value Assumptions -- Read Diestler, pp. 36-56 and bring book to class
* Sep. 26 & 28: Reality Assumptions-- Read Diestler, pp. 74-88 and bring book to class
* Oct. 3: In-class quiz on all materials covered so far
* Oct. 5: Assignment #2 instructions and work day
  + Assignment #2 due at the beginning of class on Oct. 10

**Oct. 10- Oct. 30**

**MODULE III: DEDUCTIVE & INDUCTIVE REASONING**

* Deductive logic, valid and sound arguments
* Inductive reasoning, making arguments stronger

**Module Schedule & Reading Assignments**

* October 10 &12: Deductive reasoning, testing arguments for validity & soundness; Toulmin’s method; stereotyping – Read Diestler pp. 88-106
* October 17 & 19: Inductive reasoning, strengthening arguments; uses and misuses of statistics and causal arguments – Read Diestler pp. 120-156
* October 24: In-class quiz on deductive and inductive reasoning
* Oct. 26: Assignment #3 instructions and work day
  + Assignment #3 due at beginning of class on Oct. 31

**Oct. 31- Nov. 27**

**MODULE IV: ERRORS & PROBLEMS WITH ARGUMENTS**

* Fallacies that occur because of inadequate support
* Fallacies that occur because they (intentionally or accidentally) distract from the issue
* Use and misuse of language
  + Denotation & connotation
  + Reification
  + Vague, ambiguous, and weasel words

**Module Schedule & Reading Assignments**

* Oct. 31: Fallacies that occur because of inadequate support -- Read Diestler pp. 224-240
* Nov. 2: Fallacies that distract from the issue – Read Diestler 241-255
* Nov. 7 & 9: Language problems – Read Diestler pp. 274-302
* Nov. 14: In class quiz
* Nov. 16: Assignment #4 Instructions and work day
  + Assignment #4 due ONLINE before Monday Nov. 21 at 9:30am

*Due to academic meeting and Thanksgiving, no class this week Nov 21-27*

**Nov. 28-Dec. 16**

**MODULE V: THE POWER OF SUGGESTION, BIAS & SPIN**

* Televised media
* Print media
* Social media

**Module Schedule & Reading Assignments**

* Nov. 28-30: Televised media – Read Diestler pp. 320-332
* Dec. 5-7: Print and social media – Read Diestler 333-341 and read the essay posted on Moodle
* Dec. 7: Assignment #5 instructions
  + Assignment #5 due ONLINE Monday Dec. 12 BEFORE 3pm