**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE**

**COURSE SYLLABUS: RST 204 OL**

**RELIGION, LOGIC, AND THE MEDIA**

**Fall 2016**

COURSE SECTION: 204-09 Online course

PROFESSOR: R. C. Rodman, PhD

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ONLINE OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays at 11am-12n

CAMPUS OFFICE HOURS: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00-12:15pm

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: YOU MUST DOWNLOAD THESE AND BRING THEM TO CLASS.
* 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/

**Participation:** Online course appeal to many students because they don’t have to come to class, but can work from home. While this offers advantages, one potential pitfall is the tendency to ignore or neglect your online course. You are expected to check in twice a week (I track this), to fully engage in discussions, and to take advantage of online office hours.

**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. No phone calls please.

V. ASSESSMENT

* Assignments (4 x 10) = 40
* Discussion Board Postings (8 x 5) = 40
* Exams (2 x 10) = 20

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. SCHEDULE

***Week of August 29***

***Course Introduction***

* Read materials online
  + Post your bio and answer the posted question
  + Familiarize yourself with the course
  + Purchase the textbook

***Week of Sept 5th***

***What Is An Argument? The Issue and the Conclusion***

* Read Diestler, pp. 2-11
* Discussion Board Posting due

***Week of Sept 12***

***What Is An Argument? The Reasons***

* Re-read Diestler pp. 2-11
* Readings on Moodle
* Assignment 1 due

***Week of Sept 19th***

***Value Assumptions & Ethics***

* Read Diestler, pp. 36-56
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Sept. 26th***

***Reality Assumptions & Deductive Reasoning***

* Read Diestler Chap. 3, pp. 74-93
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Oct 3***

***Stereotypes***

* Read Diestler Chap 3, pp. 93-113
* Readings on Moodle
* Assignment 2

***Week of Oct. 10***

***Inductive Reasoning: Statistics and Causes in arguments***

* Read Diestler 120-156
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Oct 17***

* Mid-Term

***Week of Oct 24***

***Generalizations***

* Read Diestler pp. 171-203 focusing especially on pp. 193-201
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Oct 31***

***Fallacies***

* Read Diestler pp. 224-255
* Assignment 3

***Week of Nov 7***

***The Power of Language***

* Read Diestler 275-302
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Nov 14***

***Suggestion in Media (Televised)***

* Read Diestler Chap. 8, pp. 320-332
* Discussion Board Posting

***Week of Nov. 21-27***

***DUE TO ACADEMIC MEETING AND THANKSGIVING, NO CLASS THIS WEEK AND NO OFFICE HOURS***

***Week of April 27-May 3***

***Suggestion in the Media (Print)***

* Read Diestler, Chap. 8, pp. 333-345
* Assignment 4

***Week of Dec 5***

***Review for Final exam***

* Discussion Board posting

***Week of Dec 12***

* ***Final exam***