Syllabus

Religion 351: Theorizing Religion, Culture, and Theology

Room: 111 Hall of Languages
Time: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00 – 3:20 PM

Instructor: Ronald R. Cavanagh
E-mail: rrcavana@syr.edu
Office: 431 Hall of Languages
Office Hours: Tues. and Thurs. 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Or by special appointment
Telephone: 443-4903

Course Objective: To engage students in a contemporary, existential, introduction to the academic study of religion at the heart of the Humanities in conversation with the Natural and Social Sciences at University, through the critical consideration of both secular and religious views of nature.

Course Requirements:

Each student is responsible for:

(1) the critical reading and discussion of the following texts

What is Religion, John F. Haught
The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins
Thank God for Evolution, Michael Dowd

Weekly Blackboard Listings

(2) prepared attendance and participation in all scheduled class sessions

(3) the legible writing/printing of three (3) scheduled take-home essay tests. What I cannot read will be given zero credit.
(4) the submission of an end of term paper in which the student develops personal existential and critical responses to the questions: What is a human being and how might one best become one? and What is the relation of reason to faith and faith to morality? This paper will be developed from the perspective of the academic study of religion at the heart of the humanities in conversation with the natural and social sciences. It should draw upon the ideas about nature, faith, reason and morality covered in the readings, lectures and discussions of this course.

**Attendance Policy:** It is expected that all students will attend all classes prepared for critical discussion. Students are expected to be in their seats at the beginning of class through to its conclusion. A student may miss without excuse two classes without penalty. Any additional unexcused absence will result in the reduction, by one +/- letter grade, of the student’s earned final grade for the course.

**Testing Policy:** All examinations will be essay in nature and given as a take-home assignments. They must be turned in on time to be graded. Students with physical or learning disabilities requiring a modification of this expectation must secure and present to me documentation to that effect from the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities, 804 University Avenue, Room 309, ext-4498.

**Grading Policy:** The assessment of a student’s work will be weighted in the following manner: 35% of the final grade for the quality of his or her cumulative classroom participation; 35% of the final grade for the quality of the three in take-home essay examinations; and 30% of the final grade for the quality of the end of term paper/course notebook.

**Academic Integrity:** It is expected that any work submitted by a student is his or her own work. Representing the work of others as your own, even when it involves an inadvertent failure to cite sources (plagiarism), is cheating, a violation of academic integrity, and will be identified to the appropriate College officials for institutional action. There is no circumstance that justifies cheating or that can compensate you for the loss of your integrity.

**Class Etiquette:** It is expected that all class participants will display a disposition of courtesy and politeness in class interactions. To this end
everyone will avoid cell phone interruptions (turn them off before class), late arrivals, early exits, using listening devices, doing e-mail, or other inconsiderate acts. Politeness is essential to learning because it indicates that you are attending to what others are doing, saying and feeling.

CLASS READING, TESTING AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Week I - Introduction to Religion 351 and the scholarly study of religion
August 31- September 2
Reading Assignment: Part I, What is Religion?
Blackboard entries

Week II – Ways of Religion
September 7-9
Reading Assignment: Part II, What is Religion?
Blackboard entries

Week III – Aims of Religion
September 14-16
Reading Assignment: Part III, What is Religion?
Blackboard entries

Week IV – Critiques of Religion
September 21-23*
Reading Assignment: Part IV, What is Religion?
*Please Note: No Class on September 23rd
Blackboard entries

Week V – The Question of God
September 28-30
Reading Assignment: Chapters 1-3, The God Delusion
Blackboard entries
First Examination: Take-Home Essay due in class 10/05/10

Week VI – What is the purpose of Religion?
October 5-7
Reading Assignment: Chapters 3-6, The God Delusion
Blackboard entries
Week VII – What is wrong with Religion?
October 12-14
Reading Assignment: Chapters 7-10, The God Delusion
Blackboard entries

Week VIII – The Holy Trajectory of Evolution
October 19-21
Reading Assignment: Part I, Thank God for Evolution
Blackboard entries

Week IX – Flat Earth Thinking
October 26-28
Reading Assignment: Part II, Thank God for Evolution
Blackboard entries

Week X - Religion and Integrity
November 2-4
Reading Assignment: Chapters 8-12, Thank God for Evolution
Blackboard entries

Week XI – Religion and the Future
November 9-11
Reading Assignment: Introduction-Chapter 13-Conclusion, Thank God for Evolution
Second Examination: Take-Home Essay due in class 11/16/10

Week XII – The Nature of Life
November 16-18
Reading Assignment: Chapters 1-4, Is Nature Enough?
Blackboard entries

Week XIII – Looking at the Cosmos?
November 23
Reading Assignment: Chapters 5-8, Is Nature Enough?
Blackboard entries

Week XIV – Morality and Suffering
November 30-December 2
Reading Assignment: Chapters 9-10, Is Nature Enough?
Blackboard entries
*Third Examination:* Take-Home Essay Exam in class 12/07/10

**Week XV – Death and Anticipation**
December 7-9

**End of Term Paper** is due no later than the morning of Tuesday December 14th. This project will be, on average, about ten typed pages, providing a student’s personal existential and critical response to the questions: What is a human being and how might one best become one? How is reason related to faith and faith to morality? Students should draw upon ideas about nature, faith and its perversions, reason, morality and the human covered in the readings, lectures, and discussions in the class.