

Syllabus

Religion 200: Faith, Doubt and Fanaticism

Room: 214 Hall of Languages

Time: Tuesday and Thursday 9:30 – 10:50 AM

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 religious extremism as a perversion of the dynamics of faith.

Course Requirements:

Each student is responsible for:

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

Religion and Doubt, Richard E. Creel

Why Would Anyone Believe in God, Justin L. Barrett

When Religion Becomes Evil, Charles Kimball

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 providing a student's personal existential and critical response to the questions: What is a human being and How might one best become one, drawing upon ideas about the nature of faith and its perversions covered in the readings, lectures and discussions on the class.

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 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, ex-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 200 and the scholarly study of religion
September 1-3
Reading Assignment: Chapters 1- 2, **Religion and Doubt**
Blackboard entries

Week II – Religion in Human Existence
September 8-10
Reading Assignment: Chapters 3 – 4, **Religion and Doubt**
Blackboard entries

Week III – The Commitment of Faith
September 15-17
Reading Assignment: Chapters 5-6, **Religion and Doubt**
Blackboard entries

Week IV – Commitment without Absolutes
September 22-24
Reading Assignment: Chapters 7-8, **Religion and Doubt**
Blackboard entries

Week V – Toward a Faith of Your Own
September 29-October 1
Reading Assignment: Conclusion, **Religion and Doubt**
Blackboard entries
First Examination: Take-Home Essay due in class 10/06/09

Week VI – What does it mean to Believe?
October 6-9*
Reading Assignment: Chapters 1-2, **Why Would Anyone Believe in God?**
Blackboard entries
Class on the 9th of October is cancelled

Week VII – Where do beliefs in God come from?
October 13-15

Reading Assignment: Chapters 3-4, **Why Would Anyone Believe in God?**
Blackboard entries

Week VIII – How natural is belief in God?
October 20-22

Reading Assignment: Chapters 5-6, **Why Would Anyone Believe in God?**
Blackboard entries

Week IX – Believing in Minds
October 27-29

Reading Assignment: Chapters 7-8, **Why Would Anyone Believe in God?**
Blackboard entries

Week X - What do you believe about God?
November 3-5

Reading Assignment: Conclusion, **Why Would Anyone Believe in God?**
Blackboard entries

Second Examination: Take-Home Essay due in class 11/10/09

Week XI – Is religion the problem?
November 10-12

Reading Assignment: Introduction-Chapter 1, **When Religion Becomes Evil**

Week XII – Blind affirmation of absolute claims
November 17-19

Reading Assignment: Chapters 2-3, **When Religion Becomes Evil**
Blackboard entries

Week XIII – Does the end justify any means?
November 24

Reading Assignment: Chapters 4-5, **When Religion Becomes Evil**
Blackboard entries

Week XIV – Holy War or Inclusive Faith?
December 1-3

Reading Assignment: Chapters 6-7, **When Religion Becomes Evil**
Blackboard entries

Week XV – Doubt and Humility

December 8-10

Third Examination: Take-Home Essay Exam in class 12/10/09

End of Term Paper is due no later than the morning of Tuesday December 15th. 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, drawing upon ideas about the nature of faith and its perversions covered in the readings, lectures, and discussions in the class.