

Religion, Secularism, and the Pursuit of Justice
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Boston University Writing Program
Fall 2010

COURSE SYLLABUS

Does separation of church and state help ensure social fairness? Is morality possible outside of religion? What role should religion play in protecting vulnerable individuals? In a democracy, should a religious majority impose its will?

In this writing course, we will ask questions such as these, as we explore the ethical impact of religious beliefs and practices as well as their absence. Each of us will ask and attempt to answer a question on this topic that especially provokes our interest.

Books to Be Purchased

- Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical's Lament* (New York: BasicBooks, 2006).
- ITW 101 Course Reader
- Diana Hacker, *A Writers Reference* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009).
- James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991).

Blackboard

At the course Blackboard site you will find documents describing the assignments, including the long writing project and project drafts, peer critiques, and reader-response papers. This syllabus is also available there, as are additional assigned readings. You can access Blackboard through your MyKSC page. After logging in, you should click on the course link. It is your responsibility to download the assignment descriptions for yourself. Please be sure also to check this site for course announcements, syllabus updates, and weather-related cancellations.

Writing

In our present time, it appears, an ever-increasing number of Americans care greatly about the connection between religion and justice. No other topic attracts more attention in blogs, books, newspapers, and talk radio. Many individuals seem intent on persuading whomever they can to buy into their views on religion and its moral-ethical impact. The topics that we address in this course, and the topic that you examine in your long writing project, speak to an important, ongoing public debate.

By learning to write clear and concise arguments, you enable yourself to weigh in on this public debate. The writing that you do in this course provides an opportunity for you to gain the equipment to enter public discussion—to persuade others to adopt your views. The writing that you do here will also assist you in a more fundamental part of this process: becoming clear on exactly what you believe and how you wish to explain it to others.

We will spend as much time class time exploring how ideas are expressed as we spend determining what the ideas are. We will consider whether some arguments are harder to follow than others because of the ways in which they are written or presented. We will ask: If a good idea is expressed poorly, then is it less likely to convince us than if it was expressed well? What can we do to make sure that we express our own ideas clearly and accurately in writing? Have we sufficiently considered alternative viewpoints? The assignments for this course are designed to encourage the development of clear, concise, and persuasive academic writing.

You will be given several types of written assignments:

1. Reader-Response Papers: On two occasions when a reading has been assigned, you will be required to hand in a reader-response paper. Your paper will begin with a summary of the book assigned for that day. It will then ask a question of the author, and it will follow that question with a speculative answer that enables you to make the text “your own” by bringing your thinking to bear on the author’s published writing. Reader-response papers should be 1–2 pages long, double spaced. The left, right, top, and bottom margins should all be 1”. For details, see Blackboard.
2. Long Writing Project: Our main focus throughout this semester will remain on developing a sustained, well-reasoned argument in a 15–20 page writing project. We will work through the entire process step by step, from the initial stage of identifying an issue and question that intrigues you, through the drafting and revising of your paper, to the finished project.
3. Project Drafts: Early in the semester, you will need to submit a proposal for your long writing project. Subsequently, you will be required to turn in four drafts (including the final draft) of your paper. The expectations for each draft will be clearly specified in advance; your goal in these drafts will be to make progress on the rough material—to refine the material so that it increasingly resembles a finished product.

As part of each draft, as well as the final paper, you will need to include a research log. The research log is a list of each source that you consulted and considered using in the current draft or at a later point. A log entry must cite the source, describe it, and explain its relevance to the draft and/or the larger project. The research log should be formatted as a bibliography, in accord with the model presented in *Writer's Reference*, p. 488.

Each draft needs also to end with a draft assessment, which consists of a paragraph surmising what the draft did well and what it did poorly. The draft assessment should also suggest ideas and resources that you might explore in your next draft. The assessment should be no longer than a single paragraph.

With each draft that you submit, you must also turn in every previous draft, as well as the proposal. Every draft, including the most recent, must be placed in the folder that you have been given at the beginning of semester. When you submit a draft, you should submit the entire folder.

Details on all elements of the long writing project are contained in the document "The Long Writing Project," which is posted on Blackboard.

4. Peer Critiques: You and two of your classmates will be placed into a three-member group. Each member of the group will read each other's drafts and offer critical feedback. During the following class session the group will meet, and each member will listen as her fellow members report back their evaluations of her paper. Peer critiques will be performed only for the first, second, and third drafts. Each critique should be 1–1½ pages long, double spaced. The left, right, top, and bottom margins should all be 1".
5. Writing Conferences: You will be required to schedule three conferences with me to discuss your writing. The first of these meetings must take place prior to Sept. 24; the second must take place prior to Oct. 29. These meetings will help you to rework your drafts—not simply by "correcting" mistakes of grammar and punctuation, but by enabling you to see your drafts differently from how you saw them previously. These meeting will enable you to rethink the organizational concepts and writing methods that you have employed.

Intermittently throughout the semester, during regular class time, I will hold blocks of pre-scheduled meetings. You may schedule your writing conferences during these blocks or during regular office hours, in my office.

Writing conferences are mandatory. Failure to meet with me will hurt your grade. With each failure to meet with me by the above dates, your total for the course will drop by twenty points.

Attendance and Class Participation

- Active and informed class participation is an essential part of this course. To receive a good grade, you need to read the assigned materials thoroughly and arrive at class prepared to participate.
- You are permitted three absences without penalty. These absences are intended for use in case of illness. I do not make a distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences—if you miss class for any reason, you are considered absent. Each absence beyond the permitted three will cause your class-participation grade to drop by ten points.
- If you need to miss more than three class sessions because of religious observances or college-sanctioned scheduled events, you must provide me—by the end of the second week of classes—with a written list of the dates and explanations for why the absences are necessary
- To get credit for an assignment, you must submit it on the day that it is due. Missing class doesn’t excuse you from turning in an assignment on time. If you do miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and getting copies of any new materials and assignments.
- Repeated tardiness will harm your class participation grade. On any given day, if you arrive more than thirty minutes late for class, I will consider you absent for that day.

Late Assignments

In this course everyone relies on everyone else’s performance. Because of that, you are expected to participate in an active and informed manner; also, because of that, you are expected to turn in all assignments at the time that they are due. When you show up without that day’s assignment completed, you deprive other students of a valuable learning opportunity. You need to submit all assignments on time if you wish to get a good grade in this course.

To receive credit for an assignment, you must hand it in on time. If you absolutely need an extension on an assignment, you need to ask for it at least four full days before the assignment is due. Even this does not guarantee that you will get the extension.

Students with an excused absence—for illness, family tragedy, religious observance, or performance in an athletic event—must work out with me a plan for submitting the assignment. Even in this event, you need to inform me before the assignment is due, not afterward.

Grading

Your final grade will be calculated out of 1,000 total points, distributed as follows:

Class participation	150 pts.
Confirmation of having read syllabus	20 pts.
Reader-response papers (two papers, 30 pts. each)	60 pts.
Project proposal	30 pts.
Project drafts (three drafts, 80 pts. each)	240 pts.
Peer review and response (three papers, 40 pts. each)	120 pts.
<u>Final project</u>	<u>380 pts.</u>
Final grade	1000 pts.

Etiquette

Because in-class discussion is so central to this course, it is especially important that everyone respect and honor everyone else. Sensitive topics will be covered. No one should be made to feel wrong or foolish on account of their personal convictions, nor should noise or distractions cause anyone to feel ignored or slighted. To help ensure a respectful classroom environment, please follow these guidelines:

- Please arrive promptly to all class sessions. If unavoidable circumstances delay your arrival, enter quietly and take your seat without disrupting the class.
- Please turn off all cell phones before class begins. Neither cell phones nor computers may be used during class.
- While in class, please do not sleep, read magazines, or engage in other activities unrelated to course material.
- During discussions please treat your classmates and your instructor respectfully. Keep in mind the manner in which you present your views: thoughtful, well-reasoned opinions are welcome, but personal attacks are not.
- Please do not use class time to discuss personal matters, such as grades and absences. Your own course-related concerns should be addressed after class, during office hours, or by email.
- Please do not begin packing your books before class has ended.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please speak with me (after class, during office hours, or by email) as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements.

Academic Integrity

You are encouraged to discuss course material with your classmates, and we will engage in collaborative work in class. Students sharing ideas is an important element of this course. However, you must complete all assignments and exercises on your own, unless you are specifically instructed to collaborate with another student on a particular assignment.

You are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by Keene State's Policy on Academic Honesty [<http://www.keene.edu/policy/academichonesty.cfm>]. That policy strictly prohibits plagiarizing and cheating, and it requires that you give proper credit for other people's ideas and/or words when you incorporate them into your own writing. We will spend time in class discussing appropriate methods for quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing sources. You should take these discussions very seriously.

Evidence of academic dishonesty will result in disciplinary action. If you are caught cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise acting dishonestly, you will probably receive an F as a final grade. After having read the college's policy, if you remain confused about what does or does not constitute academic dishonesty, please see me during office hours.

Assistance with Writing

For additional assistance with your writing, you may schedule an individual conference with a peer tutor at the KSC Center for Writing, 81 Blake St., 603-358-2412, or [<http://keeneweb.org/write>].

Class Cancellations

Whenever the weather is treacherous, you should check Blackboard to check for cancellations. On any day that class has been canceled due to inclement weather, a notice announcing the cancellation will be posted on Blackboard by 11:30 am that same day.

Reading this Syllabus

You are responsible for signing a form indicating that you have carefully read this syllabus in its entirety and have understood everything that it allows and requires from students. If there are parts of this syllabus that you do not fully understand, it is your responsibility to ask me to explain them until you do understand them. By signing this form you confirm your familiarity with all provisions of this syllabus.

Schedule of Classes—Section 29 (Monday and Wednesday, 12:00–1:45)Readings listed for a particular date are to be completed by *that class session*.

Date	Readings	Assignments Due	In-Class Activities
Mon., Aug. 31			Introduction
Wed., Sept. 2	Hunter, <i>Culture Wars</i> , 3–51		Text discussion Discussion: Reader response papers
Mon., Sept. 7	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Wed., Sept. 9	Hunter, <i>Culture Wars</i> , 107–32	Response paper on Hunter	Discussion and Activity: Grammar
Mon., Sept. 14	Stephen Carter, <i>Culture of Disbelief</i> , 23–43 Paul Kurtz, <i>Secular Humanist Declaration</i> , 7–20		Text discussion
Wed., Sept. 16	Michael Farris, <i>Joshua Generation</i> , ix–xi, 1–14		Discussion on proposal Text discussion
Mon., Sept. 21	Balmer, <i>Thy Kingdom Come</i> , 1–34, 71–108	Response paper on Balmer	Text discussion
Wed., Sept. 23	Hacker, C1a–C1b, R3c (pp. 3–9, 344–47) KSC Catalog, pp. 191–93	Deadline for first writing conference	Discussion: Finding a topic; Academic honesty
Mon., Sept. 28	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Wed., Sept. 30		Proposal due	First excursion to library (Meet in library classroom / lab)
Mon., Oct. 5	Ducat, <i>Wimp Factor</i> , 208–45		Text discussion Second excursion to library (Meet in library classroom / lab)
Wed., Oct. 7	Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement” (1988), at http://www.cbmw.org/Danvers		Text discussion
Mon., Oct. 12	Hacker, A1 (pp. 57–66)		Discussion and Activity: Sources—Different kinds; How to find; How to analyze
Wed., Oct. 14		First draft due	Discussion: Peer Critique Process Discussion and Activity: Grammar

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Date	Readings	Assignments Due	In-Class Activities
Mon., Oct. 19	Vermont Freedom to Marry, at http://www.vtfreetomarry.org/	Peer critique of first draft	Peer-critique groups Discussion and Activity: Locating Primary Material
Wed., Oct. 21	Hacker, C1c–C1d, C2 (pp. 10–18)		Discussion and Activity: What Is a Thesis?
Mon., Oct. 26	Hacker, C4a, C4d (pp. 24–25, 31–36)		Discussion and Activity: Constructing Paragraphs
Wed., Oct. 28		Deadline for second writing conference	One-on-one conferences
Mon., Nov. 2	Hacker, CMS-3 (pp. 466–71)	Second draft due	Discussion and Activity: Grammar
Wed., Nov. 4	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Mon., Nov. 9	Hacker, A2 (pp. 67–76)	Peer critique of second draft	Peer-critique groups Discussion and Activity: Counterarguments & multiple perspectives
Wed., Nov. 11	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Mon., Nov. 16	Gacek, “California Court’s Edict” Charron & Skylstad, “Statement” SBC Resolution (online) Pew Forum (online)		Text discussion
Wed., Nov. 18	Rose, “Same-Sex Marriage” Kahn, “ <i>Kedushah</i> ” Morford, “Blame the God of Woe”		Text discussion
Mon., Nov. 23		Third draft due	Discussion and Activity: Grammar
Wed., Nov. 25	NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK	NO CLASS THANKSGIVING	NO CLASS THANKSGIVING
Mon., Nov. 30	Hacker, CMS2–3 (pp. 463–71); browse CMS4 (pp. 471–81)	Peer critique of third draft	Peer-critique groups Discussion and Activity: Using and citing primary sources
Wed., Dec. 2			Discussion and Activity: Grammar
Mon., Dec. 7			One-on-one conferences
Wed., Dec. 9			One-on-one conferences
Wed., Dec. 16		Final draft due, 3:30–4:00	