

# PHL 225- SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Instructor:	Jon Brammer	Time:	W- 6:30 to 9:15 PM
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## Course description:

This course is designed around a core question: how do scientific and religious epistemologies and beliefs shape human experience? In modern times, the cultural forces of scientific inquiry and religious tradition have been at odds over explanations of the world and how humans interact with it. This has become increasingly evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as interactions between social, political and religious agendas have become more strained. This course will examine the complex dynamic between the scientific worldview and religious alternatives. Can they be reconciled? Should they be? Specific areas to be studied include, but are not limited to, the nature of scientific and religious dialogue, the role of religion and spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, human experience as a classroom of inquiry, the psychology of spirituality, empirical studies of religious practices, and the development of secular ethics.

## Learning outcomes:

- Demonstrate understanding of foundational questions/criticisms of both scientific inquiry and religious worldviews
- Analyze the consequences of applying different worldviews to historical and modern human concerns
- Demonstrate understanding of the complexity of current social issues and their connection to science and religion
- Develop an understanding of personal viewpoints on the impact of technology and the human experience.
- Use critical thinking strategies to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources (i.e. primary texts, secondary texts, multi-media presentations, experiential learning, etc...)

## Required texts:

*Religion and Science: The Basics*, by Philip Clayton (ISBN 978-0415598569)

*The Cosmic Serpent*, by Joseph Narby (ISBN 978-0874779646)

*Worldviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, by Ninian Smart (ISBN 978-01302098015)

*The Believing Brain*, by Michael Shermer (ISBN 978-1250008800)

## Attendance, grading, and due dates:

Attendance- I will be checking attendance for the first couple of meetings, but after that, it is up to you to attend regularly. Because most of the main themes in the course will be discussed in class, it is to your advantage to attend regularly. We will also be doing in-class writings on a regular basis that I will use to determine discussion grades. The class meets only once per week, so one missed class will probably not result in any kind of huge deficit, but excessive absences (two or more) will most likely impact your work negatively. If you miss a session, please check our Blackboard site if you want copies of lecture slides, handouts, etc.

Grading- The grading for this course is flexible and will be decided during the first day of class. The categories below indicate all the aspects on which you will be assessed. The weight that is assigned to each one is up to the class as a whole. There are only a few limitations: 1) no category can be worth less than 100 points, 2) fractional totals or those not rounded to the nearest ten points are not acceptable, 3) in-class writings and discussion can't be more than 200 points, 4) the total number of points must equal 1000. Please remember that if one category is given fewer points, then another category must be weighted more heavily.

Research project (personal experimentation) -----	_____	points
Mid-term and final exams -----	_____	points
Study question or event responses (4) -----	_____	points
In-class writings and discussion -----	_____	points

Letter grades are then generated at the end of the term based on a percentage scale. Grades with an attached "+" or "-" will be given for those point totals which fall within the top or bottom 2% of each grade category (there is no "A+"). For example, a student with 830 points would receive a straight "B" grade. A different student, who had accumulated only 810 points, would receive a "B-" (810= the lowest 2% of the "B" category or .81x1000=810).

A=	900-1000 points
B=	800-899 points
C=	700-799 points
D=	600-699 points
F=	below 600 points

Due dates- Due dates are included in the syllabus and are not generally flexible. Late papers will *not* be accepted unless a student is experiencing/has experienced an *extreme* situation. In such cases, please speak to me privately *before* the fact, if possible.

### Writing papers:

MLA format- **All out of class assignments must be typed and double-spaced with realistic margins according to MLA format.** I will outline this format in class prior to your first written assignment. Any up-to-date English/writing reference will have a section on how to use this set of writing conventions. These are two of the best online resource to use:

*The Purdue Online Writing Lab:* <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>  
*University of North Carolina:* <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/>

Revising, editing, and proofreading- Please be as conscientious about drafting your papers for this class as you would be for an English course. Written communication is lasting communication, so make every effort to produce your best efforts. All papers should be proofed thoroughly *by a human!* Computer spell-checks and grammar checks are notoriously fallible. I am generally more concerned about content than grammatical problems, but papers that are not carefully proofed will receive point deductions accordingly. You can also take advantage of the writing tutors in TASC/Writing Center by making a face-to-face appointment or submitting a paper via e-mail at [TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu](mailto:TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu)

Submitting papers- I prefer that all papers be submitted electronically as attached files sent to my campus e-mail address ([jbrammer@trcc.commnet.edu](mailto:jbrammer@trcc.commnet.edu)); **MS Word .doc or .docx file types are best. Please do not use the .pdf format.** Any supporting documents can be submitted either electronically or in a hard copy. Be sure you get some acknowledgement from me indicating that I have received your paper. If you do not get one, I did not receive it.

Returned papers- All graded copies of papers will usually be returned one class meeting after the due date. If something comes up that prevents that timeline, I do my best to communicate regarding the delay.

### General campus policies:

Plagiarism- Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words or ideas in your writing. **Conscious plagiarism is an unacceptable academic behavior that will result in a "0" for the plagiarized assignment, with no re-write possibilities. Any repeat offense will result in a failing grade in the course.** Plagiarism by omission or "unconscious" plagiarism will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. To review information about what constitutes plagiarism, I recommend this site:

Purdue OWL plagiarism tutorial: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

Withdrawal policy- A student who finds it necessary to discontinue a course once class has met must provide written notice to the registrar. Withdrawal forms are available at the Registrar's office. No punitive "W" grades are assigned to any withdrawal requested before the unrestricted withdrawal deadline for the semester. Withdrawal requests received after this deadline must bear the signature of the instructor. No withdrawals are permitted after the last class preceding the final exam. Those who do not obtain an official withdrawal, but simply stop attending classes, run the risk of receiving an "F" grade for the course

"N" Grade Policy- The "N" Grade is assigned to students when there is no basis for a grade. This would apply to students who never came to class as well as to those who didn't attend or participate long enough to be graded. The N grade is used to distinguish between earned failures (F), official withdrawals (W), and students who stop attending or participating before there is a basis for a grade. In most cases there would be no basis for a grade for students who stop attending or participating before the 60% point. Like a withdrawal, the N grade does not get included in a student's GPA but does count as a non-completed course.

Students with disabilities- If you have a hidden or visible disability that may require special accommodations, please see me as soon as possible. If you have a question regarding a disability that may affect your progress in this course, please contact one of the college's Disability Service Providers as soon as possible. Chris Scarborough (860-215-9289/Room A-119D) generally works with students who have learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder (ADD/ADHD), or Asperger's syndrome. Matt Liscum (860-215-9265/Room A-124) generally works with students who have physical, visual, hearing, medical, mobility, or psychiatric disabilities.

Cancelled classes- There is a possibility that class might be cancelled unexpectedly due to weather or another unforeseen circumstance. In such cases, check the college web site for official closing notifications. Also, read the two paragraphs below for methods of getting the most up to date information from the campus on weather closings and delays. Blackboard will be used for posting course materials.

Remind sign-up- I use the Remind.com application to communicate brief messages related to course content and upcoming events. You can sign up to have those messages sent to your phone, e-mail, or both. I will provide details in class.

Student e-mail accounts-All students on campus have a TRCC account that will be used as the default e-mail contact for communications. If you would like to set up that address to forward to one you check more frequently, that is easily done online. Go to this web site for detailed information:  
[http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Div\\_StudentServices/Registrar/documents/studentemail.pdf](http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Div_StudentServices/Registrar/documents/studentemail.pdf)

myCommNet Alerts- myCommNet Alert is a system that sends text messages and emails to anyone signed up in the event of a campus emergency. Additionally, TRCC sends messages when the college is delayed or closed due

to weather. All students are encouraged to sign up for myCommNet Alert. A tutorial is available on the Educational Technology and Distance Learning Students page of the web site:

[http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/div\\_it/educationaltechnology/Tutorials/myCommNetAlert/MIR3.html](http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/div_it/educationaltechnology/Tutorials/myCommNetAlert/MIR3.html)

*Digication*- All students are required to maintain an online learning portfolio in Digication that uses the college template. Through this electronic tool students will have the opportunity to monitor their own growth in college-wide learning. The student will keep his/her learning portfolio and may continue to use the Digication account after graduation. A Three Rivers General Education Assessment Team will select and review random works to improve the college experience for all. Student work reviewed for assessment purposes will not include names and all student work will remain private and anonymous for college improvement purposes. Students will have the ability to integrate learning from the classroom, college, and life in general, which will provide additional learning opportunities. If desired, students will have the option to create multiple portfolios. Go here to view video tutorials and log in to the system:

[http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Div\\_IT/EducationalTechnology/Digication.shtml](http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Div_IT/EducationalTechnology/Digication.shtml)

### Revisions to syllabus:

The information contained in the syllabus is subject to revision at my discretion. I will inform the class of any changes that are made. If you miss a class, contact me or talk to a classmate upon your return to verify that you have the most up-to-date information.



# Reading and Assignment Schedule- spring 2016

## Week 1- 1/27

- Introduction to the course, active reading strategies, writing responses to study questions, exploring epistemology, course themes and ground rules; origins of belief

## Week 2- 2/3

- Foundational assumptions of science; assumptions of religious worldviews; epistemology overview
  - Clayton- chapter 1- pp. 1-13
  - Smart- chapter 2- pp. 33-54
  - SR- Barbour typology; Gould; Schwartz

## Week 3- 2/10

- Historical debates- age of worldviews, Enlightenment ideas
  - Clayton- chapter 2- pp. 15-30
  - Smart- introduction and chapter one- pp 1-32
- **Research project proposal**

## Week 4- 2/17

- Historical debates- Copernicus, Darwin, Scopes and the Kansas textbook discussion
  - Smart- chapter 5- pp. 87-98
  - SR- mixed current events and secular humanism definitions
- **Study Question Response #1**

## Week 5- 2/24

- Core issues with science and religion- cosmology and cosmogony
  - Clayton- chapter 4- pp. 66-81
  - Smart- chapter 4- pp. 71-82

## Week 6- 3/2

- Core issues with science and religion- morality and its underpinnings
  - Clayton- chapter- 7- pp. 121-131
  - Smart- chapter 6- pp 104-116
- **Study Question Response #2**

## Week 7- 3/9

- Core issues with science and religion- materialism and spirituality; midterm topics
  - Clayton- chapter 30- pp. 43-61
  - Smart- chapter 3- pp. 55-65
  - SR- Tillich and others

## Week 8- 3/16

- Take midterm exam

## Week 9- 3/23

- No class meeting- spring break
  - Work on updates to research project

**Week 10- 3/30**

- Modern issues in science and religion- 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century thinkers and the global village
  - Smart- chapter 9- pp. 145-155
  - Clayton- chapter 9- pp. 152-167
- **Research project check-in**

**Week 11- 4/6**

- Modern issues in science and religion- bioethical frontiers
  - Clayton- chapter 8- pp. 136-144
  - Narby- chapters 1-4
  - Shermer- chapters 1-2
  - SR- Meilaender, Song, LeFleur, Singer
- **Study question response #3**

**Week 12- 4/13**

- Modern issues in science and religion- culture wars, new literalism, and neo-atheists; the evolving religious marketplace
  - Narby- chapters 5-8
  - Shermer- chapter 3
  - SR- Sagan, Harris, Dawkins

**Week 13- 4/20**

- Modern issues in science and religion- empirical studies of religious experience
  - Narby- chapters 9-11
  - Shermer- chapters 4 and 5
  - SR- Zajonc, Wallace
- **Study question response #4**

**Week 14- 4/27**

- Presentations

**Week 15- 5/4**

- Presentations
- **Final research project**

**Week 16- 5/11**

- Take final exam

**Any and all remaining work must be submitted by Friday, 5/13/2016 in order to be considered for final grading!**