



University of Waterloo

Fall 2014

COURSE NUMBER: Religious Studies 370
Course Name: Atheism, Skepticism, and Free Thought

Instructor: Douglas E. Cowan
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N.b., since every student is assigned a **University of Waterloo email account**, please use that for all electronic communications with me. Often the university servers interpret accounts such as Yahoo, Hotmail, or Gmail as spam, and delete the messages automatically. This means that either I may not get your message, or you may not get my reply. If you choose not to use your university account and you miss an assignment or an important communication because the email does not get through, this is your responsibility. Please do not communicate with me via Facebook or Twitter; I will respond to neither. Also, please note that email received after 5:00 pm Friday will be answered on Monday.

Class Times/Location: Monday/Thursday, 11:30-12:50, Renison 0106

Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:00; 5:00-6:00; Tuesday 12:00-1:00,
or by appointment

Course Description:

This course will consider the social history and popular impact of atheism, skepticism, and free thought in the context of religious debate. Primary sources will range from Hobbes and Marx to Freud and Orwell, and from Bertrand Russell and Carl Sagan to Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

N.B., should unforeseen circumstances arise, I reserve the right to modify the syllabus as necessary to ensure the academic and pedagogical integrity of the course.

Course Objectives:

In this course, students will:

- ✓ Learn how atheism, skepticism, and free thought emerged historically and contributed to religious diversity, scientific understanding, ethical debates, and social development;
- ✓ Consider the evolution of atheism, skepticism, and free thinking as opposition movements to organised religion;
- ✓ Improve communication skills through written assignments and class participation; and continue to foster skills in critical thinking and analysis.

Text: Hitchens, ed., *The Portable Atheist* (available at the bookstore)

Course Requirements:

Online Discussion and Class Participation	30%
Research Paper	50%
Class Debates	20%
Extra credit assignment	10%
Midterm Exam (date)	No midterm
Final Exam	No final exam

Online Discussion and Class Participation: 30%

Since this is a small class, we will be using a seminar format, both in-class and online. Therefore, everyone is responsible for contributing to the learning environment. This means that you should not miss class ever. Illness and family emergencies are considered acceptable excuses, but must be accompanied by appropriate documentation. Please note that participation is not the same as class attendance. Simply being in your seat is not enough; rather, it means you are actively contributing to the discussion. Working in groups, each student is expected to INITIATE one discussion thread for each class reading and RESPOND to two threads initiated by his or her group-mates. The schedule for these is available on LEARN.

Research Paper: 50%

Each student will choose a topic relevant to the course and produce a well-written, well-researched paper on that topic. Papers will be 10-12 pages, typed and double-spaced, with 10-cm margins. There are three parts to this assignment: (a) topics must be cleared with Dr. Cowan no later than October 2 and include an initial proposal (one paragraph) and a list of initial sources; (b) a rough draft of the paper is due November 13; final paper is due December 5. All materials should be submitted through LEARN.

Class Debates: 20%

Working in small groups, we will have a series of debates at the end of term (see syllabus below). These debates will consider some of the Common Big Questions in the atheist/agnostic discussions with religious believers. These are: (1) Existence of and Evidence for God; (2) Religion and Morality; and (3) Is religion dangerous? Feel free to invite your friends to these class sessions.

Extra Credit Assignment (something I almost NEVER do): 10%

On November 1, Dr. Cowan will be one of the speakers at the Non-Conference: A Conference for Non-Believers. It is at the J.R.R. McLeod Auditorium in Toronto and runs from 11:00 am to 9:00 pm. Student tickets are \$34 (consider it the cost of only one more textbook). If you attend the conference and submit a 4-5 page reflection on it, this will add 10% to your overall grade.

Late Assignments

Assignments turned in past the due date will be assessed a penalty of 10% per business day late, including the day on which you turn it in. If a paper is due on Monday and you turn it in Wednesday, there will be a 20% penalty. I do not grant extensions except for reasons of medical and family emergency, and documentation is required in all instances. To do otherwise is simply unfair to everyone else in the class. Please note that I submit my grades as soon as I have finished marking those assignments turned in on the due date. Unless you have made arrangements with me prior to the due date, once grades are submitted, they are final. Extensions require that students complete a Request for Incomplete form, available at the Renison registrar's office, and provide medical (or other) documentation supporting their request.

Communication of Grades

In an effort to protect student privacy, it is Renison University College policy NOT to post grades at any time throughout the academic term. Grades will NOT be reported over the phone by the main office or the Registrar's office. Final grades will be available on the Internet by following the online instructions at <www.quest.uwaterloo.ca>. For reasons of student security and privacy, I do not discuss grades over the telephone or via email. You are welcome to come and see me during my office hours, or to make an appointment to discuss your grades.

Classroom Etiquette

I have relatively few rules in my classroom, but please respect the ones I have.

- Respect the opinions of others. During class discussions, it is very likely that contradictory opinions will emerge, especially when we are dealing with highly emotional topics. There is no requirement in our class that students agree with each other, or with the instructors, but there is the mandate that the opinions expressed be respected.
- Please be on time. We will begin each class promptly, and I expect students to be in the room and ready to proceed. Arriving late or leaving without permission is both disruptive and disrespectful.



Use of cellphones or other electronic devices for voice or text communication is prohibited in class, and I expect all cellphones, pagers, or other wireless devices to be turned off when you enter the classroom—not simply set to silent ring—and off the desk. If a student is found using one of these devices, he or she will be immediately asked to leave the classroom and will not be readmitted for that period.



It has become evident that laptops (including Ipads and tablets) have become too much of a distraction in the classroom. Unless special arrangements have been made with me, use of a laptop in the classroom is not permitted. If you require accommodation through the AccessAbility Services, please see me.

SYLLABUS

Date	Topic	Readings (all from <i>The Portable Atheist</i>)
Sep 8-11	Introduction to the course	Lucretius (pp. 1-6); Khayyam (pp.7-11)
Sep 15-18	Religion and the Good, Moral, and Decent Fallacy	Hobbes (pp. 12-20; Hume (pp. 26-45); Boswell (pp. 46-49)
Sep 22-25	The (Non) Existence of God	Shelley (pp. 50-56); Mill (pp. 57-63); Eliot (pp. 75-92)
Sep 29-Oct 2	Screen <i>Inherit the Wind</i>	
Oct 6	Discuss <i>Inherit the Wind</i>	
Oct 13	Thanksgiving—NO Class	
Oct 9, Oct 16	The Great Debate...	Darwin (pp.93-96); Shermer (pp. 267-270); Russell (pp. 181-206)
Oct 20-23	The God Hypothesis, Part One	Sagan (pp. 226-38); Mencken (pp. 143-46); Freud (pp. 147-154)
Oct 27-30	The God Hypothesis, Part Two	Mackie (pp. 246-266); Dawkins (pp. 287-304); Stenger (pp. 311-327)
Nov 1	The Non-Conference: The Conference for Non-Believers (Toronto)	
Nov 3-6	The Move to Unbelief	van Doren (pp. 138-142); Templeton (pp. 282-286); Ali (pp. 477-480)
Nov 10-13	A World Without Religion	Anderson (pp. 333-348); Rushdie (pp. 380-383)
Nov 17-25	The New Atheism	
Nov 27	Class Debate	

Final Examination Policy

For Fall 2014, the established examination period is December 4-19, 2014. The schedule will be available in October. Students should be aware that student travel plans are not acceptable grounds for granting an alternative final examination time (see: <http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/finalexams.html>).

Accommodation for Illness or Unforeseen Circumstances:

The instructor follows the practices of the University of Waterloo in accommodating students who have documented reasons for missing quizzes or exams. See http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/students/accom_illness.html

Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>. In addition, consult <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-arts-processes> for the Faculty of Arts' grievance processes.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72>.

Academic Integrity website (Arts):

http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo): <http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

If you are using Turnitin in your course:

Turnitin.com: Plagiarism detection software (Turnitin) will be used to screen assignments in this course. This is being done to verify that use of all material and sources in assignments is documented. In the first week of the term, details will be provided about the arrangements for the use of Turnitin in this course.

Note: students must be given a reasonable option if they do not want to have their assignment screened by Turnitin. See <http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/integrity-waterloo-faculty/turnitin-waterloo> for more information.

Cross-listed course:

Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science rubric.

A respectful living and learning environment for all.

1. It is expected that everyone living, learning or working on the premises of Renison University College will contribute to an environment of tolerance and respect by treating others with sensitivity and civility.
2. Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of jokes, insults, gestures, gossip, or other behaviours that are meant to intimidate. Some instances of harassment are against the law in addition to Renison University College policy.
3. Discrimination is treating people differently because of their race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry, colour, age, creed, marital status, or other personal characteristics. The Ontario Human Rights Code considers actions and behaviours rather than intentions.
4. If you experience or witness either harassment or discrimination, you may contact the Renison University College Harassment and Discrimination Officer at mmalton@uwaterloo.ca (519-884-4404, ext. 28628).