

**GODS, GHOSTS, & GOBLINS: UNDERSTANDING BELIEF**  
**Psych 198 Course Number 11772 Gen Ed SS1 & WE**  
**INTERDISCIPLINARY FIRST YEAR SEMINAR Fall 2009**

**Professor:** Dr. Regan A. R. Gurung [www.uwgb.edu/humdev/gurung.htm](http://www.uwgb.edu/humdev/gurung.htm)  
**Class time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, MACH 234 12.30 to 1.50 p.m.  
**Office:** Mary Ann Cofrin Hall (MAC) C-309  
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**Office Hours: Mon & Wed: 10-11.00a.m. Monday 1.00-3.00p.m. Tues/Thurs: 10.00-12noon**  
 Any changes due to university meetings will be posted. Email to set up meetings at other times.  
**Class Desire2Learn (D2L) Web site:** [www.uwgb.edu](http://www.uwgb.edu) (Current Students, then D2L)

**This class is extraordinary!!!! Really. Why? We get to read fun, engaging books, think and talk about some weighty issues, AND develop habits of mind and pragmatic skills that can influence your ENTIRE college experience. Get ready to flex your minds.**

### What Is This Course About?

Do you believe in God? Do goblins, ghosts, fairies, pixies, and elves exist? A majority of this planet will respond yes to the first question, and a decent number will also say yes to the second. Why do we believe in some supernatural and non-tangible entities (e.g., God) and not others (e.g., ghosts and goblins)? How can we explain belief? This class will help you answer these questions. Using a diverse range of sources we will explore the underlying reasons as to why humans believe the things they do (and why they do not believe in other things). Along the way we shall discover what it means to think like a social scientist, and use this approach to explore the roots of religion, discuss the psychological benefits to believing and the perils of not, and examine some fascinating objects of belief ranging from paranormal activity to extraterrestrial life.

### What are the Goals of this Course (and the First Year Seminar Program)?

- A. **To Engage you, make you excited to learn, and connect you to UWGB**– Help you connect with other students, campus resources, and the university, fire your desire to learn, and give you the tools to succeed in all your college courses and endeavors.
- B. **To Provide you with knowledge of the Social Science Approach** -- Achieve the UWGB general education learning outcome of having a fundamental understanding of the Social Sciences with an emphasis on psychological approaches (*Gen. Ed. SS2*).
- C. **To Develop Scientific Values and Skills** --Learn how to: think critically and use the scientific method to ask and answer questions about everyday life, recognize common errors in decision making, thinking and acting, and especially to develop a critical attitude about accepting authority-based conclusions and media-reported evidence.
- D. **To Aid Personal Development** -- Increase your understanding of the behavior of others as well as your own. Develop an acceptance of the diversity of human nature by exploring different beliefs, and understanding why different people believe different things.
- E. **To Provide an Introduction to Interdisciplinarity and develop Informational Literacy** -- Achieve the UWGB learning goal of having a fundamental understanding of the concept of Interdisciplinarity. Develop your ability to communicate effectively through listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the use of computers.

### What will you read?

Collins, F. C. (2007). *The language of god: A scientist presents evidence for belief*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Roach, M. (2005). *Spook: Science tackles the afterlife*. New York, NY: Norton.

Shermer, M. (2000). *How we believe: Science, skepticism, and the search for God*. New York: Holt.

Selected readings posted on the class website.

### How do you Maximize Your LEARNING (and get a GREAT grade)?

1. **Come to class prepared and stay focused.**
  - a. Read the assigned readings before you come to class.
  - b. Identify difficult areas in the readings to discuss in class.
  
2. **Read Mindfully.**
  - a. Set aside blocks of time to read and read for at least 30-45 minutes at a stretch.
  - b. Minimize distractions (computer, music, T.V.) during reading.
  - c. QUESTION the readings and write down the questions.
  - d. **Note: You are responsible for all assigned readings even if not discussed in class.**
  
3. **Take good notes.**
  - a. Re-write key material from the readings/class in your own words.
  - b. Write down examples and stories..
  - c. Leave space (use one side of a notebook or leave extra lines between topics/subtopics).
  
4. **Study well for exams.**
  - a. Start studying early and study often (review text/notes after each class).
  - b. PLAN your studying and break down the task into subtasks.
  - c. Use different techniques; study with a friend.
  - d. TEST yourself well to see what you do not know and spend time restudying.
  - e. Come see me/call me/email me, if you do not understand something.

### GET YOUR MONEY'S WORTH.

Please be on time, and stay the full time.

Please limit chatting during class, and do not pack before we are done.

Courteous behavior in class and in web postings will be appreciated by all.

Please *turn off your cell phones* before each class.

Please DO NOT READ/SEND text messages during class.

Please do not use laptop computers in class. Using computers and phones in class have been linked to lower student learning (Fried, 2008)!!!!

**Come to all classes. Stay focused till the end.**

## How Do You Demonstrate Your Learning?

**The Short Answer:** Two exams, an Interdisciplinary Term Paper, 2 short Paper Assignments, a Class Presentation, a Final Paper, and campus and class Participation. *The details:*

**Exams (2, 20% each)** will consist of a combination of short answer and essay questions. Because exam dates are specified well in advance you are expected to be able to take all of them. Exceptions for catastrophic cases will be reviewed individually and will need documentation (e.g., doctor's note). **NO make-up exams will be given.**

**Short Paper Assignments (10%):** You will write 2 short papers on belief. Specific guides to writing and on each of these assignments are on the class website. All papers must be grammatically correct, error-free, stapled, concise, well-written, follow good writing etiquette, use page numbers, be double-spaced, and be without cover pages or report covers:

**1. What do You Believe and Why?** What are your core beliefs? How did you develop or gain them? What purpose do they serve for you? This paper serves to set the stage for your exploration of the roots and reasons for belief. Make sure you include as many determinants of your beliefs as possible. **Due SEPT. 15th.** Not to exceed two pages, with thesis and topic sentences (see online guides on how to write well). You will be graded on the depth of your self examination, the organization of the paper (including the basic elements of writing and composition), and the extent of critical thinking demonstrated by your writing.

**2. Annotated Bibliography:** For a film of your choice that relates to class, create an annotated bibliography of five *refereed* sources (i.e., valid, reviewed, scholarly journal articles, NO magazine or web reviews or blogs) that provide further reading on a subject in the film. This is the link for the annotated bibliography assignment:

[www.uwgb.edu/library/research/guides/AnnotatedBibliography.html](http://www.uwgb.edu/library/research/guides/AnnotatedBibliography.html)

**The Interdisciplinary Papers (15%): Interdisciplinarity Rocks.** To introduce you to interdisciplinarity, we will first have a large in-class discussion Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>. Then you will hear a visiting speaker based on the 2009-10 UWGB Common Theme-**Sustainability**. You will complete 2 worksheets and a term paper. (Detailed instructions provided in class):

**Final Essay (15%): Why do people believe what they believe?** In line with the goals of this class (i.e., helping you to think critically), this 4 page paper assignment challenges you to take the information you have learned in this class and combine it with your intellect, worldview and personal experiences. Papers are due at the start of the last day of class. To help you write better, benefit from this assignment, and get a better grade, you will be asked to turn in a draft of the paper.

**Class Group Presentation (10%):** There are a wide variety of beliefs and there are too many to be completely covered in only one semester. My coverage of the some major ones will undoubtedly omit some other topics you would like to hear more about. To ensure that you have a chance to learn even more about special topics and to give you practice in oral presentations, you will form groups of 2-3, pick a belief of interest, and present it to the class. Your presentation should illustrate the belief, present a profile of the believers, and use material from class to explain what the belief is based on.

**Participation (10%):** There are two graded components of your personal engagement in this course.

- 1. Co-curricular activities (5%):** The university offers a number of extra and co-curricular activities that can enhance your overall education. Please attend at least one from each of the following category of events: *Healthy Relationships, Diversity, Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention*. A complete listing of all the options is available on the campus life webpage, Good Times programming, and from your Peer Mentor. After you attend something, complete a brief report of it on the class D2L site (Activity Quiz). You should do at least 3 (bonus points for more).
- 2. Comment and Criticism Log (CCL, 5%):** To enable you to get the most of the readings, stimulate discussion, and prepare for class, write down 2-3 main questions about each reading/the main points, and/or your main criticisms. Create a Word document and update it as you read more. Upload it to the class site weekly (I will remind you). I will invite some of you to read your CCLs in every class, and share them with me individually to get a sense of what you got from the readings.

***Grades will be assigned in the following manner***

|           |            |          |            |
|-----------|------------|----------|------------|
| A: 93-100 | A/B: 88-92 | B: 84-87 | B/C: 79-83 |
| C: 75-78  | C/D: 68-74 | D: 60-67 | F: <60     |

**THERE IS NO CURVE!** My philosophy on grading is that individual effort rather than competition results in a more productive and successful learning environment.

**LATE POLICY:** You lose 1 point for every day the paper is late (weekend days too).

**NOTE ON EMAIL:** I will be using your UWGB student email addresses to send you updates and information. Please *check it often* (set your account to forward your email to what you check).

**A Framework For Class**

- Class will be devoted introducing, clarifying, and summarizing topics fully dealt with in the different books rather than repeating all the material in there. Bring your books to class. Mark them up while you are reading so you can find what you want in them easily. Highlight different paragraphs or concepts you disagree with. Write out questions. ENGAGE the material. **You are responsible for all the material in the assigned readings even if not covered in lectures.**
- If you do not agree with material, if something I say raises a question in your head, or if you think of something that contributes to current topic, PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND and let me hear you. I REALLY appreciate, and your CLASSMATES BENEFIT from your personal contributions.
- Use my office hours. Come to my office and chat before or after class with questions. I am here to help you do well in this class and here at UWGB.
- **Give Learning Your Time, Energy, and Commitment:** Supplement each hour of in-class work with approx. 2 hours of course related study for optimal performance and understanding.
- *If you have a disability please contact and wish to discuss special accommodations please contact UWGB's Disability Services (SS1500) or 465 2849 as soon as possible.*

## Approximate Schedule of Classes

(Changes will be announced in class/on the class web page)

| Date             | Topic  | Read (Author/Chp.)       |
|------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Sep 3            | Beliefs- Big picture and agenda setting            |                          |
| Sep 8            | Finding God, Ghosts, Goblins-A methodology         | Shermer-Appendix. I      |
| Sep 10           | Interdisciplinarity- Phoenix BC                    | Shermer 3                |
| Sep. 15          | The Soul of the Matter                             | Roach 2,3,4              |
| Sep 17           | <i>Amy W.- Medium</i> <b>SHORT PP1 DUE</b>         | “                        |
| Sep 22           | Spirits in the Material World                      | Roach 5,6,7              |
| <u>Sep 23</u>    | <u>WEDNESDAY Oil Vs. Wilderness –Waterman Talk</u> | <u>8pm Phoenix Rooms</u> |
| Sep 24           | “  | “                        |
| Sep 29           | Ghosts   | Roach 8,9,10             |
| Oct 1            | “  | “                        |
| Oct 6            | More Ghosts  | Roach 11,12              |
| Oct 8            | Paranormal Grab bag & exam review                  |                          |
| Oct 13           | <b>Exam 1</b>                                      |                          |
| Oct 15           | Lunch & Movie Fest: <i>Stigmata</i>                | <i>Christie Theatre</i>  |
| Oct 20           | Origins of Myth etc.                               | Shermer 7                |
| Oct 22           | Evolution of God                                   | Shermer 1,4, App 2       |
| Oct 27           | Atheism to Belief                                  | Collins 1-2              |
| Oct 29           | GHOST HUNTERS ‘Live’                               | Collins 4-5              |
| Nov 3            | Balancing Science and Faith                        | Shermer 5,6              |
| Nov 5            | “ <b>SHORT PP2 DUE</b>                             | “                        |
| Nov 10           | “  | Collins 6,7,8            |
| Nov 12           | Biology of Belief                                  | Shermer Afterword        |
| Nov 17           | Reflecting on God                                  |                          |
| Nov 19           | Class Presentations                                |                          |
| Nov 24           | Class Presentations <b>FINAL PP DRAFT DUE</b>      |                          |
|                  | THANKSGIVING                                       |                          |
| Dec 1            | Class Presentations                                |                          |
| Dec 3            | Class Presentations                                |                          |
| Dec 8            | Big Picture: Why we believe what we believe        | Shermer 10               |
| Dec. 10          | Big Picture. <b>FINAL PP DUE</b>                   |                          |
| <u>Dec. 17th</u> | <b>FINAL EXAM</b>                                  | <b>10.30 am-12/30</b>    |

**NOTE: On a TBA Saturday this fall the class will compete as a team in a charity event. More details in class.**