**ENC 1145-21**

Instructor: Arlynda Lee Boyer

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Time: M W F, 12:20 -1:10

Location: WMS 108

Office:

Hours:

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Writing about Faith and Atheism is a course designed to help you write your way toward a deeper understanding of your own attitudes toward the larger questions of life. What does it mean to enjoy a life well-lived? Where does morality come from? What do the world’s great religions believe, and can you compare and contrast their views to your own? Do we need a deity? We won’t answer these questions, but we will wrestle with them. The course is centered on writing – you will explore your own beliefs, research the beliefs of another spiritual tradition, and analyze and critique how those beliefs fit into your day-to-day life. The goals are to help you write papers that are deeply thoughtful and analytical and also to help you learn how to use a paper to work through your thinking on an issue, even when you aren’t certain how you feel about it. Please note: respect for one another is a bottom-line requirement for this class. Practitioners of all religions are welcome, as are atheists. *No one* is assumed to be right or wrong, ever, including me.

**FIRST YEAR WRITING**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

First-Year Composition courses at FSU teach writing as a recursive and frequently collabora­tive process of invention, drafting, and revising. Writing is both personal and social, and students should learn how to write for a variety of pur-poses and audiences. Since writing is a process of making meaning as well as communicating, FYC teachers respond to the content of students' writing as well as to surface errors. Students should expect frequent written and oral response on the content of their writing from both teacher and peers. Classes rely heavily on a workshop format. Instruction emphasizes the connection between writing, reading, and critical thinking; students should give thoughtful, reasoned responses to the readings. Both reading and writing are the subjects of class discussions and workshops, and students are expected to be active participants of the classroom community. Learning from each other will be a large part of the classroom experience. If you would like further information regarding the First-Year Composition Program, feel free to contact the program director, Dr. Deborah Coxwell-Teague ([**dteague@fsu.edu**](http://english3.fsu.edu/writing/dteague@fsu.edu)).

**COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

This course aims to help you improve your writing skills in all areas: discovering what you have to say, organizing your thoughts for a variety of audiences, and improving fluency and rhetorical sophistication. You will write and revise three papers, respond to readings, and work directly with your peers to practice critical reading and response.

**REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS**

* *The World’s Religions,* 50th Anniversary Edition, by Huston Smith, 1991
* *50 Ideas You Really Need to Know: Religion*, by Peter Stanford, 2010
* *The McGraw-Hill Handbook,* FSU Ed., by Maimon, Peritz, & Yancey, 2010

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

* Three papers, edited and polished
* Drafts and revisions of each of the three formal papers
* Two individual conferences
* Thoughtful, active, and responsible participation, including discussion, preparation for class, in-class informal writing, and reading responses

**EVALUATION**

Paper 1 25%  
Paper 2 35%  
Paper 3 25%   
Reading Responses 15%

**EVALUATION (CONT.)**

Participation in class discussion, conferences, workshops, and preparedness for class all factor into your grade. Final papers will be graded on audience awareness, organization, coherence, supporting evidence, thorough analysis, and editing. All other written and oral work will be graded on meaning or content and appropriate-ness to the assignment. See “Understanding Your Grade” below for further explanation.

**DRAFTS, REVISIONS, & FINAL PAPERS**

You'll always need to bring your paper-in-progress to class on days we workshop. All drafts and revisions must be typed (MLA format, 1-inch margins). You have access to a number of computer labs around campus if you need one. Final papers do not need covers or title pages. All your written work must have your name, my name, the class name and section, and the date at the top of the first page: You may be responsible for some photocopying expense for this class in order to share your writing with your peers, but you can also take advantage of any of the campus computer labs to print additional copies of your papers (for free). You will be required to share your work with your classmates – take care in what you choose to write about. Your writing for this class is nearly always public writing in the sense that others will be reading and commenting on it.

**ATTENDANCE**

I keep strict attendance and will adhere to the First-Year Composition rule that more than **six** absences is grounds for failure. If you have **seven** absences it will result in a lowering your final grade by a full letter (from an A to a B) **and eight or more absences will result in failure** unless there are extenuating circum-stances. Not showing up for a conference counts as an absence. If you fail to bring in your paper for a workshop day, you will be counted as absent (1 absence) but are required to stay and workshop the rest of your group’s papers.

**CIVILITY POLICY**

* Turn your phones off. **Absolutely NO texting!** This is only a 50-minute class … you’ll live.
* No laptops in class – pen and paper only, please (except for ADA needs)
* Expect class to last the whole period.
* Carrying on conversations with your classmates while others are talking is rude and I will call you out on this.
* I reserve the right to ask you to leave if I feel you are being offensive or rude.
* This class will very likely touch on some hot-button issues. Show respect for your classmates. You know the drill.
* “In order to get respect, one must give respect; this starts with self-respect.” - Tyrone Wilkerson

**PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is grounds for suspension from the university as well as for failure in this course. It will not be tolerated. Any instance of plagiarism must be reported to the Director of First-Year Writing and the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable in a course intended to aid the growth of individual writers. Plagiarism is included among the violations defined in the Academic Honor Code, section b), paragraph 2, as follows: "Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, be it published or unpub-lished, as one's own." A plagiarism education assignment that further explains this issue will be administered in all first-year writing courses during the second week of class. Please note: Self-plagiarism is also plagiarism, and the penalties (failure and suspension) are exactly the same. You **cannot** turn in one of your own papers from another class for credit in this one. Each student will be responsible for completing the assignment and asking questions regarding any parts they do not fully understand.

**GORDON RULE**

In order to fulfill FSU’s Gordon Rule “W” Designation (writing) credit, the student must earn a “C-” or better as a final grade for the course. The university requires you to write a minimum of 7,000 words; any First-Year Composition course will meet or exceed that.

**ADA**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should in the FIRST OR SECOND WEEK OF CLASS 1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and 2) bring a letter to the instructor from SDRC indicating the need for academic accommodations. This and all other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

**FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE DROP POLICY**

This course is NOT eligible to be dropped in accordance with the “Drop Policy” adopted by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2004. The Undergraduate Studies Dean will not consider drop requests for a First-Year Composition course unless there are extraordi­nary and extenuating circumstances utterly beyond the student's control (e.g.: death of a parent or sibling, illness requiring hospitalization, etc.). The Faculty Senate specifically eliminated First-Year Composition courses from the University Drop Policy because of the overriding require-ment that First-Year Composition be completed during students' initial enrollment at FSU.

**READING/WRITING CENTER**

The Reading/Writing Center, located in Williams 222-C, is devoted to individualized instruction in reading and writing. The tutors in the RWC, all graduate students in English with training and experience in teaching composition, help students at any stage of writing: from generating ideas, to drafting, organizing and revising. While the RWC does not provide editing or proofreading services, its tutors can help writers build their own editing and proofreading skills.

During the fall and spring semesters, the RWC is open Monday through Thursday from 10 - 6 and Friday from 10-2. Hours of operation vary in summer. Visit the RWC web site website or call 644-6495 for more information.

A satellite RWC location at Strozier Library provides tutoring during evening hours. Late-night tutoring is also offered at this location during peak times in the semester when students are up late writing mid-term or final papers.

**UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRADE**

**FSU Grade Scale:**

**A: 93-100 A-: 90-92**

**B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82**

**C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72**

**D+: 67-69 D: 63-66 F: 0-62**

**A–** The introduction explodes like a bomb. An A paper may complicate the text, experience, or issue at hand and may try to resolve the resulting complication. The paper is relatively free of mechanical errors, which are slight. There is excellent detail, sophisticated and in-depth analysis, and a tight focus. Outside sources if not required may have been used (where applicable) but not overused. The paper flows. The conclusion does a good job of tying up the paper and perhaps pointing in a new direction but does not merely restate or bring up new issues. The writer enlightens me about something or offers me a perspective I had not thought about before reading the paper. I am impressed.   
  
**B–** The assignment is fulfilled. Good detail, good analysis, relevant examples. The paper is fairly focused and seems strong. There are some errors, but they are relatively minor things such as misuse of possessives. The paper has a sense of structure, but does not demonstrate superior organization. There is a good level of detail but there could be more. Analysis is evident but not thorough enough. The paper offers some insights but leaves a reader wanting a bit more.   
  
**C–** The paper minimally fulfills the assignment. There is little detail, little analysis, and few to no examples. Significant portions of the paper seem to be filler, but the filler is related to the paper; it may be, for example, information that is common knowledge. The transitional sentences are weak or nonexistent. There is a conclusion, but it does little more than restate the issue or rework the introduction. The paper seems too broad and brings in meaningless examples. A high C paper may have fair to good use of examples but might not expound upon the significance of those examples.   
  
**D–** This paper does not adequately fulfill the assignment. It is lacking any detail and offers no analysis. The paper is too short (25% or more of the essay is missing), and there are serious errors. The reflection and/or analysis is superficial at best. There is no coherence and no insights offered to the reader.   
  
**F–** There is no paper. The paper is half of the required length. Mechanical errors interfere to such a degree that I cannot tell what the writer is saying. The paper is plagiarized.

**LATE PAPER POLICY**

I do accept late papers. **However**, papers will lose 5 points for every day they are late. This does not mean every class meeting day – since you can e-mail me a paper any time, including late nights and weekends, it means *every* day. If you write an A paper, but turn it in three days late, it can earn no higher than a B. Three days late, the same paper is a D. Mind you, that’s if you start out with the best possible paper. Start out with a C paper, and by day four it’s an F. If you need an extension, talk to me at least 24 hours *before* the due date – do not just show up to class with no paper and ask for an extension, because I won’t grant it.

**MY CONTRACT WITH YOU**

I understand that you may be worried about passing this class, since it is a university requirement, and that you may be worried about the strength of your writing. To relieve your worry, I am prepared to make a contract with you: if you put in a good-faith effort and meet all the requirements of the class, you will walk away with no less than a C. That means that all your papers will be the required length, that you will do all the research they require, and that they will be turned in on time. It means you will not miss class unless there is an unavoidable emergency. It means that you will be prepared for class (having done the readings) and that you will participate in workshops and discussions and show up for conferences. Do all of this, and I guarantee that you will pass, even if you’re the worst writer on the planet (I promise, you aren’t). But, blow off any of this, and the deal is gone – I respect your efforts and your fears, but I want you to respect the work that I’ve put into this class and my requirements as well. I will fail students who blow off the class, but if you show me real, honest effort, I will reward that.

The Gordon Rule still applies, meaning that you must earn a C- or greater. But if you read over the explanation of grades here, you will realize that a good-faith effort on length, research, analysis, and mechanics will get you most of the way there.

I also realize that you may have been a straight-A student with little to no effort until now. That will change – the worst mistake you can make is to underestimate what you need to do here.

**COURSE OUTCOMES**

*Rhetorical Knowledge*  
By the end of FYC, students should

* Focus on a purpose
* Respond to the needs of different audiences
* Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
* Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
* Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
* Understand how genres shape reading and writing
* Write in several genres

*Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing*  
By the end of FYC, students should

* Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
* Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, incl. finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
* Integrate their ideas with those of others
* Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

*Processes*  
By the end of FYC, students should

* Know that it takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
* Develop flexible strategies for generat-ing, revising, editing, and proof-reading
* Understand writing as an open, ongoing process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
* Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
* Learn to critique their own and others’ works
* Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
* Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

*Knowledge of Conventions*  
By the end of FYC, students should

* Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
* Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
* Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
* Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Major Papers

The theme of this course is “Writing about Faith and Atheism.” Its aim is to help improve your fluency and rhetorical sophistication, to develop the skills to write for a variety of audiences, and to practice critical reading, writing, and response techniques. More specifically, in this course we want to focus on matters generally called moral, religious, or spiritual – what governs our souls? how are we to live? what does it mean to live a spiritual life, or a life that is moral without being spiritual? In all three papers, try to keep in mind the issue of “where the rubber meets the road.” Does what the religion in question *say* match up with what it *does*? Many millions of people over time (including the whole Protestant Reformation) have changed or given up their faith because of this one question. It matters a lot.

**Reading Responses**

Reading responses are informal writing. They are 15% of your grade, but I am only grading them for their existence. I am NOT grading them for style, grammar, or anything else. Write them as informally as you would write an e-mail to a friend. Responses must be NO LESS THAN ONE FULL PAGE, double-spaced, minimum. Your response should be 1-2 pages total – one page minimum, up to two pages maximum. The word count should work out to around 250-350. Content-wise, you can say absolutely anything: for class discussion I may mention “one of you said in your response paper that …” and use the statement to spark discussion, but I will never use your name. There are a total of six response papers.

**Paper 1 -- This I Believe**, 5-7 pages

This paper asks you to write a short spiritual autobiography. What do you believe? Have you given up religious beliefs, or maybe never had any to begin with? How did you come to your beliefs, and how have they changed over time? Do you believe something different from your family? How have you handled that? Have you ever had a spiritual crisis that challenged or crystallized your thinking? What happened, and how did it change you? Do you believe in a faith that is in the minority in this country? How has that affected you? How do you live out your beliefs day to day, or do you think beliefs are private and separate from our public living?

Another approach you could take is to look at a single divisive issue within your religious background: for example, what does Christian justice look like? Is it “an eye for an eye” or is it “judge not, lest ye be judged”? If you were the victim of an injustice and you wanted to respond out of your belief system, what would you do?

This also raises the question of why people who share the same beliefs and the same texts can believe extremely different things. If both are quoting the sacred text they share, and both are quoting it correctly, is it possible to for both to be simultaneously right? Or are some parts “more sacred” than others – and who decides that (and how)?

Has one element of the faith you were born or raised in (or the belief system you have now, if that’s different) ever persistently nagged at you because you just weren’t sure it was quite right? What is it? Wrestle with it here – by the time you’ve written several pages about it, you might just find your answer.

One way or another, the paper should live up to its title: “This I Believe.” Take a stand, be passionate. Write about the beliefs that matter most to you, the answers you have found so far to the questions, “Why are we here? What’s it all about?”

**Paper 2 – Researching a Faith Different from Your Own** 7-10 pages

This paper moves beyond personally exploring one’s own culture and asks you to critically analyze another. Research the beliefs of a faith different from your own (atheism is also an option for research). Find out what they believe, how their beliefs define their world, and how they put their beliefs into practice. You must cite at least five sources and use MLA format with a works cited page.

There are a lot of ways to approach this paper. Keep in mind the goal is not merely summary, but analysis. I don’t want to know that Sunnis and Shiites fight each other – I know that already. I want to know what you find beautiful, strange, or confusing about Islam. As one of my rules of writing says, “I don’t want to know **what** you read. I want to know **your** **ideas** about what you read.” You could compare and contrast one element of a faith with your own beliefs (i.e., Christian ideas of justice versus Hindu ideas of justice). You could explore levels of meaning of one element of a faith (surface meanings and deep meanings of Talmud or Koran quotes). You could explore how Tantric attitudes toward sex are diametrically opposed to Christian ideas about sex, and imagine what having “moral sex” is like in both cultures (Tantric practices are *fascinating*). Are some of the things you do considered moral in one belief system but not in another? Explore that. You might find the Native American Church, with its sacred use of peyote, an interesting topic. Can you find God through substances? The one thing I do *not* want is 7-10 very generic pages on the history and basic beliefs of X. That is not a college-level paper. For example: not “The Life of Severus Snape,” but “How Love Both Destroys and Saves Snape’s Character.” You might worry that you won’t be able to fill 7-10 pages with what seems like a narrow topic, but believe me, there is a lot more to talk about in that second title than there is in the first.

There is a **minimum of 5 sources**, which you will analyze and comment on, required to support your paper, drawing from a **variety of source materials:** library books, journals, magazines, newsprint, credible web publications, interviews, etc. You are also welcome to use images, but there will be a maximum of 5 images–you must cite them as you would your other sources (in MLA format) and the space they take up does not count toward your seven-page minimum (if you have a half-page of pictures, then you need a minimum of 7 ½ pages total).

What counts as an impartial source when it comes to faith? What doesn’t? How do you tell the difference between the two? One important guideline: *don’t* use information about one religious group that is provided by an opposing religious group. Don’t use an evangelical Christian website to get information on Islam, or an atheist website to get information on Christianity. Get information directly from the people who practice it. You can look at what opponents say about a faith and analyze those statements to see whether or not their criticisms are accurate, but don’t let someone’s worst enemies be your primary source of information about them.

**Paper Three – A Working Guide to a Meaningful Life** 5-7 pages

This is a paper that I hope you will keep long after this class is over. As with Paper 1, “This I Believe,” the title here will be the title of your paper. I want you to create your own personal guide to living a moral life. You can draw reasons and examples from all the faiths we’ve studied or just from your own tradition. Try to write this paper as though you were looking at your own life at its very end, as though you were on your deathbed. In those final moments, what is of most value to you? What moral traits have you cultivated within yourself? How do you want to be remembered? Looking from that perspective, what does it mean to have experienced “a life well lived”? What choices will you make now that will set you on that road? As Joan Baez says, “You don’t get to choose how you’re going to die. Or when. You can only decide how you’re going to live. Now.”

Of course we’ll all say, “I want to be kind to others.” Back that up with statements from your spiritual tradition, or with something you’ve learned in this class. What do the great traditions say about kindness? If you’re an atheist, the emerging field of neuroethics might be of some interest here. You may say that a meaningful life means working to protect life, while someone else might say it means working to protect freedom of choice. A meaningful life might be working to reduce belief in religion because it is divisive, or working to encourage more religion because it is a foundation for morality. Whatever sources you use to support your working guide, the guide itself is for you and should reflect your values.

Classroom Policies Agreement

Student Name

Instructor Name Arlynda Boyer

Course and Section ENC 1145-21

Semester and Year Fall 2011

I have read and understood the syllabus and course policy sheet for this course, including the following policies and requirements:

* Required Texts
* Course Requirements
* Major Papers
* Evaluation and Grading
* Attendance Policy
* Civility Policy
* Late Paper Policy

In signing this form, I acknowledge that my success in ENC-1145 relies on my abiding by these policies. Furthermore, I attest that I am the author of all writing that I submit and post, online and offline.

Student Signature Date