RLG 200a: New Age Spirituality (WIC, 4 Cr., Moral/Phil)

Class Sessions: Monday/Thursday 10:45-12:00 in MB 227
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Office hours: Monday & Wednesday 8:30 - 15:00 and any time I am in my office and not in class, in AUF for a Department meeting, etc.; Thursday 9:00-10:40. Also by appointment

Students might choose to use other books (which provide an objective & purely scientific analysis of the Movement, either comprehensively or offer a detailed study of one of the Movement’s features/cases)

General Education Strategy

General knowledge of an educated and responsible citizen of any contemporary democratic society cannot be based exclusively on specialized branches of sciences or skills like accountancy, biology, or mathematics. Cultural literacy is one of the basic features of a citizen of such democratic society.

Today's students are tomorrow's participants in the evolving democratic societies, where and when social life largely rests upon enjoyment of creative artistic and scientific achievements of all human enterprise. The general education credit system at AUBG guides the students toward an understanding of the diverse aspects of the humanity's intellectual experience through space and time. In Introduction to New Age Spirituality, a willing student will study an aspect of interdisciplinary consequences of both a particular scholastic and of an interdisciplinary inquiry.

Course Description; Learning Strategies

Please, read this section attentively: it will briefly introduce you into the course before the first class session.

Spirituality, morality, ethics are not among those topics, that people can be somehow “lectured into”. In content, it is very far from mathematics, chemistry, geography, history, engineering, but not unfamiliar to those who are interested in modern personality, transpersonal, and social psychology, comparative study of religions (rather, of religious systems), cognitive sciences, etc. In educational strategy, (Intro to the) New Age Spirituality is closer to a “guided reading” course; a willing participant should personally hunt for a most suitable source, reflect on issues, accept or reject some of them, discuss doubts and questions, search for answers, share opinions – always being ready to tolerantly listen to others and consciously choose an educated stand on the deepest psychological and mental phenomena, so exclusively typical to humans.

The 20th century development has formed definitive negative responses to the declining traditional (a) cultic/dogmatic spiritual principle, better known as “organized religion”, and to the (b) church/parish clerical principle of human life. Both had been successfully (and still are in some portions of population) equaled to human spirituality. Regardless of our educated, or not so, opinion, the above-mentioned notions are in the basis of all social life in the Judeo-Christian civilization. We witness:

- Either a complete denial of the very possibility of any spiritual dimension in human psychological life; this trend appears under diverse terms (like “atheism”, “materialism”, “agnosticism”, “scientific literacy”, etc.). This is an extension of a modern erroneous promotion of science from the ever-developing, temporal, and culture-dependent phenomenon to the position of a pseudo-religious cult – an established, stopped developing (i.e., providing formulated all answers to all questions), prestigious, and legallyistically fixed hierarchical organization

- Or a materialization of the so-called "New Religious Movements" as a revision of the traditional religious pattern, including the outburst of religious/obscurantist fundamentalism since the early 1990s; to many people in academia, this newest trend in personal and/or communal clericalization is a revival of medieval thinking (we will not specifically deal with NRM in this course)...

- But also the appearance of the "New Age Movement", which offers a completely new approach to human spiritual needs in the form of an innovative interpretation of the five-century old controversy science V.S. dogma-free and/or anti-dogmatic (i.e. non-religious) spirituality. The New Age movement has been influential since 1840s and especially from the mid-1970s onward and seemingly only in the realm of the so-called
This phenomenon plays an important social and cultural role, being a “spiritual opposition” to the religious and political ideologies, as well as to conservative scientific establishments of today.

- Please, note that, contrary to common definitions, spirituality and religiosity are not interchangeable neither synonymous concepts. Often, they are actually antonyms to one another. E.g.,
  - an agnostic can be a good-hearted, tolerant, life-appreciating, etc. spiritual person;
  - enthusiastic members of various religious communities can completely negate human rights of other religious, ethnic, racial, etc. groups of people and claim, that all outsiders have been doomed to eternal damnation, burning in hell, etc.,
  - and even consider them unworthy of being alive, => i.e. clearly exhibit unspiritual (=inhumane) attitudes within the psychologically defined "religious sectarian thinking pattern" or, worse, "religious fundamentalism".

In lectures, discussions of lecture material and documentary movies, in student class presentations participants will study the essence of the NA movement, existing explicatory scientific hypotheses about phenomena which (from times immemorial) have been in the core of diverse religious claims, and the position of science and of the major institutionalized religions on human spiritual experience (thinking, behavior, addictive cultic life, organizations, destructive sects, etc.)

The proposed course book provides a reliable summary of established observable facts and their dominating interpretations; i.e., often drawing toward the conventional science’s attempts to burn down everything to physicality, financial gain, pseudo-religious craze, psychopathology, conscious and unintentional fraud, etc. It is correct in many cases; however, no concept, theory, hypothesis, or personal interpretation seems exhaustive at this stage of scientific assessment of any human spiritual claim. Hence, academic scepticism at all times will be our guiding star in speculations. This is why class lectures will address more concepts than the above mentioned, some of which are highly controversial. On my part, I will clearly express, explain, verify, and substantiate it by a variety of theoretic and specific examples. Of course, all will have the right to accept or to reject my opinion (and do the same with any book author’s one), and this will need an educated and convincing substantiation.

We will cool-mindedly investigate this objectively existing and influential aspect of modern Western social/spiritual life, i.e.:
  - We will not prove or disprove anything by applying customary pre-formulated statements
  - We will not avoid anything that does not fit into one’s pre-biased picture of "science" (using the latter as a tool to shout out "dissenters" or "nuts" from “science”)
  - Because science is a professional and moral obligation of studying all phenomena and accepting any results, avoiding the grave error of concentrating on events which are explicable on the basis of already firmly known “laws”. Every educated modern person should struggle against turning science into a self-appointed modern pseudo-religion, and open-minded academia - into a pseudo-church. Today's transient inability to "rationalize" (of course, within the dominating “materialist worldview”) a psychological, physical, or intellectual human phenomenon must not be taken as the ultimate unchangeable stand, independent of any new development and any new finding. This latter is pseudo-science.

I would propose, or may be even insist, that all who intend to take the course bear in mind the following important issue. It is rarely explained to modern people, that psychology and history of spirituality, religiosity, and studies of mystical and religious experiences, of the symbolic world of mythologies, transpersonal psychology (one of the newest developments in anthropology) - all deal with extremely subtle and touchy subjects of the inner constitution of human personality. All our ancestors naturally accepted spiritual dimensions of human life, believed in some kind of gods, demons, ghosts and angels, lived in mental and emotional worlds (often intellectually inaccessible to us; all initial architects of modern Western civilizations claimed a contact with gods/God) originating human civilizations and cultures, art and many other things – without any exclusion. What has done one of the greatest damages to modern man’s worldview general culture, altruism, and instigated the observable corrosion of morality, is the primitive reductionist/determinist paradigm that claims material and physical conditions of life to represent the only leading, decisive aspect of social and personal life. Sophisticated or illiterate, wealthy or poor, logical or illogical, humble or cruel individuals of any walk of life can heartily follow religious and/or spiritual choices; or even be members of a completely irrational self-destructive/criminal cult regardless of whichever non-mental aspect of their social, professional, family, etc. life. Also, all inhuman economic, political, social utopias of the 20th century were first born within individual minds of 19th century persons of a standard (in their time, general or specifically professional) scholastic, scientific, and religious education.

E.g., in the late 19th and early 20th century many European national high schools had special curriculum in the local version of Christian religion (named diversely in different languages). That was an obligatory submission of young inquisitive minds to the "spiritual" principles, formulated as fixed dogmas hundreds or even thousands of years ago for people of another time and space, of another level of general knowledge and culture. This unwise and anti-psychological approach created ridicule and hatred toward the traditional religion, later
extrapolated upon time-honored culture, arts, morality, and ethic. Bloodthirsty “ideologies” of the 20th century, mockery of spiritual behavior of good-hearted people, disrespect to human mystical experiences, etc. have been leveled with the rejected social phenomenon of religion. All spiritual phenomena were squeezed into religiosity and by this safely excluded from scientific inquiry. Instead of an adequate study of what had created all human civilizations (no matter – reflecting or not the “true nature” of life) the world got a ridiculous and anti-scientific situation of throwing the baby out with the bathwater…

Hence, the unsatisfied and unquenchable human mind’s and emotion’s call for spirituality (als, in a minority of people) found the middle path,
- Creating an interface between the core of religion (i.e. human observations and experiences unexplained by the dominating paradigm, and their symbolic interpretations), and
- Atmosphere of methodical scientific study of human being’s psychological, mental, symbolic essence

=> Resulting in the search for a new paradigm, that would comprehensively, adequately, etc. offer an updated explication of human nature, fully and objectively utilizing all achievements of psychology, medicine, modern physics and biochemistry, and all other related fields.

Apart from all peripheral bizarre and actually outdated religious tendencies (e.g., New Religious Movements; but also destructive suicidal or terrorist pseudo-religious cults), the above is the inner substance of the New Age Movement.

This moral reasoning course is intended to increase each participant’s personal world-awareness within the framework of cross-cultural/religious perspective. An open friendly discussion on human existence is critical in solving a wide number of problems (e.g., the right to choose, consciously and freely, one’s cultural and ideological environment without violating other people human rights). Everyone will have all opportunities to express opinion on the current spiritual condition of the Western civilization and human of today.

No matter if we accept or reject the New Age, it nevertheless raises questions like
- What does it mean to be human? Are we just apes with slightly bigger brains?
- What does make us unique, or is there anything unique about us at all?
- Does a dogmatically organized “book” religion make people spiritual (as mentioned above, this term addresses a human property, which opposes “materialistic”, “unscrupulous”, but also “religious” pattern; the latter - in the sense of belonging to a well-defined socio-ideological group with clear-cut border between “us” and “others”)?
- Are people, born and educated in other cultural/religious environments, “obsessed by demons”, “immoral”, etc.?
- Is “spirituality” equal to religion, faith, superstition, and psychopathology? Or is their equalization a result of a false interpretation of something very basic to us? Is it possible to be tolerant, altruistic, compassionate, etc. (i.e. “spiritual”) without belonging to a religious organization and even without being necessarily “religious”? If one is “spiritual” but not “religious”, is one “naive” or “dissociated”?
- Is, then, modern organized religion a refuge for the remnants of scientific illiteracy, cognitive disability, or intellectual insufficiency?
- Is “faith” only a blind acceptance of something, which has no substantiation in nature, in psychological constitution of human mind/brain, and cannot be explained without requesting “psychopathology”? Or is there something in the inner self of human, which makes us absolutely unique among all other living species on this planet?

To make my point clearer, let me quote a dialogue in Dan Brown’s “Angels & Demons” (ch. 83) –

“Change,” the camerlegno said, “is not something we do well within Vatican City. Admitting our past faults, modernization, are things we historically eschew. His Holiness was trying to change that.” He paused. “Reaching to the modern world. Searching for new paths to God.”

Vittoria nodded in the dark. “Like science?”

“To be honest, science seems irrelevant.”

“Irrelevant?” Vittoria could think of a lot of words to describe science, but in the modern world “irrelevant” did not seem like one of them.

“Science can heal, or science can kill. It depends on the soul of the man using the science. It is the soul that interests me.”

Expected Learning Outcomes
This course, fulfilling the General Education requirement in Moral Reasoning, aims at providing a comprehensive explanation of the current spiritual development of the Western world. More specifically, it will enable an ideal student to

1. Consciously assess the growing denial of the traditional western Biblical religious pattern as an emerging newest evaluation of human condition

   • and on this basis to better understand fundamental principles of moral/ethical reasoning and decision making in the psychological field of human need to belong to a “religion”

2. Exploring the principles of human spiritual knowledge and foundations of moral/ethical dimension in human life, to understand the “western” basis of this movement, which cannot grow within other explanations of the Universe (however, taking roots also in some Eastern religious/psychological/philosophical traditions)
leading to practical application of moral reasoning while investigating this particular and any other spiritual tradition (including – a tradition “in the making”) 
  o and to conscious evaluation of any existing religious perspective in the human explanation of the Universe we live in

(3) Be knowledgeable of the Movement’s internal values and its call for mutual cultural/racial/religious tolerance

(4) Grasping how the Movement builds foundations for a new moral and ethical setting of the Western civilization, actually giving birth to an innovative spirituality (incompatible with almost all Medieval matrixes and vigorously refuted by established Western religious organizations)

  This, in ideal, will result in application of diverse methods of moral/ethical inquiry and shaping one’s educated appreciation of the historical development of human spirituality and religious thought

(5) And to become proficient enough in applying an effective ethical and moral analysis, being immune to ideological/religious manipulations (NB: Her Majesty History has proven, that manipulation with religiosity flourishes in the realm of spiritual ignorance)

  being apt enough to articulate in an oral and written form one’s personal opinion on basic moral/ethical principles within the topic of the course.

**Class policies**

This syllabus is a social contract between course instructor and student. By enrolling both parties sign a specific list of the following explicit mutual obligations and responsibilities, as well as that you have read and accept all the regulation in the AUBG Student Handbook.

Every student will be expected to perform his/her own work and stick to the course schedule. Discipline and respect of other people rights are important.

Attendance and discussion participation in class is essential because lectures will provide a substantial range of relevant historical, cultural and theological information. There is no single book that covers the multi-aspect history of the nations, which belong to the “European cultural type” and of the latter’s traditional religious ideology. This is why any relevant book of individual choice is welcome. Students are also encouraged to use any reliable source of information in any language. Especially students’ papers and presentations, and following class discussions will bring up interesting questions and issues.

The assigned course book presents a thorough introduction into the subject. However, attendance and discussion participation is essential because lectures will deal with a wide range of diverse uncovered data, thus giving access to (at least) two different sources of information. Students are also encouraged to use any additional and reliable source of information.

Changes in class schedule will not contradict AUBG rules, and will be clearly and appropriately communicated to the participants. The Incomplete grade might be issued (instead of failing the course) only for an extraordinary and solidly documented reason. All are expected to perform their own work and stick to the course schedule. NB: "Responsibility is doing the wise thing before taking punishment, not after. That would be experience, not responsibility". As students are expected to adhere to the AUBG Academic Honesty Honor Code, violation of academic discipline will not be tolerated; any case of inappropriate behavior (e.g. – creating hostile, intimidating, or abusive work/learning environment, malicious verbal statements, late arrivals, cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will be instantly treated accordingly. Violators will face penalties ranging from final grade reduction to expulsion. An “X” grade can be granted without warning after three unexcused cuts or for systematic violation of University and class policies.

According to AUBG policies on attendance, the first week of classes will be accounted for. No late add/drops/withdrawals will be granted. Also, e.g., on the 10th minute after the start of the announced exam (if such an exam has been scheduled for the corresponding course) the door will be unconditionally closed. Three unexcused cuts may result in an F grade.

At the same time any problem concerning attendance, etc. can be solved individually. In any case for a valid excuse, please, just send me an email message at least one minute prior to the class session’s beginning hour. The message should contain

(a) The student’s full name, course signature, day/time of the class session in question, and
(b) A very short explanation of the reasons for the intended class cut.

**Emails not containing all the above data will not be accepted for a valid excuse.**

Participants are expected to actively engage in class discussions (as, e.g., asking relevant questions, arguing pro/contra existing or offered interpretations, clarifying important points, bringing personal knowledge and experience in issues, relevant to the topic).

The instructor’s and students’ fundamental right to hold divergent opinions in an academic discourse will be fully recognized: **everyone will have the right to speak freely on any controversial matter** - human religion and cultural history in general, political abuse of it, current spiritual condition of the Western civilization, why to accept or why to reject the new-agers' claims, etc. However, there is one only prerequisite to express one’s opinion in discussions, course and exam papers: clear demonstration of one’s knowledge of the basics. The latter is the basic requirement (condicio sine qua non) to have an opinion at all and to be able to articulate distinct, logical, consistent and convincing statements.

One's “opinion” about an issue is worthless if one has never studied it and the issue is simply beyond one's competence. This is especially important to know when dealing with anthropological issues (studying essential properties of humans, symbolic thinking, religiosity and spirituality being among them).
And, lastly, everyone will have a chance to improve English language skills on a challenging material of personal concern – the best way to search for information sources in this world’s most useful language of scientific communication (student language proficiency and public speech skills are supposed to be dealt with in any general education course).

NB: due to a rather delicate topic of the course, it is important to say a few words about the basics of the adequate social/civic education & fundamental politeness in academia:

- During class sessions everyone must show respect for colleagues and for the class instructor. Please do not do anything that could disturb or insult other course participants (e.g. laugh, eat, talk loudly, make noise, make irrelevant and/or offensive comments, etc.). No rude or disruptive behavior will be tolerated
- Do not arrogantly display your disinterest in the topic of this course and that, may be, you are taking it just to get the inescapable general education credits. Remember well: your individually beloved area of knowledge and skill (be it economics, business and administration, physics, mathematics, computer sciences...) is “fundamental” only to you, in your own imagination as a “inclination”, not more than this; your concentration might be completely irrelevant and even ridiculous to someone else. Do not live in this false illusory world, wrongly and immaturely thinking that a scientific/scholastic topic, which is not interesting to you and to those who agree with you, is “unscientific”. E.g., one’s interest in political sciences might provoke utmost boredom accompanied with yawning and “voting by feet” in someone else, who is, say, interested in poetry or creative arts. It was clear 2,000 years ago to Paul, one of the first modern religious thinkers, that all occupations, professions, areas of study, research, and creativity, scientific or artistic are valid and necessary to the human race at large (1 Cor 12).
- In case someone feels “frustrated” due to personal rejection of the material, of information, of the cutting-edge hypotheses, of freedom to speak about a topic which is a “taboo” in one’s traditional culture, or to whatever other reason (e.g., some people cannot understand that the issue of “god”, of their local culture taken as the only moral one – are nevertheless simple academic topics and no longer a matter of blind faith), please, simply come to talk about a possible solution to the collision. Instead of sitting in a class that bothers you and frustrates your peers, exercise your right and the freedom to simply “switch to another TV channel” by taking some other Gen Ed offering. Thus, you will spare yourself, other students, and the professor a lot of inconvenience and negative feelings. For example, a late withdrawal from this course will be no problem…
- In class, it is straightforwardly forbidden to sleep, read newspapers, play games, to write text messages and perform any other non-academic activities; read books or hide behind your peers’ backs doing homework for other courses (incl. on your tablets or book-readers). Refusal to follow the rules will result in a request to leave the room and a report to the Dean of Students and the Dean of Faculty. Once again, lack of interest in the course subjects should result in dropping the course instead of creating mutual antagonism
- Students are not allowed to use cellular phones and other electronic gadgets during all class session activities, and exams. This means a very simple thing: turn off tablets, e-book readers, etc. or at least mute (“turn off the sound system”) your cellphones BEFORE you enter the classroom. Otherwise, you will be displaying disrespect to everyone – including to you yourself: it will be a shameful parade of poor education and low self-esteem. In more mundane situations, students who expect an important phone call will be asked to sit close to the door and go out of the room quietly as soon as you notice the incoming call on the screen; those who have to leave early during a class session are asked to do the simplest and most polite thing - to warn the instructor ahead of time, sit close to the door, and quietly leave the room. Etc.

All course learning strategies, assessment procedures, class basic discipline issues, etc. are absolutely transparent, and all deadlines are clearly stated in this syllabus. It will be each student’s responsibility to keep up with the schedule, stick to the deadlines, discuss class and assignment performance with the instructor, name files appropriately, etc. Please, avoid ridiculous situations like the one to provide a medical document for having sore throat as an excuse for failing to send me an email; do not create mess in my course records; do not cheat; do not lie; be open to new and challenging/inspiring and often controversial information. Avoid making a mistake of misinterpreting your social position of learners. Students are supposed to study. All lectures, course readings, your papers and presentations, discussions are not for professors’ edification; they aren’t an assault on students’ rights to have spare time; they are intended to assist you in learning and preparing for your future professional carriers. Students are supposed to dedicate their time mostly to this, and not mostly/only to spending it playing and/or grumbling that professors make them do things, which students have no wish to do (to attend lectures, write papers, participate in discussions, etc. – becoming really educated persons of the future).

On the whole: let’s make education & academic information exchange a pleasure, instead of turning it into a hysterical mutual torture and/or display of negative/dogmatic life attitudes. Modern life is nervous and miserable enough anyway…

Learning Strategies, Assessment of Learning Outcome/Grading Procedures

Every student’s work will be evaluated on a strictly individual basis.

1. A total of 100% is possible in this course. The lowest passing grade is 50%.
2. 15% or less - class attendance (assessed by 5 randomly distributed attendance sheets, -3% on a cut; you might also get -10% for discipline violation)
3. 5% or less - class discussion activity (discussion participation, etc.)
4. The written assignments will include:
A 3-page written analytical review of a part of the course book, or of any other select publication (typically – of a reoccurring chapter or a major theme, excluding the “Introduction”), counted as a short paper and fulfilling 15% (max.) of the final course requirement.

- The purpose is to evaluate how the author or the book/chapter achieved his/her tasks of explaining the chosen issue, relating its specific topic to the broader context of current social, political, and cultural “human condition”. Your book review is expected to exemplify a creative, well structured, and neatly expressed personal educated opinion. Simple quotations mingled with repetitions of what the book’s author wrote or failed to discussed; a plan of the book; unstructured reading notes, or anything along these lines – all this does not qualify to express the reviewer’s assessment of the book

- An “analytical review of a book” is a type of a text that you can find in the appropriate section of any scholastic journal; this assignment enables you to gain skills in this specific writing aptitude. Please, find in the Library a scientific journal and look up a “review”; or come to talk in case you find this task difficult.

- Please, also come to talk if you might prefer to review any other book (relevant to the course topic, like works of C. Jung, Fritjof Capra, David Fontana, Charles Tart, P. Fenwick, Dean Radin, Gary Schwartz, Ian Stevenson, Marc Fox, P. R. Heath, J. Klimo, B. Greyson, Victor Zammitt, Jeffrey Long, B. and J. Guggenheim, Pim van Lommell, P. M. H. Atwater, Stanislav Grof, M. Macy, F. Jurgenson, R. Foy, and literally thousands of other authors, strictly scientific or just popular to choose from).

- Please, choose a book for the review according to your personal concerns and preferences, and it may be in English, in any Slavic language, German, French, Greek, or Rumanian.

- A suggestion how to work on the text of your book review (the following is also applicable to work on course papers and class presentation texts):
  - Read the “academic writing” section in any guide (like Part 9 in The St. Martin’s Handbook) and relevant pages dealing with critical approach to essays (like the ones in Literature and the Writing Process, by Elizabeth McMahan, S. Day, and R. Funk; both books are available at AUBG Library).
  - Study the content, style, etc. of at least three critical book reviews on any scientific topic, in any scientific journal, and then
  - Choose a preferred model and write your course book review.
  - Please, conduct and present your research in a text using accepted formatting and citation practices that you can find in the above named writing handbooks. I am not requiring any specific style; just choose what you like most and stick to it.

- Please, discuss with me your choice and all preliminary technicalities abiding by the following schedule and gaining percentage toward a successful completion of this course:
  - 3% for the choice of your book to be reviewed, your final course paper and its class presentation topic; the deadline will be – March 12th, 12:00 noon (or earlier)
  - 3% written electronic draft of the final course paper, of any structure, narrative and/or arranged in clear and descriptive bulleted points; one page is the minimal requirement (due at any time prior to, and not later than on Wednesday March 12th, 12:00 noon). Your draft file must be entitled only as <RLG 200 (your name) draft.doc>(x) Please, understand, that there is no sense in cheating, e.g., by leaving a hard copy by my office door
  - NB: choose a topic of your own personal concerns and preferences. All changes to the topic, title, structure, etc. will be possible 10 days before the set class presentation date. Any topic within the thematic range of the course can be accepted, especially unpublished case studies (e.g.: is there a cult/sect trying to mislead you? A friend of yours wasting time in a self-destructing pseudo-religious activity? Do you want to share a verified encounter with an unexplained psychological or physical phenomenon? Etc.)
  - 3% discussion of your choice of the topic and the draft as a plan for your paper and class presentation; the deadline is again March 12th, 12:00 noon; in case you cannot come to discuss your topic/draft immediately on March 12th by 12:00 noon, please do it by the absolute deadline (only for the discussion requirement) - not later than by Monday March 17th, 12:00 noon
  - 1% for your choice among the available dates for class presentation. The deadline will be the same as above – March 12th, 12:00 noon (or earlier)
  - Once again: the deadline for all the above four steps is March 12, 12:00 h noon (excl. the actual discussion, if you are prevented to do it immediately by March 12). However, it is advisable that you do all this much earlier, at any time
  - As stated above, the draft file title should be <RLG 200 (your name) draft.doc>(x)
  - No other words, project title, or unnecessary dashes, dots, and other junk symbols; no words like “first assignment”, “final paper”, etc.: they create search problems in managing course records.
• Do not send me your draft file in April as a “portfolio pack”; neither for the second, nor for the first time; especially in the former case: I might erroneously record that you have missed the March 12th deadline for this file and deprive you of at least 3% toward your course score.

• Text formatting requirements for all written assignments: 11 p. Times New Roman, 1.5 spacing, Justified, Indentation & Spacing 0, no blank spaces between paragraphs; longer quotations (of more than 10 words) must be typed with the “first line indent” & the “left” tabs moved to the horizontal ruler position “3”. All other formatting details are of your own choice.

• Approximate minimal word count - not less than 500 words per page of your own text (excluding citations longer than 10 words each; also, maps, graphics, etc. are not counted as a text of your own). Do not create unnecessary problems by cheating and/or using formatting tricks.

• My practice shows that, unfortunately, I will have to repeat once again the following regulation:
  - For grading and managing course records, I will keep your files - under the course designation & your name, not under your paper title, topic, neither under your e-mail message “Re:” field.
  - If I rename your student’s files in all of my courses, errors will inevitably sneak in; I doubt that anyone will be happy to have his/her work erroneously attributed to someone else. Hence, NB once again:
    - The “Re:” section of your e-mail client program is different from the “name of the attached file”. In case someone does not understand the difference, one should refer to a computer sciences professor; instruction in this discipline is not mentioned in my job description.

  The above are clear explanations why you should carefully and correctly name your file simply with the course designation, type of the assignment, and your name; nothing more. All e-mail messages with wrong file titles, as well as messages where I will be asked to repeat what is in this syllabus (e.g., deadlines), or ridiculous claims that the phrase in the syllabus, e.g., “the deadline is not later than by March 17th, 12:00 noon” is “unclear”, or that the requirement to supply one, not two or three, movie review on all documentaries shown in class is “not specific” (I’m not joking, just quoting) will be treated as junk and automatically discarded and left unanswered (unless it represents a case of a conscious discipline abuse and requires a special disciplinary treatment…)

  To every e-mail message with the attached correct written assignment file/files I will respond with an “ok”, which is student’s receipt that technically everything is okay (the file is named correctly and is operable; not that I have read it instantly upon saving it to my hard disk). It is each student’s responsibility to make sure their portfolio is complete; if you have no receipt, please, first re-check your files (how they are attached and named, etc.) and the e-mail details before blaming anyone else (on my part, begging anyone to be diligent, disciplined, open-minded, tolerant, accurate, honest, attentive, considerate, observing your course schedules and deadlines, behaving academically, etc. is not in my job description).

  Do not name your files obscurely like "Paper 0123.docx", “Popov.docx”, “Buddhist Notion of Karma.doc”, "First Assignment.doc”; etc. Rejection to accept a paper and/or presentation file will result in loss of scores toward your successful completion of the course.

  Please, use *.doc, *docx, or *.rtf formats, or *ppt, *pptx formats only. All other format attachments will be treated as junk and automatically discarded. The problem is, that usually such tricks aim at gaining time or claiming untruths that your PC is unable to work with the above formats; all know well, that any existing office suit, commercial or free, with mysterious love or unfathomable hatred in heart toward these formats, can be used for saving/opening files – OpenOffice/LibreOffice ver. 3.4 and above, KingSoftOffice 2012 & 2013, SSuite, etc., under any widely used platform – WinTel, Linux, Android, etc.) Thus, I will not be involved in any kind of fruitless discussions…

  The e-copy of the completed book review will be due by April 16, 12:00 noon (or earlier, if you choose so). The title of your file, of course, must be only < RLG 200 (your name) review.doc(x) >. Name your file, send it, and check for an “ok” receipt from me (a proof that all went well technically) yourself.

  Please, do not try to cheat by leaving a hard copy by my office door (I do not need hard-copies!), or sending first your paper in an inoperable format, or named incorrectly and then negotiating with me that you’ve done all on time, etc. All this will not work; or you will end up with a plain and ordinary loss of percentage toward the final course score.

B.

One three-page electronic review/impression/response on all documentary movies (one review on all movies, not two-three-four files on every movie separately), seen in class, fulfilling 10% (or less) of the final course grade. The e-copy of this review will be due at any time but not later than by April 23, 12:00 noon. Format your file according to the above-stipulated requirements and designate it only as < RLG 200 (your name) movie.doc(x)>.

C.

A fourteen-page electronic *.doc(x) copy of the completed final paper (excluding all illustrations, formatted and numbered separately from the text body, and all quotations longer than 20 words numbered separately from the text body as end notes and attachments) fulfilling the part of the course score of 30% (maximum). The absolute deadline to submit
the e-copy of your course paper is at any time, whenever you are ready, but not later than the absolute deadline on April 30, till 21:00 h. The same regulations as above are applicable: please, no hard copies under my office door, no cheating and formatting tricks, no display of “computer operation level 101 illiteracy”, etc.

More on the paper/presentation topic.

The course paper must reflect relevant information, provided with schemes, maps, pictures, etc., and be an exposition of a topic, not specifically covered in class. Any course paper on an academic subject measures author’s level of understanding of how facts are interconnected (an aspect of qualification). Such a paper will show the student’s ability to comprehensively analyze an issue through reasoning and deep explication of all constituent problems (i.e. to demonstrate personal interpretational approach to the data). So, please: be exact and specific, avoid general statements, and try to be clear even for a complete laic in the field, being sure to give at least one relevant example for each point in your discussion. Any point should be discussed positively and critically, demonstrating creativity in scholastic knowledge. E.g., first be sure to identify and summarize an issue (-s), then analyze it and provide your own evaluation. Always be objective and academically cool-minded even discussing topics of personal emotional concern. No authority’s statement could be uncritically used as a proof. Never assume that you know where the “truth” lies and that all understand and heartily accept what you speak about (or that you are just smarter than the rest of the silly folks around…). In real science there are no unquestioned truths, including God’s (in)existence, any human/superhuman authority’s mental sanity, as well as the educational level of most passionate (and due to this prejudiced) critics or supporters of any human psychological issue©. To repeat once again, all scholastically/scientifically relevant opinions are acceptable; irrelevant are statements uttered by those who have never studied the issue in question and are based on a priori formulated and pre-biased attitudes.

Spirituality and religiosity belong to inner realms of human personality, everyone lives, consciously or the other way around, in a symbolic world of their mind’s creation. This is why statements that label people with different opinions “crazy” (or whatever along these lines) reveal the speaker’s intellectual weakness and immaturity.

D.

A 15/20-minute class presentation on the paper’s topic, and based on the text of the final paper – counted 15% toward the final course score (after my acceptance of your final file version). Out of this: up to 5% on public speech and English language skills and content, and 10% or less on technical details like presentation design, structure, handouts, etc. Class presentation, among other goals, should aim at generating an open class discussion. Handouts for listeners, use of a multimedia projector, a possible team of not more than two students involved in preparation and performance (a team presents one paper of at least 20 pages - course paper details are specified here below), etc. will be essential for the successful presentation. NB: an educational task is not supposed to discover new horizons in human knowledge; it is a method/tool and hence should be treated as one; not necessarily as an instance of scientific work. Any course paper, however, still can represent a serious attempt to offer new and fresh scientific ideas…

The absolute deadline to submit the e-copy of your presentation file is at any time, whenever you are ready, but not later than by April 30, till 21:00 h.

Once again: submission of the final versions of both the course paper and class presentation files: not later than on April 30, till 21:00 (or earlier, if you choose so), regardless of the date of the class presentation and any other considerations. NB: minus 20% for providing all portfolio material but avoiding class presentation. The explanation for this grade reduction is simple: as a student, you present before other people not to get a Nobel Prize, but to learn how to deliver a public monologue with subsequent discussion, and to communicate any kind of material, regardless of your future career; gaining and correcting public speech skills on the personally chosen material for general education purposes – this is what you should bear in mind…

If you fail to submit all grading material by the specific deadlines, your performance will be graded on what is available by the corresponding component deadline (do not cheat by sending me a pile of all files as a “portfolio” or by leaving hard copies by my office door – when I am definitely away from AUBG…)

Copyright laws apply to your course book and movie reviews, paper and presentation text, their format, illustrations, citations, etc.

Tentative Course Schedule

NB: some class sessions through the semester will be rescheduled, as stated above in this syllabus (according to AUBG rules and for a serious reason)


Please, read the whole text of the course book (resp., of the personally chosen relevant book), paying attention to the topics within the range of your personal interest/written assignments. Make your life easier - start taking notes and writing your analytical
review while reading the book; choose a paper/presentation topic, discuss it with me, find literature on it, etc. as soon as possible.

Spring Break Week March 3rd – 9th

March 10th till April 30th: Case studies. Discussions. Student presentations.

NB: no classes on April 21st (Easter Monday) and May 1st

May 5th – 9th: final examinations.

Summary of Course Performance Assessment (Maximal Score):

- 15% attendance
- 5% class discussion participation
- 3% review book + course paper topic/presentation choice. March 12th, 12:00 noon.
- 3% paper draft, 1 page. March 12th, 12:00 noon.
- 3% paper topic/draft discussion. March 12th, 12:00 noon (by exclusion - till March 17th, 12:00 noon at the latest).
- 1% class presentation date choice. March 12th, 12:00 noon.
- 15% analytical course book review e-copy, 3 pages. Send it as an attachment only once by the deadline of April 16th, 12:00 noon, or earlier (and get a technical receipt “ok”).
- 10% documentary movies response e-copy, 3 pages. Send it as an attachment only once by the deadline of April 23rd, 12:00 noon, or earlier (and get a technical receipt “ok”).
- 15% class presentation (5% on English language/public speech skills and design, and 10% on information content, etc.)
- 30% completed e-copy of your paper, 14 creative pages min., accompanied by the *.ppt class presentation file. Deadline for both files – April 30th, 21:00 or earlier (and get a technical receipt “ok”), regardless of class presentation date, of the final exam time pattern, and of any other considerations. Do not attach your draft or book and movie review files.

Fines: I honestly hope there will be no need of the following, but just in case –

- Any minor miss of any deadline or other regulation of this syllabus (i.e. of the instructor-student social contract): -5%
- Avoidance of class presentation, even if your class written portfolio is complete and perfect -20%
- Turning in a shorter written assignment than defined by the WICs regulations of AUBG (e.g., abusing text formatting): -10%
- Any serious violation of AUBG class/course discipline -20%
- Any planned or unplanned administrative withdrawal from course (e.g., for a student’s failure to obey written course and/or AUBG polices, or for no realistic hope of completing this course successfully) will be communicated both to the student and to the Dean of Faculty (and to the Dean of Students, when appropriate) in a strict accordance with AUBG academic regulations
- Any late withdrawal for any other reason can be discussed at any time, but always in full accord with AUBG rules
- Any attempt to cheat, to plagiarize, etc., or any other sample of a major academic/collegiate behavior violation – minus 30% (if not an “X” grade) of your final course score, regardless of any other considerations.

Grading table & criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A&quot;  100% - 95%</td>
<td>Superior quality work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A-&quot; 95% - 90%</td>
<td>Extremely good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;B+&quot; 90% - 85%</td>
<td>Above average quality work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;B&quot;  85% - 80%</td>
<td>Very good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;B-&quot; 75% - 70%</td>
<td>Satisfactory level work, but not really displaying mastery of course material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;C+&quot; 70% - 65%</td>
<td>Satisfactory acquaintance with the course subject without any significant accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;C&quot;  65% - 60%</td>
<td>Basic knowledge of some important concepts, discussed in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;C-&quot; 65% - 60%</td>
<td>Basic knowledge of some concepts, gradually declining to a &quot;completely unsatisfactory&quot; work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;D+&quot; 60% - 56.66%</td>
<td>Completely unsatisfactory work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;D&quot;  56.66% - 50%</td>
<td>Failure to meet even the minimal requirements of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;D-&quot; 50% - 50%</td>
<td>Failure to meet even the minimal requirements of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;F&quot;  less than 50%</td>
<td>&quot;X&quot; with discipline violations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCLAIMER: this syllabus is subject to modification. The instructor will communicate with students on any changes in a timely fashion.