

Religion Matters (REL 100-23, Fall 2020)

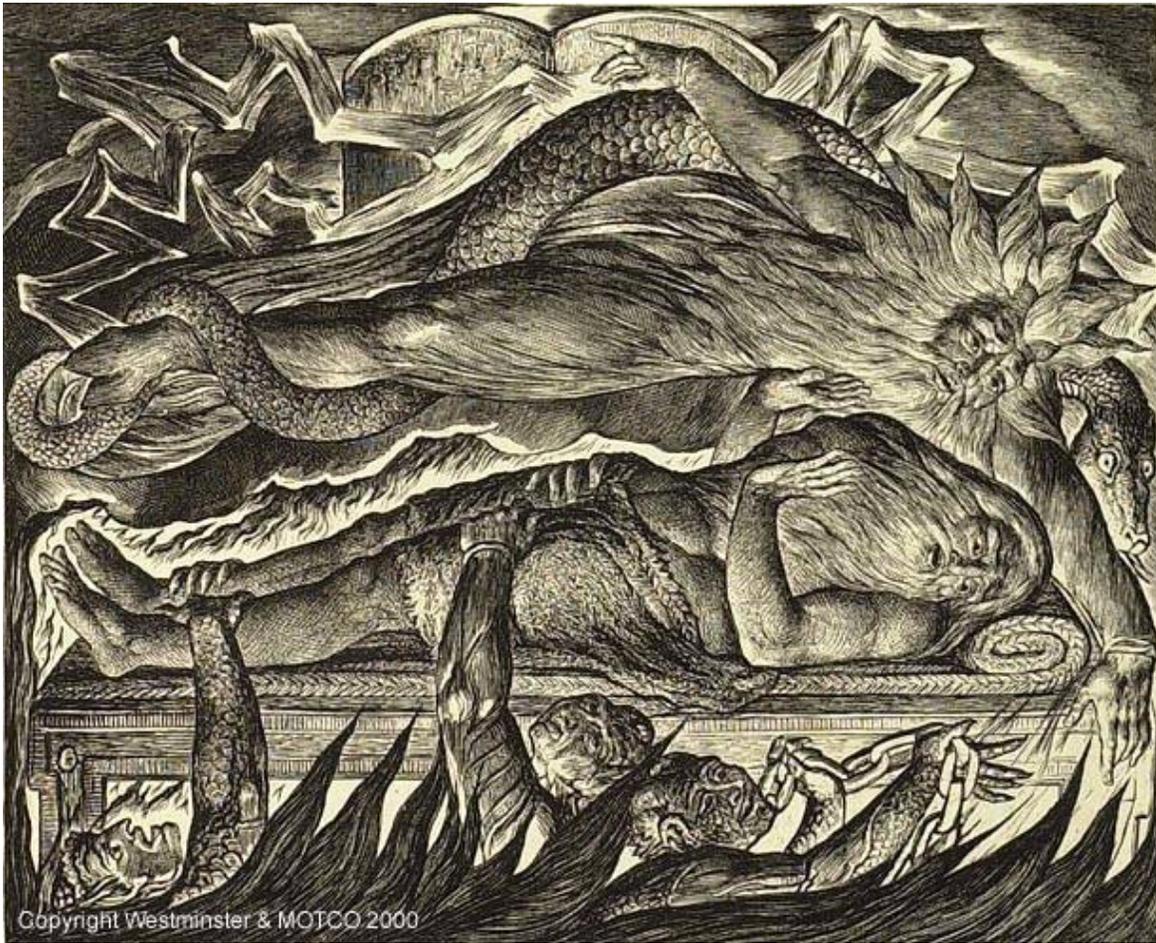
[TTh 3:30pm - 4:45pm]

Instructor: Anthony Paul Smith, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Religion & Theology

773-931-9570 (Please use WhatsApp)

Student hours: M 12:30-1:30pm , T 2:30-3:30, and by appointment. I am available to meet Monday through Friday. Please contact me through either my email (preferred) or cell number to arrange an appointment.



William Blake, "Job's Evil Dreams"

Email and Phone Policy

If you need to contact me for any other reason than to arrange an appointment then *first check this syllabus first to see if your question is answered*. Also please be aware there I will only answer my email during business hours (9am-5pm) during the work week (M-F) so if you email me after 5pm you will not get a response until the following day and if on the weekend not until the new week begins. I will return your email or phone call within 48 hours. While I have provided my personal cell phone you should only use this number for emergencies. Make sure you regularly check the email account associated with your Canvas account as I will use it to communicate with you regarding changes in the class or cancellations.

Course Description

“To one kneeling down no word came,
Only the wind’s song, saddening the lips
Of the grave saints, rigid in glass;
Or the dry whisper of unseen wings,
Bats not angels, in the high roof.

Was he balked by silence? He kneeled long,
And saw love in a dark crown
Of thorns blazing, and a winter tree
Golden with fruit of a man’s body.”
— R.S. Thomas, “In a Country Church”

“Theologians/Don’t know nothing/About my soul/About my soul/I’m an ocean/An abyss
in motion/Slow motion/Slow motion”
— Wilco, “Theologians”

“I’ve never really had a religious experience in a religious place. The closest I’ve ever come
to seeing or feeling God is listening to rap. Rap music is my religion.”
— Killer Mike, “R.A.P. Music”

This course serves as an introductory exploration to the interdisciplinary study of religion and theology. While few would argue with the statement that religion exerts enormous power in the world today, it is not an easy topic to discuss in our increasingly diverse society. Students investigate both the personal dimensions of religion that matter in their lives and the substance and cultural impact of religion in society through reflection and analysis of texts, teachings, and practices. Throughout the semester, students identify dimensions of religion and theology that are significant to their lived experience, compare “the matter” of religious traditions on something that “matters,” and articulate the challenges of religious identity in a multicultural world.

Specifically, in this course students will be introduced to the intellectual study of religion and theology. We often refer to this as a “critical” study of religion and theology, but the use of the term critical does not mean “negative”. As we will explore, the study of religion can take many forms, from atheists standing outside of religion and studying it to believers standing within their own religious traditions attempting to make sense out of them. Critical refers to the way that our study of religion attempts to get at the truth of religion and the variety of approaches testifies to the fact that religion is a multifaceted object of study.

We will systematically challenge our assumed and overly simplistic definitions of religion and peel back the façade of safety that surrounds those definitions of religion. All too often we think religion is just about morality or vague beliefs in something called “God”. But in history the various religious traditions and figures have often stood stridently against the dominant morality of their time. Every great religion that appears normal today has at some time been thought to be impious or heretical. Great figures in religious history, while they have been domesticated and made safe today, lived lives that by the standards of their own day and our own, were “weird”. In this class we will examine the weirdness of religion by reading a variety of theologians and theorists from inside and outside different traditions. In addition to studying the different forms the study of religion takes, we will see that religious practice and experience challenges everything we assume about how we should live (ethics), our ideas about sexuality and gender, our ideas about racial and class identity, and our very relationship to not only the Divine (whatever she/he/it may be) but to our own lives.

Method of Learning

A mix of lecture and small group discussion. Students are expected to have read the assigned material, look up new words, and formulate questions regarding passages they find difficult to parse. Because of the current COVID19 crisis much of this work will take place online and the entire course may eventually be taken completely online. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns or questions.

Learning Outcomes

This course meets Institutional Learning Outcome 2.1 (Reflective Thinking and Valuing): Students use reflective techniques to identify their own personal and religious or spiritual values.

This outcome is assessed through three Student Learning Outcomes:

- *Identify* a dimension of religion that is significant to your lived experience (**assessed via Entry and Exit Essay**).
- *Compare* “the matter” of two religious traditions on something that “matters” (**assessed via the Site Visit and Report**).
- *Articulate* the challenges of religious identity in a multicultural world (**assessed via Religion in the News assignment**).

Grade Summary

The grade scale is as follows: 100-95 = A, 94-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+, 86-84 = B, 83-80 = B-, 79-77 = C+, 76-74 = C, 73-70 = C-, 69-67 = D+, 66-60 = D, 59 and below = F

Assignment	Possible Points (500 overall)	Percentage of Overall Grade
1. Attendance/Participation	100 points	20%
2. Reading Journals (10)	50 points/5 points each	10%

3.Vocabulary Quizzes (10)	50 points / 5 points each	10%
4. Site Visit and Report	100 points	20%
5. Religion in the News	50 points	10%
6. Entry and Exit Essay	100 points / 25 points for entry and 75 for exit	20%
7. Discussion of Religion in the News	50 points	10%

There will be an entry and exit essay (500 words, revised to 750 words), a field trip organized by yourself to a religious meeting outside your own tradition which requires a report (2000 words), a short analysis of religion in the news (500 words), 10 reading journal (250 words each), 10 vocabulary quizzes, and one graded discussion.

Attendance policy

Your attendance and participation is required for this course and makes up part of your overall grade. You have 100 points for attendance and participation. 25 points of this will be linked to an Opening Survey on Canvas. The other points will float around based upon your attendance. Attendance is required and if you miss more than three courses without contacting me with a reason you will lose all 75 points. If you miss more than 5 sessions without contacting me, either in face to face class or in our Zoom sessions, I reserve the right to give you a failing grade for the course. Attendance is necessary for all of us to gain from each other's perspective and insights. There is no educational experience without you, me, and the rest of the class.

Note this policy is not intended to penalize those who get ill during the semester with any illness. This includes those whose mental health sometimes becomes a problem. Contacting me immediately is the best thing to do if you get physically sick or if any mental health issues get in the way of attending and doing your work. I promise to be compassionate, and to work with you, within the bounds set by the university, to help get you back on track. A primary principle of my teaching philosophy is mutual respect, which means seeing you as a real human being and respecting when you make yourself vulnerable enough to share something that is, for many people, embarrassing or difficult.

Quizzes

The ten quizzes will be based on the definitions found in Carl Olson's *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts*. On the schedule below you will see what day the quizzes will be given. On those days you will need to log-in to Canvas to take your quiz. It will unlock for five minutes for you and must be taken during our set class time. I ask that you do not cheat and work from a position of trust. Please do not violate that trust. Most students do well on these if they study even just a little.

The five terms that you are expected to have studied will be listed on the syllabus below and on the Canvas page "Information for this Week" under each weekly module. The quiz will

require you to match the term with the correct definition. There are no make-ups for the quizzes without a discussion with me.

Reading Journals

To help with your readings you will be required to write a reading journal, each of which will be turned in via Canvas. This journal is made up of 10 assignments and each assignment should be at least 250-words. These journals will be due on the dates shown below on the schedule. No late journals will be accepted, meaning that if you are not in class to turn in your journal you will receive no credit (barring serious illness or other emergencies). You are not graded on the content, unless it is clear that you have not read, and the only grades possible are “zero” (meaning no points) or “check” (meaning all possible points for that assignment). The purpose behind this journal is to get you to engage with the texts we are reading as we are reading them. Therefore your journal will take the form of a quote/note/question.

A quote is a passage from a text. A quote may be as long as a paragraph or as short as a word. The quote you select should strike you as significant for making sense of the text as a whole. You may feel like you “get” it, or you may feel utterly flummoxed by it.

A note is an observation or extended meditation about your selected quote. Notes may comment on style, language, tone or bias. A note may contextualize, explicate, and/or criticize. Your notes need not be “right,” but it ought to be thoughtful and probing.

A question is a question that you’d like to discuss in class. By question I specially mean a textual question. That is, it is not the sort of biographical or historical question that might be adjudicated through outside research. It is rather a question about what something in the text means, does, or commits the author to.

Religious Site Field Trip and Report

Each student will need to *virtually* visit a religious gathering/service/meditation group/etc outside of their own tradition and write a report and reflection of that visit. This is due **October 22nd by 11:59pm** via Canvas.

Requirements:

1. Must be outside your tradition (for those who need to discuss this aspect please email or meet with me).
2. Must provide your definition of religion going into the service. Then discuss what aspects of your definition and wider experience you need to bracket. Provide a deep description of the event. Then provide an explanation of at least one of the aspects of your description (why they did something).
3. Provide some personal reflection on your own experience of witnessing the religious “event”. Here I want you to tell me what things you felt you had to bracket as well as things that you felt may be presuppositions (“baggage”) but that you couldn’t find a way past. One way to do this is to answer the questions found on page 6 of Herling: “Where *are* you coming from? Do you have a religious background, or not? What

expectations about religion do you have? What do you think about religion in general, or about religious expressions that are different from your own [i.e. do they scare you, interest you, etc.]? How might your own experience color the way you look at other people?"

4. The paper must be 2000 words.
5. The paper will be submitted electronically via Canvas

The point of this exercise is two-fold. Firstly, I want you to experience a religion that you may be unfamiliar with, so please stretch yourself. And secondly, I want you to get a bit of practice with the techniques and methods we have discussed in class up to this point. This project should be written to the best of your abilities with regard to the grammar, but I am not expecting you to give me citations. You can use the lectures and the Herling to guide you (though if you quote from Herling, make sure to put the page number). I will be marking you based on how well you show you understand the techniques and methods, the quality of your own self-reflection and the "thickness" of your description.

Religion in the News

As part of your own development in analyzing how religion matters in the contemporary world, you will be required to read and summarize an article of your own choosing about a contemporary religious issue. You will first need to find an article on a topic of interest in some contemporary print or electronic news source. You may choose from popular news magazines (like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*), religious themes magazines (like *America*, *Commonweal*, *Tikkun*, or others), or from substantial stories found in major national or international newspapers (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*). You should be able to find this article through a database search at the library's website. ***The article you read must be at least 1000 words long.***

Your essay should be **500-words** in length. In that short space you must:

1. Summarize the article. *Be sure you name the author, title, date, and source of publication.* Include a link to the article's website.
2. Describe why you think that the article touches on how religion matters (or does not matter) in today's world. Make sure you practice care and provide detail and strong reasoning.
3. Connect your analysis of the article to any idea, concept, or text that we have studied together in class.

This assignment will be turned in via Canvas on **November 17th**.

In addition to submitting this to me via Canvas, you must post your essay in the Discussion Board "Religion in the News Discussion." You will then be required to leave two substantive comments on your colleagues' essays by **November 19th**

Entry and Exit Essay

You will write a **500-word** essay reflecting on your understanding of religion as it relates to your own life. This can be a matter of detailing what you believe or do not believe, what you understand religion to be concerned with, who is religious or not, etc. *You will not be graded on*

what you believe or do not believe, but on how well you present your ideas in the paper. This entry essay will be due **August 20th** via Canvas.

By the due date of **November 25th by midnight** you will return to the Canvas page where you originally submitted the entry essay and be asked to revise and refine your initial essay by making use of the vocabulary and concepts studied over the course of the semester. This essay should come to about **750-words**.

If your views or understanding of your views have changed significantly, you should feel free to scrap the original essay and start from scratch. If your views or your understanding of them have not changed drastically, then your main task will be to show you can express them in a more precise manner using vocabulary and concepts studied in class.

Your grade for the entry essay will be given largely on the basis of turning the paper in and using clear sentences. Your grade for the exit essay will be given largely on how much improvement you have shown in your ability to think more critically and nuanced using academic tools.

Cell Phone, Laptop and Tablet Policy (only really applicable for in class sessions)

While I understand the addiction to smart phones, the material we are studying is very difficult and therefore requires your undivided attention. If you are caught using your phone during a lecture you will be given one warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework. *Please turn all cell phones off during the lecture.* If I can do it, so can you.

Laptops and tablets are acceptable in the class, but for note taking only. If you appear not to be paying attention because you're distracted by something non-class related on your laptop then I will ask you to read the last line of notes you have just written. If you can't then you will be given a warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework.

Canvas

Please make sure that you check the email attached to your Canvas profile. I will be sending emails to that address. All course documents, slides, and other helpful links will be available on the Canvas course page. Much of this semester's work will be done via Canvas because of the strains of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remarks on Lectures, Readings, Films, and Classroom Discussions

We are dealing with adult themes and a range of different belief systems in this class. You will be exposed to different ways of thinking both in the readings, the lectures, and discussions in class. At times you may find yourself offended by one or more of the ideas presented and when you are not offended a fellow classmate may well be. This is ok! While of course verbal or physical abuse (name calling, use of hate speech directed at another student, etc.) is strictly not tolerated, we have to give each other permission to be offensive (within the bounds of respectful discourse) and to be offended. By remaining in this course you are agreeing to have respectful conversations about a wide range of different beliefs which may sometimes become heated.

This goes especially for the films and clips we will watch in class. At times I have chosen material that may be offensive to some. Some films will be rated-R and some clips from TV shows will be rated TV-MA. By remaining enrolled in this class after the first session you are entering into a non-verbal agreement that you understand and accept you will be asked to watch these films and clips.

Course Content Note¹

At times this semester we will be discussing historical events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

Notice Regarding the Recording of Lectures

Lectures remain the intellectual property of the instructor and as such students may not record them for dissemination. Students requiring accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act or with personal needs may record lectures, but must first discuss this with the instructor and the recordings must be used for personal use only. By remaining enrolled in this course each student understands and recognizes that any recordings of lectures are for personal use only and that if they record and disseminate them without permission they do so under risk of legal and financial penalty.

Required Texts

(All texts are available from the bookstore, though sometimes may be cheaper to buy them online. Please check to make sure you are buying the correct edition by using the ISBN provided. Note that Kindle versions are acceptable as long as they contain "real page numbers". I have indicated below if that is the case.)

The first four books are ones you need to get copies of, either through the bookstore or any other means. The "course reader" is a collection of PDF scans that are free and on the Canvas site already.

- Carl Olson, *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge) ISBN 978-0415487221 (Kindle version acceptable)
- St. Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St Teresa of Avila* (Penguin) ISBN 978-0140440737 (Kindle version acceptable)
- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (Norton) ISBN 978-0393008319 (Kindle version acceptable)
- Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Random House) ISBN 978-0345350688 (Kindle version acceptable)
- Course reader (found on Canvas under "Pages" tab and then "Course Reader" tab)
 - Bradley L. Herling, *A Beginners Guide to the Study of Religion*

¹ Adapted from Angus Johnston's work. See <https://studentactivism.net/2015/08/25/trigger-warnings-for-syllabi-a-how-to-one-year-along/> for more on course content notes/trigger warnings and the like.

- o Karen Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*
- o David Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*
- o Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*
- o Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*

Outline of Course and Reading Schedule

Readings listed are to be read for that class period. If the reading is listed under September 14th, it is to be read prior to the September 14th session of class. The schedule and procedures for this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances; changes will be announced in class.

Currently the schedule is created with the plan that we may eventually be forced to go completely online due to the COVID19 emergency. If we are allowed to meet on September 8th as currently planned then when you see "Zoom Session" that will become "Face to Face Class" in Holroyd 190. Given the uncertainty and virulence of this virus, I have planned the semester for far less contact than usual even if we are allowed to meet. So we will usually only be meeting once a week in person or on Zoom. The other days I expect you to be doing the work on your own so that when we are together our class sessions will be more impactful and intense.

Week 1

August 18th Introduction to the Course via Zoom

General Introduction to Religious Studies

August 20th **Entry Essay Due (bring a hard copy without your name on it to class)**

Week 2

August 25th Herling, pp. 23-46 (on Canvas)

Zoom session

Reading Journal 1

August 27th

Watch video lecture

Quiz 1 – Belief, Community, Cult, Magic, Worldview

Week 3

September 1st

Brown (on Canvas)

Zoom session

September 3rd

Watch Film – Children of Men

Reading Journal 2 (this will be about the film and a specific guide is in the assignment area).

Week 4

September 8th

Zoom session

Natural and Revealed Religion

September 10th

Hume pp. 1-2, 9-15, 54-62 (on Canvas)

Quiz 2 – Revelation, Rationality, Reductionism, Self, Theism

Week 5

September 15th

Zoom session

St. Teresa, pp. 21-32, 61-83

Reading Journal 3

September 17th

Watch video lecture

St. Teresa, pp. 98-103, 112-127

Quiz 3 – Faith, Mysticism, Orthodoxy, Sacraments, Theology

Week 6

September 22nd

Zoom session

St. Teresa, pp. 98-103, 112-127

Reading Journal 4

September 24th

St. Teresa pp. 128-152, 222-232

Week 7

September 29th

Zoom session

St. Teresa, pp. 233-240, 277-294, 306-316

October 1st

Watch video lecture

Week 8 ***Religion, the Self, and Gender***

October 6th

Zoom session

Marx and Nietzsche (on Canvas)

Reading Journal 5

October 8th

Watch video lecture

Freud, pp. 3-42

Quiz 4 - Doctrine, Gender, Heresy, Heterodoxy, Liberation

Week 9

October 13th

Zoom session

Freud, pp. 43-71

Reading Journal 6

October 15th

Watch video lecture

Daly, pp. 13-28 (on Canvas)

Quiz 5 – Apocalypse, Cosmology, Culture, Emotion, Experience

Week 10

October 20th

Zoom session

Daly, pp. 28-43

Reading Journal 7

October 22nd

Watch video lecture

Field Trip Reflection due via Canvas by 11:59pm

Week 11 The Mysterium Tremendum and Political Religion

October 27th *Zoom session*
Otto, pp. 1-30 (on Canvas)
Quiz 6 – Animism, Asceticism, Death, Economy, Sacred
Reading Journal 8

October 29th *Watch video lecture*
X, pp. 1-58
Quiz 7 – Agency, Antinomianism, Judgment, Law, Space: sacred and profane

Week 12

November 3rd *No class – USA Election Day*

November 5th *Zoom session*
X, pp. 111-171
Reading Journal 9
Quiz 8 – Monotheism, Myth, Polytheism, Pantheism, Totemism

Week 13

November 10th *Watch the film – Malcom X by Spike Lee*
X, pp. 172-226
Quiz 9 – Liminality, Modernity, Ritual, Sacrifice, Shamanism

November 12th *Zoom session*
X, pp. 271-324
Reading Journal 10 (can also be on the film)

Week 14

November 17th **Religion in the News Due**
Quiz 10 – Pluralism, Narrative, Sects, Secularization, Truth

November 19th *Zoom Session*
Discussion of Religion in the News on Discussion Board due

Finals week

November 25th **Exit Essay Due via Canvas**

American Disability Act of 1990

La Salle University abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which mandates reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities. Rose Lee Pauline is the designated contact. Please call 215.951.1014 to speak with her or another representative. You will need to provide documentation of your disability if you seek accommodations, but the counselors are there to help.

Counseling Center and Alcohol and other Drug Counseling

If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, or just having a hard time adjusting to the new

semester, please do not hesitate to contact the Counseling Center. They have a variety of resources, most of which are free to you as a student. They are located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1355).

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Counseling Center is also located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1357) or by emailing their staff <<http://studentaffairs.lasalle.edu/aodec/about/staff/>>. If you are struggling with alcohol or drug use please reach out to them.

Both are fully confidential.

Center for Academic Achievement

Students seeking tutoring support services (subject and writing tutoring, supplemental instruction, and FSGs), academic coaching, of disability accommodation services are encouraged to speak with the professionals at ARC. They are located in Lawrence Building Suite 409 and can be contacted via email at academicsupport@lasalle.edu.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide and every attempt is made to provide an accurate overview of the course. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the faculty member to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students. Changes to the syllabus will be made with advance notice.

Please see the Canvas page “University Policies and Resources” for other essential policies