It's no secret that, in the context of 9/11, the 2004 election, and everything in between, religious rhetoric has come to play a key role in American politics, whether for good or ill. In the meantime, much of American academia continues to shy away from religious discussion, widening the gulf between the classroom and the public arena. So here's an invitation to try to bridge that gap. At times, it may be tricky for us to venture out into the new (well, new for this generation) territory of discussing religious issues publicly, but the attempt can teach us much.

Though we'll be studying genres that are central to writing and speaking about religion, you'll find that these genres can be adapted to any topic of importance to the writer. I hope that this course will help you learn how to express your beliefs, whether religious or not, in a respectful and persuasive manner.

We'll start by examining two genres that have shaped much of the history of religious rhetoric: the conversion narrative and the apology (as in "rational defense of one's faith," not as in "I'm sorry"). Then we'll take a look at a couple of texts giving different perspectives on Islam, analyzing the persuasive techniques each writer calls into play. We'll end with a foray into fiction as religious argument: Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*. We'll also read a variety of non-fiction responses to the controversial novel—in this fray of competing claims to truth, you get to decide who puts forth the best case.

Required Texts:
El Fadl, Khaled Abou. *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*.
Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*.
Norris, Kathleen. *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*.

Requirements: You will be expected to
1. attend all class meetings, prepared (see attendance policy, below);
2. participate in class discussions;
3. participate in in-class writing exercises;
4. participate in draft workshops and group work (not only must you prepare a draft on the day it is due, but the draft must be a complete draft that is ready to share);

5. draft, write, and/or revise four assignments of various lengths and purposes (submit each essay in a folder, along with proposals, rough draft(s), and signed peer review comments from draft workshops), as well as posting ten reading responses online and preparing for and participating in an end-of-semester debate;

6. submit all work on time (on the hour/day it is due; late papers will normally be docked one letter grade per day, unless you get my approval for an extension before the due date);

7. submit, at the end of term, a one-folder portfolio of all your written work for this course: drafts and revisions of papers; group work and peer review.

(If you would like to have your portfolio returned, please submit a self-addressed large envelope with plenty of postage.

Please note: Passing the course requires timely completion of all of the assignments.

Attendance: As noted above, regular attendance is required. Your grade may be lowered for poor attendance, down to and including "F." This is University policy. Specifically, you are permitted three absences. After that, I reserve the right to reduce your grade as I consider appropriate.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate; it is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work. In-class work cannot be made up.

If you miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements to send it along with a classmate.

Grades:

Participation: attendance, discussion, preparation, in-class writing, group work = 10%

#1 Conversion Narrative (4-5 pages) = 15%
#2 Apology (4-5 pages) = 15%
#3 Exegesis of a Text (5-6 pages) = 20%
#4 Debate = 10%
#5 Cultural Analysis Paper (3-4 pages) and Presentation = 15%
#6 Reading Response Online Posts (1 page each, 10 per semester) = 15%

Office Conferences: Plan on having at least two conferences with me this semester to discuss your written work (at any stage of the process) and your progress in the course. Try to have the first conference early in the course; don’t delay. Also consider taking your ideas and your written work to the Undergraduate Writing Center (220 Boucke Building), where trained peer tutors will consult with writers about any piece of writing at any stage of the writing process.
Plagiarism: The departmental policy on plagiarism is included later on in the syllabus. If you have any questions about plagiarism and its consequences, please ask. Plagiarism demonstrates contempt for ethical standards, your instructor, and your peers. If you are caught plagiarizing, you risk failing the course. You may also be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs which may recommend academic probation, suspension, or expulsion for academic dishonesty.

Format: Choosing a format is a rhetorical decision—it’s all about delivery. So keep in mind that your papers should be typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Place your name, the date, and the instructor’s name in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Double space, and then center your title, which should be neither underlined nor quoted. Double space again and begin typing your essay, numbering all the pages except page 1. Fasten the pages with a paper clip or staple them together. Place in a simple file folder.

Please note: The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.

Assignments

#1: Conversion Narrative (4-5 pages, double-spaced)
due: Tuesday, September 20

Kathleen Norris writes, “The word ‘conversion’ comes from the Latin for ‘to turn around.’ Thus it denotes a change of perspective but not of essence: a change of view but not location. . . . as in turning round; turning back to or returning; turning one’s attention to.”

Turning to what? Norris answers that we turn to our own experience and re-examine it truthfully: “Conversion means starting with who we are, not who we wish we were. It means knowing where we come from.”

Where do you come from? What experiences have formed you into the person you are today? The answers to these questions take the shape of a conversion narrative, a genre central to American literature since the days of the Puritans. Though religious in origin, the conversion narrative does not have to discuss religious experience at all. For example, Jon Katz’s memoir A Dog Year, a valid example of contemporary conversion narrative, describes how one of the most dramatic changes of his life arrived on four legs, when he brought a high-strung, neurotic border collie into his hitherto peaceful home.

Though conversion narratives have been written for centuries, they may be particularly effective forms of persuasion in our day, when people tend to trust personal experience more than institutions. When you write about a way that you’ve changed, how you’ve moved from point A to point B, your readers may find it more believable that they could also make that transition.

For your topic, you may choose any event that has changed you and your beliefs or perspectives, for better or for worse. As you tell your story, make your readers feel that they are present with you — in other words, give them the details that will help them believe that your world is real. Instead of simply stating the lesson that you learned from the experience, make your readers learn the lesson along with you as a character in a story — in other words (yes, I have to say it, even if you’ve heard it before), show, don’t tell. Though your story should have a
A conversion narrative is written for a reason. Somebody wants to share his or her story, whether to change others, to irritate them (usually not a wise strategy), or simply to entertain them. Figure out your purpose and let that determine the tone in which you write (contemplative, earnest, sarcastic, regretful, joyful, whatever). To figure out your purpose, you'll need to decide on an audience. Who do you want to benefit or change from reading your story? Why would they be interested in hearing what you have to say?

Reading Norris's *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, a contemporary conversion narrative, may give you further ideas about how you can reach out to new audiences and make the genre your own.

**Assignment #2: Apology (4-5 pages, double-spaced)**

**Due: Thursday, October 6**

The apology, a formal justification or defense of a belief, has been a staple of religious rhetoric for centuries, finding its most famous expression in Augustine's *City of God*. Back in 413, Augustine defended Christianity against the charge that it was responsible for Rome's sacking at the hands of the Goths. Since then, the emphasis of apologetic writing has changed with the needs and interests of the times. Recently, for example, we’ve seen a lot of apologies written in response to the 9/11 attacks, with the goal of proving that Islam is not a violent religion.

Apologies tend to rely on reason and logic as their primary rhetorical strategies, though of course they incorporate ethos and pathos as well. They usually operate by taking a belief already held by the audience and showing how this belief is already consistent with the religion or belief system professed by the writer. As you’ll see in C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, they also rely extensively on analogies, which take a common experience and show how it illustrates some principle inherent to the writer’s belief.

Apologies are, by nature, addressed primarily to an audience who doesn’t yet agree with you. Your task is to establish common ground and to convince them that your position at least holds validity. The specific purposes of your apology may vary. Some apologies are written to convert someone to a particular religion. If you’re writing for an audience who believes that one religion is as good as another, though, you’ll first have to convince them that there are reasons why your religion is more true than the other options (using logic, not scriptural evidence from that religion’s holy book, since your audience doesn’t yet accept that book as holy). Other apologies are written to defend a religious belief against an outside challenge. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, apologies concerned themselves with the charge that, because of advances in science, religion's premises were untrue. Though this truth-oriented vein of apology still exists, the postmodern apology tends to focus more on clearing up a misconception about that belief (e.g., Islam is not inherently violent or sexist; Christianity’s doctrine of the Trinity does not make it inherently polytheistic, etc.). As with the conversion narrative, your apology does not have to be about a religious topic: you could, for example, write an apology to prove that Ayn Rand’s philosophy of objectivism does not in fact encourage greed, as many would say that it does.

This assignment is basically an extended exercise in logical persuasion. We’ll learn about
logical fallacies, logical appeals, and we’ll have fun finding flaws in each other’s arguments. Once you’re done, you should be better prepared to engage in conversation with rational people.

Assignment #3: Exegesis of a Text (5-6 pages)
Due: Tuesday, November 8

An exegesis is an analysis or explanation of a text, often of a scriptural passage from the Bible, the Qu’ran, or another holy book. However, you’ll find that the kind of arguments put forward by religious exegesis are amazingly similar to arguments about the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. For this assignment, feel free to write about either a religious text or an important secular text on which a group of people bases its decisions.

Unlike apology, exegesis is usually directed to the writer’s coreligionists (people of the same religion). Therefore, your audience for exegesis already agrees with you that this text is an important one. However, as you are probably already aware, even people of the same religion can have widely divergent interpretations of the same scriptural text. In order for your essay to have some exigence, you’ll want to pick a specific passage about which people have significant disagreement. You’ll want to figure out why people have different beliefs about it: is it because they assign a larger role to cultural context in their interpretation? Is it because they’ve never heard an alternative explanation?

To write a convincing exegesis, you’ll need to do some research (that’s why this assignment is a little longer than the others; your exegesis should use at least three sources). Research the variety of interpretations of this passage. Research why people hold these opinions. Research other passages within the whole document that might apply to the issue raised by your passage. Along the way, you should find some support to back up your own interpretation of the text.

In your exegesis, you should first establish the importance of the issue dealt with by this passage. Move into a brief survey of the different interpretations, but spend most of the paper proposing your interpretation and backing it up with support from history, from logic, from other expert interpreters, and from other passages within the document. End with something that will help your readers translate your interpretation into terms that will make a difference in their lives.

Though works of pure exegesis are published, it’s often more common to see exegesis used as one strategy within a multifaceted argument. As we read Nomani and El Fadl (with his respondents), pay attention to the ways each author uses the interpretation of scriptural texts to make his or her argument about the role of women in Islam or about the place of tolerance in Islam.

Assignment #4: Cultural Analysis Paper (3-4 pages) and Presentation
Due: on the day of your presentation, one person per class period

Scriptural texts aren’t the only things out there that influence and are influenced by our religious beliefs: religious values often disseminate out to mainstream culture through slogans, movies, T-shirts, signs, and other products or trends. For the cultural analysis paper and presentation, pick a contemporary trend that seems to indicate something about religious rhetoric
in contemporary America. It could be an episode of The Simpsons, a WWJD bracelet, a trendy phrase you’ve heard in places of worship, Madonna’s recent endorsement of Kabbalah, a political speech using religious language, or whatever else catches your attention. Whatever you pick, make sure you bring in an “artifact” (an object, a video clip, a handout) to show the class during your presentation.

Both your presentation and your paper should explain where you found your artifact and why it interested you. Tell us why it’s significant. Tell us what it says about religious rhetoric in America at this moment in time. Who is the audience for this artifact? Why would it speak to them? To which of the audience’s values or prior assumptions does it try to appeal? Why does it use this rhetorical technique right now, as opposed to any other point in history?

Your presentation should be 5-10 minutes long, and it should be interesting. Dazzle us with your insight. Your paper, which should be 3-4 pages long, should go beyond mere description of your artifact into analysis of why it’s relevant right now and how it’s targeted to a particular audience. Your paper will be due on the same day that you make your presentation.

Assignment #5: Debate
Due: Outlines and Works Consulted Lists due Thursday, December 1; debates follow on December 6 or 8

Few recent novels have sparked as much interest and controversy as Dan Brown’s bestseller The Da Vinci Code. Before the film version comes out in spring of 2006, here’s your chance to weigh in on the discussion. For our formal debate, we’ll address four “hot” claims raised by the novel. Each question will have a “pro” and a “con” side, with three people to each side of the issue. Keep in mind that you do not have to really agree with the position you’re arguing for in the debate—sometimes it’s a fun strategy to see if you can make a convincing argument for something you disagree with.

Each issue will be debated by six people, divided according to the following tasks:

*Affirmative Opening Statement*
*Affirmative Cross-Examination and Rebuttal*
*Affirmative Closing Statement*
*Negative Opening Statement*
*Negative Cross-Examination and Rebuttal*
*Negative Closing Statement*

**Debate Order:**

Affirmative Opening Statement (5 min.)
Negative Cross-Examination of Affirmative Side (2 min.)
Negative Opening Statement (5 min.)
Affirmative Cross-Examination of Negative Side (2 min.)
Affirmative Rebuttal (3 min.)
Negative Rebuttal (3 min.)
Affirmative Closing Statement (5 min.)
Negative Closing Statement (5 min.)
Sample debate questions:

- Does Christianity suppress the “sacred feminine”?
- Did Jesus have a romantic relationship with Mary Magdalene?
- Is Brown’s interpretation of Leonardo’s The Last Supper (that the missing chalice suggests the Holy Grail, that the figure next to Christ is Mary Magdalene and not the apostle John) correct?

Following each debate, your classmates will vote on which side made the most convincing case. I won’t base your grade on that vote, however: you will be graded based on the quality of your research and on how you use the rhetorical strategies we’ve discussed throughout the semester. To help me evaluate the former, you will each individually submit an outline and a Works Consulted List for your portion of the debate. (I recognize that the outline may change based on what the other side says during the debate, but I do want evidence that you have carefully considered your arguments beforehand.)

Assignment #6: Online Posts of Reading Responses

Due: 7:00 p.m. the night before the reading assignment is due; 10 posts during the semester, one page each (or approx. 300 words)

Reading responses are a chance for you to process your thoughts about the generic and rhetorical elements of the assigned texts before you have to write your own version of the genre. Since you’ll be posting them online, they’re also a chance for you to interact with your classmates about what you’re reading.

Your posts should not be mere summaries of the content of the reading. Instead, you should discuss your response to the author’s use of rhetoric. What was particularly effective for you as a reader? What could have been done more persuasively? What points did you agree or disagree with and why? Does your personal experience at all affect how you read the text? These are just samples of some questions you can ask yourself. I’ll post more specific questions for each reading: feel free to respond to them or to go off in another direction if you have something else relevant to say.

I do require that you submit your post by 7:00 p.m. the night before the class for which the reading assignment that you’re responding to is due. This is so that I’ll be able to read all your posts before class the next morning, so that I’ll know what kinds of issues you’re interested in discussing. And who knows? Your classmates might even want to read them, too. I won’t be grading the posts for grammar, but please do edit before you post so that your classmates don’t have the chance to misjudge you based on silly errors.

Make your posts online at our course site on Angel (http://cms.psu.edu), under the “Course Lessons” section. The link labeled “ENGL 30 Reading Responses” will take you to the message board where we’ll all be able to post and read responses.
Syllabus of Reading and Writing Assignments

**Week 1**
Tues, Aug. 30
Thurs, Sept. 1  Nash 9-14; 176-189 (electronic reserve)

**Week 2**
Tues, Sept. 6  Norris, 1-64
Thurs, Sept. 8  Norris, 65-123

**Week 3**
Tues, Sept. 13  Norris, 124-176
Thurs, Sept. 15  Norris, 177-220  Narrative Draft Due

**Week 4**
Tues, Sept. 20  Narrative Due
Thurs, Sept. 22  Lewis, Preface and Book I

**Week 5**
Tues, Sept. 27  Lewis, Book II
Thurs, Sept. 29  Lewis, Book III

**Week 6**
Tues, Oct. 4  Lewis, Book IV  Apology Draft Due
Thurs, Oct. 6  Apology Due

**Week 7**
Tues, Oct. 11  Nomani, Preface and Part One
Thurs, Oct. 13  Nomani, Part Two

**Week 8**
Tues, Oct. 18  Nomani, Parts Three and Four
Thurs, Oct. 20  Nomani, Parts Five and Six
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<th>Week 9</th>
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<td>Tues, Oct. 25</td>
<td>Nomani,</td>
<td>Part Seven and Epilogue</td>
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<td>Thurs, Oct. 27</td>
<td>El Fadl,</td>
<td>vii-41</td>
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<th>Week 10</th>
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<td>Tues, Nov. 1</td>
<td>El Fadl,</td>
<td>42-90</td>
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<td>Thurs, Nov. 3</td>
<td>El Fadl,</td>
<td>93-111</td>
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<td>Exegesis Draft Due</td>
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<td>Tues, Nov. 8</td>
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<td>Thurs, Nov. 10</td>
<td>Brown,</td>
<td>1-87</td>
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<td>Exegesis Due</td>
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<td>Tues, Nov. 15</td>
<td>Brown,</td>
<td>88-172</td>
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<td>Thurs, Nov. 17</td>
<td>Brown,</td>
<td>173-259</td>
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<td>Tues, Nov. 29</td>
<td>Brown,</td>
<td>260-454</td>
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<td>Thurs, Dec. 1</td>
<td>Extra readings</td>
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<td>Debate Outlines and Works Consulted Pages Due</td>
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<td>Tues, Dec. 6</td>
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<td>Debates</td>
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<td>Thurs, Dec. 8</td>
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I. English 30 Grading Standards

These grading standards establish four major criteria for evaluation at each grade level: purpose, reasoning and content, organization, and expression. Obviously, every essay will not fit neatly into one grade category; some essays may, for instance, have some characteristics of B and some of C. The final grade the essay receives depends on the weight the instructor gives each criterion and whether the essay was received on time.

The A Essay

1. The A essay fulfills the assignment—and does so in a fresh and mature manner, using purposeful language that leads to knowledge making. The essay effectively meets the needs of the rhetorical situation in terms of establishing the writer's stance, attention to audience, purpose for writing, and sensitivity to context. Furthermore, the writer demonstrates expertise in employing the artistic appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos appropriately.

2. The topic itself is clearly defined, focused, and supported. The essay has a clear thesis that is supported with specific (and appropriate) evidence, examples, and details. Any outside sources of information are used carefully and cited appropriately. The valid reasoning within the essay demonstrates good judgment and an awareness of the topic's complexities.

3. The organization—chronological, spatial, or emphatic—is appropriate for the purpose and subject of the essay. The introduction establishes a context, purpose, and audience for writing and contains a focused thesis statement. The following paragraphs are controlled by (explicit or implicit) topic sentences; they are well developed; and they progress logically from what precedes them. (If appropriate, headings and subheadings are used.) The conclusion moves beyond a mere restatement of the introduction, offering implications for or the significance of the topic.

4. The prose is clear, readable, and sometimes memorable. It contains few surface errors, none of which seriously undermines the overall effectiveness of the paper for educated readers. It demonstrates fluency in stylistic flourishes (subordination, variation of sentence and paragraph lengths, interesting vocabulary).

The B Essay

1. The assignment has been followed and fulfilled. The essay establishes the writer's stance and demonstrates a clear sense of audience, purpose, and context.

2. The topic is fairly well defined, focused, and supported. The thesis statement is adequate (but could be sharpened), especially for the quality of supporting evidence the writer has used. The reasoning and support are thorough and more than adequate. The writer demonstrates a thoughtful awareness of complexity and other points of view.

3. The B essay has an effective introduction and conclusion. The order of information is logical,
and the reader can follow it because of well-chosen transitions and (explicit or implicit) topic sentences. Paragraph divisions are logical, and the paragraphs use enough specific detail to satisfy the reader.

4. The prose expression is clear and readable. Sentence structure is appropriate for educated readers, including the appropriate use of subordination, emphasis, varied sentences, and modifiers. Few sentence-level errors (comma splices, fragments, or fused sentences) appear. Vocabulary is precise and appropriate; punctuation, usage, and spelling conform to the conventions of Standardized American English discussed in class.

The C Essay

1. The assignment has been followed, and the essay demonstrates a measure of response to the rhetorical situation, in so far as the essay demonstrates some sense of audience and purpose.

2. The topic is defined only generally; the thesis statement is also general. The supporting evidence, gathered honestly and used responsibly, is, nevertheless, often obvious and easily accessible. The writer demonstrates little awareness of the topic’s complexity or other points of view; therefore, the C essay usually exhibits minor imperfections or inconsistencies in development, organization, and reasoning.

3. The organization is fairly clear. The reader could outline the presentation, despite the occasional lack of topic sentences. Paragraphs have adequate development and are divided appropriately. Transitions may be mechanical, but they foster coherence.

4. The expression is competent. Sentence structure is relatively simple, relying on simple and compound sentences. The paper is generally free of sentence-level errors; word choice is correct though limited. The essay contains errors in spelling, usage, and punctuation that reveal an unfamiliarity with the conventions of Standardized American English discussed in class.

The D Essay

1. The D essay attempts to follow the assignment, but demonstrates little awareness of the rhetorical situation in terms of the writer’s stance, audience, purpose, and context. For example, the essay might over- or under-estimate (or ignore) the audience’s prior knowledge, assumptions, or beliefs. The writer may have little sense of purpose.

2. The essay may not have any thesis statement, or, at best, a flawed one. Obvious evidence may be missing, and irrelevant evident may be present. Whatever the status of the evidence, it is inadequately interpreted and rests on an insufficient understanding of the rhetorical situation. Or it may rely too heavily on evidence from published sources without adding original analysis.

3. Organization is simply deficient: introductions or conclusions are not clearly marked or functional; paragraphs are neither coherently developed nor arranged; topic sentences are consistently missing, murky, or inappropriate; transitions are missing or flawed.

4. The D essay may have numerous and consistent errors in spelling, usage, and punctuation that reveal unfamiliarity with the conventions of Standardized American English discussed in class (or a lack of careful proofreading).

The F Essay
1. The F essay is inappropriate in terms of the purpose of the assignment and the rhetorical situation. If the essay relates vaguely to the assignment, it has no clear purpose or direction.

2. The essay falls seriously short of the minimum length requirements; therefore, it is insufficiently developed and does not go beyond the obvious.

3. The F essay is plagued by more than one of the organizational deficiencies of a D essay.

4. Numerous and consistent errors of spelling, usage, and punctuation hinder communication.

5. It may be plagiarized: either it is someone else’s essay, or this essay has used sources improperly and/or without documentation.

II. University Attendance Policy

According to Penn State Faculty Senate Policy 42-27,

"The faculty, staff, and other resources of the University are furnished for the education of students who attend the University. A class schedule is provided for students and faculty so that a reasonably orderly arrangement for instruction is facilitated. The fact that classes are scheduled is evidence that the faculty believes class instruction is important. Therefore, class attendance is important for the benefit of students.

Accordingly, it is the policy of the University that class attendance by students be encouraged and that all instructors organize and conduct their courses with this policy in mind. A student should attend every class for which the student is scheduled and should be held responsible for all work covered in the courses taken. In each case, the instructor should decide when the class absence constitutes a danger to the student's scholastic attainment and should make this fact known to the student at once. A student whose irregular attendance causes him or her, in the judgment of the instructor, to become deficient scholastically, may run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured had the student been in regular attendance.

Instructors should provide, within reason, opportunity to make up work for students who miss class for regularly scheduled, University-approved curricular and extracurricular activities, such as Martin Luther King Day of Service, field trips, debate trips, choir trips, and athletic contests. However, if such scheduled trips are considered by the instructor to be hurting the student's scholastic performance, the instructor should present such evidence for necessary action to the head of the department in which the course is offered and to the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled or to the Division of Undergraduate Studies if the student is enrolled in that division.

Instructors also should provide, within reason, opportunity to make up work for students who are obliged to miss classes for other legitimate reasons."

III. University and English Department Plagiarism Policy

The Department of English insists on strict standards of academic honesty in all courses.
Therefore, plagiarism, the act of passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own, will be penalized severely. The following discussion is offered so that you won't commit plagiarism.

Sometimes plagiarism is simple dishonesty. If you buy, borrow, or steal an essay to turn in as your own work, you are plagiarizing. If you copy word-for-word or change a word here and there while copying without enclosing the copied passage in quotation marks and identifying the author, you are also plagiarizing.

But plagiarism can be more complicated in act and intent.

Paraphrasing, stating someone else's ideas in your own words, can lead you to unintentional plagiarism. Jotting down notes and ideas from sources and then using them without proper attributions to the authors or titles in introductory phrases may result in a paper that is only a blend of your words combined with the words of others that appear to be yours.

Another way to plagiarize is to allow other students or friends to give you too much rhetorical help or do too much editing and proofreading of your work. If you think you have received substantial help in any way from people whose names will not appear as authors of the paper, you should acknowledge that help in a short sentence at the end of the paper or in your list of Works Cited. If you are not sure how much help is too much, talk with your instructor, so the two of you can decide what kind of outside help (and how much) is acceptable, and how to give credit where credit is due.

As you go through the writing process, you should keep careful track of when you use ideas and/or exact words from sources. As a conscientious writer, you have to make an honest effort to distinguish between your own ideas, those of others, and what might be considered common knowledge. Try to identify which part of your work comes from an identifiable source and then document the use of that source using the proper format, such as a parenthetical citation and a Works Cited list. If you are unsure about what needs documenting, talk with your instructor.

When thinking about plagiarism, it is hard to avoid talking about ideas as if they were objects like tables and chairs. Obviously, that’s not the case. You should not feel that you are under pressure to invent completely new ideas. Instead, original writing consists of thinking through ideas and expressing them in your own way. The result may not be entirely new, but, if honestly done, it may be interesting and worthwhile reading. Print or electronic sources, as well as other people, may add useful ideas to your own thoughts. When they do so in identifiable and specific ways, give them the credit they deserve.