

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Department of Religious Studies
REL 4461 Jacques Derrida
Fall 2014

Instructor: Mr. Daniel Alvarez
Office Hours: T/TH, 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
DM 304A

Class Days & Times: MWF 11:00 - 11:50- a.m.
Class Room: Chemistry & Physics (CP) 103
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines a specific topic in the philosophy of religion, such as faith and reason, religious experience, or an important thinker. It may be repeated with permission of the instructor. This semester the course will focus on the work of Jacques Derrida, the preeminent post-modernist philosopher of our time.

TEXTBOOK

Peggy Kamuf, editor, *A Derrida Reader* (Columbia University Press, 1991), ISBN 978-0-231-06659-4.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES AND COURSE STRUCTURE

In this course we will attempt a close reading of the text itself. In other words, no use of secondary literature. We are going to wrestle with the text, as Jacob wrestled with God at Bethel, and perhaps we will wrest enough “blessings” from the text to leave satisfied at the end of the term. If we hunger for more, there is always another seminar I can schedule in Fall 2015.

Our goal is to read as much of the book as possible. Given the fact that the selections are organized in chronological order, this will allow to appraise the evolution of Derrida’s thought from the earliest to the latest writings in order. We will not rush through the texts; we will read with the purpose of gaining enough understanding of the text that will allow us to move forward to the next selection. The Reader contains a generous selection of Derrida’s output, and we will not feel obligated to read through the entire book. One reason for not rushing through the texts is that Derrida is notoriously difficult, if not cryptic, and discerning his thought beyond the standard clichés and stereotypes of what means will not be an easy task. But that **is our task**. In terms of number of pages, if I have an implicit goal, it is to read up to Part III of the Reader (page 309), with a couple of selections from Part IV (where Derrida engages Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche on sexual difference). It’s not the whole book, but it is a substantial number of pages. But perhaps I am being too optimistic in thinking we will achieve this goal. We will have to see.

Those of us trained in the Analytic (Anglo-Saxon) tradition in philosophy have had difficulty making sense of Derrida (and most of the Continental tradition in philosophy for that matter). We will “bracket” (a good Husserlian word) those prejudices, regardless of how well founded or misguided some of us might find them to be, for the purposes of the course. I am primarily interested in this course in what Derrida has to say to us and what he means, than in whether Derrida is right. One must also remember that thinkers trained in the Analytic Tradition, such as Richard Rorty, do not consider Derrida absurd and his words meaningless.

However, it is also clear that Derrida, along with Heidegger and Rorty, a barrage of criticism and their reputation in the Analytic tradition has not fared well. On this side of the Atlantic at least, the admirers in academic philosophy are few; the detractors many. Again, our goal is to *understand* Derrida, and this will require a major effort and discipline on our part. With that said, the influence of Derridean “deconstruction” and post-Modernism in modern philosophy, but particularly in

literary theory (and even fields such Sociology and Anthropology) has been far-reaching. How long this romance with Derrida will last we cannot say. But that Derrida's influence is ubiquitous simply cannot be denied, and, therefore, his thinking cannot be ignored.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

1. One research 12-15 research paper on a topic provided by the instructor (70% of final grade).
2. Class Presentation (based on the reading assignment for each week): Two (2) pages, orally delivered in class (30% of final grade).

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

A	95-100	C	70-74
A-	91-94	C-	68-69
B+	88-90	D+	66-67
B	83-87	D	63-65
B-	79-82	F	0-62
C+	75-78		

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1

Introduction: Syllabus, Requirements, Textbooks, Overview of course\
Philosophy until Derrida, and why Derrida

Week 2

Derrida Reader, 3-31, from *Speech & Phenomena*.

Week 3

Derrida Reader, 31-60, from *Of Grammatology*.

Presentation: _____

Week 4

Derrida Reader, 61-79, from "Differance."

Presentation: _____

Week 5

II. Being in the World in General as the Basic State of Dasein(78-90)

Presentation: _____

Week 6

Derrida Reader, 112-139, from "Plato's Pharmacy"
Recommended: Plato's Phaedrus

Presentation: _____

Week 7

Derrida Reader, 169-199, from "The Double Session."

Presentation: _____

Week 8

Derrida Reader, 200-220, from “Psyche: Invention of the Other.

Presentation: _____

Week 9

Derrida Reader, 221-235, from “What is this thing Poetry?”

Presentation: _____

Week 10

Derrida Reader, 241-253, from “The Tower of Babel.”

Presentation: _____

Week 11

Derrida Reader, 254-268, from “Living on: Border Lines.”

Presentation: _____

Week 12

Derrida Reader: 269-276, from “Letter to a Japanese Friend”; 277-309, from “Restitution of the Truth in Pointing.”

Presentation: _____

Week 13

Derrida Reader, 313-352, from “Glas” (in dialogue with Hegel and Kant)

Presentation: _____

Week 14

Derrida Reader, 353-377, from “Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles.”

Presentation: _____

Week 15

Concluding Discussion on Derrida

Presentation: _____

LAST DAY OF CLASSES, RESEARCH PAPERS DUE