

Evolution of Religiosity and Human Coalitional Psychology

BIOL 419/519 • PSY 450 • REL 447

Course CCR Numbers: 83125; 83126; 83127; 87128, respectively

Spring 2026 - **Tuesday/Thursday, 11:00–12:15 PM**

Location: **Castetter Hall room 258.**

Instructor: Dr. Paul J. Watson

Office: Marron Hall, Room 235

Email: pwatson@unm.edu

Office Hours: Tue/Thu 12:30 PM onward, Wed 1–3 PM, *and by appointment*, including weekends if needed.

Phone/Text (505) 681-3391; do not hesitate to call. If necessary, office hour conversations can be arranged to be held via phone or Zoom.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores human religiosity as an evolved and completely natural phenomenon. Our analysis of the potentially adaptive roles of religious practice and belief is situated at the intersection of evolutionary behavioral ecology, cognitive behavioral neuroscience, and cross-cultural coalitional social dynamics.

Religiosity refers to genetically evolved cognitive proclivities—learning responsive instinctive patterns of thought and behavior—that predispose humans toward systems of moralistic supernatural beliefs and practices. Morals are rules of conduct that address one's positive or negative effects on others' well-being. Religion evolves culturally and refers to collaborative ingroup projects where individuals strive to please group-specific supernatural social partners (gods, spirits, etc.) or affect supernatural processes, with the primary intent of benefitting the ingroup.

Key questions:

1. What makes human social life unique—and how does that create a need for religion and selection pressures favoring cognitive traits that accommodate religious and diverse supernatural beliefs?
2. What evolved mental traits make us susceptible to emotional attachment to religious belief systems?
3. How might these primordial religious proclivities, once they exist, provide adaptive advantages to individuals or groups?

This course does not address whether supernatural agents or processes exist, nor is it a survey of culture-specific religious practices. We focus on pan-cultural, species-typical cognitive processes and the selection pressures that designed our minds to generate them.

The course never judges or advocates for any particular religious or spiritual practices or beliefs. Nor does it promote atheism or agnosticism, etc. For pedagogical reasons, the instructor will share some of his own journey through religious and quasi-religious traditions, and some students may choose to do the same. The course does, however, offer compelling biological and socioecological explanations for how natural selection, sexual selection, and social selection has rendered humans prone to develop religions and often place them at the center of their lives and cultures. I have had many deeply religious students who emerged from this class

with their faith and beliefs fully intact, sometimes enhanced through better understanding. *But, I cannot guarantee that course ideas will not threaten your belief systems as you ponder them. Such may be a part of your personal developmental process before and after the course.*

The course proceeds through four major units:

- Unit I: Evolutionary Foundations—Darwinism, Hamiltonianism, species-typical human socioecology, complex contractual reciprocity, adaptively subjective dream world, Homo duplex, the mystery instinct, and rationality switch.
- Unit II: Origins of specific religiosity instincts (from cognitive byproducts to adaptations). • Unit III: Theories about the adaptive significance of religiosity (published and new models).
- Unit IV: Student presentations of empirical primary literature and integration

There is an overall expectation for collaborative understanding, explanation, description, and integration—not mere recall. This is a 400/500-level course. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to introspect—testing hypotheses about their own cognition.

PREREQUISITES

Upper-division or graduate standing is the norm, but not a rigid one. Explicit instructor permission is required to register and is the only true prerequisite. A short 1-on-1 meeting (in person or by phone), initiated by emailing the instructor, is usually required. No specific prior course is required, though background in biology, psychology, anthropology, or religious studies is helpful. Humanities majors are encouraged to enroll!!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Unit 1 – Learning Objectives

- Understand the opportunity to gain self-knowledge by combining an evolutionary, biological perspective on human nature with introspective reflection, cross-referencing scientific hypotheses and predictions with one's own experience.
- Be able to describe the key realizations about how the world operates that Darwin assembled in developing the original mechanism for evolution by natural selection. • Be able to explain the advancements introduced by Hamiltonianism and the Second Darwinian Revolution (1960s–70s), including solutions to major behavioral puzzles left by Darwin: the evolution of kin-directed and non-kin-directed altruism, the concept of direct and indirect reproductive strategies, and the heightened scientific focus on individual versus group selection in the evolution of all traits in living organisms.
- Be able to explain additional problems solved during the Second Darwinian Revolution, such as the evolution of parent-offspring conflict, the evolutionary theory of sex differences, and the interaction between genetic and cultural evolution.
- Be able to describe the essential socioecological uniqueness of humans and the basis for human success as a species; specifically, the ability to cooperate in large groups while maintaining an appreciable degree of individual sovereignty.
- Understand the selection pressures that led to the evolution of human cognitive capacities for constructing contractual boilerplates with moral content, and for experiencing a phenomenally conscious life comprised of an adaptively subjective dream world.
- Be able to describe the nature of the adaptively subjective dream world and the human lifestyle that enables our key species-level success: complex contractual reciprocity.

- Understand the concepts of *Homo duplex* - the mystery instinct and the associated rationality switch. Integrate these concepts with the more conventional cognitive science idea of “Dual Systems Theory.”
- Understand the key pan-cultural role of religious professionals in managing the rationality switch and in providing sacred, subgroup-specific contractual boilerplate teachings—primarily when that switch is in the “off” position.
- Understand the place of Honest Signaling Theory in explaining animal and human social behavior. Be able to give examples of honest signals and explain what makes a signal honest. Understand why so-called honest signals may also be laced with falsehoods or misinformation intended to manipulate the receiver’s behavior for the sender’s advantage.
- Understand the place of self-deception in human (and possibly other animals’) honest signaling systems.
- Be able to explain the inclusive fitness theory of religion as formulated by Richard Alexander and further developed by Crespi and Summers. Three references will be provided; students are encouraged to carefully read the abstracts, the first few paragraphs of the discussion sections, and the conclusions sections in these papers (expected time to be spent reading the three references: one to two hours).

Unit 2 – Learning Objectives

- Understand the evolutionary origin of supernormal stimuli and their central place in religious practice.
- Understand the role of religious professionals in managing group members’ exposure to most supernormal stimuli.
- Be able to describe the selection pressures that indirectly caused the evolution of approximately eight religious proclivities or instincts (as described in class) to evolve (Evolutionary Origins).
- Be able to describe the selection pressures that transformed these primordial religiosity instincts over evolutionary time into an integrated suite of adaptations (Evolutionary Adaptive or Functional Significance).
- Deepen your understanding of how the mystery instinct and rationality switch mediate the interaction between analytical thinking and scientifically unverifiable religious belief; explain why the intrapsychic design enabling this coexistence and interaction is essential for human social life.

Unit 3 – Learning Objectives

- Be able to explain the main complementary published and unpublished accounts that describe the five major adaptive functions (as discussed in class) that have made hairtrigger attraction to religious practice and belief a pan-cultural human phenomenon.
- Understand how, according to these models, individual selection and cultural group selection are expected to align in favoring intact, legitimate religious traditions as the ultimate basis for humans perceiving meaning and purpose in traditional societies.
- Develop an appreciation for the challenges faced by non-religious institutions in replacing religious ones when it comes to engendering a deep sense of purpose, meaning, well-being, and mental health.

Unit 4 – Learning Objectives

- Practice reading, interpreting, and presenting primary empirical literature.

- Become familiar with and discuss the diversity of empirical approaches for testing evolutionary hypotheses concerning human religious experience and practice.
- Deepen your appreciation of how evolutionary hypotheses about human behavior can be tested.
- Expand your horizons regarding the historical and most current issues of interest in the evolutionary psychological study of religiosity.

How Will You Know You've Achieved These Learning Objectives?

Your progress toward these objectives will be evident through your reflection and participation, as well as grade updates accessible via Canvas.

- Willingness to ask questions when confused and seek clarification in class or office hours
- Ability to paraphrase and explain course concepts in your own words (in discussion, journals, or emails). Stop me by raising your hand any time you wish to check your understanding in class; every time you do this I can better help you achieve the learning objectives, and you will also be providing a valuable service for the class.
- Quality and depth of your in-class participation, including the questions you raise and the statements you make
- Written reflections in your journal, where you explicitly and implicitly can critically evaluate your own understanding and confusion
- Performance on the midterm exam, where you'll synthesize material from readings, lecture, and discussion
- Ability to engage thoughtfully with feedback from the instructor and peers
- Integration of course ideas into your analysis and discussion of presentation papers, and the clarity with which you connect these papers to the larger course framework
- Active self-assessment through writing, thinking, and honest appraisal of your understanding as you move through the course

You are encouraged to use every tool available—asking, paraphrasing, reflecting, writing, and discussing—to ensure you truly understand, not just memorize, course content.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Grading Breakdown

Attendance: 30%

Participation: 20%

Journal: (portable computer or preferably legibly handwritten): 20%

Midterm (Blue Book, provided by instructor. Bring your own pencils!): 15%

Final Powerpoint Presentation (minimum 20-minutes, with unlimited followup Q&A): 15%

Consistent in-person attendance is *required*. Excessive unexcused absences may (read, 'will') result in you being dropped (barring official accommodations, details below). Participation includes all substantive* verbal contributions you make during in-class discussions and journal writings.

*Every time you respectfully speak with comment or question or challenge, is cherished. As a rule, there are no stupid questions. I and your classmates appreciatively will make the most of all your verbal contributions, maybe not always in the way you expect, but educationally. It is cliché but true, that if you are confused or have a question, many others probably have it too, even if they do not know it. When you wish to speak, hand-raising traditions are best, but you can also stand up on the table or rush toward me (no physical contact, please). Importantly, you

will be given time to formulate your statement or question to your satisfaction while we all listen intently – if you ever feel that has not happened let me know in real time! The instructor will lecture but wants every lecture to include generous discussion.

Your Journal requires emailed biweekly highlights (first one due by Thursday, Jan. 29th, 5:00 PM) and end of semester full submission, handwritten or computer file. The midterm is a closed-book short essay exam, exclusively handwritten (unless official accommodations are requested). The final in-class presentation is a 20–30-minute talk with Q&A, scheduled during the last four classes, or possibly earlier if you desire.

How to get an 'A'

Serious engaged students almost always earn an A or B in this course. Ask questions and offer comments and critiques or appropriate personal reflections freely in class and in your journaling. I also encourage that you come to see me for conversation during scheduled or special appointment-based office hours, although I am not allowed by the administration to use office hour attendance or our interaction quality to influence your course grade (bummer).

Attend regularly and be on time. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class; you are responsible for getting your name and arrival time on that handwritten list every meeting. Missing the first 5 or 10 minutes of class can hinder your understanding of the entire session, so avoid that. I notice and record late arrivals that become routine.

All class sessions are recorded. **Request** via email (Subject line: Class Recording Requested!) and listen to class recordings promptly if you must miss a class or more than 10 minutes of one, **and promptly email the instructor a summary of the recording's highlights** (100–200 words). It is also wise to ask for recordings if you arrive \geq 10 minutes late for class. Doing so will give you a perfect attendance record (see more below). However, unless medically necessary, you CANNOT forgo coming to class meetings and routinely listening to recordings instead; this is philosophically inconsistent with the class, will negatively affect your learning and mine, and kill the Participation component of your grade.

Engage actively and regularly - set a goal to ask a question or make a scientific or pertinent personal observation at least every second class session. Keep track of these contributions, perhaps in a special section of your journal, as will the instructor. Personal observations conveying *experiences* you have had, or are having in the moment, that arguably are related to course topics, are most helpful in class, but observations based on your personal philosophy or ideology are also fine to bring up particularly during office hours – I'm interested in you and your ideas, your ponderings and impressions.

Bring your journal to class (but do not use it to take class notes, because it is for *your* thoughts and questions – a tool for pondering) and carry it with you everywhere along with an enjoyable-to-use pencil(s) and a good eraser. Send in your biweekly journal highlights *on time* (via email, every 2nd Thursday by 5:00 PM- the first emailed highlights due 29 January by 5:00 PM).

Begin early preparing for your paper presentation and seek instructor help as much as needed after you have made a serious attempt to read the entire (chosen and approved) paper on your own. Do not get hung up on complex statistical methods, but understand how data were

collected and glean how the data support or refute the authors' hypotheses and predictions from Tables and Figures, identifying metrics for both effect sizes and levels of statistical significance.

Grade progress is updated weekly, by grading category, on Canvas, by 5 PM Sunday; students are encouraged to also self-track attendance and participation. High attendance and thoughtful participation almost always lead to an 'A' unless key assignments are badly neglected or missed. If you are into A+'s, coming to regular or special appointment office hours typically helps, but is not required. I enjoy and believe deeply in the pedagogical value of office hour conversations.

Attendance and Recordings

If you must miss class for a valid reason, request the recording by email.

If you listen to the full recording during the same calendar week, you get full credit for attendance for that day. Remember you must send in a highlights email to get credit for listening to a recording (use a subject line such as, 'Recording Highlights, [Date], [Last Name].

If you listen and /or send in highlights after that week, you receive 50% credit.

Regular reliance on recordings, however, is not a viable strategy; it will lower your participation grade and reduce comprehension.

Getting Dropped Due To Absences or Disruptive Behavior

1. *Early-term absence threshold:* Except for documented emergencies, students who miss 3 of the first 6 meetings (even if they listen to recordings) will be dropped.
2. *After week 3:* Do not rely on recordings any more than is absolutely necessary. Listening to more than 4 recordings after the first three weeks is strongly discouraged and will depress your participation grade. Students planning sporadic attendance should not enroll.
3. *Disruptive behavior* will result in being asked to leave a class meeting and recorded as an unexcused absence. Per the absence policy for this class, a student will be dropped after five (5) unexcused absences without demonstrated and reported listening to class recordings. University policies D75 (Classroom Conduct), 2240 (Respectful Campus), and 2210 (Campus Violence) apply.

Journal & Journal Highlights

Buy a notebook or journal you can regularly carry with you. It should be in front of you during class.

Maintain this required journal throughout the semester to:

- Reflect on / ponder course ideas
- Identify personal misunderstandings
- Generate questions for class or office hours
- Track integration of ideas across units
- Optionally, compare course models to your own mental experience
- Write down things for office hour discussions you do not feel able to share in class

Journal highlights must be non-AI extracts from your raw non-AI journal entries, typed and emailed every second Thursday by 5:00 PM. Use helpful email subject lines like

“Journal Highlights 1,” [Your Last Name]. Highlights must be submitted on time for journal grades to be updated on time on Canvas (hopefully by 5 PM each Sunday).

Write legibly and in full sentences. Make it clear what course ideas your Journalentries most closely pertain to. *Your full original handwritten journal will be due during the final class (April 30, 2026) for complete review and final grading. They will be returned on request.*

Do not use AI to generate journal entries or highlights. If you ever want to have a discussion about how to properly use AI as a student in a thinking / experiential class like this one, let me know. I will let you know my philosophy on that, not University Policy, although you must also adhere to the latter (see below).

Presentation

Each student gives a 20–30 min presentation based on an **instructor-approved** peer-reviewed **empirical** paper from the primary literature (usually, from the provided course library or an instructor-approved discovery you make). Presentations begin anytime after the midterm exam. *You may not schedule your presentation until your preparation is instructor approved.* You may give your presentations at any time in the second half of the semester with prior approval and planning. Each presentation is followed by open-ended unhurried Q&A.

Students are encouraged to discuss their paper with the instructor during office hours—unlimited help is available, including by phone or Zoom if necessary. The big priorities for your presentation are to make it clear to the class: (1) what the author’s research questions were (pause here to verify everyone in the class understands them), (2) why they felt these questions were important, (3) the data they collected to test their hypotheses and related predictions, (4) their most important results including a clear presentation of effect sizes and significance levels, and (5) a summary of the key conclusions as highlighted in the discussion section of the paper.

Presentation time limits apply only to your speaking time; follow-up Q&A/discussion is open-ended. No final course grade will be issued until the presentation is completed; missed presentations will result in the student receiving an “Incomplete.”

Workload Expectations

As a 3-credit course, expect 6–9 hours per week of out-of-class work:

First half: 2–3 hr/week reading Rossano, 1–2 hr/week journaling and highlights
Second half: 2–3 hr/week reading/Preparing an empirical paper, 1–2 hr/week on journal/presentation prep, meetings, feedback, and rehearsals

These expectations follow university policy and are intended for steady progress and deep engagement.

Feedback and Progress Updates

Grades will be updated in Canvas weekly by category (Attendance, Participation, Journal, Midterm, Presentation).

Students may request a progress update by email or in office hours at any time. Assignment rubrics and grading criteria are stated in each relevant section.

Materials and Technology

Communicate with the instructor in-person, via email, or by phone – NOT Canvas.

There are no assigned readings for individual class sessions.

Required reading Matt Rossano's *Supernatural Selection: How Religion Evolved* (Oxford, 2010) must be read before the midterm. PDF provided; hardcopies available on Amazon, etc. Occasional optional readings will be emailed and posted to Canvas. Powerpoint slides also emailed/archived. *Read this book in the first half of the semester.*

Canvas Usage

Used for syllabus, grades, library, slides, and readings only.

There will be no library of class recordings on Canvas, these are available only via emailed request.

No assignments, messaging, or required interaction on Canvas.

Students are encouraged to initiate discussion boards on Canvas, but these are optional and will not be graded or monitored by the instructor, except *maybe* if students invite an instructor response.

Questions and insights that arise in these discussions will be addressed by the instructor in class upon request. That will be good for your participation grade. They may also be used to help you develop and augment material for journal entries as long as the final composition of all entries are your own. Norms of academic respect, inclusivity, and camaraderie will be enforced in these discussions as they are in class.

Classroom Device Policy

During class, phones must be put away, out of sight – not on the table. Laptops may **only** be used for taking notes. Paying attention to your devices lowers participation, which is graded. If you must use your phone, please immediately step out into the hallway. I walk in irregular patterns around the classroom while speaking as it helps me concentrate and occasionally look you in the eye. I will see what's on your screen eventually – if it is not notes your computer will no longer be allowed in class.

COURSE SCHEDULE (SPRING 2026)

All topics are subject to adjustment based on class pacing and discussion needs.

I have met you all before allowing you to register for this class. You may remember that by nature and intentionally I teach in a somewhat non-linear fashion in which strategic tangents happen and key topics are revisited time to time in different contexts and so that you meet them again with different levels of background knowledge; this helps you digest the key ideas of the course more deeply, I hope. You should already know that most of my lecturing is a planned improvisation where I am struggling to think precisely *and* have original ideas and formulations of class concepts develop and emerge in the form of speech. That is what you will be party to most of the time, and invited to help it along with your own comments and questions, like my bandmates.

UNIT I — Evolutionary Foundations and Human Socioecology

Unit Focus: This unit establishes the foundational principles of evolutionary theory, kin selection, and human socioecology, providing the conceptual framework for understanding human religiosity as a product of biological and social evolution. Students will begin connecting scientific models to their own experience and to the unique features of human social life.

T Jan 13 — Introduction and Course Overview, including a first example of the evolutionary origins and probable adaptive functions of a specific ‘religiosity instinct’

Th Jan 15 — Darwinism: The fundamental process of adaptation and natural selection

T Jan 20 — Hamiltonianism: The true meaning of fitness; the evolution of altruism toward relatives and non-relatives; understanding the roles of individual versus group selection in the evolutionary process

Th Jan 22 — Contractual Boilerplates and the Essential Role of the Adaptively Subjective Dream World in Human Social Life

T Jan 27 — Complex Contractual Reciprocity, Homo Duplex, and the Mystery Instinct

Th Jan 29 — Honest Signaling Theory and the Evolution of Communication

T Feb 3 — Flex Day or Catch-Up Day

Th Feb 5 — The Inclusive Fitness Theory of Religion

UNIT II — Origins and Adaptive Significance of Specific Religious Proclivities

Unit Focus: This unit investigates the evolutionary origins and functional significance of major human religiosity instincts, tracing their emergence from cognitive byproducts to integrated adaptations. Special attention is given to the social and psychological mechanisms underlying these traits.

T Feb 10 — Supernormal Stimuli and Religious Engagement

Th Feb 12 — A. Hyperactive Agent Detection Device / B. The Bargaining Instinct

T Feb 17 — Leader Selection Instincts

Th Feb 19 — Ontological Categorization Instinct

T Feb 24 — Promiscuous Teleology, Imminent Justice, and Imaginary Friends

Th Feb 26 — A. Attachment and Religious Bonding / B. Fictive Kin and Religious Brotherhoods

T Mar 3 — Analytical Thinking vs. Religious Beliefs

Th Mar 5 — Flex Day or Catch-Up Day

T Mar 10 — MIDTERM REVIEW (study hints will be given; you will profit from them if you have finished reading the book.)

Th Mar 12 — MIDTERM EXAM (if you cannot finish your midterm during the class period, extra time will be offered after class and on Friday Mar 13).

UNIT III — Adaptive Significance of Religiosity

Unit Focus: This unit synthesizes competing models for the adaptive functions of religion, with a focus on pan-cultural human phenomena. Students will critically evaluate published and unpublished accounts explaining why religiosity persists and how it is shaped by selection at both individual and group levels.

T Mar 24 — Review of Mid-term Answers; Help Estimating Your Midterm Grade

Th Mar 26 — Parasite Avoidance Hypothesis of Moral and Religious Diversity

T Mar 31 — Evolution of Placebo and Supernormal Placebo Effects

Th Apr 2 — Informational Boundaries Hypothesis of Religion Part I

T Apr 7 — Informational Boundaries Hypothesis Part II

Th Apr 9 — The Meaning of Willpower; The Intrapsychic Process of Willpower Generation; Religion as a Conditioning Program for Developing Willpower

T Apr 14 — Religion and Willpower Continued

Th Apr 16 — Reintegrate the Kin Selection Theory of Religiosity

UNIT IV — Student Presentations

Unit Focus: In this unit, students engage directly with primary empirical literature, testing, presenting, and integrating evolutionary hypotheses about human religiosity. Emphasis is placed on scientific reasoning, clear communication, and the critical evaluation of both evidence and theoretical models.

T Apr 21 — Begin Student Presentations I; The Reproductive Support Hypothesis of Religion.

Th Apr 23 — Student Presentations II

T Apr 28 — Student Presentations III

Th Apr 30 — Student Presentations IV and Course Wrap-Up

(Final journals due; final slot used for presentation overflow if needed)

UNIVERSITY-WIDE POLICIES (note the APPENDIX below, added 16 January 2026)

Accommodations & Accessibility:

In accordance with University policy, students with documented disabilities who require academic adjustments or accommodations must provide a letter of accommodation from the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC). Please contact the ARC at (505) 277-3506 or visit <https://arc.unm.edu/> as early as possible to ensure your needs are met.

Title IX & Gender-Based Discrimination:

UNM faculty are required to report any knowledge of gender discrimination, including sexual harassment or misconduct, to the Office of Compliance, Ethics & Equal Opportunity. If you experience harassment or discrimination, you can contact the LoboRESPECT Advocacy Center (277-2911) or report it at <https://oeo.unm.edu/>.

Non-Discrimination & Equal Opportunity:

UNM prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, disability, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, medical condition, spousal affiliation, or immigration status.

Harassment and retaliation based on these protected statuses are not tolerated. UNM provides reasonable accommodations for pregnancy and childbirth, for the religious beliefs and practices of its students and employees, and for individuals with disabilities. Students are entitled to use their preferred name and pronouns and to access gender-specific facilities consistent with their gender identity.

If you experience or witness discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, please report through UNM's EthicsPoint hotline or contact the Office of Compliance, Ethics & Equal Opportunity (505-277-5251 or ceeo@unm.edu). For complete policy details, see UAP 2720.

Respectful Classroom Environment:

This course investigates religion and belief systems from a scientific perspective. *No position is taken for or against the truth(s) of any particular religious claim.* Note that in scientific discourse, however, nobody is under any obligation to agree with your claims, because the instructor and

students are called upon to do their best to *analytically and critically consider* anything of scientific substance you claim or suggest. Thus we will always be engaging in respectful scientifically grounded discourse, even about shared experiences, always in a spirit of mutually appreciative critical camaraderie.

I emphasize, students of all religious backgrounds—and none—are welcome. Respectful discussion and intellectual curiosity are expected at all times. Disrespectful behavior toward other students or groups will result in removal from the class roster.

Academic Integrity:

Academic dishonesty—including plagiarism, fabrication, or cheating—will not be tolerated. Any case of suspected academic misconduct will be handled in accordance with the UNM Student Code of Conduct. If you are unsure whether something constitutes plagiarism or misconduct, please ask. Careful and critical interactive use of AI to help you understand course material, including your presentation paper, is permitted, but any and all written assignments that consist of AI-generated text will be rejected.

Inclusive Learning:

We are all co-learners in this course, including your instructor. Your experiences and perspectives are valuable. If you encounter barriers to participation or feel excluded in any way, please let the instructor know. The course aims to be intellectually rigorous and humanely inclusive. If you find it easy to speak, great, but make sure you encourage and allow time for others to do so as well. *There are no “stupid questions.” Really.* Questions only need to be relevant. If you ask a question that feels “dumb” to you, it may reveal a misunderstanding that you and at least some other fellow students have. Asking it gives the instructor or another classmate to address it, which is very useful. Moreover, what may feel like an uninformed question may, in reality, contain a “genius” idea, or high quality generate ideas in others! Be brave and consider these possibilities seriously. Also know that you will always be given the time you need to ask your question properly and fully. In this class we patiently listen to others struggling to formulate questions and observations.

COVID-19 or Emergency Policy:

Should in-person classes be suspended due to public health or weather-related events, course meetings will continue via email and synchronous/asynchronous communication tools as needed. The instructor will notify students of any such changes.

Campus Resources:

- Accessibility Resource Center: <https://arc.unm.edu/>
- CAPS (tutoring & learning support): <https://caps.unm.edu/>
- Counseling Services: <https://shac.unm.edu/mental-health/>
- LoboRESPECT Advocacy Center: <https://loborespect.unm.edu/>

This document may be updated slightly to comply with evolving UNM policies, but the intellectual core of the course will remain as presented.

Accommodations & Accessibility

UNM is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students with documented disabilities. To engage in a confidential conversation about requesting reasonable

accommodations for this class, please contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) at arcsvs@unm.edu or (505) 277-3506 as early as possible.

Credit-Hour Statement

This is a three-credit-hour course. Class meets for two 75-minute sessions per week for fifteen weeks during the Spring 2026 semester. **Please plan for a minimum of six hours of out-of class work each week** (e.g., reading, journaling, presentation preparation, and other assignments).

Religions and Faith Traditions

The University of New Mexico promotes respect for all religions and faith traditions. Any student who is unable to attend class or complete work due to the observance of a major religious holiday or cultural observance (including related travel) is encouraged to speak with the instructor about an excused absence and opportunities to make up missed work without unreasonable burden.

Thriving and Finding Support

Students succeed at UNM when they take advantage of resources and get involved in campus life. Your MyUNM portal links to wellbeing resources (mental health, financial support, food, housing, jobs) and academic resources (tutoring, study abroad). Advisors and resource centers are reachable through the Student Hub in MyUNM.

APPENDIX

New Syllabus Language for Spring 2026

I gladly include here the following statements provided by the Office of the Provost and EVP for Academic Affairs as described below.

The following two statements regard student accommodations and UNM policies on Equal Opportunity and Prohibited Discrimination and Sex Discrimination Including Sexual Misconduct:

Accommodations: UNM is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students with documented disabilities. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate an inclusive classroom setting, in which students have full access and opportunity to participate. To engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations for this class and/or program, please contact Accessibility Resource Center at arcsrvs@unm.edu or 505-277-3506.

UAP 2720 and 2740: Our classroom and university should foster mutual respect, kindness, and support. If you have concerns about discrimination, harassment, or violence, please seek support and report incidents. Find confidential services at LoboRESPECT Advocacy Center, the Women's Resource Center, and the LGBTQ Resource Center. UNM prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (including gender, sex stereotyping, gender expression, and gender identity). All instructors are "responsible employees" who must communicate reports of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence to Compliance, Ethics and Equal Opportunity. For more information, please see UAP 2720 and UAP 2740.

The following two statements on credit hours provide transparency to students and UNM accreditation policy:

Credit-hour statement: This is a three-credit-hour course. Class meets for two 75-minute sessions of direct instruction for fifteen weeks during the Spring 2026 semester. Please plan for a minimum of six hours of out-of-class work (for homework, study, assignment completion, and class preparation) each week.

Respectful Conduct Expectations: I am committed to building with you a positive classroom environment in which everyone can learn. I reserve the right to intervene and enforce standards of respectful behavior when classroom conduct is inconsistent with University expectations [and/or classroom community agreements]. Interventions and enforcement may include but are not limited to required meetings to discuss classroom expectations, written notification of expectations, and/or removal from a class meeting. Removal from a class meeting will result in an unexcused absence. [Insert number] or more unexcused absences may result in permanent removal and a drop from the course (see attendance policy). The University of New Mexico ensures freedom of academic inquiry, free expression and open debate, and a respectful

campus through adherence to the following policies: D75: Classroom Conduct, Student Code of Conduct, University Policy 2240 - Respectful Campus, University Policy 2210 - Campus Violence.

Academic honesty and AI use

Responsible Learning and Academic Honesty: Cheating and plagiarism (academic dishonesty) are often driven by lack of time, desperation, or lack of knowledge about how to identify a source. Communicate with me and ask for help, even at the last minute, rather than risking your academic career by committing academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty involves claiming that work created by another source is your own original work. It is a Student Code of Conduct violation that can lead to a disciplinary procedure. When you use a resource in work submitted for this class, document how you used it and distinguish clearly between your original work and the material taken from the resource. (Add specifics about acceptable AI usage.)

Thriving and Finding Support: Students are especially successful at UNM when they take advantage of support and get involved in campus and academic life. Your MyUNM login page provides direct links to wellbeing resources, including financial capability, mental health, food, jobs, and resource centers. MyUNM will help you identify academic resources like peer tutoring and opportunities like study abroad. You can contact academic advisors and resource advisors for information and guidance via Student Hub on MyUNM. I look forward to providing you with information about academic opportunities related to our class and to helping you find support resources.

Course Materials Access program.

Instructor Comments specific to 'Evolution of Religiosity'

I have had a 2-year break from teaching and never have used Canvas; as of this writing don't even know how to! 🤷‍♂️ As of this writing (16 Jan 2026, 1:50 PM) I have added nothing to your My Shelf facility in Canvas. 😞

For our course you need nothing from the UNM Bookstore, unless you wish to buy a journal from there for your required weekly or daily writings outside of class, or an optional notebook for in-class use. I have sent you a PDF book via email, 'Supernatural Selection,' which must be read before Midterm Day: March 12th; I will supply Bluebooks for your 1-4 sentence written responses.

Although they may eventually show up on Canvas, I will be sending/supplying (email, CD-R, USB-A or C memory stick transfer to your computer) you a semi-organized **course library** of mostly Presentation - qualified empirical papers. The library will also include classic reference materials. You will have that on or before the first week of class. In the meantime, start reading 'Supernatural Selection.'

I hope I can learn to use Canvas to allow you to get a good estimate of your Grade Progress, updated weekly, hopefully broken down by grading category. Updates should be available on Canvas by 5 PM each Sunday unless you do not turn in Journal Highlights on time. Students are encouraged to self-track attendance and participation.

High attendance and thoughtful participation almost always lead to an 'A' unless other key requirements are badly neglected, missed or AI-generated. If you are into getting A+'s, coming to regular or special appointment office hours typically helps, but is not required. I enjoy and believe deeply in the pedagogical value of office hour conversations.

[University Statement: Course Materials Access](#) (for Albuquerque undergraduate students only): Your digital course materials are directly available now on the My Shelf link in Canvas. Your physical course materials, such as books and required lab/studio course kits, are available at the UNM Bookstore, and you will receive an email about how to pick them up. To simplify your course materials access, you are automatically enrolled in a Complete option at a flat rate of \$279 per semester. This will show up on your bursar bill. The Complete option covers all your required course materials for all your Albuquerque campus courses, including any graduate courses you may be taking (branch campus course materials are billed and available separately). If you are interested in course materials access for only selected courses, or if you want to opt out entirely, you will need to select the option you want in the My Shelf link in Canvas. You can change your selected option in the My Shelf link in Canvas until the registrar's "Last Day to Drop Without a 'W' Grade and 100% Tuition Refund." Make sure that you review the video and information here to understand cost and the options for Complete (automatic enrollment), Select (take action), and Opt-out (take action).