

What was God Thinking?

Course Syllabus

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Course Info

Course Description

Since we humans have become self-reflective, we have been driven to discover what our place is under the sun. We as a species are not known for our humility, so western science since the 1500s has been delivering serious blows to our ego. Eastern and North African cultures caught on to the bad news earlier than we in the West. So thanks to Copernicus and then Galileo we found out the sun does not revolve around us, we revolve around it. "The universe is not all about us." Those bright lights in the sky aren't just dots of light for us to connect to form constellations, but other suns. "Are we just one among many?" Some of those dots are not just other suns, but whole galaxies with billion of stars. "We are not all that unique." Thank you Edwin Hubble. Our sun is just one out of a billion stars located out in the suburbs of the galaxy we call home. "Does anybody Care?" Our sun only has about 4 billion years left before it becomes a red giant that will engulf our earth. "We are not forever, in fact, everything we have, know and love is going to be vaporized. Where does that leave us?" All the differences we cherish and identify ourselves by to maintain some sense of personal worth and, perhaps, superiority are mainly figments of our imagination. We are all constituted by same residue of exploding stars and enlivened by the same amino acid structures that are at the basis of all life. "We are either really special or very lucky, but do we have anything that truly makes us different?" If we are God's pride and joy – the point of it all – why did it take 13.49 billion years of the universe's existence to pass before anything like us arrived? "Was He saving the best for last?" On that subject; given that we can now identify better than 200 'suns' that have planets orbiting them, are we alone? Or better yet, "Do we really believe that we are the best that God could do?"

Course Learning Goals

The journey through the evolution of the universe that this course provides will enable the participants to raise multiple questions about our current place in the universe and our destiny as a species. At the end of the course the participants will have:

- Gained an overview of the forces and interactions that have created our universe and world using the best scientific models available today.
- Grappled with and juxtaposed their religious beliefs with the scientific explanations of how energy became matter, matter became biological and biological became intelligent.

- Used lessons learned from previous mass extinctions on our planet to understand the inseparable link between species of life and the environment.

Course Resources

All course readings will be available through the course. Besides the Introduction and the Overview, each module includes video which further explains the concepts introduced in the Introduction and Overview. It is expected that you will view these video materials as part of the course. You will need Flash to view the content.

Course Competences

In this course, you will develop the following competences:

Competence	Competence Statement and Facets/Criteria
A-4	Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems
A-3-G	Can assess the assumptions and implications of significant ideas about human experience
H-5	Can analyze issues and problems from a global perspective

How Competences will be Demonstrated in this Course

A-4: Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.

- The participant using the current scientific understandings of the origins of life on this planet will be able to compare and contrast a purely naturalistic explanation with either the Genesis story in the old testament or with modern 'intelligent design' explanations
- The participant will be able to Identify the meaning of human evolution in the naturalistic explanation as compared to either Genesis or 'intelligent design'. Simply – what do we count for – just one among other evolving species or are we something special – if so why and how
- The participant will be able to articulate what is the destiny and meaning of human evolution in naturalistic verses either Genesis or 'intelligent design. Are we the end of the line? Is there a life form that will evolve from us and surpass us? Are we the best God could do or is there other intelligent life forms in universe or other dimensions?

A-3-G: Can assess the assumptions and implications of significant ideas about human experience.

- Can identify the basic outline of the immediate evolutionary processes that leads to us (homo sapiens).
- Can identify behaviors that indicate growing evolutionary skill sets.
- Can delineate the behaviors and cultural practices that indicate self-reflective intelligence.
- Can articulate a statement that expresses a personal view of our place in the universe

H-5 Globalization: Can analyze issues and problems from a global perspective.

- Able to review and tersely account for at least three global climate changes that wiped out significant life forms on our planet.
- Can tersely put in perspective the causes and effects of global warming in its current configuration
- Can describe the destiny of our planet in relation to the moon and sun.

Course Structure

This course consists of 10 modules. The estimated time to complete each module is one week.

To view the course schedule, click on the Schedule link on the left-hand navigation bar. This page contains the most recently updated listing of the topics and assignments due for each week of the course.

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Assessment

Assessment of Learning

There is a lot of technical information presented in the videos and readings. The effort of the course is not to make you into rocket scientists, but to dramatically change your view of our place in the order of all things. Please feel free to bring scientific facts into the discussions and papers, but the main effort of discussion and papers is to demonstrate how the scientific facts/data affect your view of yourself, the world we live in and its meaning to you as you go about life.

If you are doing H-5 – global issues - then a number of the topics on tectonic plates, asteroids and the composition of our atmosphere will provide a solid grounding to put our current struggles with global warming in perspective. Your papers and discussions can highlight the implications and consequences of some of our current human behavior.

If you are pursuing A-3-G – significant ideas – then just about every topic has implications for ‘God’s role’ in the creation. The dawn of life and, in particular, the evolution of us has wide ranging implications for religion’s belief that we are chose of God.

So write and engage you peers in defending, refining or refuting God’s role in the evolution of the universe and our place in it.

If you are working on A4 – two ethical systems – draw out the implications of our very privileged position in evolution or develop an approach to our meaning and worth that is simply one more step in inexorable unfolding of the universe.

The Expectations:

I believe your peers are the best learning resource in the course. To maximize that resource I expect everyone to be in the discussion at least three times a week. To make that work I need you to be in their once by Wednesday, again by Saturday and a final time by Monday night. No sense putting three responses in at the end of the week after everyone has offered their thoughts. I would hope you would challenge each other – there is no guru on these topics. I expect the challenges to be professional. Challenge

the idea presented not the person presenting them. In the threads, comments like I agree are not comments. Add something to the discussion or start a new thread if you think some other area needs comment. Look forward to discussion.

To complete a competency you must:

If you are doing **one competency**, then complete **four 2 page papers** from any one of the 10 weeks of topics. Pick the four you are most interested in. If you are doing **two competencies** then complete **six 2 page papers** from any one of the 10 weeks of topics. Pick the six topics you are most interested in.

Compete the 5 page paper on the specific competency you seek to complete. If you are doing two competencies then do a second 5 page paper on that competency.

The papers are two or five pages plus or minus a paragraph or two. They are an opportunity for you to articulate your take on the scientific data/facts being presented. You may think the scientists are out to lunch on a given topic – so state your point of view and why you are not buying the scientific model being proposed. I need to hear the ‘why’ you are not buying it. It is an opportunity to develop your critical thinking skills. If you do buy the model being proposed, then direct your paper to the implications, how this puts things in perspective, what you see as supporting this model. Again an opportunity to do some deductive and constructive thinking.

Percentage Distribution of Assessments

The discussion will make up **40%** go the grade, the papers will make up the other **60%**. I grade the discussion comments on their addition to the thread or creativity in adding a new thread. I use a 2 point scale for each comment: a ‘1’ if the comment has basic substance; a ‘2’ if the comment adds something to the discussion; a ‘3’ or higher if the comment really makes an outstanding point. The papers I grade on insightfulness and cohesiveness. To say it differently, the paper needs to hold together (make a point or set of related points) and demonstrate a personal perspective on of the scientific model being proposed. The perspective can articulate disagreement, larger implications, important consequences or personal reflection.

I will post the grades for the discussion and paper by the middle of the week following . If you or I don't like the paper you submit, you can resubmitted for a better grade. It is my sincere hope each of us hits the weekly marks for the work of the course. It is very important to achieve a solid interaction with the other participants in the course.

Course Grading Scale

A = 95 to 100	A- = 91 to 94	B+ = 88 to 90
B = 85 to 87	B- = 81 to 84	C+ = 77 to 80
C = 73 to 76	C- = 69 to 72	D+ = 65 to 68
D = 61 to 64	F = 60 or below	INC

For SNL courses taken for Pass/Fail, a “Pass” represents a grade of “A” for purposes of financial aid and employer reimbursement.

Students wishing to declare a Pass/Fail option must do so before the end of the 2nd week of the quarter.

Your Grading Policies and Practices

All students, no matter what competence they seek, are expected to:

- Read assigned texts in timely fashion.
- Participate regularly and articulately in class discussions.
- Show respect for divergent points of view expressed within the discussions.
- Turn in assignments in timely fashion.
- Use correct academic format including citation in all work.
- Follow rubrics given in courseguide for each assignment.
- Revise according to instructor suggestions when requested or required.

General Assessment Criteria for All Writing Assignments

All writing, including posted messages, must be:

1. Original work. All work must be in your own words. If you have questions about whether you have paraphrased or cited correctly, click on the “Academic Integrity” button on the upper left-hand side of the Blackboard entry page and follow the links there, or ask for help from the DePaul University Writing Center, which provides online help for no charge.
2. Professionally stated. Even though we hope to be a friendly group online, casual or slangy wording is inappropriate in college classes. If you imagine yourself at a business meeting (even if you are sitting at home in your pajamas), you are more likely to write in an appropriately formal style.
3. Correctly spelled, punctuated, and phrased. Even in postings, you should be careful to use correct standard English. This is required as well in all written materials that you submit for assessment.

Final Paper or Project by Competence

A-4: Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems

Given our propensity to see all things from our self-center vantage point develop a five page paper on how would you:

1. Apply you personal religious beliefs to the data science is providing on our place in the evolution our universe
 - a. Does this all seem to be the unfolding of a divine plan leading to our arrival
 - b. Are we a time limited insignificant species that live on an insignificant plant out in the far suburbs of the milky way galaxy
 - c. Are we the best that God could do
2. Given our species contribution to evolution so far
 - a. Is out technology going to be able to save us the fate of every other species that has come and gone
 - b. Is there another species to come after us – either through major leaps in our genetic technology or natural processes
 - c. If you believe there are other intelligent life forms in the universe, how do they relate to us and our ‘God’

A-3-G: Can assess the assumptions and implications of significant ideas about

human experience

Given the scientific data on the origins of the hominid species which demonstrates multiple subspecies evolving over some 3 million years, develop a five page paper that:

1. Lays out at least three branches of the evolving hominid species identifying:
 - a. Their skill sets and their demonstrated basic way of dealing with their peers
 - b. Their main habitat
 - c. Their time on the planet
2. States your opinion about our (homo sapiens) evolution from this
 - a. How does this alter or effect your religious beliefs
 - b. How does this alter or effect you belief about our place in the order of the universe
 - c. How does this effect your belief that there may be evolved species beyond our capabilities
3. Given that multiple hominid species emerged here on earth:
 - a. What is your opinion about other cognitive species existing on other planets

H-5 Globalization: Can analyze issues and problems from a global perspective

Life on earth has been nearly wiped out at least 6 times that we know of. Global natural forces caused massive changes in the environment that eliminated the environment certain life forms needed for survival and provide the opportunity for new species of life to evolve. In a five page paper

1. Chronicle at least one of those mass extinctions pinning down:
 - a. what species thrived prior to the extinction and what environment support those species
 - b. what were the natural forces that reconfigured the environment
 - c. what was the new environment post the global cataclysm and what new species profited from it
2. Given what you have learned about global extinctions offer your thoughts about the current concerns related to global warming.

Online Discussion

Assessment Criteria for Online Discussion Participation

The material to be considered in this course may be considered by some to be controversial. It is important to note that the study of myths is, like the interpretation of literature and art (of which myth has been considered a form), is a rigorous academic discipline that is entirely separate from belief. Just as one can appreciate a landscape that is quite different from that which one loves and calls "home," so one can read with appreciation the myths of other cultures without that challenging the basis of one's own religious traditions. There is no intention in this course to promote one religion's worldview as superior to another, nor is there any intention to suggest that any religious worldview (ancient or modern) is problematic or deficient.

Online participation will be assessed according to the following expectations:

- Each student will post each week in that week's forums.
- Students are expected to work on a weekly basis; each forum will be closed to new postings after two weeks.
- Postings should be on topic and in professional language.
- Postings may disagree with other postings, but disagreements should be courteously stated.
- Postings should be substantive, meaning they should do more than agree or disagree with an earlier posting.
- Postings should, when appropriate, reference works from the class bibliography or outside sources. Such citations should be appropriately quoted and sourced.

Online Participation Guidelines for this course

Discussion Boards

Discussion Boards are a forum for discussion and sharing information among students. Your instructor may create one or more public conferences related to the topics you are studying each week.

At the beginning of the quarter, your instructor will set up three discussion conferences. These three conferences will help you and your classmates get off to an immediate start on the course, by providing conversational spaces for necessary, ongoing social and administrative activities. These conferences are:

- Introductions
- Course Q&A
- The Student Union for discussion that is not directly related to course content.

The Q&A conference is where the management and administrative tasks of the course are conducted, and where you can ask 'process' questions and receive answers.

The Student Union can be used freely for your own conversation (like setting up groups or teams, if these are used in the course)

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Policies

Academic Integrity

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification

of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html for further details.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.
- Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.
- Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
- The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If a instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion.

Incomplete Grades

The intent of the Incomplete grade is to allow students extra time to complete their final assignments. This need arises because, in the closing weeks of the course, they have an event of significant magnitude (think "Hurricane Katrina") adversely impact their ability to complete the course,

You must request an incomplete grade in writing two weeks before the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades will be considered only after you have *satisfactorily* completed at least 75 percent of the coursework, and you have an event of "Katrina" magnitude that prevents you from completing your course. Do not assume that you will qualify for an incomplete. Students who are failing the course at the point where they request an incomplete will not receive one, nor will they be granted after the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.

If you do receive permission from the instructor to take an incomplete in the course, you will be required to complete a contract with the instructor, specifying how you will finish the missing work within the next two quarters (excluding summer). Incompletes not finished by the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) will automatically become an F grade on your transcript.

Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee.

NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four week grace period before final degree certification.

Protection of Human Subjects

For more information see: <http://condor.depaul.edu/~irb>

Demonstrating the acquisition of competences in this course can involve "interactions"—

interviewing and or observing other people—discussing those interviews or observations with other class members and writing them up in one or more final report(s).

As such, these activities qualify as “research” with “human subjects” and are subject to University and Federal guidelines. Because it takes place in the context of this course, your research is exempt from approval by the School for New Learning’s Local Review Board only under the following conditions:

1. The information you collect is EXCLUSIVELY for the purpose of classroom discussion and will NOT be used after the term is over. If there is any possibility that you will EVER use it in further research or for publication, you must obtain approval from the Local Review Board before you begin.
2. You assess and ensure that no “harm”—physical, mental, or social—does or could result from either your interviews and/or observations or your discussion and/or reports.
3. The privacy and confidentiality of those that you interview or observe must be protected. Unless you receive specific permission, in writing, from the person(s) you interview or observe, please change their names, and make sure that their identity cannot be readily ascertained from the information you provide.
 - a. If you want to use real names and relationships, they must sign an “informed consent” document. For information on creating an “informed consent document” see, for example, www.research.umn.edu/consent/

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Course Expectations

Time Management and Attendance

SNL’s online courses are **not** self-paced and require a regular time commitment EACH week throughout the quarter.

You are required to log in to your course at least **FOUR** times a week so that you can participate in the ongoing course discussions.

Online courses are no less time consuming than “face to face” courses. You will have to dedicate some time every day or at least every second day to your studies. A typical four credit hour “face to face” course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week, plus at least three to six hours of study and homework per week.

This course will require at least the same time commitment, but your learning activities will be spread out through the week. If you have any problems with your technology, or if you need to improve your reading or writing skills, it may take even longer.

The instructor should be notified if your life events do not allow you to participate in the course and the online discussions for more than one week. This is particularly important when there are group discussions or you are working as part of a team.

If you find yourself getting behind, please contact your course instructor immediately.

Your Instructor’s Role

Your instructor’s role in this course is that of a discussion facilitator and learning advisor. It is not their responsibility to make sure you log in regularly and submit your assignments. As instructor, s/he will read all postings to the general discussion forums

on a daily basis but may not choose to respond to each posting. You will receive feedback to assignments posted to your delivered to you by your instructor via email or through the Gradebook. You can view your feedback by selecting “My Grades” in the course website and viewing your assignment.

The instructor may choose to designate “office hours” when s/he will be online and available and will immediately respond to questions. Depending on the instructor, this response may be by e-mail, instant messenger or telephone. Otherwise, you will generally receive a response to emailed or posted queries within 48 hours.

Your Role as a Student

As an online student, you will be taking a proactive approach to your learning. As the course instructor's role is that of a learning guide, your role is that of the leader in your own learning.

You will be managing your own time so that you can complete the readings, activities and assignments for the course, and you will also be expected to take a more active role in peer learning.

You will learn with and from your classmates in the online discussions and group assignments, sharing information and resources and posting your ideas and critiquing and expanding on the ideas of others in a collegial fashion. You are encouraged to bring your questions to the online discussions and respond to each other — do not always wait for the instructor to answer questions.

If events arise in your life that will prevent your attendance in class for one week or more, it is your responsibility to make sure that your instructor is advised at the first possible opportunity. You, or a friend or family member can do that by email, postal mail or phone. Someone could also send a note to snlonline@depaul.edu. This will allow your instructor to assist you to make up missing work. If these events occur early in the quarter and you wait until the end of the quarter before informing your instructor, do not expect to receive an Incomplete.

Credits

This course was designed and produced by John Minogue and staff of SNL Online at DePaul University.

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