Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves. Chickering, A & Gamson, Z. F. (March 1987) Seven principles for good practice. AAHE Bulletin 39: 3-7.

Only my overwhelming sense of its reality. After all it was an experience of the same order as the mystics have had all over the world through all the centuries. Brahmns in India, Sufies in Persia, Catholics in Spain, Protestants in New England; and so far as they've been able to describe what defies description they've described it in similar terms. It's impossible to deny the fact of its occurrence; the only difficulty is to explain it. If I was for a moment one with the Absolute or if it was an inrush from the subconscious of an affinity with the universal spirit which is latent in all of us, I wouldn't know. – Larry Darrel from the Razor's Edge, p. 221

Scholars have wrestled with questions of faith for ages. Recent research from neuroscience and related fields (e.g., genetics) are touching on such questions. What does it mean that exogenous psychoactive substances can produce mystical experiences with a great deal of consistency across individuals and cultures? What does it mean that certain areas of the brain are active or quiet during meditation and other forms of contemplation? Has science and philosophy brought us to the point where we can entertain the question: Does god exist? This course will explore such questions from philosophical, religious, neuroscience, psychopharmacological, and psychological perspectives. It will expose you to empirical findings that demonstrate the neurochemical and genetic basis of mystical experience. Such findings beg the question: Is god nothing more than a brain state? Current science and newly emerging fields such as neurotheology, cannot answer this question definitively, so students will be engaged in passionate dialogue and debate regarding these issues.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS COURSE

You are expected to participate fully in this course. This requires attendance, doing the readings on time, engaging with the material, and being willing to discuss it. Obviously too, you are expected to complete all assignments according to the instructions detailed in the syllabus. As psychologists and scientists, we must be willing to examine questions of religion, spirituality, and mysticism from an objective scientific standpoint. Recent scholars have noted the taboo on discussing the topic of religion and faith. We will break this taboo. If you are not comfortable examining and discussing your personal religious beliefs, this is not the right course for you. This class will be a process of participatory democracy. As mentioned below, you are expected to participate, both in small group and large group dialogues. You will each be responsible for evaluating each other. This is not meant to encourage competition, but accountability.
**Grading Policy:**

Attendance is integral to this course and will be taken at every class. You may have one (1) absences without any questions asked. Unexcused absences beyond this will be deducted from your grade. For each unexcused absence, a 6-point deduction will be made from your final grade point total. Excused absences include documented serious medical illness, family emergencies, and so forth. See the University policies below:

*Students are expected to attend all regularly scheduled classes. The instructor has the final authority to excuse absences. It is the responsibility of the instructor to inform students of his or her policy for handling absences and tardiness, and the penalties that may be imposed. Notification should be done both verbally and in writing at the beginning of each semester.*

*It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor regarding the reason for absence or tardiness from class, and to discuss these with the instructor in advance whenever possible. The instructor has the right to require documentation in support of the student’s request for an excuse from class. If an out-of-class exam is scheduled which conflicts with a regularly scheduled class, the regularly scheduled class has priority.*

*Religious Holidays: Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Each semester students should submit in writing to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes their documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. Faculty must permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.*

**Small Group Dialogue**

You will be assigned to a discussion group for the semester. Each week there will be a leader and a secretary on a rotating basis. There will be a sign-up sheet. The leader will lead the small group discussion, and everyone will be expected to participate. You will all be prepared by having done the readings and completing your *Weekly Reading Discussion Questions and Commentary* form. The secretary will record the issues and points raised in the group and will be responsible for rating the participation of each group member. These ratings will contribute to your participation grade. Each group member will rate the performance of the group leader according to the criteria in the Leader form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Ratings</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader was prepared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader was sensitive to group members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions made me think about the material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weekly Reading Dialogue Questions and Commentary (RDQC)**

The purpose of the Reading Dialogue Questions and Commentary is twofold. The first purpose is to give you a structure for engaging with the material. The second purpose is for you to demonstrate that you completed the readings and that you have thought about them in a meaningful way. Please observe the following style guidelines: 1-inch margins, 12-point font, and regular text (no italics or bold). Limit your write up to 250 words (use the word count function in your word processor). Use the form provided by inserting typed text into the space below the questions. Arrange the size of the fields as needed (see form below). Focus on the readings other than the textbook. A great author once said, "If I had had
more time, I would have written less.” SUBMIT ONE PAGE ONLY. DO NOT EMAIL. NO EXCEPTIONS. Dialogue Questions are due at the beginning of the class on Monday (except for the two weeks we have a Monday holiday). They will be evaluated as follows. Check plus will be given for full credit write-ups that clearly show you’ve done the reading and have engaged meaningfully with the material. A check will be given for an adequate write-up that shows you’ve done the reading and have thought about it to some degree. These will be given 85% credit. A check minus will be given for those write-ups that do not demonstrate that you’ve done the reading completely or have given them much thought. This will be given 60% credit. If your write up is late, or does not follow the style guidelines, it will be demoted as follows: 10 points for style departure (20 points for being over the word limit), 10 points for each class period late/30 points for once weekly classes (you may submit it to my mailbox on days that classes don’t meet to reduce penalty)

**Presentations and Annotated Bibliography**

Everyone will participate in a group presentation (likely in pairs) and prepare annotated bibliographies. Your presentation will cover an empirical question and will summarize and review the available research on this topic. Your grade for the presentation will be co-determined by your peers and by me. Grading Criteria for Oral Presentations are: organization, clarity, use of audiovisual sources, comprehensiveness, responsiveness to questions, and overall quality. Each group member will submit a written annotated bibliography of 5 sources. Guidance from two online sources is presented below. **LIMIT YOUR REVIEW TO 100 WORDS FOR EACH ARTICLE (500 total).**

**Guidelines for Annotated Bibliography** (From the Owl at Purdue: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/))

**Summarize:** What are the main arguments? What is the point of this article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.

For more help, see our handout on **paraphrasing** sources.

**Assess:** After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is it this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

For more help, see our handouts on **evaluating resources**.

**Reflect:** Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

- Use APA Style. The Owl at Purdue has guidance on using APA Style. [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/)
- More information on writing the annotated bibliography is available from Cornell. This link gives an overview and example of an annotated bibliography: [http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm](http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm)
- This link discusses how to critically analyze sources: [http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm](http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm)

**Extra Credit**

Extra credit opportunities may present themselves throughout the semester. Feel free to suggest events you know about. To obtain extra-credit, write a one-page, double-spaced synopsis of the event describing what you took from the talk. You'll receive 1% on your grade for each extra credit (to a maximum of 3)
Special extra credit opportunity: On 18 January, I will be presenting Grand Rounds to the Department of Medicine. These are held at 8 AM in the Davis Auditorium (at the Medical Center). Everyone is invited to attend.
Texts:

   Wilber is dense and fascinating reading. No Boundary is a narrative, self-help format. I don’t agree with everything Wilber proposes, so read this with a critical eye.

   Polly Young-Eisendrath is a Jungian Analyst, Buddhist, and feminist scholar who happens to live in Vermont. She is the author and editor of many books. These include Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy, The Resilient Spirit: Transforming Suffering into Insight and Renewal, The Self-Esteem Trap, Subject to Change, Women and Desire: BeyondWanting to be Wanted. Melvin Miller is another Vermont psychologist. We are fortunate to have the perspectives presented in the Psychology of Mature Spirituality. We will read much of this volume through the semester.

   This book is a good primer on Entheogens and presents some pioneering and fascinating research conducted by a psychiatrist.

Articles & Chapters (on electronic reserve at the library)

Dawkins (2006). Chapter 4: Why there almost certainly is no god. 111-159
And others ...


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Due for Class</th>
<th>Video/Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 January</td>
<td>Welcome/Overview/Introduction</td>
<td>Nightline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21 January</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Holiday No Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28 January</td>
<td>Unity Consciousness</td>
<td>No Boundary, pp 1-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 February</td>
<td>Structures and States/Religion and Atheism</td>
<td>No Boundary, pp 94-143 and Kirkpatrick (2005), 101-119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11 February</td>
<td>Religion and Atheism</td>
<td>Brook (2000) Emissaries from the Underworld: Psychotherapy’s challenge to Christian Fundamentalism, 145-159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>Presidents Day No Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 March</td>
<td>Anatomy and Phenomenology of the Mystical Experience</td>
<td>Julian of Norwich selected reading James (1900). Chapter Mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>Spring Break No Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>17 March</td>
<td>Entheogens</td>
<td>Strassman: DMT Spirit Molecule, 21-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Entheogens continued</td>
<td>Strassmann, Part IV: The Sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
do bad things. In PMS, 47-61.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Presentations:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|14 | 14 April | 1. The God Spot (Persinger)  
2. Brain Bliss: Meditating Monks and Nuns (Newburg, Davidson, Beauregard)  
3. Brain on Fire: Mystical Visions of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (Ramachandran) | Readings TBD |
|15 | 21 April | 4. Speaking in Tongues (Newburg and D'aquili)  
5. Go to the White Light: Near Death Experiences (Blackmore; Strassman)  
6. Watch Out for the Anal Probe: Alien Abductions (Blackmore; Strassman) | Readings TBD |
|16 | 28 April | 7. Is there One Mind or Two: Hallucinating the Voice of God (Jaynes)  
8. Keep the Party Going: Consciousness After Death (Schwarz)  
9. Psychosis and Spirituality: Is the Pre/Trans Fallacy valid | Readings TBD  
Grof (1976)  
Dass (1979), Laing (1979)  
Wilber (1982) |
Weekly Reading Discussion Questions and Commentary (RDQC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings Covered:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What struck you as worth discussing in class? If you were going to be the group leader, what questions would you ask the group?

What did you find difficult or confusing in the readings? Were there concepts for which you question the validity?

Material that held personal application or interest: