Instructor: Scott Korb  
E-mail: smk21@nyu.edu  
Classroom: 1 Washington Place, Rm. 501  
Office Hours and location: Thursdays, 1-4 PM; 1 Washington Pl., room 608

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**  
Look at the headlines, flip through a magazine, or click the link to your favorite blog, and increasingly you’ll find that whether faith comes between us, separating one believer from another, or lives between us, forming the glue that holds communities together, is a question we all must face. No matter your tradition, or lack thereof, these days everyone seems to have something pressing to say about God, faith, belief, practice, or, yes, even unbelief. Through a consideration of a variety of (mainly) contemporary religion writing – mostly from newspapers, popular magazines and books, and journals – this course asks you to take your own excursions into faith and faithlessness, and through a process of writing, workshopping, and the all-important rewriting, create the stories that, in Joan Didion’s words, “we tell ourselves in order to live.”

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**  
Writing should be pleasurable, hard work. And when done well, it should exhibit a Democratic Spirit. I’ve tried to select readings that, above all, make this point obvious.

• The aim of this course is to help you merge cogent, lively writing with precise, exploratory thinking.

• Over the course of the semester you will expand your repertoire of styles, forms, and techniques while finding and explaining (in writing) ideas that are new to the world.
• Most importantly, you will learn to construct interesting, arresting essays that build upon the work you do for your daily assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Throughout the course I will help you learn to write effectively; you can also expect a great deal of help from your classmates. We will often have workshops in class. You can expect to write for every class. Major course requirements are as follows:

• At least ten instructor-evaluated writing exercises. Required lengths for each will be specified when we discuss the exercise in class.

• Four peer-evaluated/instructor-graded essays; the first three essays must have one rough draft (with significant revisions) in addition to the final manuscript, and the final essay must have two rough drafts in preparation for the final manuscript. (All drafts of all four essays must be submitted with the manuscript on that essay’s due date.)

The four essays, like our readings, will all consider questions of “faith.” How you understand and define “faith” — that is, what ideas we might include under that label — will likely (I hope) change over the course of the semester. Through your writing, you are expected to help me and your classmates follow you on this journey. Again, where you need it, we’ll be there to help you along the way.

The first essay will be a familiar, narrative essay that primarily derives its evidence from personal experience but enters into conversation with at least one other voice. (2-3 pages; no more than 900 words.)

The second essay will require you to debate with or elaborate on, with fresh insight, one generally recognized idea or commonly held belief. Reckoning with this idea — whether you agree with it or not — will help you to develop and express your own idea that is new to the world. (3-4 pages; no more than 1,200 words.)

The third essay will require you to combine the techniques you developed in your first essay, which required you to create a narrative from personal experience, and in your second essay, where you were asked to reckon with an idea that seems to exist independent of you. Now, this essay requires you to draw evidence from the experience of another person — either through interviews or other research — and create a narrative that, through its telling, reveals your own thinking about the person and his or her ideas. (4-6 pages; no more than 1,800 words.)
The fourth essay is a literary-critical one, which requires you to gather evidence from of a variety of other thinkers and writers and develop an *organizing principle* around which you present this evidence in support an idea of your own that, once again, is new to the world. This final piece of writing may be a further development of the ideas you’ve presented in the previous essays, but *no material* from your other essays may appear word-for-word in the final one. (7-8 pages; no more than 2,400 words.)

All essays and out-of-class writing exercises should be typed, double-spaced, in twelve-point font with one-inch margins. Please use MLA citation style (with in-text citation and a Works Cited list) for all papers. We will go over the specifics of citation in class.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS**
This course requires a great deal of class participation. You’ll be expected to share not just your responses to your classmates’ writing and the required readings, but also to question both me and your classmates and to be ready to defend (and, occasionally, abandon) your own ideas.

Every student will have marked at least one passage from each class’s required reading that you will be prepared to read aloud and discuss with the class. The selection may be a beautiful paragraph, or a revealing turn of phrase, or an example of what you believe to be awful thinking. Whatever it is, it should be *marked*. This means that you must *print out* those readings you access either from on-line sources or through a library database.

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for your next class. Please be aware that more than two absences will jeopardize your course grade.

**STANDARDS AND GRADES**
All final essays must:
- explore and develop an idea from diverse evidence in a coherent, interesting way;
- have a thoughtful, elegant beginning, middle, and end;
- be grammatically correct; and
- have a tone appropriate for the intended audience.

A work achieves excellence in all listed standards. B work achieves general superiority in all listed standards. C work is average in each standard. D or F work is seriously deficient in one or more of the listed standards. Final grades break down as follows:
Each of four essays: 80% (essay 1, 15%; essay 2, 15%; essay 3, 20%; essay 4, 30%)

Daily writing assignments: 10%
Participation and attendance: 10%

If you are unable to complete all four required essays over the course of the semester you may discuss with me the possibility of an Incomplete(I). This is not advised unless absolutely necessary.

A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

REQUIRED READINGS
Most of the readings listed in this syllabus are available in various formats either online or through the library, by which I mostly mean the library’s vast database resources. (Hard copies of most of the magazines and journals are also available.) Because I would like to use this class as an introduction to the information and resources available to you as writers, I have not prepared a reading packet. Instead, during our first few meetings – and beyond that as much as necessary – I will explore with you several research tools that I’ll expect you to use to find the required readings. You should be prepared each Monday to discuss that week’s reading.

The required books for this course are:

James Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time
Ayad Akhtar’s play Disgraced

Remember: You are required to print out all required readings and bring them, marked up, to class.
COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK ONE
Weds., Sept 2 – Introductions


WEEK TWO
Mon., Sept. 7 – NO CLASS, LABOR DAY
Weds., Sept. 9


WEEK THREE
Mon., Sept. 14 – First draft of personal, narrative essay due (Full-class workshop, Group 1)
Weds., Sept. 16 – Small-group workshops

NO READINGS

WEEK FOUR
Mon., Sept. 21
Weds., Sept. 23 – Final draft of personal, narrative essay due

Reading: Ayad Akhtar, Disgraced

WEEK FIVE
Mon., Sept. 28

Readings: Jennifer Percy, “We Kill Ourselves Because We are Haunted,” Guernica, January 13, 2014.
Weds., Sept. 30

Readings: Jeff Sharlet, “Jesus Killed Muhammad,” Harper’s, May 2009

WEEK SIX
Mon., Oct. 5


Weds., Oct. 7


WEEK SEVEN – NOTE WE MEET TUES. AND WEDS. THIS WEEK
Tues., Oct. 13


Weds., Oct. 14 – Class visit by Meera Subramanian


WEEK EIGHT
Mon., Oct. 19 – First draft of debate/elaborative essay due (Full-class workshop, Group 2)
Wed., Oct. 21 – Small-group workshops


WEEK NINE
Mon., Oct. 26 – Final draft of debate/elaborative essay due


Weds., Oct. 28


WEEK TEN
Mon., Nov. 2 – First draft of reported narrative essay due (Full-class workshop, Group 3)
Weds., Nov. 4 – Small-group workshops

NO READINGS

WEEK ELEVEN
Mon., Nov. 9 – Final draft of reported narrative essay due


Weds., Nov. 11


WEEK TWELVE
Mon., Nov. 16
Weds., Nov. 18 – First draft of literary-critical essay due (Full-class workshop, Group 4)
Reading: James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind” (1962), from The Fire Next Time.

WEEK THIRTEEN
Mon., Nov. 23 – Small-group workshops
Weds., Nov. 25 – NO CLASS

NO READINGS

WEEK FOURTEEN
Mon., Nov. 30 – Second draft of literary-critical essay due. (Full-class workshop, Group 5)
Weds., Dec. 2 – Small-group workshops

NO READINGS

WEEK FIFTEEN
Mon., Dec. 7


Weds., Dec. 9


WEEK SIXTEEN
Mon., Dec. 14 – In-class work day [FINAL ESSAY DUE AT 5PM, FRIDAY, DEC. 18, BY EMAIL]