



**UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHWESTERN**  
— ST. PAUL —

OFFICE OF ADULT  
& GRADUATE STUDIES

# **BIA5021 Apologetics**

**SUMMER 2023**

**SYLLABUS**

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# BIA5021 Apologetics

University of Northwestern – St. Paul

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of apologetics, the defense of the Christian faith, with emphasis on critical thinking, theistic arguments, and the problem of evil. Students will also be introduced to Christian approaches to ethics and ethical issues.

**Credits:** 2

**Prerequisites:** None

## INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Please see “Contacting the Instructor” on the course site.

## COURSE OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, a successful student will be able to

- CO-1. Develop a method for testing truth claims. (*Create*)
- CO-2. Evaluate the various arguments for the existence of God. (*Evaluate*)
- CO-3. Formulate a response to the problem of evil. (*Create*)
- CO-4. Make use of apologetics in real life conversations. (*Apply*)

## MATERIALS

### Required Textbooks and Materials

Groothius, Douglas. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. Publisher: Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. Year: 2011. ISBN: 9780830839353

### Required Tools

For this course, students will need access to Microsoft Office (available at no cost to students through the University of Northwestern-St. Paul), a PDF reader, and a standard internet browser. Please refer to the Tech Requirements found in the Technology Help section at the top of the course site for the full requirements.

## GRADING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### Course Grade Explanation

Assignments	Grade Weight
Reading Reflections (4x7)	28
Discussion Forums (4x5)	20
Pair Conversation Analyses (3x4)	12

Interview Projects (2x8)	16
Final Paper	<u>24</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

## Grading Scale Percentages

A	≥ 93	B	≥ 83	C	≥ 73	D	≥ 63
A-	≥ 90	B-	≥ 80	C-	≥ 70	D-	≥ 60
B+	≥ 87	C+	≥ 77	D+	≥ 67	F	< 60

## Late Work

All assignments are due as described in the course syllabus. Students are responsible for meeting assignment deadlines. Late assignments will be deducted one full letter grade (e.g., A to B) per day; late assignments will not be accepted for a grade beyond 3 calendar days past the original deadline. Forum discussion activities must be completed on time; late forum posts will not receive any credit. Students should contact the instructor via e-mail if an extenuating circumstance exists.

## Feedback Expectations

Students should expect feedback for their submitted assignments within 5 days of the assignment due date or the time of their submission, whichever is later.

## INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND SERVICES

### Guidelines and Information

Students are responsible for policies and procedures found in the Office of Adult & Graduate Studies Catalog located on theROCK. These policies include the following:

- Deadlines for dropping or withdrawing
- Attendance
- Class cancellations
- Plagiarism and cheating
- Grading System
- Complaints, exceptions, and appeals

Instructors may have course-related expectations that further detail the policies and procedures outlined in the catalog. Any such expectations must be provided to students in writing (e.g., handout, course site posting) prior to or at the beginning of the class.

Traditional undergraduate students enrolled in A&GS courses are subject to the traditional undergraduate student handbook for all non-course-specific policies and procedures.

## Academic Integrity

Members of the Northwestern community mutually commit to personal integrity and honesty. Students submitting work are expected to convey their own thoughts unless the source is cited appropriately. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty violate ethical and intellectual principles.

In every course, students are required to view the Understanding Plagiarism video and complete the Understanding Plagiarism Quiz prior to completing any of the course content. These items are part of the course orientation.

## **Academic Achievement**

UNW students requesting academic accommodations in association with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are directed to notify [Disability Services](#) to begin the application process. Academic Achievement also provides the following: [Writing Tutoring](#), [Subject Tutoring](#), advocating, transitional skill building, [Academic Coaching](#) (organization, time management, test taking, etc.).

Contact Academic Achievement for more information: [AcademicAchievement@unwsp.edu](mailto:AcademicAchievement@unwsp.edu) | 651-628-3316 | N4012 (Revised 07/22).

## **Support Services**

Links to support services are available found in the Student Services section at the top of the course site.

## **COURSE POLICIES AND INFORMATION**

### **Email and Announcements**

Students are responsible to regularly check their Northwestern student email and the announcements in the course site in order to receive updates and information.

### **Attendance**

Due to the accelerated nature of the online curricula, students are expected to participate in all course activities. Students must contact the faculty member in advance or as soon as possible if unable to participate in all or part of the course activities for a given week because of a medical (which includes having to quarantine or isolate due to COVID-19 exposure or confirmed illness), family, or work-related emergency. Students should refer to their course syllabus and/or faculty member for specific requirements. Students who do not participate in course activities and fail to withdraw from the course will receive a failing “F” grade.

### **Submission Standards**

All assignments, unless otherwise stated, must be submitted on the course site in Microsoft Word document format (.doc or .docx). For all assignments, use a standard readable font, double-spaced, etc.

### **Critical Response to Alternate Viewpoints**

When students are reading or viewing course materials, they may encounter viewpoints, words, or images that their instructors would not use or endorse. Students should know that materials are chosen for their value in learning to read, write, and view critically, not because the materials are necessarily Christian.

### **Scholarly Research**

Quality participation in this course requires contribution of scholarly research to class interactions. Students can engage in external research via the Berntsen Library website by performing a search of the 60+ databases available to students. Also available on the library site are multiple tutorials to educate learners in effective search techniques. Other credible journals/articles are options as well.

## ASSIGNMENTS

See the course site for complete details on the assignments.

### Writing Standards

All written work in the course should adhere to the Student Supplement for *The SBL Handbook of Style*. See the library's Citation Resources linked within the Academic Information portal on top of the course site or [www.sbl-site.org](http://www.sbl-site.org) for more information.

Unless otherwise instructed, all submitted papers for this course are expected to be double spaced, use 12-pt. standard font, and be the assigned length, using Microsoft Word format files.

### Discussion Forums (CO-1, 2)

Many topics that are not black and white are best understood in dialogue from differing perspectives. The Discussion Forums in this course aim to invite you to refine your thinking by taking and defending positions while also developing your own depth of understanding by questioning, challenging, and helping your classmates refine their own position.

Full credit will be earned by posts that are clearly communicated, organized well, fully developed, and reflective of the assigned readings. They should further the discussion as well as demonstrate your mastery of the material. In addition, posts that respond to other students should show the same level of engagement for full credit. Posts that lack structure, do not engage the reading materials, or in other ways fail to demonstrate meaningful interaction with the readings or with the students' comments will receive low marks.

Post initial responses by 11:59 p.m. CT on Day 4 of each week and respond to a least 2 classmates' threads by 11:59 p.m. CT on Day 7 of each week.

### Reading Reflections (LO-1, 2, 3)

You will probably be familiar with the contours of most of the arguments we discuss in this course. In our careful study of them, however, we will look in much more detail at how these arguments work and how reasonable people who understand them might still make objections. One way to more fully understand an argument is to be able to reproduce it succinctly and fairly in your own words. To that end, in preparation for each weekly class session, read the assigned texts and write a 2- to 3-page reading reflection each week.

Each paper should include the following elements:

1. **Argument:** Summarize the arguments presented in the assigned reading for each week.
2. **Objections:** What are the primary objections to each argument and what makes them compelling?
3. **Reaction:** Report and record your reactions to encountering the arguments, such as how strong or weak you find each argument, how practically useful within relationship or personal faith you consider it, and what changes you observe in your opinions of the argument as you have studied it more in depth.

The observations, summaries, and questions included in these papers should inform your online discussion each week. Outside research is not necessary for these papers, though insight from other materials is welcome.

Reading Reflections are graded based on the following criteria:

- Accurate representation of argument and objections (40%)
- Depth of reflection (40%)
- Economy and accessibility of presentation (20%)

## **Pair Conversation Analyses (CO-3)**

The skills you are developing in this course are not meant for purely academic purposes, but are also meant to help you eloquently engage in informed conversation with people who disagree with you in improvisational or unstructured settings.

To refine this aspect of your apologetic skills, each of Weeks 1–3, in pairs assigned by the instructor, connect via phone, in person, video conferencing through Skype, the tool on the course site or any other real-time method of verbal communication. One student takes the role of a Christian apologist and the other takes on the role of a critic or skeptic. The apologist leads a conversation between intelligent associates, as if you are friends or family members.

Each conversation should last a total of a half hour to 45-minutes including the following segments.

1. In each conversation, the critic should begin by asking the apologist for reason to believe the Christian myth.
2. The apologist should then lead a 10-minute back-and-forth conversation (not just a monologue answer).
3. For 5 minutes, debrief together and generate constructive feedback, primarily for the apologist
4. Swap roles and repeat steps 1–3 in your new roles.

After the conversation, submit a one-page reflection that analyzes the conversation experience, addressing the following topics:

- What do you feel you did well in both roles from what you learned this week?
- What did your partner do well in both roles from what you learned this week?
- What was your partner's key feedback for you in either role?
- What would you want to improve next time?

For further grading criteria, see the Completion Rubric posted in the Rubric Directory on the course site.

## **Interview Projects (CO-1, 2, 3)**

In order to bridge connections between the academic discussions and real-world application in an apologetic context, you will conduct two interview projects where apologetics is the topic, following the instructions below.

For both projects, whichever form they take, be on the lookout for strengths and weaknesses in both challenges and responses to challenges regarding Christian belief. Additionally, rigorously examine the inconsistencies, presuppositions, and entailments represented in both your own and others' arguments as actually articulated, especially your own.

In both projects, your submitted reflections in the presentation or reflection write-up should answer the following questions:

- *What would you do differently next time? What impact do you hope such changes might cause?*
- *What connections do you observe between the interview conversation and course concepts and ideas?*

Interview Project 1 is due by Week 3 Day 7. Interview Project 2 is due by Week 4 Day 7. Be sure to begin planning and scheduling for these projects immediately, since working around another person's timeframe in a couple short weeks can be challenging.

For further grading criteria on both project deliverables, see the Completion Rubric posted in the Rubric Directory on the course site.

### **Interview Project 1 Instructions**

For the first project, interview someone with whom you want to have a spiritual conversation (not a spouse or child, and not a Christian).

- Prepare 5 questions to ask and discuss for a total of a half hour to an hour. The questions you ask must draw on the concepts covered in the course readings. For example, you might ask your conversation partner how he/she thinks the universe began to exist, or whether there is such a thing as objective morality.
- After the interview, produce an 8- to 10-minute narrative synopsis and analysis of your conversation to share with your peers using VoiceThread. Your presentation should address the two reflection questions above. Accompanying your narration, produce a PowerPoint slide for each question you ask that highlights the main ideas of your interlocutor's answer and your reflections on the experience during each question (5 slides total).

For grading purposes, submit your slides and the link to your Apologetic Interview presentation. Then post the VoiceThread link again in the Interview Project Sharing Forum for sharing and peer feedback. View at least two other presentations and provide feedback describing what you believe to be the presenter's most compelling elements and why. Try to distribute your responses so that everyone gets feedback. Replies are due by Day 7.

### **Interview Project 2 Instructions**

For your second project, you may choose either to conduct a second apologetic interview with a different person (following the same parameters and producing the same deliverables as Interview Project 1), or you may elect to engage in online apologetics discussions as follows.

If you choose to engage online discussions, read comments on apologetics-related videos on YouTube, or posts and threads on Reddit or Facebook. This could get messy, so take time to get acquainted with the discourse in your selected venue. Then, find and enter or create a discussion related to one of the main arguments studied in this course. Spend at least a total of an hour and a half engaging in conversation, though you likely won't spend this time all at once. Be as respectful and God-honoring as possible in both your speaking and listening, as St. Francis of Assisi's prayer famously says, seeking "not so much to be understood as to understand."

Reflect on the experience in one written page addressing the same two reflection questions above. Insert screenshots of at least five of your comments in the document you submit.

## Final Paper (CO-1, 2, 3)

In order to synthesize and demonstrate your apologetic critical analysis skills refined during this course, and build your confidence in applied apologetics, this project asks you to more deeply master the holistic nuances, factors, and perspectives involved in a single apologetics issue.

Write a 7-page paper discussing either an apologetic issue covered in the course. Each paper must cite biblical references on the topic as well as other non-biblical sources from the textbooks, class discussions, or other literature relevant to your topic. Include at least four scholarly, peer-reviewed resources in addition to materials assigned in class. Two of these must be from authors who disagree with your position (instead of secondary summaries of their perspectives).

Your paper should embody the following form:

- **Issue:** The first part of the paper should clearly define the topic and issue of the paper. You should lay out your clear opinions on the apologetic or ethical issue and why this issue is important to you. This first section of the paper should be about three pages total.
- **Challenges:** The second part of the paper should consist of another two pages in which you write out the challenges to what you presented on your apologetic or ethical issue - the main objections to your view. Remember critics have good arguments and raise hard questions, so write out their objections clearly and be fair to the other side. Sources used that are critical of your position should be from people who actually oppose your position, preferably non-Christians, rather than Christian apologists' summary of critiques.
- **Responses to challenges:** The last two pages of the paper should deal with your responses to those hypothetical questions concerning your apologetic or ethical issue. Also, provide a summary paragraph summing up your whole belief on your apologetic or ethical topic, why you chose it for the paper, and why you think it is important.

This project is graded based on the Final Paper criteria posted in the Rubric Directory on the course site.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Format

This course is delivered in an online format that provides all learning activities online. The day the course starts is considered Day 1 of Week 1 for the course. For example, if a course begins on a Monday, then Day 1 is Monday, Day 4 is Thursday, and Day 7 is the following Sunday.

This course is an accelerated course. As a rule of thumb, students should expect to spend on average 17.5 hours on course work each week.

### Due Dates

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are to be submitted on the course site **by** 11:59 p.m. CT on Day 7 of each week. Please see the following schedule for details on when an assignment is due.

For any questions regarding these assignments, contact the instructor.

### Orientation

- Read the Getting Started Page
- Participate in the Introductions Forum
- View and Complete Understanding Plagiarism Presentation and Quiz



- Complete Student Responsibilities Exercise

## **Week 1: Apologetics and Rationality**

- Complete **Orientation tasks** listed on the page "Getting Started in Your Course" on the course site
- Read Groothius, Chapters 2–8
- Read article: "Does Science Make God Unnecessary?"—Sickler on the course site
- View video presentation: Approaches to Apologetics (11:12)

### **Due Day 4**

- Participate initially in Wk1 Discussion Forum

### **Due Day 7**

- Complete participation in Wk1 Discussion Forum
- Submit Wk1 Reading Reflection
- Submit Wk1 Pair Conversation Report

### **Topics**

- Class Introductions
- Overview of Syllabus and Course
- Apologetics and Rationality
  - The nature of apologetics
  - Essentials of Christian worldview
  - Truth and postmodernism
  - Faith and rationality
  - Does science make God unnecessary?

## **Week 2: Classic Arguments for Theism**

- Read Groothius, Chapters 9–15
- View video presentation: The Kalam Cosmological Argument (4:53)

### **Due Day 4**

- Participate initially in Wk2 Discussion Forum

### **Due Day 7**

- Complete participation in Wk2 Discussion Forum
- Submit Wk2 Reading Reflection
- Submit Wk2 Pair Conversation Report

### **Topics**

- Classic Arguments for Theism
  - Theistic arguments in general
  - Ontological argument
  - Cosmological argument
  - Design argument
  - Moral argument

## Week 3: Modern Theism in Context

- Read Groothius, Chapters 16–18, & 23–24
- Read Web Article: "Pascal's Wager" on Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- View video presentation: On Souls (10:38)

### Due Day 4

- Participate initially in Wk3 Discussion Forum

### Due Day 7

- Complete participation in Wk3 Discussion Forum
- Submit Wk3 Reading Reflection
- Submit Wk3 Pair Conversation Report
- Submit Interview Project 1
- Post your Interview Project 1 presentation in the Wk3 Interview Project Sharing Forum and view a few of your peers'

### Topics

- Modern Theism in Context
  - Epistemology and religious experience
  - Consciousness and human nature
  - Religious pluralism
  - Islam and Christianity
  - Pascal's wager

## Week 4: Jesus and Suffering

- Read Groothius, Chapters 19–22
- View video: Evidence for Jesus Resurrection from a Historian (5:12)
- Read *Without a Doubt* ch. 7
- Read Blackwell companion Chapters 1 & 12
  - Ch. 1: Brief History of Problems of Evil
  - Ch. 12: Brief History of Theodicy

### Due Day 4

- Participate initially in Wk4 Discussion Forum

### Due Day 7

- Complete participation in Wk4 Discussion Forum
- Submit Wk4 Reading Reflection
- Submit Interview Project 2
  - Post presentation or write-up for Interview Project 2 in the Wk4 Interview Project Sharing Forum
- Submit Final Paper

### Topics

- Jesus and Suffering
  - Historical Jesus
  - Incarnation
  - Resurrection
  - Problem of Evil