

REASON, FAITH, AND GOD:

Philosophy of Western Religion

PHIL 134.001/RELI 126.001 / Autumn 2024
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Art Source: Artway.eu

COURSE INFORMATION

Credit Hours: 3

Target Audience: undergraduates

Meeting Pattern: TR 9:30–10:45 A.M.

Instructional Format: in-person

Classroom or Location: Gardner (GA) 210

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Meredith Sheeks (she/[they](#))

Email: msheeks@unc.edu

Office Location: Caldwell 210B

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:50 A.M.-12:50 P.M. and by appointment (in-person)

COURSE CONTENT

Course Description

An introduction to the philosophy of religion, the critical analysis and evaluation of religious concepts, practices, and beliefs in the Western tradition. Topics to be discussed include the elusive nature of religion; the nature and concept of God; the traditional divine attributes and associated puzzles; the problem of religious diversity; teleological, cosmological, and ontological arguments for God's existence; the logical and evidential problems of evil; the project of theodicy; skeptical theism; the role of faith in religious belief and experience; reformed epistemology; whether science undermines religion; whether religion is necessary for morality; and the problem of hell.

Course Texts & Materials

There is one required textbook for this class,

The Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction, 1st Edition,
by Linda Zagzebski (Wiley-Blackwell), 2007.

The book is available for purchase at UNC bookstores and online: [Here](#) and [here](#). (Estimated cost new: ~\$30.)

Students will also need access to [the course's Canvas site](#).

Additional course texts will be available (for free) on Canvas.

Class Expectations

Successful students should plan to attend class, actively participate in class,
and work outside of class 6 to 9 hours each week on course assignments.

Students are strongly discouraged from using laptops or other electronic devices during class.

Students who use these devices (for any non-medical reason) will be asked to sit in the back of the classroom.

Course Goals & Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

All UNC philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of UNC's philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge.

These **basic philosophical skills** involve being able to:

- Think critically;
- Correctly deploy philosophical concepts and terminology, in a historical or contemporary setting;
- Clearly and accurately represent the views or arguments of particular philosophers, in a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions; and
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented in them.



Art Source: news.art.net

In addition, PHIL 134/RELI 126 satisfies the **metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language** requirement for UNC's philosophy major and minor, and as such aims at developing the following learning outcomes:

- familiarity with leading philosophical answers to fundamental questions about what is real and what we can know;
- the ability to recognize and use philosophical approaches to develop and validate knowledge of the unfamiliar world;
- the ability to evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge;
- the interrogation of assumptions that underlie our perceptions of the world by way of recognizing that (i) these assumptions presuppose ontological and metaphysical claims that are not always warranted or sustainable and (ii) our knowledge is limited;
- the employment of strategies to (i) mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases and (ii) address challenges posed by skepticism and relativism;
- the application of philosophical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

As part of the IDEAs in Action General Education Curriculum, this course satisfies the following Focus Capacities:

Focus Capacity #1—Ways of Knowing

Description: Why do I believe what I believe? Why do so many people disagree? Courses in the Ways of Knowing Focus Capacity challenge students to critically examine their own beliefs, alongside the beliefs of others. They offer students the opportunity to explore a concept from a variety of perspectives, to encounter alternative ways of thinking about the world.

Student Learning Outcomes:

These are the learning outcomes that are expected of students after completing a course.

1. Recognize and use one or more approach/es to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Questions for Students:

These are the types of questions you should be able to answer after completing a course.

1. What norms and expectations do I take for granted?
2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?

Focus Capacity #2—Ethical and Civic Values

Description: What does it mean to be a part of a community? How do our decisions, and those decisions of our leaders, affect those around us and society at large, not only now but in the future? Learn how different perspectives can influence our idea of what is ethical and how to think critically about how we make and justify private and public decisions and evaluate the actions of public leaders.

Student Learning Outcomes:

These are the learning outcomes that are expected of students after completing a course.

1. Explain the contexts in which questions of justification arise.
2. Assess ethical values in terms of reasons offered.
3. Recognize different ethical perspectives and the distinctive approaches these perspectives bring to questions of value, evaluating ethical justifications for different ways of organizing civic and political communities.
4. Analyze the differences between personal ethical decisions and those bearing on the public and civic spheres.

Questions for Students:

These are the types of questions you should be able to answer after completing a course.

1. How can people think fruitfully, individually and together, about how they should live their lives?
2. What is required to judge a standard or value as worthy of support?
3. How should we distinguish between prejudices and reasonable grounds for value judgments?
4. What considerations—stories, reasons, testimony, documents, data, et cetera—can justify our values and commitments, whether personal or social?

Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

- Writing, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent;
- Presenting material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means; and
- Collaborating in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research.

These activities are designed to help students practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS



Art Sources: [WikiArt](#) + [Art.com](#)

Assignment Descriptions

Reading Responses and Discussion (30%)

Throughout the course, students will have the opportunity to raise questions, criticisms, or reflections about the assigned readings once per week (for credit) in an online discussion forum.

The primary purpose of the forum is to motivate participants in the class to not only read the texts assigned for the course, but to critically engage with those texts. The forum posts will also serve to guide class discussion and to offer inspiration for argumentative paper topics.

Students are required to contribute a minimum of **10** posts to the forum. Each post should approximate 150 words. (Together, these posts will amount to ~5 pages of writing, since 150 words amounts to around half a page double-spaced, 12pt., Times New Roman font.) For the first week of class, posts will be due by the time class begins. After the first week, posts for a given reading will be due by 6 A.M. on the day that the reading is assigned.

Students will receive full credit for their posts, as long as they substantively engage with the assigned course readings for the week. Posts that substantively engage with the relevant readings demonstrate that a student has (a) read the assigned reading for the week and (b) reflected upon it. During the first week of class, the professor will offer model responses to indicate which kinds of posts are expected for full credit.

The 10 required reading responses contribute to 30% of the final grade.

Cumulative Final Exam (20%)

There will be one exam at the conclusion of the course. The purpose of the exam is to challenge students to retain and consolidate the array of views and arguments considered throughout the semester.

Scheduled for Friday, **December 13th** at 8:00 A.M., the final exam counts towards 20% of the final grade.

Group Debate Presentation (20%)

During the few weeks of class, students will be placed into groups of three to four students. Each group will be assigned a future presentation date and asked to prepare for a ~30-minute debate on one of six arguments for the existence of God:

- (1) the classic argument from design; (2) the fine-tuning argument;
- (3) the kalam argument; (4) the argument from contingency;
- (5) Anselm's ontological argument; & (6) the modal ontological argument.

Two groups will be assigned to each argument, one group in favor of the case and one group in opposition.

The overarching goal for each group positioned *in favor of* an argument will be (i) to carefully present the argument in an original and engaging but clear and precise manner and (ii) to defend the argument from subsequent rebuttal.

The goal for each group positioned *in opposition to* the argument will be (i) to develop and defend at least two cogent lines of objection to the argument and (ii) to anticipate and respond to further defenses of the argument.

Excellent debate presentations will show that students understand the core strengths and weaknesses of the argument to which they have been assigned. Since collaboration on this assignment is crucial, students will be required to anonymously assess their team's individual and collective efforts on the assignment immediately following their debate presentation day.

The purpose of the group debate presentation assignment is to press students to collaborate on how to best use skills of argumentation and reasoning to address the longstanding question of God's existence.

The group debate presentation contributes to 20% of the final grade.

Papers (30%)

Students will be tasked with completing two argumentative papers.

The first argumentative paper assignment will challenge students to develop a sustained case in response to the problem of religious diversity, a puzzle concerning the divine attributes, or the problem of evil. It will be due at the end of the day (11:55 P.M.) on Monday, **November 4th**.

The second argumentative paper assignment will ask students to argue for or against a particular view about the role of faith in religion, the relationship between science and religion, or the link between morality and religion. It will be due at the end of the day (11:55 P.M.) on Friday, **December 6th**.

As the due date for each paper approaches, the professor will provide a list of sample topics, alongside various tips and resources for success.

The purpose of each writing assignment is to expose students to the unique style and technique of philosophical writing and to offer students the occasion to develop and apply critical reasoning skills, concerning a view that they find worth defending.

Each paper should be between 5 and 7 pages—double-spaced, 12pt., Times New Roman—in length. And each paper counts for 15% of the final grade.

Grading Scale & Schema

Late Work

In general, late work will not be accepted. The professor will regularly remind students of upcoming requirements and due dates in the course. Students will be expected to work ahead on assignments and to plan accordingly, in light of other coursework, extracurricular activities, and additional commitments. Exceptions may be made, at the discretion of the instructor, in cases of emergency.

Grading Scale

Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
93.5 and above	A
89.5 – 93.4	A-
86.5 – 89.4	B+
82.5 – 86.4	B
79.5 – 82.4	B-
76.5 – 79.4	C+
72.5 – 76.4	C
69.5 – 72.4	C-
66.5 – 69.4	D+
59.5 – 66.4	D
59.4 and below	F



Art Source: [Art.com](https://www.art.com)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: Religion, God, and Diversity

Date	Topic(s)/Guiding Questions	Readings or Assignments Due
Tuesday, August 20 th	What is philosophy of religion?	
Thursday, August 22 nd	What is religion?	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, “The Philosophical Approach to Religion” (The reading is available on Canvas.)
Tuesday, August 27 th	The Problem of Religious Diversity	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meister, “Religious Diversity and Pluralism” (The reading is available on Canvas.)
Thursday, August 29 th	Who, or what, is God?	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.77-85 ○ Hick, “Who or What is God?” (The second reading is available on Canvas.)
Tuesday, September 3 rd	Well-Being Day—No Class	
Thursday, September 5 th	Meeting God, the Person	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.85-99 ○ Mavrodes, “Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence” (The second reading is available on Canvas.)

Unit 2: Reasoning about God’s Existence

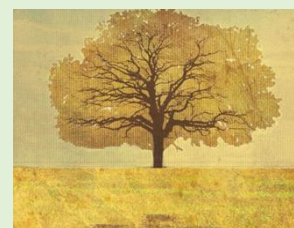
Date	Topic(s)/Guiding Questions	Readings or Assignments Due
Tuesday, September 10 th	Teleological Arguments for God	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.30-37 ○ Selections from William Paley’s <i>Natural Theology</i> ○ Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong on Fine-Tuning (The latter two readings are available on Canvas.) <p>Debate Day 1: Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4</p>
Thursday, September 12 th	Cosmological Arguments for God	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.37-48 ○ Selections from T. Aquinas’ <i>Summa Theologiae</i> ○ Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong on the Kalam Argument ○ Selections from the Russell/Copleston debate (The latter three readings are available on Canvas.) <p>Debate Day 2: Groups 5, 6, 7, and 8</p>
Tuesday, September 17 th	Ontological Arguments for God	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.48-52 ○ Selections from Anselm’s <i>Proslogian</i> ○ Plantinga, “God and Necessity” ○ Tooley, “Plantinga’s Defence of the Ontological Argument” (The latter three readings are available on Canvas.) <p>Debate Day 3: Groups 9, 10, 11, and 12</p>

Date	Topic(s)/Guiding Questions	Readings or Assignments Due
Thursday, September 19 th	Connecting & Contextualizing the Arguments for God	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.25-30, 52-54
Tuesday, September 24 th	The Logical Problem of Evil	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.143-152 ○ Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (The second reading is available on Canvas.)
Thursday, September 26 th	Defenses & Theodicies	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.152-157 ○ St. Augustine, "Evil is Privation of Good" (The second reading is available on Canvas.)
Tuesday, October 1 st	The Soul-making Theodicy	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy" (The reading is available on Canvas.)
Thursday, October 3 rd	The Evidential Problem of Evil	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.157-160 ○ Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" (The second reading is available on Canvas.)
Tuesday, October 8 th	A "noseeum argument" from evil?	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.160-163 ○ Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil" (The second reading is available on Canvas.)
Thursday, October 10 th	Skeptical Theism	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ekstrom, "Skeptical Theism" ○ [optional] Senor, "Skeptical Theism, CORNEA, and Common Sense Epistemology" (The readings are available on Canvas.)
Tuesday, October 15 th	Deepening the Problem of Evil	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stump, "The Problem of Evil and the Desires of the Heart" ○ M. Adams, "Afterword" (The readings are available on Canvas.)
Thursday, October 17 th	Fall Break—no class	

Unit 3: Faith, Science, & Morality

Date	Topic(s)/Guiding Questions	Readings or Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 22 nd	Moderate Fideism	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.56-65 ○ Selections from Pascal's <i>Pensées</i> ○ Jackson, "Faithfully Taking Pascal's Wager" (The latter two readings are available on Canvas.)
Thursday, October 24 th	Radical Fideism	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, pp.65-71 ○ Kierkegaard, "Against Proofs in Religion" (The second reading is available on Canvas.)

Date	Topic(s)/Guiding Questions	Readings or Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 29 th	Reformed Epistemology	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meister, "Alvin Plantinga and Reformed epistemology" Plantinga, "On Taking Belief in God as Basic" (The readings are available on Canvas.)
Thursday, October 31 st	Faith & Rationality	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buchak, "When is Faith Rational?" (The reading is available on Canvas.)
Monday, November 4 th		Paper 1 Due (at 11:55 P.M.)
Tuesday, November 5 th	Religion & Science, Opposed	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meister, "Religion and Science" Worrall, "Science Discredits Religion" (The readings are available on Canvas)
Thursday, November 7 th	Religion & Science, Reconciled	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratzsch, "The Demise of Religion" (The reading is available on Canvas)
Tuesday, November 12 th	Does Morality Need Religion? Clarifying the Question	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zagzebski, <i>The Philosophy of Religion</i>, Chapter 6
Thursday, November 14 th	Divine Command Theory	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selections from Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i> R. Adams, "A New Divine Command Theory" (The readings are available on Canvas)
Tuesday, November 19 th	Moral Arguments Against God	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anderson, "If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?" (The reading is available on Canvas)
Thursday, November 21 st	Sin v. Wrongdoing?	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leftow, "What is Sin?" (The reading is available on Canvas)
Tuesday, November 26 th	The Problem of Hell	<u>Read:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> M. Adams, "The Problem of Hell" (The reading is available on Canvas)
Thursday, November 28 th	Thanksgiving Break—no class	
Tuesday, December 3 rd	Closing Reflections & Discussion	
Friday, December 6 th		Paper 2 Due (at 11:55 P.M.)
Friday, December 13 th (at 8:00 A.M.)	Cumulative Final Exam	



Art Source: [The Witness](#)

Academic Policies

University Class Attendance Policy

University Policy: As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\) website](#) provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Code of Conduct Statement

All students are expected to adhere to University policy and follow the guidelines of the UNC Code of Conduct. Additional information can be found at studentconduct.unc.edu.

Guidelines for Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools

In this course, the use of generative AI is not permitted on any assignment (whether graded or not). Any use of generative AI tools is an instance of academic dishonesty, and it will be referred to the Honor System.

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Acceptable Use Policy

By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it is quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property. Additionally, consult the [Safe Computing at UNC](#) website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Grade Appeal Process

If you have any concerns with grading or feel you have been awarded an incorrect grade, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If we cannot resolve the issue, you may talk to our director of undergraduate studies or department chair.

Services & Student Support Policies

Equal Opportunity and Compliance—Accommodations

Equal Opportunity and Compliance Accommodations Team ([Accommodations—UNC Equal Opportunity and Compliance](#)) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. EOC Accommodations team determines eligibility and reasonable accommodations consistent with state and federal laws.

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to the website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/> or by contacting the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, titleixcoordinator@unc.edu) or the Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu). Confidential resources include Counseling and Psychological Services and the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu). Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered, and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email reportandresponse@unc.edu or see additional contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Diversity Statement

I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve. I appreciate any suggestions.

Undergraduate Testing Center

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit <http://testingcenter.web.unc.edu/>.

Learning Center

Want to get the most out of this course or others this semester? Visit UNC's Learning Center at <http://learningcenter.unc.edu> to make an appointment or register for an event. Their free, popular programs will help you optimize your academic performance. Try academic coaching, peer tutoring, STEM support, ADHD/LD services, workshops and study camps, or review tips and tools available on the website.

Writing Center

For free feedback on any course writing projects, check out UNC's Writing Center. Writing Center coaches can assist with any writing project, including multimedia projects and application essays, at any stage of the writing process. You don't even need a draft to come visit. To schedule a 45-minute appointment, review quick tips, or request written feedback online, visit <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.