Welcome to The Evolution/Creation Debate (ESCI/PHIL/REL 309)

Instructor
My name is Timothy Heaton and I am Professor Emeritus of the Earth Sciences at USD (now living in southern Utah amidst spectacular geologic scenery). My specialty is fossils and the history of the earth. I have also been a long-time student of the interaction between science and religion and have met and corresponded with many creationists as well as scientists. I first taught this topic as an Honors Seminar in 1992 then developed it as a regular course in 1994. The course has always been very dynamic, and I have used a variety of formats when teaching it on campus. The course was first offered online in the Fall of 2010, and I have been offering it at least once a year since then.

Course Overview
The purpose of the course is to expose students to the various varieties of creationism (Young-earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, Intelligent Design, Theistic Evolution, etc.) as well as the scientific evidence for an ancient earth and an evolutionary history. The focus will be on the claims of each camp and an exploration of the motives and methods of each group, with their history and legal battles being covered only tangentially. Students will read and discuss books written by prominent members of each camp and use the Web to see how these groups promote themselves on this very public and political topic.
In addition to becoming familiar with the various brands of creationism and the kinds of data and arguments they appeal to, we will also explore the benefits and problems associated with trying to blend science and religion. These two realms of human engagement have radically different methodologies and authority structures which make them very hard to mix in any form that is universally appealing (thus leading to the diverse spectrum of attempts that are mutually exclusive). For example, we will see how various creationists respond to cases where science and religion make conflicting claims. The course does not promote any particular viewpoint or reconciliation, though the claims and arguments of each group will be given critical analysis.

This is a very large topic for a single course because it involves a wide spectrum of the sciences as well as topics in religion and philosophy, so not everything can be covered. We will only have time to explore some of the key groups of Christian creationists. Because Christian creationism is based primarily on the Creation and Flood accounts in the biblical Book of Genesis, the topics are relevant to Jews and to a lesser degree to Muslims as well.

In addition to exploring the scientific and creationist literature, we also want to include the experiences, perspectives, and questions of class members in order to make this topic relevant. This class covers questions about human origins and purpose that most everyone has pondered, and over which many have had arguments with friends and family members. Experiences and opinions are welcome and encouraged as part of the discussion. The first assignment for the course is to write a short essay on your own background and experiences related to this topic and what you hope to gain from the course. These will be available for other class members to read and comment on. Given the emotional nature of these issues, it is critical that we have some basic ground rules for these discussions. Each participant must be respected for his or her views. We do want to explore and analyze any data or arguments that form the basis for a position, and this can be done respectfully and courteously.

**Requirements**

Course requirements include doing assigned readings and answering questions that will help focus on the key issues. Most questions are factual (what did the author say?), but some require a personal reaction or analysis to what is being presented. Students are also required to post a comment or analysis of each reading to the discussion board and to comment on some other students’ comments by certain deadlines. A few short essays and assignments will be required throughout the course as well as a capstone project where each student will explore a topic of choice (approved by the instructor) to research and present in greater depth. There will also be a midterm exam and a final exam on the factual issues covered in the course (the data, methodology, and arguments used by each camp, etc.).

**Getting Started**

This is an entirely online course. If you are new to online study please review the Online Orientation Guide at [http://www.usd.edu/continuing-and-distance-education/upload/Online-Orientation-Guide.pdf](http://www.usd.edu/continuing-and-distance-education/upload/Online-Orientation-Guide.pdf). The guide contains the minimum hardware and software requirements needed to complete the course. The IT Helpdesk can assist with technical problems (605-658-6000). Online courses are offered using course management software called Desire 2 Learn (D2L, [http://d2l.sdbor.edu](http://d2l.sdbor.edu)). **Students will not have access to the D2L website until shortly before the first day of class on Monday, January 8, 2018.** The South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) will send students an email with password and login ID for D2L shortly before the term starts. **Please make sure you log into the D2L course by January 17, 2018 to maintain enrollment.** Also be sure to purchase the six required books before the course begins. Please address any questions about the course to Timothy.Heaton@usd.edu. Expect responses to e-mail messages within 24 hours unless otherwise announced.
Required Books
These six books form the bulk of the reading material for the course and should be purchased before the course begins. All are inexpensive and add up to less than the cost of a typical textbook. Only the first book on the list will be used during the first week of class.


