



# Course Syllabus

SNS 101: Introduction to Spiritual Naturalism  
 May 1<sup>st</sup> – May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016

## Mentor

Your Mentor Name:	B. T. Newberg
Your Mentor Contact:	btnewberg@gmail.com

## Calendar

Sunday	Monday - Saturday
<b>May 1</b> <b>Start Module 1</b>	Complete online course Units throughout week. Perform optional Integrative Activities and record in journal. If any urgent questions or issues, contact mentor via email.
<b>May 8</b> <b>Module 1 due*</b> <b>Start Module 2</b>	Finish previous Module (complete when final Unit marked “complete”). Complete current Module online course Units throughout week. Perform optional Integrative Activities and record in journal.
<b>May 15</b> <b>Module 2 due*</b> <b>Start Module 3</b>	Finish previous Module (complete when final Unit marked “complete”). Complete current Module online course Units throughout week. Perform optional Integrative Activities and record in journal.
<b>May 22</b> <b>Module 3 due*</b> <b>Start Module 4</b>	Finish previous Module (complete when final Unit marked “complete”). Complete current Module online course Units throughout week. Perform optional Integrative Activities and record in journal.
<b>May 29</b> <b>Module 4 due*</b>	Finish previous Module (complete when final Unit marked “complete”). Course complete – congratulations!

\*All assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. on the date indicated.

## Login Instructions

To login to the course, follow these instructions:

1. Visit [www.SpiritualNaturalistSociety.org](http://www.SpiritualNaturalistSociety.org).
2. Log in at Supporting Members > Supporting Member Login.
3. Go to Academy > Current Student Portal (scroll down to find)
4. If you experience problems logging in or accessing the course, contact your mentor via email.

## Course Modules and Units

<b>Module 1</b>	<b>Emotion</b>
Unit 1	Orientation
Unit 2	Module 1 Preview
Unit 3	What Is Spiritual Naturalism?
Unit 4	Exploring Emotion
Unit 5	Working with Compassion
Unit 6	Emotions Gone Wild
Unit 7	Mindfulness Meditation
Unit 8	Module 1 Forum
Unit 9	Module 1 Summary and Resources
Unit 10	Module 1 Questions and Comments
<b>Module 2</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Unit 1	Module 2 Preview
Unit 2	Exploring Reason
Unit 3	Working with Inner Conflict
Unit 4	Reason and Anger
Unit 5	Beyond Reason?
Unit 6	Lovingkindness Meditation
Unit 7	Module 2 Forum
Unit 8	Module 2 Summary and Resources
Unit 9	Module 2 Questions and Comments
<b>Module 3</b>	<b>Practice</b>
Unit 1	Module 3 Preview
Unit 2	Exploring Practice
Unit 3	The Baby in the Bathwater
Unit 4	Tips for Establishing a Practice
Unit 5	Communities I
Unit 6	Communities II
Unit 7	Reappraisal Training
Unit 8	Module 3 Forum
Unit 9	Module 3 Summary and Resources
Unit 10	Module 3 Questions and Comments
<b>Module 4</b>	<b>Happiness</b>
Unit 1	Module 4 Preview
Unit 2	Exploring Happiness
Unit 3	Grief, Loss, and Death
Unit 4	Awe, Wonder, and Profound Experiences
Unit 5	Citizens of the Cosmos
Unit 6	Compassion Meditation
Unit 7	Module 4 Forum
Unit 8	Module 4 Summary and Resources
Unit 9	Module 4 Questions and Comments
Unit 10	Course Evaluation Form
Unit 11	Where To Go From Here

## Course Concept: Integration Through Practice

*Not having heard something is not as good as having heard it;*

*Having heard it is not as good as having seen it;*

*Having seen it is not as good as knowing it;*

*Knowing it is not as good as putting it into practice.*

– Xunzi, Confucian philosopher, 3<sup>rd</sup> cen. BCE

Since spirituality explores core aspects of existence, familiar themes tend to recur across traditions: compassion, love, responsibility, and so on. In this respect, this course follows tradition.

However, the real question is not what we may already know or not know, but rather *what is or isn't fully integrated into our lives yet*. In this respect, this course is different.

This course aims to empower us through practice in the context of Spiritual Naturalism. Videos and discussions aid articulation of what we may have already intuited but struggled to put into words, while meditations and other activities aid integration of what we may have put into words but struggled to put into practice.

## Course Summary

SNS 101 presents essentials of Spiritual Naturalism, with emphasis on compassion, reason, and practice. Students engage content through discussion, meditation, and integration into daily life.

Designed for both beginning and experienced practitioners interested in cultivating a meaningful life, this course surveys core themes in a nonsectarian manner unified by scientific models as *one possible approach* to Spiritual Naturalism.

Time Commitment: Approx. 3 hours per week for 4 weeks.

## Course Goals

Students will:

- ✓ acquire a broad view of core themes in Spiritual Naturalism, and a specific understanding of it as practiced in the Spiritual Naturalist Society
- ✓ develop working knowledge of the psychological processes of emotion, reason, and practice, as supported by modern scientific evidence and cultivated in various religious, non-religious, and philosophical contexts
- ✓ reflect upon, integrate, and apply course content through forum interaction with other students and the mentor
- ✓ implement practices learned in the course, including meditation techniques and optional integrative activities

This course is primarily designed to spark thought and broaden horizons. If, in the end, the student has gained an expanded perspective, the chief aim of the course will have been achieved.

## Required Resources

The following are required in order to fully access the course:

- Access to email and Internet, including ability to stream online videos
- Ability to view PDF documents (free software: Adobe Reader).

## Student Responsibilities

- *Effort and Respect.* Students are responsible for demonstrating a genuine willingness to engage with course materials, complete assignments, work with the assigned mentor, and show basic respect to others in all activities associated with the course.
- *Punctuality.* Students are responsible for working through and completing all assigned coursework by specified due dates.
- *Communication.* Students are responsible for communicating with the mentor in a timely manner as necessary for course content completion, and responsible for communicating any requests, special needs, or intentions to withdraw from the course.

### Statement on Academic Integrity

All student coursework must be the student's own original work, not copied or plagiarized from other sources. Infraction of this requirement may be grounds for dismissal from the course.

## Mentor

Your mentor is your guide-on-the-side. Mentors are experienced practitioners of Spiritual Naturalism, and are there to answer questions, provide feedback, and follow up on course completion.

Mentors are not teachers in the conventional sense of someone who doles out grades, and are also **NOT** gurus, priests, personal therapists, or any other such authorities. View your mentor as a helper, while *you* are responsible for your own independent learning.

Reach out to your mentor at any time during the course using the contact information below. Generally, the mentor will respond within three days, barring unusual circumstances.

The mentor will:

- act in an advisory capacity to address student questions, issues, and needs
- provide feedback on completed coursework
- respond in a timely manner to all student communications (generally within 3 days), except in cases of interrupted Internet access or other such unforeseen events
- communicate special student requests, needs, and complaints to Society staff, where necessary and appropriate
- abide by commonly-accepted codes of conduct for instructors, including non-discrimination, respect for students, and restriction of activities to those appropriate to a mentor-student relationship (see also our Statement on Principles)

In the event of failure of the mentor to meet these responsibilities, the student may contact the Executive Director of the Spiritual Naturalist Society at:

[spiritualnaturalistsociety@gmail.com](mailto:spiritualnaturalistsociety@gmail.com)

## **Your Mentor: B. T. Newberg, [btnewberg@gmail.com](mailto:btnewberg@gmail.com)**

B. T. Newberg is a professional educator with a Masters of Education degree. He has been practicing spirituality from a naturalistic perspective since the year 2000, with a special emphasis on Buddhist, Pagan, and Humanistic practices. He is the Education Director of the Spiritual Naturalist Society, as well as Advising Editor for [HumanisticPaganism.com](http://HumanisticPaganism.com). Professionally, he teaches English as a Second Language, and lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

## **Technical Support**

Send all questions, including technical issues, to your mentor at the address above. Anything the mentor cannot resolve will be passed on to our IT Director, Tony Schlisser, in a timely manner.

**Tony Schlisser** has roots in the Appalachian foothills of Tennessee. He has taken a winding path to live in Louisville Kentucky with his large and extended family as a philosopher and spiritual vagrant. A lifelong lover of learning, over the years Tony's formal studies at various colleges have included majors in Bible, Christian education, English literature and philosophy, and human services. Having started as a fundamentalist Christian, Tony has followed a peripatetic path through paganism, studying enlightenment meditation, and atheism/agnosticism/ignosticism with peeks into Taoism, Buddhism, Queer/Gay Spirituality, Deep Ecology, and other spiritual paths. He is currently piecing together his own brand of spiritual naturalism that he has termed Sagaianism (a portmanteau word that derives from sage, saga, Sagan, and Gaia). Tony is a self-taught web developer who has helped several non-profit groups and businesses develop their web presence. The IT Director oversees all matters relating to the SNS website, databases, and online functions.

## **Time Commitment**

To fully take advantage of this course, expect to devote about 3 hours in total for each Module:

- 1.5 hours: Videos, quizzes, meditation, and forums
- 1.5 hours: Integrative activities and further meditation sessions (both optional)

## **Videos**

Core concepts are introduced via video: 5 per Module, 9-11 minutes each (the first video is a bit longer). Take notes, as concepts build upon each other sequentially.

*Note on References:* Videos include frequent footnote references as supporting evidence. The full references list can be found in the syllabus (see above).

## **Meditation**

In order to develop essential mental skills for putting spirituality into practice, we will experiment with four techniques in this course, using instructional materials kindly provided by Rick Heller and Helen Weng.

Students should try each technique at least once. Thereafter, ongoing practice is highly recommended. Also, this course is only intended to provide a first taste for each technique; seeking deeper instruction is strongly advised.

*Note:* The meditation instructors have been kind enough to let us use their training materials, but are not course mentors. As such, they are under no obligation to respond to emails or otherwise interact with students as part of the course.

**Rick Heller** has contributed two video guided techniques: Mindfulness of the Breath (Module 1), and Lovingkindness Meditation (Module 2).

Rick Heller is the author of the upcoming book *Secular Meditation: A Guide from the Humanist Community at Harvard*. He is also the co-founder of the Humanist Mindfulness Group, which is sponsored by the Humanist Community Project at Harvard. He is also the creator of [Seeing the Roses: A Nonreligious Path of Lovingkindness and Mindfulness](#), and of a video course on the science behind meditation.

Rick Heller received a master's degree in journalism from Boston University and also holds degrees from Harvard and MIT. His writing has appeared in *Free Inquiry*, *UUWorld*, *Tikkun*, *Buddhadharma*, the *Boston Globe*, and *Lowell Sun*. His fiction has appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* magazine.

**Dr. Helen Weng** has contributed two audio guided techniques: Reappraisal Training (Module 3), and Compassion Meditation (Module 4)

Helen Weng is a post-doctoral scholar at UCSF's Osher Center for Integrative Medicine where she's studying mind-body interventions and relational functioning. She completed her work as a doctoral student in clinical psychology in 2014, conducting research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Investigating Healthy Minds at the Waisman Center. Her research on compassion training was published in *Psychological Science* in May 2013 with coauthors Andrew S. Fox, Alexander J. Shackman, Diane E. Stodola, Jessica Z. K. Caldwell, Matthew C. Olson, and Richard J. Davidson. To learn more, visit the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds.

## Forums

Traditional religions and philosophical societies place a premium on fellowship. The first step is interaction, and this is the role of the forum. Forums also provide opportunities for more nuanced exploration of concepts through mutual exchange.

Students are strongly encouraged to engage in extended conversations via the forums, sharing and responding to ideas and experiences. The mentor may join in as just one more voice in the conversation.

There are five forums in this course: the Open Forum (free discussion), and four weekly forums (focused-topic discussions).

For purposes of course completion, all students are required to post at least one comment per forum.

## Integrative Activities (Optional)

Each video is followed by an integrative activity intended to bring learning to an experiential level. While these are optional, they are highly recommended as a means of moving your practice from the intellectual to the hands-on.

## Course Journal (Optional)

The Course Journal is a printable document providing an opportunity to record notes and experiences in an offline or mobile manner. You need never submit your journal or show it to anyone else unless you wish to; it is just for yourself.

All the course content is also available online.

## **Questions and Comments**

There is a questions and comments page at the end of each module. Anything on which you would like feedback from your mentor, along with any questions and comments you may have, may be entered there. If you have a more urgent issue, you may also email your mentor directly.

## **Quizzes**

Most units feature self-check quizzes. These are intended to help you self-check your understanding and root out any misconceptions. These are not graded, and serve no purpose other than helping you gauge your understanding and further your engagement with the material.

A few "quizzes" are actually surveys or confirmations.

## **Course Format and Navigation**

This course employs a "drip" format, doling out content on a weekly basis. This encourages taking time to digest content, and ensures all students are working on the same thing at the same time.

The course is broken into a sequence of four modules, each comprised of a sequence of single-page units. Units become visible only when the appropriate course date for the module arrives (e.g. Module 1 becomes visible on the first day of the course).

You may navigate between completed units freely using the sidebar on the right of each page. To find individual units, you may have to click on the module to expand it.

You may logout and return at any time; your work will be saved.

Any technical difficulties you cannot resolve should be referred to the mentor.

## **Statement on Diversity within Spiritual Naturalism**

There are many different ways to practice Spiritual Naturalism. While this course concentrates on one way, it acknowledges and welcomes others. Difference, debate, and disagreement are all encouraged, provided conversation remains civil and focuses on arguments supported by reasons and evidence.

## **Credits**

SNS 101: Introduction to Spiritual Naturalism  
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Created by B. T. Newberg, with contributions from DT Strain, Rick Heller, and Helen Weng

Technical assistance and web coordination by Tony Schlisser

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