How did our universe and our planet form? Where did life come from? Are we alone? These questions have been pondered for some time by philosophers, but only within the last century have scientists really begun to seriously address them. The emerging field of astrobiology, which encompasses astronomy, biology, physics, and chemistry, seeks to understand the origin of life in the universe and our ultimate fate. In this First Year Seminar, we’ll explore what science is doing to answer these questions, and we’ll discuss how scientific discoveries are impacting our view of our place in the universe.

The main purpose of this course is to develop your skills in critical thinking and writing. We will devote a small amount of time at the beginning of certain class periods covering grammar topics, with the majority of time being spent on discussing astrobiology topics from the texts. During class you will work in groups to discuss and evaluate portions of the text, as well as in presenting the results of your discussions. You will also spend time on informal writing assignments. Throughout the semester, you will learn the basics of rhetoric and grammar in order to develop ideas and assemble them together to formulate an essay that is clear, logical, and persuasive. Hence, this course satisfies the freshman writing requirement with the General Education program.

Texts

*The Bedford Handbook*, 8th ed. by Hacker and Sommers  
*Astrobiology: A Brief Introduction*, 2nd ed. by Plaxco and Gross  
*A Brief History of Time* by Hawking  
*Deception Point* by Brown  
*Webster’s New College Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (suggested)

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the course it is expected that you will be able to:

1. Form a clear thesis statement and adequately support it with appropriate evidence.

2. Construct sentences that plainly and concisely convey your ideas.

3. Develop effective paragraphs that order your thoughts around a central topic.
4. Assemble, in a logical order, a four to five paragraph essay that consists of introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs.

5. Write avoiding major errors of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun-antecedent agreement, as well as errors in punctuation.

6. Cite sources correctly in the text and at the end of the essay.

**Grades**

Semester grades will be assigned using the following cutoff percentages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A−</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B−</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C−</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D−</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cutoff %</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Evaluation Criteria**

Your course grade will be determined based on a combination of essays, a final essay exam, grammar quizzes, and class participation:

- Essays: 4 × 100 = 400
- Final Essay Exam: 1 × 200 = 200
- Grammar Quizzes: 5 × 20 = 100
- Class Participation: 1 × 50 = 50
- Total: 750

**Essays**

Four formal written essays, each of which will be 1250 words in length, will be required over the course of the semester. These essays must adhere to the format guidelines given in this syllabus. Before each essay is due, you will submit to me a tentative thesis, and one week later you will meet with me for an individual conference to discuss a rough draft of your essay. You should bring this draft of your essay along with you to the conference, which will last around 15 minutes.

Each essay will be graded out of 100 points and there will be no rewrites or revisions allowed. Grading emphasis in each of the areas of content, organization, clarity, and grammar will increase over the course of the semester. As we cover more topics, my expectations of your writing abilities will grow. Each essay will be due on the date indicated in this syllabus, or you will be penalized 3 points for each day it is late. With each essay you must also hand in your prewriting and any rough drafts you have composed. Graded essays will be returned no later than two weeks after they are handed in to me.

The final exam will be an essay that you prepare based on the final text we discuss in class. Essentially, you will write an essay without any supervision of the steps taking place before a final draft is submitted. For the final exam
you will be allowed to bring a laptop, the texts, and a collegiate dictionary to compose your essay. The final exam will be graded out of 200 points.

**Essay Guidelines**

1. Essays must be written on a word-processing program such as Microsoft Word. Always keep backup copies of your essays.

2. The length of each essay must be at least 1250 words and contain a minimum of four paragraphs.

3. Essays must be double-spaced, written in a font no less than 12 point, with one inch margins on all sides and the right justification off.

4. Each essay must have a title, which should be centered at the top of the first page. Follow MLA formatting for numbering your pages and including your name on the paper.

5. With each essay you should demonstrate that:

   a. you are able to follow the conventions of standard written English, as outlined in *The Bedford Handbook*;

   b. you are capable of understanding and thinking critically about what you have read;

   c. you can formulate a thesis statement and develop it fully and sufficiently through support from text and from reasoning;

   d. you can plainly express your own opinions and that you are aware of which opinions are yours and of those which belong to others;

   e. you can communicate clearly and effectively through a coherent argument laid out effectively in well-structured paragraphs with sound transitions between them;

   f. you are able to reflect on what you have read with considerable thought and depth.

**Writing Center**

The LVC Writing Center, located in the basement of the Bishop Library, provides individual peer tutors who are students that have been recommended by the LVC faculty. They assist students with all aspects of writing, ranging from developing a thesis to helping you learn to identify and correct grammatical errors. Hours where tutors are available on a drop-in basis will be announced sometime during the beginning of the semester. For an appointment outside of these times, you may also fill out the form on the Writing Center webpage, call 867-6790, or e-mail wcenter@lvc.edu.
Grammar Quizzes
Quizzes based on the assigned grammar topics will be given in class on the dates listed in the syllabus. You will be allowed to use the textbook and any notes during the quizzes. Each quiz will consist of 10 questions worth 2 points apiece, and there will be 5 quizzes total this semester.

Class Participation
In addition to attending class regularly, you will be expected to contribute to the class discussion. At the end of the semester I will award a score out of 50 points based on your participation and leadership during discussions.

Attendance
Regular attendance for class is expected. To be present and accounted for you must be seated and ready before the class period begins. At the end of the semester I will award an attendance bonus of 20 points for zero absences, 10 points for one absence, and 5 points for two absences. No points will be awarded for more than two absences. I will not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences in awarding of the attendance bonus.

Academic Honesty
Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will be subject to the penalties described in the Student Handbook and outlined in LVC’s “Academic Honesty Policy” (http://www.lvc.edu/catalog/acad-reg-procedures.aspx). Cheating and plagiarism are acts of academic dishonesty. Students who take part in violations such as cheating or plagiarism are subject to a meeting with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, who has the authority to take further action, up to and including expulsion from The College.

Course Evaluation
During one of the last several weeks of the course, you will have an opportunity to evaluate different aspects of this course. The College utilizes a standardized course evaluation instrument called IDEA. The IDEA evaluation will be administered through an on-line form that you will be asked to complete in a timely manner outside of class. I have chosen the following objectives for evaluation using IDEA:

1. Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions)

2. Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing

3. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view

Disability Services
If you have a physical, medical, psychological, or learning disability that is going to impact your attendance or require accommodation, please let me know. In order to ensure that your learning needs are appropriately met, you will need to provide documentation of your disability or medical condition to the Director of Disability Services. The Office of Disability Services will then provide a letter of verification of disability that describes the
accommodations needed for this class. *Accommodations are not retroactive.* This office is located in the Humanities Building, room 04, and the Director may be reached by phone at 717-867-6071.

### Course Schedule

The following abbreviations are used in the schedule below to refer to the texts:

- **BH** *The Bedford Handbook*, 8th ed. by Hacker and Sommers
- **ABI** *Astrobiology: A Brief Introduction*, 2nd ed. by Plaxco and Gross
- **BHT** *A Brief History of Time* by Hawking
- **DP** *Deception Point* by Brown

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Grammar Topic</th>
<th>Discussion Topic</th>
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<td>course introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th 8/30</td>
<td>BH Ch. 1</td>
<td>BHT Ch. 1 – 2</td>
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<td>Tu 9/4</td>
<td>BH Ch. 2</td>
<td>BHT Ch. 3 – 4</td>
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<td>Th 9/6</td>
<td>BH Ch. 3</td>
<td>BHT Ch. 5, ABI Ch. 1</td>
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<td>Tu 9/11</td>
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<td>ABI Ch. 2</td>
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<td>BHT Ch. 8</td>
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<td><strong>FINAL ESSAY EXAM</strong></td>
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