

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Department Information:

Division: Humanities  
Department: Philosophy/Religious Studies  
Course ID: RELIG 110  
Course Title: Tribal and Ethnic Religions  
Units: 3  
Lecture: 3  
Prerequisite: None

Catalog Description:

A comparative study of supernaturalism in primitive societies, both past and present including witchcraft, magic, totemism, mythology and ritual, nativistic movements, and the religious context of drug usage. Prehistoric religion will be examined, as well as the belief systems of selected tribal peoples. This course is also offered as RELIG 110.

Schedule Description:

A comparative study of supernaturalism in primitive societies, both past and present including prehistoric religion as well as the belief systems of selected tribal peoples.

**II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One**

**III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Create and articulate a historical, cultural, and/or intellectual matrix within which the concerns and the questions of the sub-discipline of the anthropological study of religion (emphasizing the inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary nature of the field) can be placed;
- B. Critically evaluate selected "primary sources" in the sub-discipline of the anthropological study of religion;
- C. Respond critically, analytically, and/or synthetically in writing to issues dealing with the anthropological approach to religious studies, (including but not limited to the origin of religion, the function of religion, myth, ritual, symbolism, taboo, ethnomedicine, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, and new religious expressions);
- D. Apply the ideas and concepts in the sub-discipline of the anthropological study of religion to contemporary experience in its social, institutional, psychological, and/or political manifestations (such as entheogenic drug use and the Native American Church).

**IV. COURSE CONTENT:**

- A. The Anthropological Study of Religion
  1. Definitions of religion
  2. Academic study of religion
  3. Religion as a cultural symbols system
  4. History/evolution of religion
  5. Relativism/Absolutism
  6. Inclusive/Exclusive approaches to religion
  7. Esoteric/Exoteric levels of religions expression
- B. Myth, Ritual, Symbolism, Taboo
  1. Psychological vs. Anthropological approaches to myth
  2. Rituals and liminality
  3. Freud and Douglas on Taboo
  4. Symbols vs. signs
- C. Shamans, Priests, Prophets
  1. Shamanic authority and spiritual experience

San Bernardino Valley College  
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2. Priestly authority and social affirmation
3. Definition of prophets and prophecy
- D. The Religious use of drugs
  1. Peyote
  2. Aldous Huxley
  3. Huston Smith
  4. Entheogenic drugs and religious experience
- E. Ethnomedicine: Religion and Healing
  1. "Primitive" vs. modern medicine
  2. Psychotherapy and "primitive" medicine
- F. Witchcraft and Sorcery
  1. History of Witchcraft
  2. An Anthropological perspective on witchcraft
  3. Cross-cultural inspection of witchcraft: Australia, Africa, America
  4. Wicca
- G. Divination, Magic, Exorcism
  1. Psychosocial Interpretations of exorcism
  2. Oracles
  3. Magic and rationality
- H. Ghosts, Souls, And Ancestors: The Power of the Dead
  1. Voodoo
  2. Haiti's Living Dead
  3. Literary expressions of ghosts
- I. Old and New Religions
  1. Ghost Dance religion
  2. Cargo Cults
  3. Serpent-Handline
  4. Heaven's Gate
  5. Implications of the anthropological study of religion for emerging religious expressions

**V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:**

- A. Lecture
- B. Discussions (class and group)
- C. Audio-Visuals
- D. Reading of texts, both secondary and primary
- E. Writing tasks appropriate for the material
- F. Computer Tutorials (if applicable)
- G. Online or web-based delivery of instruction

**VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:**

- A. Reading and Critical Thinking  
Read Daniel Gordon's "Female Circumcision in Egypt and Sudan: A Controversial Rite of Passage." Summarize the key ideas in that article. Compare and contrast the view that a culture's rituals cannot be judged from outside that culture with the view that there are cross-cultural norms by which rituals of any culture can be judged. Be prepared to discuss your summary, your comparative analysis, and your own personal ideas on the topic with the class.
- B. Writing and Critical Thinking  
Write an essay in which you, first, describe the Peyote Sacrament of the Native American Church. Then, using Huston Smith's categories from his book, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception*, conclude the essay with an analysis of the impact of non-addictive entheogenic substances on the history of religion, the philosophy of religion, and the religious life itself.

**VII. EVALUATION:**

- A. Methods of evaluation will vary from instructor to instructor, but may include true-false tests, multiple choice tests, or sentence completion tests. In addition, written components such as essay tests, writing tasks (i.e. journals, summary reviews, interpretive essays, and/or term projects) will be included. Telecomputing can include downloading and uploading reading and writing tasks, on-line discussion, and computer tutorials. Grading may be comparative within a class or may be based on an absolute standard. Methods of evaluation will adhere to the parameters set out in the "Expected Outcomes for Students" section above.
1. Sample objective test question: Horace Minor's primary intent in writing "Body Ritual among the Nacerima" was
    - a. A thick description of an Australian aboriginal culture
    - b. A critique of twenty-first century anthropological methods
    - c. An autobiographical reflection on his childhood
    - d. None of the above
  2. Sample subjective test question: Describe Victor Turner's use of the concept of "liminality" in analyzing rituals. Give one example from contemporary experience that illustrates this concept.
- B. While the frequency of evaluation will depend on the type of evaluation (i.e. "objective" or written), evaluation will take place periodically throughout the semester with enough frequency to be sufficient to measure student progress and will be sensitive to the various learning styles of students. The minimum evaluation will consist of: at least two evaluative instruments (i.e. papers, projects, portfolios, or tests) chosen by the instructor of record for the class.

**VIII. TYPICAL TEXT(S): (samples)**

- A. *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*. Eds. Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers. Fifth Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001.
- B. Smith, Huston. *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals*. Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2003
- C. Noel, Daniel C. *The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imaginal Realities*. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- D. Wallace, Anthony. *Religion: An Anthropological View*. New York: Random House, 1966.
- E. Rappaport, Roy A. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- F. Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969.
- G. Eliade, Mircea. *Australian Religions: An Introduction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.

**IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:**

Supplementary material may include handouts, primary sources, maps, study guides, computer disks, and/or software.