

**REL 2388 /ANT3930**  
**FALL SEMESTER 2011**  
**INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS OF THE AMERICAS**  
**PROFESSOR ROBIN M. WRIGHT (office hrs. M & W 11 a.m. – 12 noon)**  
**T.A. ALYSIA RADDER (office hrs.: T & Th 12:45-1:15pm)**  
**TTH 11:45-12:35; F 10:40-11:30**  
**MAT 0018**  
**TUR 2342 (ANT SECTS. 8003, 8004, 8006; REL. SECTS. 0456, 0460, 0477)**

**Objectives of the Course:** This course introduces the student to the historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices of Native peoples of North, Central and South America. With such a vast and diverse universe to study, our approach will (1) highlight key components of indigenous religions of the Americas; (2) discuss aspects of religion in several of the major civilizations (Maya, Inca, Aztec); and (3) focus on the religious ethnographies of contemporary native peoples in all three macro-regions of the Americas. Thus, the course is a mix of what we understand about the religions of the historic great civilizations of the Americas, and what we now understand about contemporary indigenous religiosities. The main emphasis in all three objectives is on historical change and continuity in indigenous religions.

The Introductory section presents key components of native religions throughout the Americas: the notions of an intersubjective cosmos, a multi-tiered cosmos, and multiple notions of time and space; inter-relationality among spirits, deities, and humans; the central importance of, and inter-relations among religious specialists: shamans, priests, sorcerers, ceremonial leaders, and prophets; reciprocity as both a founding principle of ongoing religious & social life and yet, paradoxically, its negation; the importance of “traditional ecological knowledge” to the understanding of cosmology; and the adaptability of religious beliefs to change. While the course highlights the resilience of indigenous religions, it also analyzes the principle threats to continuity, focusing on the “appropriations” by non-indigenous peoples of indigenous beliefs and practice, the shattering of religious institutions during the conquest, the imposition of Christianity and its indigenization, and processes of ‘ethnogenesis’ (the rebirth of religious traditions).

Following the Introduction, the course will be divided into 3 main sections: (1) Native Central American Religions, mainly Aztec and Mayan. The films and readings are designed to provide both scholarly views on the great civilizations of the past, the visions of the vanquished, and the challenges their historical descendants face today; (2) Native South American Religions, including the Andean Highlands (Inca) but most especially, Lowland Amazonia. Here, we will concentrate on religious ethnographies, discussing major cycles of sacred stories, the critical importance of eschatologies, ancestor ‘cults’, sorcery or ‘dark shamans’, religious movements in history, ‘conversion’ to evangelicalism; and (3) Native North American Religious traditions, especially the immense powers of the religious specialists, the appropriation and adaptation of native cultures and religious traditions by non-native peoples, sacred rites and religious renewals, contemporary ceremonialism, and the importance of ‘sacred ecology’ to native

peoples' worldviews. Films will illustrate the various challenges Native North, South, and Central American religious traditions have faced and continue to face today; and how native peoples have forged solutions to contemporary 'problems' posed by political and economic changes.

This course can thus be considered under the rubric of the Humanities in that its focus is the religious traditions of native peoples of the Americas, and how they have been studied or presented through scholarly production, cinema, and indigenous perspectives. It seeks to present an in-depth understanding of the cosmogonies (views on creation), cosmologies (the spatio-temporal structures of the universe), anthropologies (relations among all living beings, what constitutes a 'person', and what constitute 'specialists'), and eschatologies (views on death and the afterlife) of the native societies studied. The methodologies this course adopts are comparative, historical, and 'thickly descriptive' ethnographies. The instructor's fieldwork conducted over three decades among peoples of the Northwest Amazon will provide a constant baseline for comparisons. A major concern is to construct a critical reflection on the possibilities and limitations of doing religious ethnography among an indigenous people whose understanding and worldview are distinct in fundamental ways from the so-called "Western traditions". How can research tools be modified such that this study becomes a meaningful enterprise - one in which the native peoples have an active role in constructing their religious histories and writing their own ethnographies ?

The student will learn about native religious traditions of the Americas, which is not offered in any other course, to our knowledge, at this University (this course is required for those who intend to minor in Native American Studies). The students will learn more about the histories of the Americas from the perspectives of the peoples whom European societies and their descendants colonized for centuries and who are, only recently, beginning to write their own religious histories from their own perspectives, revitalizing the sacred in new and creative ways. The Writing Requirement (Gordon Rule 2) ensures that students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. As indicated in the **Requirements** section below, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. All written assignments have word counts and submission deadlines.

The materials for the course consist of the readings (articles scanned and included on Sakai, and books to purchase in bookstore or by Amazon.com); films and slides are directly related to the readings and to the lecture material. Discussion groups with the TA will be scheduled on the first day of class.

### **Schedule of Readings, Films, and Lectures:**

**08/23: Introduction to the Syllabus and Readings; elements of Religions in general;**

**08/25: Part I: Key elements of indigenous religions:**

Readings: Graham Harvey, "Introduction", pp. 1-19; Kenneth Morrisson, "The cosmos as intersubjective: Native American other-than-human persons", in Graham Harvey (ed.) Indigenous Religions: A Companion (London: Cassell, 2002), pp. 23-36;

Recommended Reading: Wright, "Native American Religious Beliefs and Practices", pp. 1-31, on website [www.robinmwright.com](http://www.robinmwright.com) ; also watch "The Art of World-making", on same website

**08/26: Section discussions;****08/30: Key elements (cont.)**

Readings: G. Harvey, Part II of Animism, pp. 99-113; "Ojibwa ontology, behavior and worldview" A. Irving Hallowell, in G. Harvey (ed.) Readings in Indigenous Religions (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 17-49;

**09/01: Shamans, Priests, Prophets & Sorcerers**

Readings: G. Harvey, Part III.9, pp. 139-152; "Shamanism", Piers Vitebsky, in G. Harvey, Indigenous Religions: A Companion, pp. 55-67; "Training for the Priesthood among the Kogi of Colombia", Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, in: Moro, Myers & Lehmann, Magic, Witchcraft and Religion, pp. 167-181; Michael Brown, "Dark Side of the Shaman", in *ibid.* pp. 163-166 .

**09/02: Section discussions;**

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**09/06: Part II: Native Central American Religions. Introduction**

Reading: Austin, Alfredo Lopez, "Guidelines for the Study of Mesoamerican religious traditions", in J. Olupona (ed.), Beyond Primitivism, pp. 118-127; Carrasco, David, Religions of Mesoamerica. Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers, Chs. 1 & 2;

**09/08: Central America (cont.)**

Reading: Leon-Portilla, Miguel, Broken Spears, chs. 1-8 (& preface); Carrasco, Religions...., Ch. 3.

**Film:** "The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico" (59 min.)

**09/09: Section discussions;****09/13: Aztec (concl.)**

Reading: Leon-Portilla, Miguel, Broken Spears, chs. 9-16 (& appends.); selections from In the Language of Kings (on course website)

**09/15: Maya**

Reading: Carrasco, Religions..., ch. 4; Mercedes de la Garza, "Sacred Forces of the Mayan Universe", in Sullivan, NR&CCSA (Native Religions and Cultures of Central and South America), pp.     ;

09/16: Section discussions;

09/20: Maya (cont.)

Reading: "The Popol Vuh", In the Language of Kings.

**Film:** "Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya" (60 min.)

09/22: Central America Today (concl.)

Reading: Carrasco, Religions..., ch. 5; Alfredo Austin, "Indigenous Mythology from present-day Mexico," in Sullivan, NR&CCSA;

Recommended Readings: Carrasco, David, "Jaguar Christians in the Contact Zone", in J. Olupona (ed.), Beyond Primitivism, pp. 128-138; Lincoln, Bruce, "He, not they, best protected the village", in J. Olupona (ed.), Beyond Primitivism, pp. 149-163.

09/23: Section discussions.

### **First papers (section paper & film reactions) due by 09/30.**

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09/27: Part III: Native South American Religions. Introduction

Reading: L. Sullivan, "The World and its End: Cosmologies and Eschatologies of South American Indians," in Sullivan, ed. NR&CCSA, pp.     ; Tom Zuidema, "Inca" in Sullivan, NR&CCSA, pp.

Recommended Reading: L. Sullivan, Icanchu's Drum, MacMillan Press, ch. 1; "Introduction", Whitehead & Wright, In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery in Amazonia , pp. 1-19

09/29: Intensive Religious Ethnographies of Amazonian Indigenous Peoples: The Baniwa of the Northwest Amazon

Reading: R.M. Wright, "South American Indian Religions: The Northwest Amazon", on course website; "The Baniwa", in L. Sullivan (ed.), NR&CCSA, pp. 221-236; Readings: R.M. Wright & J. Hill, "History, Ritual and Myth", Ethnohistory, vol. 33 (1), 1986, pp. 31-54;

09/30: Section discussions

10/04: Baniwa (cont.) and Comparative : Shamans, Sorcerers, and Prophets

Readings: Wright, "The Wicked and the Wise Men: Witches and Prophets in the History of the Northwest Amazon", in Whitehead & Wright, In Darkness and Secrecy, pp. 82-108; Fernando Santos-Granero, "The Enemy Within: Child Sorcery, Revolution, and the Evils of Modernization in Eastern Peru", in Whitehead & Wright, pp.272-305

**Films:** “The Shamans’ House of Knowledge and Power”; “The Making of Shamans’ Snuff”; “From the Other Side of the Sky”, “Holy Spirits of the Rainforest”;

**10/06:** Baniwa (concl.)

Readings: R.M. Wright, “The Art of Being Crete. Baniwa Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sustainable Development”, on course website;

**Film:** “Baniwa. A Story of Plants and Cures” (53 min.)

**10/07:** Section discussions;

**10/11:** Intensive Religious Ethnographies: the Wari’

Reading: Part I;

**10/13:** Wari’ (cont.)

Reading: Part II;

**10/14:** Section discussions;

**10/18:** Wari’ (cont.)

Reading: Part III;

**10/20:** Wari’ (concl.)

Reading: Part IV

**10/21:** Section discussions;

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## **Second papers (section paper and film reactions due by 10/28/2011)**

**10/25:** Native North American Religions.

Readings: Vine Deloria, “Tribal Religions and Contemporary American Culture,” Chapter 14 of God is Red; John Mohawk, “Tribal Traditions and Western Religious Discourse” in Olupona, Beyond Primitivism, pp.111-117;

**Film:** “Imagining Indians”;

**10/27:** North America (cont.) -

Readings: Vine DeLoria Jr., The World We Used to Live In, pp. xvii-xxxii, chs. 1, 5;

**10/28:** Section discussions;

**11/01:** North America (cont.)

Readings: Vine DeLoria Jr., The World We Used to Live In, chs. 6, 8;

**11/03: North America (cont.): Religious Lifeways**

**Readings:** (1) L. Sullivan, “Introduction: Understanding Native American Religious Lifeways”, (2) Inez Talamantez, “In the Space between the Earth and Sky: Contemporary Mescalero Apache Ceremonialism”, in: L. Sullivan, Native Religions and Cultures of North America;

**Film:** “Apache Girl’s Initiation Ceremony”;

**11/08: North America (cont.): religious lifeways**

**Readings:** (1) L. Sullivan, “The Religious Spirit of the Navajo”; (2) Trudy Griffin-Pierce, “The Continuous Renewal of Sacred Relations: Navajo Religion”, (3) Ann Fienup-Riordan, “Eye of the Dance: Spiritual Life of Central Yup’ik Eskimos”; #s 2 & 3 in: L. Sullivan, Native Religions and Cultures of North America;

**11/10: North America (cont.): appropriation of native religious lifeways**

**Readings:** Philip DeLoria, Playing Indian, Introduction, chs. 1, 2;  
**Recommended Reading:** ch. 3

**11/15: North America (cont.): appropriation of native religious lifeways**

**Readings:** DeLoria, Playing Indian, chs. 5, 6, Conclusion,  
**Recommended Readings:** Ch. 4 of Ph DeLoria, and Helen McCarthy, “Assaulting California’s sacred mountains: shamans vs. New Age merchants of Nirvana”, in Olupona, Beyond Primitivism, pp. 172-8;  
**Film clip:** the “Chasco Fiasco”

**11/17: North America (cont.): the Church and Native American Boarding Schools of Canada.**

**Readings:** Kevin Annett, Unrepentant. Disrobing the Emperor  
**Film:** “The Unrepentant. Disrobing the Emperor”

**11/18: Section discussions;****11/22: North America (cont.): ‘Development’ and ‘resource management’ are religious issues**

**Readings:** Fikret Berkes, Sacred Ecology, chs. 1, 4;

**THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS 11/24 – 11/26****11/29: North America (cont.): ‘Development’ and ‘resource management’ are religious issues**

**Readings:** Fikret Berkes, Sacred Ecology, chs. 9, 10;  
**Film:** “In Light of Reverence”

**12/01: North America (concl.): NAGPRA and Repatriation as a religious question**

**Readings: Brown, Who Owns Native Culture ?**

**Film: "Who Owns the Past ?"**

**12/02: Final Section Discussions;**

**12/06: LAST CLASS: EVALUATIONS & WRAP-UP**

**12/15: FINAL PAPERS & FILM REACTIONS DUE (deliver to Professor or TA in person)**

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes and complete assigned readings prior to each class meeting. Class participation does count in final grade evaluation. Discussion sections will be established by the T.A. after the first class. Continued absences will not be tolerated; following the third absence, 3 grade points will be taken off the final grade for each day of absence. More than 6 absences will lead to administrative withdrawal from the course;

2) Three written papers on topics that emerge from the readings, each 3-5 pages in length, to be handed in on the week following the final day of Parts II, III, IV;

3) Four reaction papers to ANY of the films, each 500 words in length. Papers should seek to establish links to the readings and answer specific questions. Prompts will be distributed prior to film-showing. Reaction Papers are due on the same date established for Unit Papers. Papers should be typed in format Times New Roman 12 double-spaced. In all, the four reaction papers are to have 2,000/3,000 written words;

Feedback will be provided on all written assignments;

4) Pop-quizzes will be administered whenever the Professor and T.A. consider them necessary.

### **GRADE DISTRIBUTION:**

20% for the first paper; 20% for the second paper; 20% for the third paper; 25% for the reaction papers; and 15% for discussion participation and pop-quizzes.

### **RULES**

1. **Plagiarism or cheating:** Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a

footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action.

See

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm><http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> for more information on UF policies.

2. **Incompletes are strongly discouraged** and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete **before** the end of the semester.

3. **Make-up exams and quizzes** will be given only under very special circumstances, such as a medical emergency. In that case, students must bring a doctor's note.

4. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class. Texting is not permitted during class, and any inter-nauting during classtime that is not related to the material being discussed will be penalized.

5. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.