

ANT3930 - Anthropology: Indigenous Religions of the Americas

ANT3930 (28632) Section OC39

ANG5931 (30400) Section OC59

T | Period 2 (8:30 AM - 9:20 AM) Room [MAT 0013](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

R | Period 2 – 3 (8:30 AM - 10:25 AM) Room [TUR 2336](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Lecturer: Dr. Augusto Oyuela-Caycedo

Office Hours: You can come to my office, and we can meet after class any Tuesday or Thursday. If that is not possible, we can arrange an appointment by email.

Email: caycedo@ufl.edu

Office: B-131 Turlington Hall.

Introduction

This course introduces students to America's historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices. We will examine the diverse and complex ways Indigenous communities have understood and related to the world, including their land, water, climate, and life ontologies. By exploring critical features of Indigenous religious traditions, we will investigate how historical and ecological contexts have shaped these beliefs. By incorporating shamanism into the course, we can explore Indigenous spiritual practices and their role in community life more in-depth. The course will also consider the impact of European and African religious traditions on Indigenous worldviews and practices.

Through an examination of contemporary Indigenous communities, we will explore:

Key areas of focus include:

- **Indigenous cosmologies and ontologies:** Examining the unique ways these cultures conceptualize the universe, the human place within it, and the interconnectedness of all beings.
- **Sacred landscapes and natural resources:** Exploring the spiritual significance of specific geographic features and the intricate relationships between Indigenous peoples and their environments.

- **Ritual, ceremony, and spiritual practices:** Analyzing traditional and contemporary religious expressions, their social and cultural functions, and their role in maintaining ecological balance.
- **Indigenous knowledge systems:** Investigating traditional ecological knowledge, healing practices, and sustainable food systems as integral aspects of Indigenous spirituality.
- **The challenges and resilience of Indigenous religions in the face of colonialism, nationalism, globalization, and climate change.**

By the end of the course, students will develop a nuanced understanding of the rich tapestry of Indigenous religious thought and practice across the Americas, fostering a deep appreciation for these invaluable cultural and ecological perspectives.

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous peoples' diverse religious beliefs and practices across the Americas, focusing on North America, Mesoamerica, the Andes, and the Amazon.
2. Analyze and compare the cosmological and ontological frameworks of various Indigenous cultures, including their conceptions of the universe, humanity's place within it, and the interconnectedness of all beings.
3. Evaluate the significance of sacred landscapes and natural resources in Indigenous religious and cultural life and explain the complex relationships between Indigenous peoples and their environments.
4. Describe and analyze the role of ritual, ceremony, and spiritual practices in Indigenous communities, including their social, cultural, and ecological functions.
5. Assess the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems in shaping worldviews and practices, including traditional ecological knowledge, healing practices, and sustainable food systems.
6. Appreciate Indigenous concepts of ownership and stewardship, reciprocity and exchange with the natural world, the role of ceremony and ritual in economic life
7. The impact of colonial and capitalist economies on Indigenous worldviews
8. Critique the impact of colonialism, globalization, and climate change on Indigenous religions and cultures and analyze the challenges and strategies for preserving Indigenous heritage.
9. Apply anthropological and religious studies methodologies to explore and understand Indigenous perspectives on the world.

10. Communicate effectively about complex religious and cultural concepts through written and oral presentations.

This course may count towards the minor/certificate in Latin American Studies.

Click [here](#) for more information about enrolling in the undergraduate programs offered by the Center for Latin American Studies and [here](#) for the graduate programs.

Do not hesitate to contact the undergraduate coordinator at luisgomezlomeli@ufl.edu if you have any questions. If you are a graduate student, contact the graduate coordinator, Clate Korsant, at ckorsant@latam.ufl.edu.

Textbook chapters from this book and supplementary readings:

Crawford O'Brien, Suzanne, and Ines Talamantez. 2021. *Religion and Culture in Native America*. Rowman & Littlefield

Exams and Grading

This course has two take-home exams (each one is 20% of the total final grade). Both exams will be in essay format and have more extended essay questions.

Students are also required to write a term paper during the semester. The paper is expected to be approximately 4000 words, typed and double-spaced. The paper should follow the format guidelines of the journal *American Anthropologist*. **It is on a topic of your choice** but approved ahead of time. I'll send you detailed directions and a list of suggested topics next week. Students must submit a brief proposal (4% of the grade) to facilitate their writing, outlining the paper topic and critical sources. The paper is worth 16 % of the final grade.

Because of the discussion-oriented nature of the class, students will be graded on the quality of class participation. Participation is a constructive activity, which means you must have interesting and valuable things to contribute to the discussion and remain sensitive to others in the classroom. Being disrespectful of other opinions or hogging the spotlight is just as bad as not saying anything. Your participation grade is worth 20 points (20% of your final grade); this is a manageable course component.

Because actual participation remains an unusual component of most college classrooms, I should add that "participation" and "discussion" are not unstructured activities. Instead, much of the discussion is guided by instructor questions about the readings and in-class discussions of particular topics.

In summary, the grade breakdown for the course looks like the following:

First take-home exam	20 points
Second take-home exam	20
Proposal term paper	4
Term Paper 4000 words approx.	16
Participation in class	20
Attendance	20
Total	100

Letter grades are as follows:

A	93 – 100%	C-	70 – 72.9%
A-	90 – 92.9%	D+	68 – 69.9%
B+	88 – 89.9%	D	63 – 67.9%
B	83 – 87.9%	D-	60 – 61.9%
B-	80 – 82.9%	E	0 – 59.9%
C+	78 – 79.9%		
C	73 – 77.9%		

A complete listing of university policies on grades may be found at <http://graduateschool.ufl.edu/files/handbook.pdf>.

The paper should follow the format guidelines of the journal American Anthropologist.

There is a large amount of literature to be covered in this class, and each student must be able to discuss each article. You are responsible for all of the readings. It always helps to write a review on each article or chapter you read and have notes on the topics relevant for the discussion and questions on the take-home on the aspects that you need help understanding.

Disclaimer: During the semester, the schedule and course requirements may be adjusted. All changes will be announced.

Just to let you know, attendance is required.

No extra credit is offered for this course.

Course Policies

Electronics. Cell phones must be turned off during class. If you insist on using a laptop (not entirely necessary, as I will post any PowerPoint presentations I might use), social media sites must be off. A significant body of research demonstrates that students who use laptops during class do significantly worse than students who do not.

Academic Honesty. Unless it is connected explicitly to assigned collaborative work, all work should be individual. Evidence of collusion (working with someone not connected to the class or assignment), plagiarism (use of someone else's published or unpublished words or design without acknowledgment), or multiple submissions (submitting the same work for different courses) will lead to the Department's and the University's procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the [University's Honor Code \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the [Disability Resource Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Links to an external site.](#) The DRC will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. **You'll need to make a request for me.**

UF Counseling Services. Resources are available on campus for students who have personal problems or need more clear career and academic goals that interfere with their academic performance. These resources include:

1. [University Counseling and Wellness Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Links to an external site.](#), 3190 Radio Road, 392-1575. Personal, career, and emergency counseling.
2. [Career Resource Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Links to an external site.](#), Reitz Union, 392-1601, Career development assistance and counseling
3. [Writing Studio \(Links to an external site.\)](#) [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Links to an external site.](#) 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Writing assistance, study skills, test preparation

Course Evaluations. Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing evaluations. Evaluations are typically open during the last 2-3 weeks of the semester, but students will be notified of specific times when they are open. [Summary results \(Links to an external site\)](#) [\(Links to an external site\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#) of these assessments are also available to students.

Course Outline

Module 1: Introduction to Indigenous Worldviews and Methodologies (Weeks 1-2)

- Understanding Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies
- Animism as a foundational worldview.
- Shamanism as a spiritual practice and role.
- Ethical considerations in Indigenous studies

Module 2: Land, Water, and Climate (Weeks 3-4)

- Indigenous concepts of land and territory
- Water as a sacred element
- Climate change and Indigenous perspectives
- Animistic perspectives on land, water, and climate

Module 3: Sacred Sites and Cultural Heritage (Weeks 5-6)

- Protecting sacred places
- Cultural heritage and intellectual property
- Indigenous tourism and cultural revitalization
- Sacred economic relations between humans and non-humans

Module 4: Food Sovereignty and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Weeks 7-8)

- Animistic relationships with food and plants
- Reclaiming Indigenous foods
- Traditional ecological knowledge and sustainability
- Food as medicine and cultural identity

Module 5: Health, Wellness, and Spirituality (Weeks 9-10)

- Indigenous healing practices
- Mental health and well-being
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Shamanic healing and spiritual practices

Module 6: Social Justice and Indigenous Women (Weeks 11-12)

- Gender and spirituality in Indigenous cultures
- Violence against Indigenous women
- Indigenous feminism and activism

Module 7: Contemporary Indigenous Movements (Weeks 13-14)

- Indigenous rights and self-determination
- Environmental activism
- Indigenous youth leadership

Module 8: Course Synthesis and Future Directions (Week 15-16)

- Review of key concepts and themes
- Student-led presentations on selected topics
- Exploring future research and engagement opportunities

CRITICAL DATES

Term Paper Proposal, Due September 16

First, the take-home exam is due on September 24

Term Papers are due November 5

The second take-home exam is due on November 19