

INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAS

REL2388/ANT3930

General Education: Humanities (H) and Writing (4000 words)

Instructor: Dr. Robin Wright, Department of Religion. Anderson Hall 107C. <https://wrightrobin.academia.edu/> (Links to an external site.); <https://religion.ufl.edu/faculty/core/robin-m-wright/> (Links to an external site.)

Meeting Time: MWF (Period 4: 10:40 – 11:30)

Meeting location: AND0013

Office: Anderson Hall 107C

Office Hours: In-person (MWF 12:00-1:55) /remote (by arrangement)

Description & Objectives of the Course:

This course introduces the student to the historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices of Native peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean. With such a vast and diverse universe to study, our approach will (1) highlight key features of indigenous religious traditions throughout the Americas; (2) discuss central features of religious traditions in various of the major historical civilizations in the Americas; and (3) focus on religious ethnographies of contemporary native peoples in all regions.

The course is organized into five main sections:

(1) The Introduction discusses key themes and features of indigenous religious traditions in all of the Americas and Caribbean.

(2) Native Religions of the Caribbean discusses narratives of creation, sacred landscapes, ritual specialists, religious and ethnic resurgence.

(3) Native Central American Religions discusses ancient and historical civilizations, cosmologies and ceremonialism, sacred places and times, centralization of sacred power.

(4) Native South American Religions, focusing especially on Amazonia: contemporary spiritual specialists, cosmologies, ceremonial cycles, sacred places, sacred plants.

and (5) Native North American Religious traditions, including creation narratives, sacred landscapes, contemporary ceremonialism, and the spiritual foundations of political activism.

All **Readings** are provided in pdf format, in the Modules section, except for the required *Popol Vuh* (Bazzett translation in Kindle version).

Role in Curriculum

This course is required for those who intend to minor in American Indian and Indigenous Studies or are in the Interdisciplinary Studies Major. [For more information, visit: <https://aiis.clas.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.)]

Assignments and Grading Rubric

Assignments

- Attendance (tracked in class)
- Writing: four 5-page papers
- Other small individual and group assignments

Assignment Description

1. Course participation and attendance (15% of grade). Includes attendance and contribution to class discussions. To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment.
2. Papers: (70% of grade)
 - four 5-page paper (400 points). Write four 5-page papers on religious traditions in each of the major regions discussed, highlighting key themes in the ethnographies (1200 to 1500 words plus bibliography). Prompts will be provided in the Assignments tab. A Writing Rubric can also be found in the Assignments tab. We will be going over the paper requirements in detail.
3. Other Assignments (15% of grade): Oral presentations. These will be done at the end of the course and will consist of a brief (10-minute) discussion of what you perceive to be cross-cutting spiritual values of importance among all of the religions we have studied during the course.

Grading Policies

The course follows the standard UF grading scheme.

- o A 94 to 100
- o A- <94 to 90
- o B+ <90 to 87

- o B <87 to 84
- o B- <84 to 80
- o C+ <80 to 77
- o C <77 to 74
- o C- <74 to 70
- o D+ <70 to 67
- o D <67 to 64
- o D- <64 to 61
- o E <61 to 0

The course instructor reserves the right to lower or raise course grades based on classroom contributions or upon absences. There is no A+ grade. Grades are not rounded up; for example, a 93.85% is an A- and not an A; grades are consistent with UF policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

Late or Missing Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit.

Course Policies

Communication with Instructor

Communication and grading will take place online through Canvas. Please enable Canvas to forward all course announcements and instructor communications to your email so that you stay informed. You may email me directly but communication through Canvas is preferred.

Use of Technology

During class, electronic devices may be used only for notetaking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings or completing online polls. Headphones may not be worn in class.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations (including those involving the use of technology) is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as

confidential as possible. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. The Disability Resource Center may be contacted here: 352-392-8565; <https://disability.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.)

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is required. Please make the classes on time, and let me know about any planned absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible, and at least 24 hours in advance. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let me know as soon as possible and provide paper or electronic documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if possible. While some absences are unavoidable, if you expect to be unable to make classes on a regular basis, you must receive permission in advance. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog.

COVID-19 Protocols

In response to COVID-19, the following practices are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- **Vaccines** are readily available at no cost and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit this link for details on where to get your shot, including options that do not require an appointment: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/vaccinations/vaccine-availability/>.
- It is recommended that you wear approved **face coverings** during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated. Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.

o sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.

o Hand sanitizing stations are located in every classroom.

- If you are sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email

covid@shcc.ufl.edu) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus. UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website for more information.

o Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

o If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.

- Continue to regularly visit coronavirus.ufhealth.org and coronavirus.ufl.edu for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and vaccination.

All lectures will be recorded for the benefit of enrolled students who may miss class for excused reasons, such as illness or quarantine. Students with an excused absence may be allowed to make up classes via recorded lectures. However, those without a valid excuse can only receive credit for attendance by attending class in the classroom. I am not offering a hybrid option for this course.

Returned Assignments

Assignments will usually be graded no later than one week after they were due.

Academic Honesty and the Honor Code

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 may 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 the policy website (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) ([Links to an external site.](#)) for more information.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations during the available interval. Summary results of these assessments will be available to students.

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CONTENT OF THE COURSE

This course seeks to present an in-depth understanding of the cosmogonies (views on creation), cosmologies (the spatiotemporal structures of the universe), relations among all living beings (what constitutes a 'person', and what constitute 'religious specialists'), and eschatologies (views on death and regeneration) of the native societies studied. The methodologies this course adopts are comparative, historical, and interpretative.

An Introduction discusses key features of indigenous religious traditions in general: ceremonial life, sacred narratives (or myths), worldviews (often called by non-indigenous, 'Animism'; known by native people as 'Tradition'), and language.

While the course highlights the diversity of indigenous religions and their resilience [i.e., how they have withstood colonial histories], it also discusses the ongoing threats to their continuity, among which are: the appropriations by non-indigenous peoples of indigenous beliefs and practice, land loss and heritage destruction, the shattering of religious institutions during the conquest, and the imposition of Christianity. Indigenous spiritualities have demonstrated their remarkable resilience by engaging in processes of healing, through the resurgence of religious traditions, the spiritualization of political change, and the ongoing critiques of Western religion and its impositions on their spiritualities.

Reading Assignments and Course Schedule:

08/24: Course presentation and Readings.

INTRODUCTION

08/26: A Continental Perspective: connections and exchanges

(powerpoint of "Maps of Native Peoples of the Americas")

08/31: Ceremonial Life and Mythology as Sacred

Readings: "Religion", George Tinker, *Encyclopedia of Native American Religion*; and "The Sacred in Nature: Mythology can change our minds", in John Mohawk, *Thinking in Indian*

09/02: Animist Traditions

Reading: Linda Hogan, "We Call it Tradition"

09/07: Language and Thought

Readings: Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Learning the Grammar of Animacy"

PART I. INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS OF THE CARIBBEAN

09/09: Ancient Island Cultures

Readings: watch at home "The People Who Greeted Columbus" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2Zc9NhO8I> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)



[site.\) \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

09/12: Historical sources on Taino society and Religion

Reading: Jose Barreiro, "Beyond the Myth of Extinction"[pdf in Modules]

09/14: The Modern-Day Resurgence of "Taino" Ethnicity

Readings: Barreiro, *Dreaming*, Introduction, pp. 17-37.

09/16: Biographical history of Cacik Panchito Ramirez

Readings: Barreiro, *Dreaming...*, pp. 37-74.

09/19: Life and Teachings of Panchito

Readings: Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 75 - 107.

09/21: Teachings / Summary of Part I

Readings: Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 108-27

PART II: INDIGENOUS CENTRAL AMERICA: OLMEC, AZTEC, MAYA, AND HYBRID TRADITIONS

09/23: Introduction

Readings: Introduction & Chapter 1 in Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*

09/26: The Olmec, Teotihuacan, Classic Maya

Readings: Carrasco, Ch. 2.

09/28: Religion of the Aztecs

Readings: Carrasco, Ch. 3.

Watch at Home: "The Five

Suns" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQcy2D_MBUg&t=1622s&ab_channel=Calm



[ecacXochipilli \(Links to an external site.\) \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

09/30: Maya Religion

Readings: Carrasco, Ch. 4.

NOTE: PAPERS ON THE CARIBBEAN DUE TODAY

10/03: The Mayan Creation Narrative - 1

Readings: *The Popol Vuh* (Bazzett Translation) Introduction, Parts 1 & 2

Watch at Home:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOEQNo5m4rg&t=918s&ab_channel=PhilHarris (Li



[nks to an external site.\) \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

10/05: The Mayan Creation Narrtive - 2

Readings: *The Popol Vuh* (Bazzett transl.), Parts 3 & 4

10/07: Contemporary 'Hybrid' Religions in Central America

Readings: Carrasco, Ch. 5.

PART III: INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS OF HIGHLAND (THE ANDES) & LOWLAND SOUTH AMERICA (THE AMAZON)

10/10: Ancient Civilizations of the Andes– the Pilgrimage site of Chavin de Huantar

Watch at home: documentaries on Chavin de

Huantar: (1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCfQjn0IG74> (Links to an external site.)



; (2)<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBas6hNXTLM> (Links to



[an external site.](#))

and

(3)<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnloffCCyBI> (Links to an external site.)



10/12: Ancient Civilizations of the Andes - Tiwanako Ceremonial Life

Watch: BBC documentary on the temples at Tiwanako: “The Stone at the Centre”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmT0IBSc54o> (Links to an external site.) (Links to



[an external site.](#))

OCTOBER 12 IS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY

10/14: Ancient Civilizations of the Andes - The Inca

Watch at home: “The Inca – Cities in the Clouds, Parts 1 &

2<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRB9dJmZhVk> (Links to an external site.)



and <https://youtu.be/BRB9dJmZhVk> (Links to an external site.)



10/17: Amazonian Indigenous Religious Traditions

Readings: Gomes, Denise. "Santarem: Symbolism and Power in the Tropical Forest";

Highly recommended: Gomes, D. "Indigenous Societies in Brazil before the European Arrival"

10/19: Introduction to the Yanomami of the Amazon

Reading: Hutukara, "The Yanomami in Brazil" (pdf in Modules);

10/21: Two ways of Seeing the World

Readings: Ch. 1, "Drawn Words", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

10/24: Narrative of the First shamans

Readings: Ch. 2, "The First Shaman", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

NOTE: PAPERS ON CENTRAL AMERICA DUE TODAY

10/26: Getting to Know the Xapiri spirits

Readings: Ch. 3, "The Xapiri's Gaze", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky*

Watch: "Xapiri" <https://vimeo.com/47012586> (Links to an external site.) [This is an experimental film inspired by Yanomami shamanism]

10/28: Humans and Animals Share Common Ancestors

Readings: Ch. 4, "The Animal Ancestors", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky*

10/31:

Readings: Ch. 8, "The Sky and the Forest", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky*

11/02: Ritual, Power and Authority in the Xingu

Readings: Carlos Fausto, "Chiefly Jaguar, Chiefly Tree. Mastery and Authority in the Upper Xingu", pp. 37-69

11/04: "Enchanted Cities" in the Northwest Amazon

Readings: R. Wright, "Cities of Transformations and Power in the Baniwa and Kuripako Cosmos." (in press) in: *Urban Imaginaries in Indigenous Amazonia*, F. Santos-Granero & E. Fabbiano, eds. University of Arizona Press.

11/07: **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PART III**

PART IV. NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN TRADITIONS

11/09: Joel Martin, Native American Religion, Chapter 1, "Circling Earth", pp. 14-38.

Watch: "Cities of the Sky" <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/cities-of-the-sky?context=channel:academic-video-online> (Links to an external site.)

11/14: Cosmologies and Ceremonialism of the Moundbuilders

Readings: Williamson, Raymond. 1984. Chapter 11: "Eastern Sun Worship." In Living the Sky: The Cosmos of the American Indian, pp. 236-288

Watch: "Cahokia." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_ddTW7CADO (Links to an



[external site.](#)) (Links to an external site.)

11/16: Timucua Culture and religious traditions

Readings: Tamara Spike, "Death and Death Ritual among the Timucua of Spanish Florida", pp. 187-201; and Spike, "Sucking, Blood and Fire: Timucuan Healing Practices in Spanish Florida", pp. 143-68.

For general reading on the Timucua: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timucua> (Links to an external site.)

PAPERS ON SOUTH AMERICAN TRADITIONS DUE TODAY

11/18: Native American Ceremonialism and Colonial history

Readings: Martin, Chapter 2, "Tradition and Crisis in the Eastern Woodlands", pp. 39-66

11/21: Conversion & Transformation to Christians

Readings: Martin, Chapter 3, "Native and Christian", pp. 67-90

[THANKSGIVING BREAK: 11/23-26]

11/28: Prophets and Revitalization Movements

Readings: Martin, Chapter 4, "New Religions in the West", pp. 91-119

11/30: Contemporary Religious and spiritual Issues

Readings: Martin, Chapter 5, "Homecoming", pp. 120-145

12/02: Oral Presentations

12/05: Oral Presentations

12/07: Oral Presentations

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PART IV – CONCLUSION OF COURSE

PAPERS ON NORTH AMERICAN TRADITIONS DUE BY DECEMBER 12