

# **Religion, Medicine and Healing: Contemporary Perspectives**

## **Syllabus**

### **I. Instructor and Teaching Assistant for the course**

Professor Robin M. Wright; TAs

### **II. Course Website**

Students are held responsible for all materials and related information posted on the course website. The required E-textbook for the course, titled Religion, Medicine, and Healing – Contemporary Perspectives (Kendallhunt, 2014) contains all of the reading material for the course. All assignments and grades, as well as announcements, will be posted on the course website.

### **III. Course description**

The focus of this course is on healers and healing practices in various religious traditions around the globe. The most important themes we shall discuss are:

- the 'efficacy' of religious symbols for the healing process; cross-
- cultural notions of the body, of pain, and healing; embodiment
- of healing powers by religious specialists;
- ritual healing performances and their meanings;
- the importance of sound, sonic imagery, and music to healing processes;

- the relations of healing practices to cosmology, metaphysics, and sacred narratives;
- the transformations of self and meaning that emerge during or from a cure.
- Intellectual Property Rights (esp. healing knowledge) of indigenous societies.

The healing traditions we shall study, by ethnic groups, religions, or geographical regions, are the following:

- Indigenous shamanisms of the Americas and urban mestizos of Latin America;
- Asian, Eurasian, and Southeast Asian shamanisms;
- Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism;
- Judaism and Christianity;
- Naturopathy and Nature Religions.

## **IV. Course Structure and Readings**

All Readings are reprinted in the E-anthology for the course (Kendallhunt, 2016); some are available also via links to websites. The sequence of Modules begins with a discussion of theoretical and empirical questions that connect Medicine and Healing Traditions with Religion. Western biomedicine is a specific approach to healing that in general gives little credence to non-Western spiritual matters, non-Cartesian philosophies, non-Aristotelian metaphysics. By contrast, non-Western and local traditions derive their efficacy from beliefs in the existence of multiple souls, interaction with non-human spirits, and specialists who have obtained their knowledge and power through religious experiences.

Module 2 presents a selection from the vast array of shamanic healing practices developed by indigenous Amazonia and Asia. In traditional contexts, sickness-giving spirits, soul-loss, and sorcery are among the most important explanations given for illness. In their rituals, the shamans perform their journey to the Other World, or make contacts with the spirit world. These performances are in themselves highly structured events, musical and

poetic, the goal of which is to return the sick person's soul, or part of it to the sick person's body. In urban shamanism, spirits have a different connotation altogether, having to do with ethnic, cultural, and individual identities. This has produced a re-inventing of shamanic practices to make them more appropriate to the urban contexts.

Modules 3 – 7 take us on a panoramic and historic journey to several of the best-known, non-Western healing traditions where there are open connections between religious belief and medicinal practice. This is fully understandable once we learn the extent to which the notions of 'body', 'soul', 'illness' and 'health' are intertwined in their cosmologies, metaphysics, and ontologies.

The clearest associations amongst all elements can be seen in cultures with highly-developed medical systems that are intimately tied to the deities, extensive pharmacologies and ecological knowledge, and above all, a clear notion of a divine 'life-force' or 'vital principle' - and 'balance' that must be maintained with one's surroundings, as well as between one's inner self and external environment. In order for there to be healthy communities, such conditions of balance must prevail. We can see this especially well not only in Mayan and Traditional Chinese Medicine, but also in the ancient "Four Tantras" traditions of Buddhism. The Medicine Buddha's extensive knowledge of the natural elements and their properties, the combinations of minerals and plants in complex remedies, were developed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE. The Ayurvedic Tradition of Medicine, associated with Hinduism, follows Buddhism in its teachings that disease is the result of excess, and that the "Middle Way" is the path to maintaining good health. We also take a brief glimpse at the varieties of "religious sicknesses", that is, syndromes associated with conversion, from the testimonials of Charismatic Catholics relating their possession by demons, to the ecstatic Sufi healing dance and devotional tradition called *qawalli*.

The use of herbal remedies was a predominant form of treating illness until the 1920s and '30s, when Western Biomedicine assumed a claim over the field in such a way that any lingering 'ancient knowledge', 'folk knowledge', popular healer's knowledge, or even spirituality, were purged from the dominant biomedicine-technology model. Since then, that model has demonstrated that it has its strengths

and its weaknesses. It seems to be a common opinion today that the ideal paradigm is one based on “Integrative” Medicine which does not close its doors to ‘alternative’, ‘non-conventional’ forms of medicine, but rather, adopts a cautious approach to inclusion.

The international recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to keep their medicinal knowledge intact stands in stark contrast with its actual rapid disappearance. Recovering and/or re-vitalizing traditional knowledge and practice is thus vital to the indigenous side of the issues.

In Western culture, there is a syndrome called the “disconnect with nature”. The phrase refers to the barriers the West has constructed historically, separating us from non-Western societies by symbolic and political domination, massive alterations of the natural environment, and a blind trust in the future of high technology. In light of this, there is an overwhelming need to know, recover, and where possible live the healing experiences of traditional peoples. All who are engaged in this endeavor ultimately stand to gain from the exchange.

## **V. Course objectives:**

Students who successfully complete this course will be well-versed in the following aspects of Medicine that are not usually studied in standard courses:

- Phenomenological studies of experiences of sickness and healing; contrasting approaches to sickness and healing among both traditional and non-traditional peoples;
- ‘Aesthetic’ aspects of healing: the importance of the religious imagination in representing pain, the notion of ‘soul-loss’; synaesthesia, ethnopoetics, sonic imagery; music and religion; music and healing; relations of ethnomusicology and medical anthropology;
- ‘Performance’: traditional healing relies on a wide variety of performative aspects (e.g., dance and induction of altered states of consciousness) that must be mastered by the healer during his/her training; these aspects are crucial for shamanic traditions

of ‘community healing’ in which specialists embody through performance the ancestral energy, or life-force, transmitting it in their cures;

- Diversity in cultural meanings of sickness and healing (in cosmology, cosmogony, ontology, eschatology); sources of and access to, spiritual ‘power’;
- Plant spirit shamanism, ‘ayahuasca’ curanderos or ‘vegetalistas’ of urban Latin America who seek through visionary experience a cure for their clients; importance of sacred plants in healing rites; Mayan herbalists;
- Healing as a process consisting of distinct phases; the relations between categories of illness and modes of healing; ritual forms, dietary restrictions, and preventive modes of protection against illness;
- The ‘embodiment’ of the sacred, in Western Pentecostal Christianity and Charismatic Catholicism, and its importance to understanding processes of healing;
- The relevance of the socio-political contexts in which non-conventional healers work, their relation to ‘dominant structures’ of scientific expertise; economic, political power.

## **VI. The Readings (all Readings are in this Anthology, unless otherwise specified):**

### **Module 1: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

- ❖ “What is Specific to Western Medicine?” by Arthur Kleinman, In: Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine, Vol. 1, edited by W. F. Bynum and R. Porter, Routledge, 1993, pp. 15-23.
- ❖ “Pain and Bodies” by Jean E. Jackson In: A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment edited by Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 370-387.

## Module 2: Shamanisms of the World

### 2.1 Northwest Amazonia: shamanic knowledge and power to heal

- ❖ Ch. 2, Wright, R.M. "The Making of a Jaguar Shaman", In: *Mysteries of the Jaguar Shamans of the Northwest Amazon*. 2013 U Nebraska Press.

### 2.2 Ayahuasca: sound and pattern medicine

- ❖ "The Symbolic Efficacy of Rituals: From Ritual to Performance" by Esther Jean Langdon;
- ❖ "La Medicina: Ritual and Healing with Ayahuasca" by James Taylor;

### 2.3 Shamanic performance in the Himalayas: feeling the presence of spirits

- ❖ "Presence" by Robert R. Desjarlais, In: *The Performance of Healing*, edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, NY: Routledge. 1996, pp. 143-164. (**Reading on website**)
- ❖ "The Man Chinni Exorcism Rite of Tamang Shamans" by Larry G. Peters, *Shaman's Drum*, No. 55, 2000, pp. 16-25.

### 2.4. Healing through Musical Performance

- ❖ "Poetics of Healing in Malay Shamanistic Performance", Carol Laderman, In: *Laderman and Roseman*, 1996, pp. 115-141.

## 2.5. New Age shamanisms: rekindling lost spiritual awareness.

- ❖ “Core and Neo-Shamanism” by Joan Townsend, In: Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices, and culture, Mariko Namba Walter and Eva Jane Neumann Fridman, eds., 2004, Volume 1, pp. 49-57.

### **Module 3: Life-force and Balance: Mutual Understanding of Ancient Mayan & Chinese Medicinal Systems**

- ❖ “Human Relations with the Cosmos in Mayan and Chinese Medicine,” In: Wind in the Blood: Mayan Healing and Chinese Medicine by Hernan Garcia, Antonio Sierra, and Gilberto Balam, North Atlantic Books, 1999, pp. 1-20.

### **Module 4: Local Diversity vs State Centralization in Traditional Tibetan Medical Systems**

- ❖ “Tibetan Medicine Plurality” by Jan Salick, et al., Economic Botany, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Autumn, 2006), pp. 227–253.
- ❖ Geoffrey Samuels – Civilized Shamans: Buddhism In Tibetan Societies <https://www.scribd.com/document/216727610/81124806-Geoffrey-Samuels-Civilized-Shamans>
- ❖ John Myrdhin Reynolds. – “Ancient Tibetan Bonpo Shamanism” <http://www.holybooks.com/studies-tibetan-bon-tradition/>
- ❖ <http://www.tibetanmedicine-edu.org/images/stories/pdf/TibetanMedicineD1.pdf>

## **Module 5: Hindu Ayurvedic Medicine: Ancient Practice in a Pluralistic and Globalized Setting**

- ❖ “Indian Medicine?” by Dominik Wujastyk, In: Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine, Vol. 1, edited by W. F. Bynum and R. Porter, Routledge, 1993, pp. 755-778.
- ❖ “Modern Practice of Ayurveda and its Globalization” by Michaela Lee.

## **Module 6: Charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostal Christianity Healing**

- ❖ “Imaginal Performance and Memory in Ritual Healing” by Thomas J. Csordas, in The Performance of Healing edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, NY: Routledge. 1996, pp. 91-113.

## **Module 7: Sufism. Healing in the *Qawalli* devotional tradition**

- ❖ “Unseen Power: Aesthetic Dimensions of Symbolic Healing in Qawwuālī” (text only) by James R. Newell, The Muslim World, Vol. 97, October 2007, pp. 640-656.

## **Module 8: Naturopathy & Herbal Medicine**

- ❖ “Naturopathy”, in Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturopathy>
- ❖ "Use of Herbal Medicines and Implications for Conventional Drug Therapy Medical Sciences" Rivera JO, Loya AM and Ceballos R. Alternative and Integrative Medicine. 2013, 2:6



- ❖ “The Multiple Uses of Cannabis for Religious Purposes”, C. A. Wright, paper presented at the 2011 Symposium on “Plants and Healing”.

## **Module 9: Contemporary Nature Religions: Healing the Planet, Revitalizing Ecosystems, Native and Western Medicines**

- ❖ “Nature Religions in the U.S.”, by Catherine Albanese, In: Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Bron Taylor, editor. NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005, pp. 1175-1186.
- ❖ “Ecopsychology”, by Andy Fisher, Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, *ibid.*
- ❖ “Ecotherapy and Ecotopia” by Cathrien de Pater, Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, *ibid.*
- ❖ “Dark Green Religion” by Bridgette O'Brien (excerpt from Ph.D. thesis);

## **Module 10: Protecting Traditional Medicinal Knowledge**

- ❖ “Monopolizing Medicinal Methods: The Debate Over Patent Rights for Indigenous Peoples” by Heather A. Sapp, In: Temple Journal of Science, Technology & Environmental Law, Vol. XXV, pp. 191– 212.

## **Module 11: Bibliographic Resources**

## **VII. Expectations:**

Our Responsibilities: To present a solid review of the subject matter. The Instructor and Teaching Assistant are committed to helping you understand the material. If you have any questions regarding course materials, policies, grading, and technical problems, contact one of us ahead of time. You are encouraged to ask questions through the course web page.

Your Responsibilities: To keep up with lectures, readings, films, and submitting assignments BEFORE the due date. This is an online course, and it is easy to fall behind, therefore you are encouraged to keep up with the “Lecture Schedule” provided on the Resources tab. You are expected to:

- Follow guidelines provided by the instructor: watch lectures, do the assigned readings, watch films or other audiovisual material by the assigned date;
- Submit assignments BEFORE the due date;
- Follow the honor code (see below). Remember: All written portions of assignments are checked for plagiarism.

## VII. Grading:

**Midterm and Final Exam:** The midterm exam will consist of a combination of question types: defining terms, multiple choice, and short essays. The material to be covered by the midterm includes everything from Day 1 of the course until mid-semester. Midterm exams will be opened under the Assignments section, at 8 a.m. and closed by midnight. The Final exam will be structured similarly to the Midterm, and will cover all material from midterm until the last day of class. The Final will be available at 8 a.m. and due by midnight. Keep in mind that exams are timed. Once you begin the exam, you will have 2 hours to complete it. Both the Midterm and the Final exams will be evaluated for possible plagiarism by the Turnitin tool.

**Attendance:** 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 at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

**Quizzes:** There will be a total of four multiple-choice quizzes. You will need to go to the Assignments tab on the date indicated on the Lecture Schedule and take the quiz. The quiz questions will be posted in the days **before** the quiz is to be taken. The quiz will open at 8 a.m. of the scheduled day and will close at midnight.

**Extra Credit Essay:** The wealth of material available for each topic makes it impossible to cover all of the interesting questions that are currently of great relevance to this course. Thus, for students interested in researching and writing a 3-5 page paper, extra credit points can be garnered (10 total to add on to your total final points).

**Grade calculations:**

Midterm Exam: 110 points (25%)

Final Exam: 110 points (25%)

Quizzes (4 – each worth 20 points): 80 points (50%)

Total: 300 points (100%)

Extra Credit points: maximum total of 5 points

Final scores will not be rounded (i.e., 89.92% is not 90%).

Your grade will be based on the average of one midterm exam, one final exam, and the five quizzes.

**Grade Scale:**

A: 95 - 100

A-: 90 - 94

B+: 87 - 90

B: 83 - 86

B-: 80 - 82

C+: 77 - 79

C: 73 - 76

C-: 70 - 72

D+: 67 - 69

D: 60 - 66

D-: 57 - 59

E: below 57

\* Note: A grade of C- is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, or College Basic distribution credit. For UF's policies on grade points and grading, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

## **VIII. Special Treatment**

We do not offer any kind of special treatment, or adjust grades on an individual basis. If you are having problems with the course material or health related problems, please contact instructor as soon as possible. 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.

## **IX. Email Communication**

All email correspondence to course instructors must be sent through the course website using the Mail function. Correspondence regarding the lecture, homework, and the overall course should be directed to the instructor, or TA.

## **X. Academic Honesty and the Honor Code**

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> for more information on UF policies.

## **XI. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting 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.

## **XII. Student Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.

