

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

## **Syllabus**

**General Education: Humanities (H),  
International (N), and Writing (2000 words)  
Material and Supplies: None**

Professor Robin M. Wright (Department of Religion, UF, Anderson 107C). For a brief biography, see: <https://religion.ufl.edu/faculty/core/robin-m-wright/>

## **I. Course description**

This course seeks to provide students with a broad base of scholarly reflections from the Humanities and allied fields on the importance of religious practices and beliefs related to healing and medicinal traditions around the globe. This course draws on contemporary perspectives that clarify the following themes:

- the effectiveness of religious symbols in the healing process.
- cross-cultural notions of the body, of pain, and healing.
- the embodiment of healing powers by religious specialists.
- ritual healing performances, their structures, and 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 healing procedures.
- Traditional healers and their socio-political contexts, e.g., state-

sponsored medicine and global religious processes.

- Healing the relations of human communities to their environments and /or traditional territories.
- Intellectual Property Rights (esp., healing and medicinal knowledge) of indigenous and traditional societies, and legal protections.

The healing and religious traditions we shall study include the following:

- Shamanisms of the Americas and Asia,
- the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam),
- Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism.

This course does not purport to be a Medical Humanities course, though perspectives from the medical sciences are most welcome. Its main emphasis is rather on non-biomedical healing and healers. To the extent possible, this course distinguishes local (Floridian) healing traditions (e.g., hydrotherapy) though its primary emphasis is on the most important international traditions, their content and the contexts in which they have developed.

## II. Course objectives:

This course will explore:

- (a) the diversity of cultural meanings and experiential aspects of sickness and healing in different cultures throughout the world (Gen Ed H & N).
- (b) cross-cultural representations of pain and sickness; the notion of 'soul-loss'; sicknesses due to spiritual imbalance in human-environmental relations (Gen Ed H).
- (c) the performative aspects of healing in which specialists embody a life-force that is transmitted through their cures (Gen Ed H).
- (d) the importance of herbal healing and associated spiritualities in numerous cultural traditions (Gen Ed H & N).
- (e) Healing as a spiritual process consisting of distinct phases, dietary restrictions, and preventive modes of protection against illness (Gen Ed H).
- (f) the relevance of the socio-political contexts in which non-conventional

- healers work, their relations with ‘dominant structures’ of scientific expertise, the state, corporations, etc. (Gen Ed N)
- (g) the histories of non-Western medical traditions grounded in religious and philosophical systems (e.g., Ayurveda, early Judaism) (Gen Ed H and N).
  - (h) the importance to health of the preservation of balance in human-environmental relations (Gen Ed H and N).
  - (i) the special knowledge that traditional healers possess and its protection through international legal mechanisms (Gen Ed H and N)

This course thus fulfills the **Humanities (H)** course designation of the Gen Ed requirements which specify that Humanities courses must “provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.”

This course also fulfills the **International (N)** course designation which “promote the development of students’ global and intercultural awareness. Students examine the cultural, economic, geographic, historical, political, and/or social experiences and processes that characterize the contemporary world, and thereby comprehend the trends, challenges, and opportunities that affect communities around the world. Students analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultural, economic, political, and/or social systems and beliefs mediate their own and other people’s understanding of an increasingly connected world.”

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):** Students who successfully complete this course will become knowledgeable in the diversity of healing traditions among cultures throughout the world that are not usually studied in standard courses.

### **Humanities SLOs:**

At the end of the course, students will be able to

- (1) identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theories and

methodologies used by scholars in the study of the intersections of Religion, Medicine and Healing. **(Content)**

(2) identify and evaluate key elements, ideas and influences that shape thought regarding the intersections of Religion, Medicine and Healing. This course approaches issues and problems from multiple perspectives and across disciplines (Religion and Anthropology, History, Ecology, especially). **(Critical Thinking)**

(3) through their written work and course participation students will synthesize and communicate their knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively. **(Communication)**

### **International SLOs:**

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

(1) Identify, describe, and explain historical, cultural, political, and/or social experiences and processes that have characterized the relationships between traditional practitioners and state-sponsored medical institutions in different cultures of the world. **(Content)**

(2) Analyze and reflect on the ways in which different cultural, political, and religious systems and beliefs related to medicine and healing have become interconnected in the globalized world. **(Critical Thinking)**

(3) Clearly and effectively communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning regarding non-Western forms of medicine. **(Communication)**

## **III. Course Structure**

Module 1: Concepts

Module 2: Shamanisms

Module 3: Mayan Healing

Module 4: East Asian Religions and Medicine

Module 5: Ayurvedic Medicine & Hinduism

Module 6: Tibetan Buddhism

Module 7: Healing in Judaism

Module 8: Christianity and Healing

Module 9: Healing in Islam

Module 10: Naturopathic Medicine

Module 11: Nature Religions and Healing the Planet

Module 12: Traditional Healing Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights

All Readings are reprinted in the E-anthology for the course (Kendallhunt, 2016); some are available also via links to websites.

**Explanation of Modules:** the course begins (**Module 1**) with a discussion of theoretical and empirical questions that connect Medicine and Healing Traditions with Religion. Western biomedicine is a specific approach to curing illnesses that in general privileges standardized, evidence-based treatment validated through biological research, with treatment administered via formally trained doctors, nurses, and other such licensed practitioners. By contrast, non-Western and local traditions derive their effectiveness in restoring health from a set of spiritual or religious beliefs, a group of specialists who have obtained their knowledge and power through religious experiences, and practices that directly engage spiritual beliefs with bodily processes and the environment. Effectiveness is, of course, a culturally bound term that refers to the qualitative changes that occur in a person or community's health and well-being through the restoration of a sense of order, balance and harmony.

**Module 2** presents a selection from the vast array of shamanic healing

practices developed in indigenous Amazonia and Asia. Spirit-based traditions often represent healing, performatively, as a cosmic quest or struggle against harmful and intrusive spirit forces. 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 body, thereby restoring health and balance. Shamanism has developed within the political-economic context of colonialism, dealing as it can with the sicknesses produced by its impact. Shamanism has become a commodity in the global market, compromising the authenticity of spiritual experiences sought by persons seeking treatment.

**Modules 3 – 6** present an historical panorama of several of the best-known, non-Western healing traditions where there were and often still are, open connections between religious belief and medicinal practice. These are cultures with highly developed medical systems that are still intimately tied to the sacred, to ecology, and above all, to notions of a divine 'life-force' or 'vital principle', and 'balance' that must be maintained between one's inner self and external environment. Modules 3 and 4 present traditional Mayan and Chinese Medicine, while Module 6 focusses on the ancient "Four Tantras" traditions of Buddhism. The Ayurvedic Tradition of Medicine associated with Hinduism is presented in Module 5. Both it and Buddhism teach that disease is the result of excess, and that the "Middle Way" is the path to maintaining good health. In the four traditions, the extensive knowledge of natural elements and their properties, the combinations of minerals and plants in complex remedies, has been inherited from a "classic" past. In the context of the contemporary world, each tradition has a variable relation with the secular state and Western biomedicine

**Modules 7 – 9** explore the history of healing beliefs and practices in the so-called Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) from Biblical times to the present. "Holistic healing" in contemporary Judaism presents an important critique of modern patient-doctor relation that have become bereft of qualitative human experiences. In Charismatic Catholicism, healing is predicated on the patient's experience of engagement with performances by specialists. In the Sufi healing tradition called *qawwali*, musical performance is combined with healing and devotion to the saints, along with the 'unseen power' that restores harmony and balance.

**Module 10** centers around Naturopathic Medicine. The use of herbal remedies and other natural procedures was a predominant form of treating illness in the US until the 1920s and '30s, when Western Biomedicine

assumed a claim over the field. Afterwards, there was a campaign to purge any lingering ‘ancient knowledge’, ‘folk knowledge’, and spirituality, from the politically and economically dominant, biomedicine-technology model. Since then, the biomedical model has demonstrated its strengths and weaknesses. There seems to be a growing tendency today towards an “Integrative” Medicine that does not close its doors to ‘alternative’, ‘non-conventional’ forms of medicine, but rather, adopts a cautious approach of inclusion.

In much scholarly writing, it has been demonstrated that the contemporary “disconnect with nature” has resulted in numerous modern-day sicknesses (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression). Western societies have produced massive alterations of the natural environment and this, predictably, has had major health consequences for societies impacted by these changes. **Module 11** explores how the concepts of the ‘healing powers of nature’ and the ‘natural order’ have been discussed in the recent history of Western thought. Various contemporary forms of therapy have been developed that seek to re-connect communities with their natural surroundings. Indigenous peoples’ recovery of their traditional territories has provided healing both the physical territory itself and its aboriginal caretakers.

Finally, **Module 12** explores the international recognition of the rights of indigenous and traditional peoples to keep their medicinal knowledge intact. This stands in stark contrast with its actual rapid disappearance, highlighting the importance of legal measures to ensure the recovery and/or re-vitalization of traditional knowledge and practice.

## IV. Readings:

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 most of the reading material for the course. Other Reading assignments are uploaded to the Modules pages of the course website.

## V. Expectations:

Our Responsibilities: To present a solid review of the subject matter. The Instructor and Teaching Assistant(s) 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 Discussion or Chat tabs.

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 in the Resources tab. All changes in assignments and grades, as well as announcements, will be posted on the course website. 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 written assignments on or BEFORE the due date.
- Submit assignments in the appropriate place. **DO NOT** send us any assignment through personal emails nor leave a hard copy at our offices.
- Follow the honor code (see below). Remember: All written portions of assignments are checked for plagiarism.

## VI. Assignments:

The following are the principal assignments for the course. A complete Assignments Schedule for the semester (including dates for writing submissions) may be found in the Course Materials tab on the course website.

**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>



**Midterm and Final Exam:** Both Midterm and Final are designed to assess the student's capacity for identifying, distinguishing, and critically evaluating the material presented in each half of the course. The midterm exam will consist of a combination of question types: defining key terms, multiple choice, and short essays. The essays require the students to distinguish key concepts and features in each tradition and to compare among the traditions. 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 tab, 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.

**Quizzes:** There will be a total of four (4) participation quiz assignments. The Quizzes are designed to evaluate the student's capacities for Critical Thinking and identification of Content. Students will need to go to the Assignments tab and take a multiple-choice quiz on the date indicated on the Lecture and Assignments Schedule. Quizzes open at 12:00 am and close at midnight of the same day. Do not attempt to take the quiz at 11:50 pm because the due date is at midnight and the assignment will close at that time. The quizzes will cover the material from the readings, lectures, lecture notes, and films.

Quizzes are intended to be "participatory" in the sense that students are encouraged to connect by e-mail (or other group meeting format) on the day prior to taking the quiz, when the Questions are posted (at 12 am), and discuss the possible answers to each of the Questions. Students should use the appropriate tab for the purpose of communicating ideas and substantively contributing to the Discussions. Part of your final grade (20 pts.) will be assessed by your participation in these Discussions. On the following day, each student will then individually enter her/his answers.

**Extra Credit Essay:** The wealth of material available on all topics related to the Modules 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 short essay on selected topics, extra credit points can be garnered (20 total) to add to your grade at the end of the semester. These essays require the student to reflect on key questions in the relations between Western and non-Western medicine. The essays will be assessed for content, for critical thinking, and for communication. The questions for the essays are available altogether under the Assignments tab where you can also submit your papers. Papers should be 750 words in length and in .doc format. Extra credit essays will be evaluated according to the same rubric as the Reflection Papers. Feedback on the Essays will be provided as written comments as soon after submission as feasible.

### **Recommended Writing Guide and Information About Citations:**

Strunk, William, and Elwyn B. White. 2014. *The Elements of Style*. Pearson, Boston MA.

Citation Management Guide from UF Libraries:  
<http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/citationsoftware>

## **VII. GRADES, GRADING DISTRIBUTION, AND GRADE POINTS:**

Grades for the course will be calculated through evaluation of the following assignments:

- Midterm Exam= 100 points
- Final Exam= 100 points
- Four Participation Quizzes – each worth 20 points= 80 points
- Discussion Participation= 20 points
- Extra Credit= 20 points

Your final grade will be based on the sum of the Reflection Papers, Midterm Exam, Final Exam, Participation Quizzes and, where applicable, the Extra Credit, divided by total possible number of points (300). Expressed in % values, Final Grades will be assigned based on the following chart:

A 93-100

A- 90-93

B+ 87-90

B 83-87

B- 80-83

C+ 77-80

C 73-77

C- 70-73

D+ 67-70

D 63-67

D- 60-63

E 0-60

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Grade points are assigned based on University of Florida policy:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Please Note:**

We do not offer any kind of special treatment or adjust grades on an individual basis. However, if you are having problems with the course material or health related problems, please contact the lead 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.

## **VIII. Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-3928565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) 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.

## **IX. Email Communication**

All email correspondence to course instructor and Teaching Assistant(s) must be sent through Canvas course website. Correspondence regarding the lecture, homework, and the overall course should be posted on the "General Course Questions" under the Discussion tab. Anything related to grades and personal matters should be sent using the emails of the Instructor ([baniwa05@ufl.edu](mailto:baniwa05@ufl.edu)) and TAs (Please do not post anything related to personal matters on the Discussion tab).

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

### **Plagiarism or cheating:**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code ([sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/](http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

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. 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> (Links to an external site.) for more information on UF policies.

## **XI. Online Course Evaluation by Students:**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations 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/results/>

## **XII. Campus Resources:**

### Health and Wellness

*U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [umatter.ufl.edu/](http://umatter.ufl.edu/) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit [counseling.ufl.edu/](http://counseling.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

*Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit [shcc.ufl.edu/](http://shcc.ufl.edu/).

*University Police Department:* Visit [police.ufl.edu/](http://police.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

*UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center).

### Academic Resources

*E-learning technical support:* Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

*Career Connections Center:* Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services [career.ufl.edu/](http://career.ufl.edu/).

*Library Support:* [cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask](http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask) various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

*Teaching Center:* Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. [teachingcenter.ufl.edu/](http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/)

*Writing Studio:* 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. [writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/](http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/)

*Student Complaints On-Campus:* [sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/](http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/)

*On-Line Students Complaints:* [distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/ /](http://distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/)