

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

## **I. Instructor and Assistants for the course**

Course: Religion, Medicine, and Healing: Contemporary Perspectives (REL 3938/ ANT 3930).

Instructor: Dr. Robin Wright, Department of Religion. Anderson Hall 107C.

Teaching Assistant: Kerri Blumenthal, Department of Religion. Anderson Hall (Graduate Students Office).

## **II. Course Website**

Students are held responsible for all materials and related information posted on the course website. There is a required textbook for the course, all of the Readings and Lecture Notes based on Powerpoints can be found in the e-book *Religion, Medicine and Healing: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by RM Wright (kendallhunt, 2014). This required book can be obtained through the publisher Kendall Hunt.

## **III. Objectives of the course:**

The focus of this course is on 'non-conventional' 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, pain, and healing; embodiment of healing powers by religious specialists; ritual 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; and, finally, the transformations of self and meaning that emerge during or from a cure.

The healing traditions we shall study, by ethnic groups or geographical regions, are the following: (1) Indigenous peoples shamanisms of the Americas and urban mestizos of Latin America; (2) Asian, Eurasian, and Southeast Asian Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Sufism; (4) Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostalism; (5) Naturopathy and Nature Religions; (6) Intellectual Property Rights. How does each tradition contrast with 'Western'

bio-medicine? What relations does each maintain with conventional 'Western' bio-medical systems?

Is our current national health system capable of collaborating with non-conventional forms of spiritual healing? Or are the interests of the industrial and pharmaceutical complex a hindrance through market control, predatory production of herbal remedies in ways that are damaging to peoples and the environment?

Finally, this course raises a more fundamental question of "Healing the Earth," which lies at the heart of our and many other societies' principal illness, that has been popularly called the "disconnect with nature," the barriers we've 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. This course argues that the way to healing ourselves and re-establishing a sustainable relationship with our "home" - the planet earth – and its aboriginal inhabitants is through healing the 'nature disconnect' on various fronts. The lessons of ancient traditions coupled with a re-scaling of 'modern medicine' are valuable starting-points towards this overall humanitarian goal.

#### **IV. Each of the modules focuses on one or more of the following Themes:**

- Phenomenological study 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 which perform 'community healing' in which the specialists embody the ancestral energy, or life-force, transmitting it in their cures;
- Diversity of cultural meanings of sickness and healing (in cosmology, cosmogony, ontology, and eschatology); the 'category of the unknown,' reversible 'deaths,' and levels of 'knowledge' in curing; 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 idea of 'embodiment' of the sacred, as in Western Pentecostal Christianity and Charismatic Catholicism, and its importance to understanding the processes of healing;
- The relevance of the socio-political contexts in which the non-conventional healers work, their relation to 'dominant structures' of scientific expertise; economic and political power.

## V. Expectations:

*Our Responsibilities:* To present a solid review of the subject matter. The instructor and Teaching Assistant are committed to help you understand the material. If you have any questions regarding course materials, policies, grading, and technical problems, I would highly encourage you to contact one of us ahead of time. You are encouraged to ask questions through the Canvas Discussion tab.

*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 we highly encourage you to keep up with the "Lecture Schedule/Due Dates" provided to you in the "Course Materials" tab. You are expected to:

- Follow guidelines provided by the instructor.
- Watch lectures, do the assigned readings, and watch films.
- Submit assignments **BEFORE** the due date.
- Submit assignments in the appropriate place. There are many students registered for this course, therefore **DO NOT** send us any assignment through

email nor leave a hard copy at our offices. This would make the grading process too difficult.

- Follow the UF honor code (see below). Remember: All written portions of assignments are checked for plagiarism.

## **VI. Grading:**

Reflection Paper: There are three “reflection papers” required for the course. Each one should be written about one of the films presented before the due date of the reflection paper. Each paper should be 1-2 pages (700 words) in length, typed, saved as .docx, using 12-size Times New Roman font in a double-spaced format. Papers should seek to answer “prompt” questions provided beforehand in a clear, succinct, and original way. The prompt questions generally ask you to focus on a theme that is important in both the film and the readings to which the film is related. Simply repeating the storyline is not acceptable. The prompt questions will be posted on the “Assignments” section of the Sakai course website. The due dates are indicated in the "Lecture Schedule/Due Dates".

Midterm and Final Exam: The Midterm Exam will consist of a combination of question types: multiple choice, definitions, and a short essay. The material to be covered by the Midterm includes everything from Day 1 of the course until mid-semester. The Midterm Exam will be opened under the "Assignments" section. The Final Exam, will be structured similarly to the Midterm, and will cover all material from mid-semester until the last day of class. 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.

Make-up Exams: will be scheduled for those students who are unable to take the Midterm or Final on the dates established. Students must present appropriate written proof that it was not possible to take the exam on the established date (a doctor's note in the case of a medical situation requiring immediate treatment, a statement from the director of a sports program in the case of the student's participation in a sports event, appropriate letters in the case of a family emergency, or family event). In all cases, clearance from the Professor is required for a make-up exam to occur. Depending on the circumstances of the case, students should plan to take make-up exams one week following the scheduled date.

Participation question: There will be a total of six participation assessments. You will need to go to the "Assignments" tab and take a multiple-choice quiz. The quiz will open up on the date indicated on the "Lecture Schedule/Due Dates" at 8:00 am and will close at midnight of the same day. Note that the quiz is timed. Once you begin taking the quiz, you will have 30 minutes to complete it. 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, powerpoint/lecture notes, and films. Keep in mind that quizzes are not cumulative.

Extra Credit Essay: The wealth of material available on Religion and Healing makes it impossible to cover all of the interesting questions that are currently of great relevance to this course. Thus, for example, for students interested in researching and writing a short essay on selected topics, extra credit points can be garnered (50 total) to add to your grade at the end of the semester. You can submit your extra credit (.docx format) under the "Assignments" tab.

Grade calculations:

Reflection Paper (3 - each worth 100):	300 points	(37.5%)
Midterm Exam:	205 points	(25%)
Final Exam:	205 points	(25%)
Participation Quiz (6 – each worth 15):	90 points	(12.5%)
Total:	800 points	(100%)

Final scores will not be rounded (i.e., 89.92% is not 90%). Your final grade will be based of three Reflection Papers, one Midterm Exam, one Final Exam, and Participation Questions.  
Grade Scale:

A:  $\geq 93\%$  of X

A-:  $\geq 90\%$  of X

B+:  $\geq 87\%$  of X

B:  $\geq 83\%$  of X

B-:  $\geq 80\%$  of X

C+:  $\geq 77\%$  of X

C:  $\geq 73\%$  of X

C-:  $\geq 70\%$  of X

D+:  $\geq 67\%$  of X

D:  $\geq 60\%$  of X

D-:  $\geq 57\%$  of X

E: <57% of X

## **VII. Special Treatment**

We do not offer any kind of special treatment, or adjust grades on the individual basis. If you are having problems with the course material or health related problems, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. Do not attempt to contact me at the end of the semester and expect me to solve any of the above problems. 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. Email Communication**

All email correspondence to course instructor and assistants must be sent through Canvas. Correspondence regarding the lecture, homework, and the overall course should be posted on the "Course Questions" under the Discussion tab. Anything related to grades and personal matter should be sent using the "Mail" tab (Please, do not post anything of personal matter on the Discussion tab).

## **IV. 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. 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.

## **X. 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. In this case, you can set up a meeting with me to give me the document.