

Anthropology of Religion

ANT 3241

University of Florida, Department of Anthropology

Spring 2019

TUR L005

T 11:45-1:40 and R 12:50-1:40

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Course description

This course provides an introduction to the anthropological study of religion. In addition to exploring different theoretical positions and concepts that have informed anthropological conversations about religion, we will critically study and compare religious practices and beliefs. Course readings will include selected classical texts as well as anthropologically informed contemporary studies of religion, with examples from both small-scale religions and from the world's major religions. The course encourages critical thinking and self-reflexivity. It is important to acknowledge that the way we see things and the questions we ask are influenced by our biographical, historical, and cultural and religious/non-religious background.

IMPORTANT: Students should be aware that this is NOT a course that promotes a particular religious or spiritual belief. We will not discuss whether a religion is true or false. In addition to critically exploring the concept of religion, we will study various religious practices and beliefs with a little judgement as possible. The expression of religious prejudices will not be tolerated.

Course readings

Stein, R. L. & Stein, P.L. (2011) The Anthropology of Religion, Magic and Witchcraft

PDF files of other required readings are available at the course e-learning website (Canvas).

General Course objectives

The following are the objectives I have for this course

- Ensure that students master the course subject matter
- Ensure that students engage in discussions in a respectful way
- Develop students' ability to use course concepts in thinking and problem solving
- Prepare students to be life-long learners
- Develop students' interpersonal and team interaction skills
- Have students enjoy the course

Course outcomes

When finished with this course, you will be able to do the following:

- Describe how an anthropological approach to the study of religion differs from other disciplines
- Describe and critically discuss different definitions and theoretical approaches to the study of religion
- Describe and critically discuss key concepts within the anthropology of religion (e.g. symbols, magic, rituals etc.) using ethnographic examples
- Employ competing anthropological and social theories and theoretical terms and approaches developed within the anthropology of religion to critically discuss religious practices and beliefs
- Read a newspaper article about a religious issue with an anthropological lens
- Use relevant research to explore and test ideas and to support or refute generalization
- Conduct ethnographic research using common methodological approaches such as participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews
- Analyze empirical data
- Produce ethnographically inspired accounts

Course structure

This class is structured after the team-based-learning (TBL) strategy, first developed by Larry Michaelsen. The course encourages collaboration and active learning for individuals and teams. While content knowledge also is an important part of the TBL strategy, the course will have a major focus on how to apply the concepts and theories that are introduced. The TBL strategy is specifically designed to enhance your problem solving skills and to develop your level of critical thinking. TBL allows you to engage with me and other students in the class, and you will have plenty of opportunity to get to know people and to make new friends. Most in-class time will be spent working on team activities. For those of you who have negative experiences with group work I want to emphasize that TBL was developed in order to avoid common drawbacks and flaws associated with traditional group work. You should therefore not assume that TBL is

equivalent to regular group work or group projects. TBL is different. It is a strategy that is well researched and a number of studies have shown that it has improved student performance. TBL is currently being used in a number of disciplines, including medicine, history, literature, anthropology and law.

Teams will be formed during the first week of the semester using the online tool CATME. More information about this will be given in class and posted on Canvas.

The course is divided into six modules. The syllabus for each module, including learning outcomes (which I encourage you to use actively for the Readiness Assessment Tests) will be posted on Canvas a week before the start of a new module. Each module will contain specific learning objectives for that module and readings that will enable you to reach these objectives. Below is a preliminary schedule. The most updated information about course readings will be found on CANVAS.

This semester I am testing out TBL in a hybrid format. This means that the class consists of a combination of in-class and on-line activities. In order to introduce you to the works of other professors at UF whose work reflect anthropological methods and perspectives on religion, the course also features guest lectures.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE		
ONLINE MARKED IN GREEN		
DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
COURSE INTRODUCTION		
Tuesday Jan 8	Introduction - online	Introduce yourself
Thurs Jan 10	Introduction to Team Based Learning (TBL)	
Tues Jan 15	Practice readiness assessment test Talking about religion	<u>Read:</u> Syllabus The Case for Religious Studies https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/22/understand-todays-world-more-students-should-study-religion-essay <u>Listen:</u> RB003 Talking about religion (From the Religion Bites Podcast) http://religionbites.xyz/rb003-taking-about-religion/

MODULE 1: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGION/ MYTHOLOGY		
Thurs Jan 17	Readiness Assurance Test	<u>Read:</u> Stein & Stein Chapter 1 & 2 <u>Listen:</u> RB002 Defining Religion (From the Religion Bites Podcast) http://religionbites.xyz/rb002-defining-religion/
Tues Jan 22	In-class Applications	<u>Read:</u> Wagner, M.B. (1999) The Study of Religion in American Society <u>Watch:</u> Participant observation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zo8xrY0XxT4
Thurs Jan 24	Online applications	Geertz, Clifford (1957) Ethos, World-Views and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols
Tues Jan 29	In-class applications	<u>Read:</u> Beattie, J (1960) Nyoro Myth Ziewitz, M. (2016) Governing Algorithms: Myth, Mess, and Methods Salvation by algorithm: God, technology and the new 21st-century religions https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/09/salvation-algorithm-god-technology-and-new-21st-century-religions
MODULE 2: RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS / RITUAL		
Thursday Jan 31	Readiness Assurance Test	<u>Read:</u> Stein & Stein Chapter 3 & 4
Tues Feb 5	In-class Applications GUEST LECTURE Dr. Susan Gillespie	<u>Read:</u> Turner, V.W. (1964) Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage
Thurs Feb 7	On-line applications	Daugherty, M. L. (1976) Serpent-Handling as Sacrament
Tues Feb 12	In-class Applications	<u>Read:</u> Powers, M.N. (1980) Menstruation and Reproduction. An Oglala Case
MODULE 3: ALTERED STATES OF CONCIOUSNESS / RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS		

Thurs February 14	Readiness Assurance Test	<u>Read:</u> Stein & Stein Chapters 5 & 6
Tues February 19	Applications	<u>Read:</u> Vitebsky, P. (2000) Shamanism
Thurs February 21	Applications	<u>Read:</u> Lewis, I. M. (1971) Trance and Possession
Tues February 26	Guest lecture Dr. Pete Collings	<u>Read:</u>
MODULE 4: EXPLORING ETHNOGRAPHY https://youtu.be/IJCv64adY3Y		
Thurs February 28	On-line assignment	Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Out5aigb5Ls
SPRING BREAK		
Tues March 12	In-class application	Read: Village Gone Viral. Introduction
Thurs March 14	Online application	Read: Chapter 1 & 2 Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwihu7o6YxM
Tues March 19	In-class application	Read: Chapter 3 Models for and models of Kenyon, S. M. (1995) Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan
MODULE 5: MAGIC AND DIVINATION / SOULS, GHOSTS AND DEATH		
Thurs March 21	Readiness assurance test	Stein & Stein: Ch. 7 & 8
Tues March 26	Applications	Gmelch, G. (1971) Baseball Magic Metcalf, P. A. (1978) Death Be Not Strange
Thurs March 28	Guest- lecture Dr. Kathrine Grillo	

Tues April 2	In-class applications	Conklin, B. A. (2001) Cannibal Epistemologies Lock, M. (1996) Death in Technological Time: Locating the End of Meaningful Life
MODULE 6: GODS AND SPIRITS / WITCHCRAFT/SEARCH FOR NEW MEANING		
Thurs April 4	Readiness assurance test	Stein & Stein: Ch. 9, & 11 Hoodfar, H. (1993) The Veil in their Minds and on our heads. The persistence of colonial images of Muslim women
Tuesday April 9:	Applications	Geshiere, P. (1998) Globalization and the Power of Indeterminate Meaning: Witchcraft and Spirit Cults in Africa and East Asia
Thurs April 11	Online applications	Thomas, F. (2007) "Our Families are Killing us": HIV/AIDS, Witchcraft and Social Tensions in Namibia
Tues April 16	Applications	Favret-Saada (1989) Unbewitching as therapy
Thurs April 18	Course review and evaluations	
Tues April 23	Final test - online	

Each module will follow a sequence known as the Readiness Assurance Process.

Readiness Assurance Process (RAP)

The RAP is an integral piece of the TBL Strategy. This process allows you numerous opportunities to demonstrate that you comprehend the readings and course concepts, while receiving immediate feedback on your progress. The RAP takes place in a sequence containing the following components:

1) Readings

At the start of each module, you will complete a number of readings outside of class. These readings contain the core concepts and ideas of that particular module. While these will not be the only reading for each module, they will provide you with the foundation that will be built upon with supplemental readings later on in each module.

2) Individual Readiness Assessment Test (I-RAT)

The first in-class activity for each module is the I-RAT, which is based on the assigned readings. These are in the form of a short quiz featuring multiple-choice questions focused on the key concepts and ideas of the readings. They are designed both to assess comprehension as well as to maintain accountability for reading the

assignments on time. You will take the I-RAT on InteDashboard so you have to bring your laptop or a device where you can do this during the assigned time in class. Your I-RAT scores will be anonymous.

3) Team Readiness Assessment Test (T-RAT)

Right after finishing the I-RAT you will take the same test as a team. You are allowed to discuss the questions as a team and decide on an answer for each question. You will also take the t-RAT on InteDashboard. (If this by any chance should not work, you will take the team using a special “scratch-off” answer sheet that immediately tells you whether you have the correct answer.)

4) Appeals

After the T-RATs are completed, teams can appeal any question they missed on the team test. Appeals are only granted when an argument is presented demonstrating comprehension of the concepts. An appeal must be submitted in writing and explain in a couple of short paragraphs why the team believes its answer to be correct. *Direct evidence from the reading must be used and cited.* Appeals are to be submitted to me by e-mail within 24 hours after class. If the appeal is successful, the points will be added to the team score as well as for any individual that answered the same way as the team. Any team members who had the question correct initially will continue to receive credit on the question. ONLY the members of a team that appeal will be eligible for a change in score, meaning each team must complete and submit a separate appeal. If an appeal is unsuccessful (or your team does not submit an appeal) you will not receive points of the question, regardless of whether or not other teams successfully appeal the question.

Class activities, requirements and assignments

Applications

Most of the class meetings will consist of team-based activities that will allow you to apply the material learned from the readings. I will assign different types of applications. Most of the application exercises will, however pose a question (often based on a news article, a case, a film), and require that you as a Team make a decision. Your Team will need to poll each member, listen to each member’s ideas and their explanation for why their idea should be supported, and then reach a Team consensus. At the end of your deliberation, all of the Teams will be asked to simultaneously report their decisions. Then we will discuss the question as a class. Over the semester we will do many smaller applications.

Some of the applications will be randomly graded. The Team Portion of each graded application is worth 20 points and will be posted on Canvas.

Exploring ethnography

This semester I will be sharing with you parts of my book manuscript *Village Gone Viral*. We will use my manuscript as a point of departure for discussing and exploring

ethnography as a method and form of writing. Your writing assignment for this class consist of the following:

- 1) A one-page research proposal that describes a religious space, practice or institution you would like to explore ethnographically
- 2) Field-notes based on actual participant observation done in relation to your research topic
- 3) An ethnographic vignette that conveys an ethnographic encounter

More information about these assignments will be given in class and posted on Canvas.

Final Test

In addition to selected questions from the readiness assessment test, the final test will have questions that draws on the guest lectures. The latter could either be questions from the texts assigned as readings associated with the guest lectures, or from the lectures itself. This means that it is important for you to attend the guest lectures.

Peer Evaluation

One of the most significant concerns with working in a group and receiving team grades is that some of the members of the team may work harder than others or “free-ride” off those in the group willing to put in more effort. You will be given a chance to evaluate your team member peers during the course. There will be an informal evaluation at the mid-term point, used as feedback for individual team members. At the end of the semester, each of you will complete a confidential “peer evaluation” to assess the contribution of the other members of your team. You will be evaluating each member on his or her participation in team activities. (Did they come to class regularly? Were they prepared for the day’s activity? Did they contribute productively to the team? Respect others’ ideas?) These evaluations are completely anonymous and give you a chance to reward or punish teammates based upon their team efforts. I will provide more information about this in class and a copy of the evaluation form will be posted on Canvas.

Grading

Grades are based on three categories of evaluations

A) Individual Performance (40 % of grade)	
a. 6 IRAT scores, 40 points each	240
b. Exploring ethnography project	200
c. Final test	100
B) Team Performance (45 % of grade)	
a. 6 TRAT scores, 40 points each	240
b. 6 graded Team Applications, 30 points each	180
C) Team Contribution (15 % of grade)	
a. Mid-term peer evaluation	100

Grading scale

GRADE	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
TOT %	94-100	88-93	82-87	76-81	71-75	66-70	61-65	56-60	51-55	46-50	40-45	<40

UF Policies

Academic Honesty: When students enroll at UF they commit themselves to honesty and integrity. As a result of completing the registration form at the University of Florida, every student has signed the following statement: *“I understand the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.”*

On work submitted for credit by UF students, the following pledge is either required or implied: *“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”*

Campus Helping Resources: Students experiencing crisis or personal problems that interfere with their general wellbeing are encouraged to utilize the university’s counseling resources. The UF Counseling and Wellness Center provides confidential counseling services at no cost for currently enrolled students.

1. Counseling and Wellness Center, <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>
2. Student Health Care Center: <http://shcc.ufl.edu/>

For an overview of various resources see <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help>

Disabilities: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, 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.

Technical assistance: For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Sakai, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2

- <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>