

# Religion, Medicine and Healing: Contemporary Perspectives Syllabus

## I. Instructor and Assistants for the course

Course: Religion, Medicine and Healing (REL 3xxx).

Instructor: Dr. Robin Wright, Department of Religion. Anderson Hall 107C. Office Hours TWR 11:00 – 1:00  
352---392---1625

Teaching Assistant: John Balch

## II. Course Website

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

## III. Course description:

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, 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 and, finally,

- the transformations of self and meaning that emerge during or from a cure.
- Intellectual Property Rights (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;
- Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostalism;
- Naturopathy and Nature Religions;

#### IV. Course Structure

All Readings are reprinted in the E---anthology for the course (Kendallhunt, 2014), and/or are available 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 shuns 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: acquiring skills at recognizing the actions of the spirits, interacting with and even expelling them from the sick, returning the sick to a state of health.

Module 2 presents a selection from the vast array of shamanic healing practices from 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. 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 become more adequate to the urban contexts.

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

The clearest associations amongst all of these elements can be seen in cultures with full-blown 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 in 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 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 elements 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. In ancient Greek society, the cult of Aesculapius, the deity of Medicine, flourished around 300 BCE and was noted for its use of snakes considered highly sacred in the cult's purification rituals. Finally, we take a brief glimpse at the varieties of "religious sicknesses", that is, syndromes associated with conversion, for example, from the testimonials of Charismatic Catholics relating their possession by demons, to the utterly ecstatic Sufi healing dance and devotional tradition called *qawalli*.

The final 3 Modules should be seen as a unit, with its focus on forms of healing directly relating to nature. Naturopathy was a predominant form of treating illness up until the 1920s and '30s, when Faculties of Medicine (Western Biomedicine, that is) assumed a claim over the market of Medicine in such a way that any lingering 'ancient knowledge', 'folk knowledge', popular healer's knowledge, or even spirituality, were purged from the dominant Western biomedicine-technology model. Nevertheless, 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 is, rather, cautious.

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, as much as it is vital to know their evaluations of our 'cultural sicknesses'.

"Healing the Planet" is the title of the penultimate chapter. Far from being a mere metaphor, the issues raised by the "Dark Green Religions" discussed here bring together questions that have haunted Western culture for decades, and have now become a true nightmare. Among traditional Shamans of the Amazon, there is a ritual for "Healing the World" which undoubtedly has to do with the immediate reality of the native people, threatened by an excess of violence, or gradually losing cultural heritages due to 'modern-day' life-ways.

In Western culture, this syndrome has been called the "disconnect with nature". The phrase refers to 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. In light of this, there is an overwhelming need to know, recover, and where possible live the healing experiences of other 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:

- Σ Phenomenological studies of experiences of sickness and healing; contrasting approaches to sickness and healing among both traditional and non---traditional peoples;
- Σ 'Aesthetic' aspects of healing: the importance of the religious imagination in representing pain, the notion of 'soul--- loss'; synaesthesia, ethno-poetics, sonic imagery; music and religion; music and healing; relations of ethnomusicology and medical anthropology;
- Σ '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;
- Σ Diversity of cultural meanings of sickness and healing (in cosmology, cosmogony, ontology, eschatology); the 'category of the unknown', reversible 'deaths', and levels of 'knowledge' in curing; sources of and access to, spiritual 'power';
- Σ 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;

- Σ 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;
- Σ The 'embodiment' of the sacred, in Western Pentecostal Christianity and Charismatic Catholicism, and its importance to understanding processes of healing;
- Σ 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:

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

Chapter 2 "What is Specific to Western Medicine?" by Arthur Kleinman, Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine, Vol. 1, edited by W. F. Bynum and R. Porter, Routledge, 1993, pp. 15---23.

Chapter 21 "Pain and Bodies" by Jean E. Jackson from *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**

Chs. 2 & 3 Wright, R.M. *Mysteries of the Jaguar Shamans of the Northwest Amazon*. 2013 U Nebraska Press.

Excerpt from Resolution "Lista Representativa de Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial del ámbito Nacional," Bogotá, D.C.

#### **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;

### **Suggestion for Further Reading:**

"Sound --- Trance --- Healing --- The Sound and Pattern Medicine of the Shipibo in the Amazon Lowlands of Peru" by Sabine Rittner, *Music Therapy Today*, Vol. VIII (2), July 2007, pp. 196---235. (<http://musictherapyworld.net>)

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

Chapter 5 --- "Presence" by Robert R. Desjarlais in *The Performance of Healing* edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, NY: Routledge, 1996, pp. 143---164.

"The *Man Chinni* Exorcism Rite of Tamang Shamans" text by Larry G. Peters, Ph.D., photos by Larry Peters and Carol Peters, *Shaman's Drum*, No. 55, 2000, pp. 16---25.

### **2.4 Re---vitalizing Diasporic Identity in Mardi Gras shamanic performance**

"Drumming, African Identity, and Shamanism: The "SSC" and the Ritual Healing of the Spirit of *Fi Yi Yi* in the Black (Mardi Gras) Indian Tradition of New Orleans" (text only) by Jeffrey David Ehrenreich, Ph.D. In: *The Journal of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies*, Issue 23, December 2010.

### **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.

### **+ 3.0 Life---force and Balance: Mutual Understanding of Ancient Mayan & Chinese Medicinal Systems**

Chapter 1 "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.

### **+ 4.0 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.

### **Suggestions for Further Readings:**

Geoffrey Samuels – *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism In Tibetan Societies*

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/78360455/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>

### **+ 5.0. Hindu Ayurvedic Medicine: Ancient Practice in a Pluralistic and Globalized Setting**

Chapter 33 "Indian Medicine?" by Dominik Wujastyk, *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 Michela Lee (UF---Gainesville), 16 p. paper;

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

Chapter 3 "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. [ISBN---10: 0415912008; ISBN---13: 978---0415912006]

### **+ Module 7: Islamic Sufi. Healing in the *Qawalli* devotional tradition**

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

### **+ Module 8: Naturopathy**

(see entry for “Naturopathy” in Wikipedia:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturopathy>)

"Feeding the Spirit: Nutritionist Helps Tribes Rediscover Traditional Foods" by Valerie Segrest, February 9, 2012; <http://www.bastyr.edu/news/general---news---home---page/2012/02/feeding---spirit---nutritionist---helps---tribes---rediscover---traditional>

"The Multiple Uses of Cannabis for Religious Purposes", C. A. Wright, paper presented at the 2011 Symposium on "Plants and Healing", Department of Religion, University of Florida Gainesville, 2011.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading:**

"Cannabis in Traditional Indian Herbal Medicine (pre--- publication draft)" by Dominik Wujastyk, Dept. of South Asian, Tibetan & Buddhist Studies  
Spitalgasse 2---4 / 2.1;

"Cannabis Has Always Played an Important Role in Religion" by Chris Bennett. See his website: <http://www.cannabisculture.com/blogs/Chris---Bennett?page=1>

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

"Nature Religions in the U.S." by Catherine Albanese,  
*Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Volumes 1 & 2*, Bron Taylor, editor. NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005, pp. 1175---1186.

"Ecopsychology", by Andy Fisher in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Volumes 1 & 2*, Bron Taylor, editor. NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.

"Ecotherapy & Ecotopia" by Cathrien de Pater,  
*Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Volumes 1 & 2*, Bron Taylor, editor. NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading:**

"Dark Green Religion" by Bridgette O'Brien (excerpt from Ph.D. thesis);

"A Voyage to Health," produced by the National Institute of Health.  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/avoyagetohealth/education/higher---education.html>



"The Totem's Journey." <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing---totem/index.html>

### **Module 10: Traditional Healing Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights**

"Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge & Intellectual Property Issues Paper" by Dr. Jane Anderson, Center for the Study of the Public Domain, 2010.

"Monopolizing Medicinal Methods: The Debate Over Patent Rights for Indigenous Peoples" by Heather A. Sapp, as appeared in *Temple Journal of Science, Technology & Environmental Law*, Vol. XXV, pp. 191---212.

### **Module 11: Bibliographic Resources (all Modules)**

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#### **VII. Expectations:**

**Our Responsibilities:** To present a solid review of the subject matter. The instructor, Teaching Assistant, and Research 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 them ahead of time. You are encouraged to ask questions through the Sakai 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 I highly encourage you to keep up with the "Lecture Schedule" provided to you on the Resources tab. You are expected to:

- o Follow guidelines provided by the instructor;
- o Watch lectures, do the assigned readings, watch films or other audiovisual material by the assigned date;
- o Submit assignments **BEFORE** the due date;

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

## VII. 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, 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 Sakai.

Midterm and Final Exam: The midterm exam will consist of a combination of question types: matching terms to definitions, multiple choice, and short essays. The material to be covered by the midterm includes everything from Day 1 of the course until \_\_\_\_\_. Midterm exams will be opened under the Tests and Quizzes section on \_\_\_\_\_, at 8 a.m. and closed by midnight on \_\_\_\_\_. The Final exam, scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_, will be structured similarly to the Midterm, and will cover all material from \_\_\_\_\_ until the last day of class. The Final will be available at 8 a.m. on \_\_\_\_\_, and due by midnight on \_\_\_\_\_. 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>

Participation question: There will be a total of ten participation assessments. You will need to go to the Test and Assessments tab and take a 4---question multiple---choice quiz. The quiz will open up on the date indicated on the Lecture Schedule and will close at midnight of the same day.

Extra Credit Essay: The wealth of material available on Modules 8 & 9 ("Naturopathy" and "Healing the Planet" respectively) 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 a film (TBD), extra credit points can be garnered (50 total) to add to your grade.

Grade calculations:

Reflection Paper (3 --- each worth 100): 300 points (37.5%)

Midterm Exam: 200 points (25%)

Final Exam: 200 points (25%)

Participation (10 – each worth 10):100 points (12.5%)

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Total: 800 points (100%)

Final scores will not be rounded (i.e., 89.92% is not 90%). Your final grade section of the Sakai course website on the day of the showing – in nearly all cases, a Friday --- and will be due by midnight on the dates indicated in the Lecture Schedule (September 20, October 18, November 18).

will be based of three reflection papers, one midterm exam, one final exam, and participation questions. 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 the individual basis. If you are having problems with the course material or health related problems, please contact 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.

### IX. Email Communication

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

### 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/judicial/academic.htm> 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\*\*](https://evaluations.ufl.edu)

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