



ANT 3241 Myth, Ritual, and Mysticism

Section: U06

In Person

Spring Term 2024

Course Meeting Information

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00PM - 3:15PM in Viertes Haus 131

Professor Information

Robin Steiner

Contact: rsteiner@fiu.edu

Office Hours:

After Class or By Appointment

Course Description and Purpose

This course provides an introduction to the anthropological study of religion. Rather than focusing on the traditions of larger, established religions, most of the examples we will explore in this course will be taken from smaller communities, many of whom do not view the traditions they practice as religious or limited to a private sphere of personal beliefs. Instead, we will examine how such traditions locate practitioners in a supernatural cosmos of spirits, gods, and the dead; sorcery and witchcraft; magical powers and mystical dangers. Following anthropology's commitment to holism and the study of context, we will approach such traditions as structured, rule-bound systems of knowledge

capable of generating realities and lifeworlds as whole and compelling as those with which most of us are more familiar. Along the way, this course will explore the history of religion as a category of human experience, in the process challenging conventional assumptions about what religion is and how it 'should' work. We will examine patterns in how people make sense of and act upon their worlds by assigning meaning to objects, beings, events, and persons; connecting things together into symbolic patterns and narratives, and creating elaborate forms of symbolic action. Finally, this course will introduce you to the concepts, frameworks, and theoretical approaches used by anthropologists to study the practices and traditions of the communities with whom they work.

Our goal in this course is not to promote or debunk any of the beliefs, practices, or traditions we examine. Instead, we will be concerned with learning how to analyze and study beliefs and practices from the perspective of anthropology, weigh alternative interpolations, and appreciate the complexity and ambiguity of the historical and anthropological record.

Course Goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Define anthropology and explain what ethnographic research entails.
- Describe how an anthropological approach to the study of religion differs from that of other disciplines.
- Understand the difference between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism and to describe when each perspective may or may not be useful.
- Describe the history of religion (as a category of human experience) and explain why many of the communities we study do not understand their own practices as 'religious'.
- Explain and differentiate between different theoretical approaches to the study of religion in anthropology.

- Explain the concept of ritual and categorize different types of rituals.
- Differentiate between the various types of supernatural entities recognized by anthropologists including gods, spirits, souls, ghosts, and ancestors.
- Outline the difference between sorcery and witchcraft and provide examples of each.
- Apply anthropological concepts to analyze beliefs, rituals, practices, and superstitions present in their own lives.

Be a better world citizen by understanding the existence of different ways of being human, of being spiritual and religious, or atheist.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a comprehension of various perspectives associated with different culturally-based conceptualizations of the supernatural world and their attendant practices and rituals, which can also be linked to different geographic locations on the global stage. (GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE)
- Students will be able to—willingly—better engage in a number of problem solving activities in a variety of sociocultural contexts around the globe.(GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT)
- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical and contemporary inter-relatedness of key local, regional and global religious and spiritual issues and events, including beliefs in magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. (GLOBAL AWARENESS)

Expectations of the Course

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

This course uses FIU's Check-In App for attendance as well as to access course readings and materials. Please make sure to bring an Internet-accessible device such as a laptop or a smartphone to class every day so that you can participate. While we will use laptops and smartphones for in-class activities, class time is not the time for social media browsing, social networking or working on outside assignments. Doing so is not only detrimental to your learning but also creates a distraction for others and disrupts our class' learning environment. Please refrain from using laptops and smartphones during class time for non-class activities.

Course readings and assignments will be posted on our class's Canvas webpage. Both Canvas and FIU's Check-In App will be introduced during the first day of our course; if you have any questions or problems using either Canvas or the FIU's Check-In App, please reach out to your instructor, Dr. Robin Steiner, for assistance.

OUR CLASS ENVIRONMENT

Our objective in this course should be to create a positive learning community in which you and other students are able to learn from each other as well as from the professor. To do so, we need to make sure that we maintain a respectful in-class environment in which everyone feels valued and listened to, is comfortable asking questions and is able to explore their curiosity. Students who are not respectful of others or create a distraction will be asked to leave.

Assignments

This course involves four graded components: 1) Reading Questions; 2) Quizzes; 3) Projects; and 4) Attendance and Participation. Details of each component of the course are outlined below.

Assessments

1) Reading Questions (2 questions x 50 points each), 100 points

Every day before class, you are responsible for preparing at least one discussion question about that day's readings for us to potentially talk about in class. Your question can ask for clarification about aspects of the reading that were unclear, explore a tangent you were curious about, or provoke a broader discussion about the topic(s) covered in that day's reading. Regardless, your question should demonstrate that you have carefully completed and thought about the readings. Based on a randomized list of student names, four students will be selected to share their question at the start of every class for 50 points. All students will be selected to share a question at least twice during the semester; students absent or unprepared when their names are picked will miss the opportunity to earn points or have the class discuss their question.

2) Exams (3 exams x 100 points each), 300 points total

This course has three exams. These exams will include multiple-choice, T/F, and short answer questions and will require you to demonstrate with course concepts and the religious traditions we explore in this course. (GLOBAL AWARENESS).

3) Projects (10 required projects x 50 points each), 500 points total.

Throughout this course, you will have the opportunity to complete a variety of projects in response to project prompts. Depending on the prompt, projects provide you with the opportunity to summarize and reflect on a supplemental reading, write a personal reflection, listen and respond to a podcast or film, or conduct your own research and present your own analysis. Projects will require you to demonstrate mastery of the material covered as well as an ability to apply acquired knowledge to an improved understanding of the global world. In addition to the 10 required projects, there will also be additional projects which you may complete for extra credit. Each project is worth 50 points. Projects are due each week by 11:59 pm on Tuesdays. Projects submitted late (including those completed extra credit) will lose 10 points. (GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT).

4) Attendance (80 points) and Participation (20 points), 100 points

You are expected to complete readings before class, to arrive on time, to actively participate in class discussions and activities, and to attend all classes. Attendance will be taken using FIU's Check-In App; if you forget your phone or are unable to use the FIU Check-in App, please check in with me at the end of class so that I can mark you as here. Absences resulting from self-quarantining due to COVID-19 or documented medical or family emergency will be excused. In addition to attendance, class participation will be included in your final grades.

Grading

Reading Questions (2 x 50 points each): 100 points

Exams (3 in total, 100 points each): 300 points

Projects (10 required, 50 points each): 500 points

Attendance (80 points) and Participation (20 points): 100 points

Total: 1000 points

Grading Scheme: A (930-1000), A- (900-929), B+ (870-899), B (830-869), B- (800-829), C+ (770-799), C (730-769), C- (700-729), D+ (670-699), D (630-669), D- (600-629), and F (599 and below).

Textbook and Course Materials for Purchase

If no materials listed, no items are needed.

The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Rebecca Stein and Philip Stein

Publisher: Routledge

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