Myth, Ritual, and Mysticism
Spring 2023
ANTH 3241 – U06
Florida International University

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Office Hours: After Class or By Appointment
Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-10:45 am in Viertes Haus 131

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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 OBJECTIVES

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.

GLOBAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

This is a Global Learning course. By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- 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)
- Demonstrate the ability to compose an analysis 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)
- Willingly better engage in a number of problem solving activities in a variety of sociocultural contexts around the globe.(GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT)

For more information about the Global Learning Student Learning Outcomes, please consult the FIU Global Learning for Global Citizenship (https://goglobal.fiu.edu).

REQUIRED TEXT

Stein, Rebecca L., and Phillip L. Stein. *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*. New York: Routledge, 2017. ISBN: 9781138692527
4th edition (2017) or 3rd Edition (2011).

E-text is available here- https://www.routledge.com/The-Anthropology-of-Religion-Magic-and-Witchcraft/Stein-Stein/p/book/9781138692527

Additional course readings will be posted on Canvas.

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.

1) Reading Questions, 200 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. Reading questions will be submitted in class using Poll Everywhere, our course's in-class polling app. To participate, you will need to bring your laptop computer or smartphone to class and log into the app as a registered user. Details about how to use Poll Everywhere will be covered on the first day of class. You must be present in class to receive credit for your Reading Questions.

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 (9 required projects x 50 points each), 450 points total.
Throughout this course, you will have the opportunity to complete a variety of projects in response to weekly project prompts. Prompts will be posted on Canvas and introduced in class on Tuesdays. Depending on the week's prompt, projects may 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. You are expected to submit **at least 9 projects** over the course of this semester (out of the available 15 prompts). **Any projects submitted beyond the required 9 will receive extra credit.** (GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE, AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT).

4) Attendance and Participation, 50 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. 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 taken into account in calculating final grades.

GRADING POLICY
Reading Questions: 200 points
Exams (3 in total, 100 points each): 300 points
Projects (9 required, 50 points each): 450 points
Attendance and Class Participation (50 points): 50 points
Total: 1000 points

Grading Scheme: A (930-1000), A- (900-920), B+ (870-890), B (830-860), B- (800-820), C+ (770-790), C (730-760), C- (700-720), D+ (670-690), D (630-660), D- (600-620), and F (below 600).

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: POLL EVERYWHERE AND CANVAS

This course uses a Poll Everywhere app, websites, and technology for in-class activities. **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 Poll Everywhere will be introduced during the first day of our course; if you have any questions or problems using either Canvas or the Poll Everywhere system, please get in touch with 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.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As an FIU student, you are expected to abide by the university's policies particularly those governing academic honesty and plagiarism as they appear in the FIU Student Handbook. If you submit work for this course that is not your own, use the work of other authors without properly giving them credit, or give or receive help to other students during quizzes, you will be reported to Academic Affairs and will receive a '0' on the assignment. Please note that in this course forming a What's App (or similar) group to work together on take home quizzes is not permitted and will be considered cheating.

This syllabus is subject to change.
Please see Canvas for updated assignments/course schedule.