Course Syllabus

RELIGION IN THE AMERICAS
RLG 6126/REL 4936

INSTRUCTOR:
Robin M. Wright
Anderson 107C
392-1625
(office hours: by apptmt.)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The basic objective of the course is to offer a long-range, historical and hemispheric overview of the encounters and exchanges among the religions of the Americas. In this course, we will consider six broad thematic areas: 1. Theoretical and Methodological Questions on an Hemispheric Approach to the study of Religions in the Americas; 2. Indigenous Religious Traditions of the Americas; 3. Colonial Encounters Part I: Christianity and Indigenous Religious Traditions; 4. Colonial Encounters Part II: African Religious Traditions and Diaspora; 5. “Borderland” Religions and Post-Colonial Encounters; 6. Globalization, Transnationalism, and Migration.

This is primarily a reading and discussion course. The course bibliography is based on the Graduate Program’s Religions in the Americas Area Reading list. We will read and discuss our way through the semester with each of us bearing some leadership load. Thus, the course requirements consist of participation in seminars, presentations of summaries of the readings, discussion and debate about ideas raised in the readings, as well as book reports and one longer paper (20-25 pp.).

We look upon this course as a kind of collective venture into the terrain in which all are expected to participate together, and each can provide a special area of expertise which will help us answer some of the questions posed by the thematic areas discussed in the course. The central guiding questions of the course are: what sorts of perspectives are entailed by “a hemispheric view” on the Religions of the Americas? How is such a view distinct from prior perspectives? What theories, concepts, methodologies and resources are available for constructing and developing a truly hemispheric perspective?
This is a proseminar. It is intended to immerse advanced undergraduate and graduate students in the literature. You will read and critically assess major books, articles and methods current in the field. You will not do primary research. Within the seminar you will be expected to clearly report on your reading and directly respond to the ideas of your fellow students. All of the class meetings, your readings, and written assignments are intended to help you develop a knowledge of the historiographical and methodological terrain.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are five major requirements:

1) Each week a core of common readings will form the basis of our discussions. Your careful reading and reflection upon these weekly readings is essential to the success of this course. The required books are listed in the syllabus, some are available at the University Bookstore and all can be purchased via the internet (many are Kindle e-books). Most of the articles will be available online or through course reserve in the UF library.

2) Three times during the semester each student will be responsible for summarizing the methodological and theoretical issues contained in the week's common readings (three presentations will be required of each student). This summary will offer a starting point for our discussions.

3) Six times in the course of the semester each student will be required to submit by class time a one-page synthesis of the required readings for that day.

4) Two book reviews will be required of each student. These reviews will consist of three to five pages, double-spaced. These students are also expected to provide expertise in the discussion of the week's topics based on their reading.

5) Each student will also prepare an essay on one of the topics discussed in the field. The essay should be twenty to twenty-five pages in length. The subject may be based on one of the oral reports or book reports, and it should fully cover the topic. First drafts of this essay will be distributed to class members and discussed in class.

GRADING:

Essay (20-25 pp.) 26%
Oral Report (3) 30%
TOPICS AND READINGS:

Schedule of Seminars:

I. Orientation (week 1)
- Introductions
- Review of syllabus
- Course mechanics

II. Overviews (weeks 2-3)

III. Indigenous Religious Traditions of the Americas (weeks 4-5)
- The Popol Vuh, Dennis Tedlock (ed.), (pdf in Modules section);
- The Huarochiri Manuscript. A Testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion. Translation from the Quechua by Frank Salomon and George Urioste, University of Texas Press, 1991; (available as Kindle e-book)
- DeLoria, Vine. The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men. Fulcrum Press (or Kindle edition);
Miguel León-Portilla, The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico, expanded and updated edition, pp. xxv-xlviii, 1-126 (available as Kindle)

III. Colonial Encounters I: Christianity and Native Religions (weeks 6-7)


(chapters) Joel Martin and Mark B. Nicholas, Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2010


Bartolomé de las Casas, A Short account of the Destruction of the Indies (available as audible and ebook), 1992


IV. Colonial Encounters II: The African Diaspora (weeks 8-9)


V. Borderlands and Post-Colonial Encounters (weeks 10-11)


VI. Globalization, Migration, and Transnationalism (weeks 12 - 14)


VII. Papers Workshop (Final Week)

Discussion of Drafts of Final Papers