

SYLLABUS FOR REL3938/ANT3930
INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE
AMERICAS

ANT3930, Section 126B: Fall, 2014 REL3938, Section 0296: Fall,
2014

PROFESSOR ROBIN M. WRIGHT (Anderson Hall 107C,
352-392-1625)
baniwa05@ufl.edu
(office hours: TR 1-2:30, or by apptmt.)

AND013: T4; R4-5

Objectives of the Course: This course introduces the student to the historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices of Native peoples of North, Central and South America. With such a vast and diverse universe to study, our approach will (1) highlight key features of indigenous religious traditions throughout the Americas; (2) discuss central features of religious traditions in several of the major civilizations (Maya, Inca, Aztec); and (3) focus on religious ethnographies of contemporary native peoples in all three macro--regions of the Americas. Thus, the course is a mix of what we understand about the religions of the historic great civilizations of the Americas, and what we understand about contemporary indigenous religiosities. The main emphasis in all three objectives is on historical change and continuity in indigenous religious traditions.

Reading List (Required Books):

1) Title: THE WORLD WE USED TO LIVE IN
Author: VINE DELORIA JR Edition: 2006 Publisher: FULCRUM New
Retail Price: \$16.95 Used Retail Price: \$12.75 New Rental Fee: \$11.02
Used Rental Fee: \$7.63
This text is required

2) Title: RELIGIONS OF MESOAMERICA

Author: DAVID CARRASCO Edition: 2014 Publisher: WAVELAND PRESS New Retail Price: \$23.95 Used Retail Price: \$18.00 New Rental Fee: \$17.96 Used Rental Fee: \$13.17

This text is required

3) Title: NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Author: SUZANNE CRAWFORD Edition: 2007 Publisher: LAURENCE KING

This text is required

4) Title: INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF SOUTH AMERICA

Editor: ROBIN M. WRIGHT (unpublished collection of articles in **Resources** section of this website)

Required

Course Requirements:

1.) Students are expected to attend all classes and complete assigned readings prior to each class meeting. Class participation does count in final grade evaluation (10%) . Discussion sections are scheduled every week. Continued absences will not be tolerated; following the third absence, 3 grade points will be taken off the final grade for each day of absence. More than 6 absences will lead to administrative withdrawal from the course;

2) FOUR papers on topics that emerge from the readings and the films, each paper being 3---5 pages in length (750 words), to be sent to the **Assignments** tab on this website on the week following the final day of Sections I, II, III, IV; Papers should be formatted in Times New Roman 12 double---spaced. Feedback will be provided on all written assignments;

3) A Reflection paper on the Symposium "Native Spiritualities: North and South America" to be held on October 13, 3-5 pm, sponsored by the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program, at UF. Place: TBA. For those who are not able to be present physically at this event, it will possibly be transmitted live. Details will be provided before the event.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

20% for the first paper; 20% for the second paper; 20% for the third paper; 20% for the fourth paper; discussion participation (10%); and 10% for a reflection paper on the "Native Spiritualities" Symposium, October 13.

Content of the Course

The course is organized into four main sections:

1. General Introduction to Indigenous Religious Traditions of the Americas;
2. Native North American Religious Traditions;
3. Native South American Religious Traditions;
4. Native Central American Religious Traditions.

The Introductory section presents key components of native religions: the notions of an intersubjective cosmos, a multi---tiered cosmos, and multiple notions of time and space; a holistic cosmos, with inter---relationality among spirits, deities, and humans; the central importance of, and inter---relations among religious specialists: shamans, priests, sorcerers, ceremonial leaders, and prophets; reciprocity as both a founding principle of ongoing religious & social life and yet, paradoxically, potentially its negation through sorcery; the importance of “traditional ecological knowledge” to the understanding of cosmology; and the adaptability of religious beliefs to change. While the course highlights the resilience of indigenous religions, it also analyzes the principle threats to continuity, focusing on the “appropriations” by non---indigenous peoples of indigenous beliefs and practice, the shattering of religious institutions during the conquest, the imposition of Christianity and its indigenization, and processes of ‘ethnogenesis’ (the rebirth of religious traditions).

Following the Introduction, the course is divided into 3 main sections: (1) Native North American Religious traditions, especially the knowledge and powers of religious specialists, sacred rites and religious renewals, contemporary ceremonialism, and the importance of ‘sacred ecology’ to native peoples’ worldviews. (2) Native South American Religions, including the Andean Highlands (Inca) and most especially, Lowland Amazonia (where the Instructor has realized most of his fieldwork and

research). Here, we will concentrate on the writing of religious ethnographies, discussing cycles of sacred narratives, the critical importance of eschatologies, ancestor 'cults', sorcery or 'dark shamans', prophet movements in history, 'conversion' to evangelicalism; and (3) Native Central American Religions, mainly Aztec and Mayan. The films and readings are designed to provide both scholarly views on the great civilizations of the past, the visions of the "vanquished---but---not---defeated", and the challenges their historical descendants face today. Films will illustrate how native peoples have creatively forged solutions to contemporary problems posed by political and economic changes.

The student will learn about native religious traditions of the Americas, which is not offered in any other course, to our knowledge, at this University (**this course is required for those who intend to minor in Native American Studies or are in the Inter-disciplinary Studies Major**). The students will learn more about the histories of the Americas from the perspectives of the peoples whom European societies and their descendants colonized for centuries and who have written their own religious histories from their own perspectives, revitalizing the sacred in new and creative ways.

This course can thus be considered under the rubric of the Humanities in that its focus is the religious traditions of native peoples of the Americas, and how they have been studied or presented through scholarly production, cinema, and indigenous perspectives. It seeks to present an in---depth understanding of the cosmogonies (views on creation), cosmologies (the spatio---temporal structures of the universe), anthropologies (relations among all living beings, what constitutes a 'person', and what constitute 'specialists'), and eschatologies (views on death and the afterlife) of the native societies studied. The methodologies this course adopts are comparative, historical, and 'thickly descriptive' / hermeneutic ethnographies. The instructor's fieldwork conducted over three decades among peoples of the Northwest Amazon will provide a constant baseline for comparisons. A major concern is to construct a critical reflection on the possibilities and limitations of doing religious ethnography among an indigenous people whose understanding and worldview are distinct in fundamental ways from the so---called "Western traditions". How can research tools be modified such that this study becomes a meaningful enterprise --- one in which the native peoples have an active role in constructing their religious histories and writing their own ethnographies ?

The materials for the course consist of the readings (articles scanned and included in the **Resources** section and books to purchase in bookstore or by Amazon.com); powerpoint lectures and films supplement the readings. **Films** can sometimes, not always, be accessed through UFL Library Proxy. Discussions of the **Readings and Films** are generally on Tuesdays; **Lectures and Films** are scheduled for Thursdays.

As indicated in the **Requirements** section, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. All written assignments have word counts and submission deadlines.

Program of Lectures, Readings, Films, and Discussions:

8/26: Part I: Introduction to the Syllabus and Readings; elements of Religions in general

08/28: Introduction to Indigenous Religious Traditions & Spiritualities:

Readings: (1) Wright, "Indigenous Religious Traditions of the World"; (2) Graham Harvey, "Introduction", pp. 1-19; (3) Kenneth Morrison, "The cosmos as intersubjective: Native American other-than-human persons", in Graham Harvey (ed.) *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, pp. 23-36;

Suggested Reading: Wright, "Native American Religious Beliefs and Practices "(working paper);

09/02: Introduction to Indigenous Religious Traditions and Spiritualities:

Readings: (4) G. Harvey, Part II of *Animism*, pp. 99-113; (5) "Ojibwa ontology, behavior and worldview" A. Irving Hallowell, in G. Harvey (ed.) *Readings in Indigenous Religions* (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 17-49;

09/04 : Introduction to Indigenous Religious Traditions and Spiritualities:

Reading: (6) Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism", pp. 45-60;

09/09: Shamans, Priests, Prophets & Sorcerers

Readings: (7) Piers Vitebsky, in G. Harvey, *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, pp. 55-67; (8) Michael Brown, "Dark Side of the Shaman", pp. 163-166 .

09/11: Native Americans in the Western Imagination

Readings: (9) John Mohawk, "Tribal Religious Traditions are constantly devalued in Western discourse"; Vine Deloria, "The Indians of the American Imagination";

09/16: Discussion of Part I Readings

09/18: First Essays are Due;

Readings: Suzanne Crawford, *Native American Religious Traditions*, Chs. 1-2;

09/23: Part 2: Native North American Religious Traditions (cont.):

Readings: S. Crawford, Chs. 3- 4

Discussion

09/ 25: North American Religious Lifeways (cont.):

Readings: S. Crawford, Ch. 5

09/30: North American Religious Lifeways (cont.):

Readings: (1) L. Sullivan, "The Religious Spirit of the Navajo" Pts 1& 2; (2) Trudy Griffin---Pierce, "The Continuous Renewal of Sacred Relations: Navajo Religion", in: L. Sullivan, *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*;

Film: "Reel Indians"

Discussion;

10/02: North America (cont.)

Readings: Vine DeLoria Jr., *The World We Used to Live In*, pp. xvii---
xxxii, chs.

1, 5

10/07: North America (cont.)

Readings: Vine DeLoria Jr., *The World We Used to Live In*, chs. 6, 8

10/09: Sun Dance Way: Lakota _ Apsaloope

Film: "Native Spirit and the Sun Dance Way"

10/13: FORUM ON "NATIVE SPIRITUALITIES OF NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA"

10/16: Reflection Paper on FORUM due;

Discussion;

10/21: Part 3: Indigenous Religious Traditions of South America: Introduction

Readings: All of "1.INTRODUCTION" folder in **Resources** SECTION 3

10/23: Inca Religiosity

Readings: "2. INCA TRADITIONS" folder in **Resources** SECTION 3

Film: TBA

10/28: Material and Spiritual Worlds

Readings: "3. THE OCCULT SIDE OF THINGS" folder in **Resources** SECTION 3

10/30: Enawene Nawe (F ilm and Discussion) "Yakairiti"

11/04: Shamans and Sorcerers

Readings: "4. SORCERY" folder in **Resource** SECTION 3

11/06: Hohodene Jaguar Shamans

Readings: "5. MYSTERIES OF THE JAGUAR SHAMANS" (CHAPTERS 1-3) folder in **Resource** SECTION 3

11/11: VETERANS' DAY - NO CLASS

11/13: Hohodene Jaguar Shamans

Readings: "5. MYSTERIES OF THE JAGUAR SHAMANS" (CHAPTERS 4-5) folder in **Resources** SECTION 3

11/18: Yanomami shamanic Traditions

Readings: "6. YANOMAMI SHAMANIC TRADITIONS" folder in **Resources** SECTION 3;

11/20: Film: "Interview with Davi Kopenawa" & Discussion of *The Falling Sky*, by Davi Kopenawa & Bruce Albert (2014)

11/25: Third Paper is Due & Discussions

11/27: Part 4 : Native Central American Traditions: Introduction

Readings: "1. Introduction to Central American Traditions" in SECTION 4, **Resources**; Chapter 1 in Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (Waveland Press, 2014);

12/02: Origins, Histories, and Ancestors

Readings: D. Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*, (second edition, Waveland Press, 2014), Ch. 2.

12/04: Religion of the Aztecs

Readings: D. Carrasco, Ch. 3;

Film: "The Five Suns"

12/09: Maya Religion

Readings: Carrasco, Ch. 4;

Film: "Popol Vuh" & Final Discussion

[If any time is left over, we will discuss the final chapter in Carrasco. There is supplementary material on Aztec, Mayan, and Olmec Religious Traditions, as well as Taino of the Antilles in the **Readings** section. Students can write their final papers based on this material plus the principal readings and films.]

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON CENTRAL AMERICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS BY THE END OF EXAM WEEK.

RULES

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class. Texting is not permitted during class, and any interneting during classtime that is not related to the material being discussed will be penalized.

4.

Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom 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.