

# Religion, Medicine and Healing: Contemporary Perspectives

## Syllabus

Gen Ed H (Humanities), N (International), and WR2 (2000)

Material and Supplies: None

Professor Robin M. Wright (Department of Religion, UF, Anderson 107C). For a brief biography, see: [https://religion.ufl.edu/faculty/core/robin-m-wright/Links to an external site](https://religion.ufl.edu/faculty/core/robin-m-wright/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site).

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## I. Course description

This course seeks to provide students with a broad base of scholarly reflections from the Humanities and allied fields on the importance of religious practices and beliefs related to healing and medicinal traditions around the globe. This course draws on contemporary perspectives that clarify the following themes:

- the effectiveness of religious symbols in the healing process.
- cross-cultural notions and experiences of the body, of pain, and healing.
- the embodiment of healing powers by religious specialists.
- ritual healing performances, their structures, and meanings.
- the healing powers of sound, sonic imagery, and music.
- sacred plants and medicinal herbs.
- the relations of healing practices to cosmology, metaphysics, and sacred narratives; the transformations of self and meaning that emerge during or from healing procedures.
- Traditional healers and their socio-political contexts, e.g., state-sponsored medicine and global religious processes.
- Healing the relations of human communities to their environments and /or traditional territories.
- Intellectual Property Rights and legal protections of indigenous and traditional societies' healing and medicinal knowledge.

The healing and religious traditions we shall study include the following:

- Shamanisms of the Americas and Asia,
- the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam),
- Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism,
- Naturopathy and contemporary Nature spiritualities.

This course does not purport to be a Medical Humanities course, though perspectives from the medical sciences are most welcome. Its main emphasis is rather on the importance of religions to non-biomedical healing and healers around the world. To the extent possible, this course distinguishes local (Floridian) healing traditions (e.g., hydrotherapy) though its primary emphasis is on the most important international traditions, their content and the contexts in which they have developed.

## II. Course objectives:

This course will explore:

- the diversity of cultural meanings and experiential aspects of sickness and healing in different cultures throughout the world.
- cross-cultural representations of pain and sickness; the notion of 'soul-loss'; sicknesses due to spiritual imbalance in human-environmental relations.
- the performative aspects of healing in which specialists embody a life-force that is transmitted through their cures.
- the importance of herbal healing and associated spiritualities in numerous cultural traditions.
- Healing as a spiritual process consisting of distinct phases, dietary restrictions, and preventive modes of protection against illness.
- the relevance of the socio-political contexts in which non-conventional healers work, their relations with 'dominant structures' of scientific expertise, the state, corporations, etc.
- the histories of non-Western medical traditions grounded in religious and philosophical systems (e.g., Ayurveda, early Judaism) .
- the importance to health of the preservation of balance in human-environmental relations.
- the special knowledge that traditional healers possess and its protection through international legal mechanisms.

## III. Course Structure

Module 1: Concepts

Module 2: Shamanisms

Module 3: Mayan Healing

Module 4: Daoism and Medicine

Module 5: Ayurvedic Medicine & Hinduism

Module 6: Tibetan Buddhism

Module 7: Healing in Judaism

Module 8: Christianity and Healing

Module 9: Healing in Islam

Module 10: Naturopathy and Herbal Medicine

Module 11: Nature Religions and Healing the Planet

Module 12: Traditional Healing Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights

**Explanation of Modules:** the course begins (**Module 1**) with a discussion of theoretical and empirical questions that connect Medicine and Healing Traditions with Religion. Western biomedicine is a specific approach to curing illnesses that in general privileges standardized, evidence-based treatment validated through biological research, with treatment administered via formally trained doctors, nurses, and other such licensed practitioners. By contrast, non-Western and local traditions derive their effectiveness in restoring health from a set of spiritual or religious beliefs, a group of specialists who have obtained their knowledge and power through religious experiences, and practices that directly engage spiritual beliefs with bodily processes and the environment. Effectiveness is, of course, a culturally bound term that refers to the qualitative changes that occur in a person or community's health and well-being through the restoration of a sense of order, balance and harmony.

**Module 2** presents a selection from the vast array of shamanic healing practices developed in indigenous Amazonia and Asia. Spirit-based traditions often represent healing, performatively, as a cosmic quest or struggle against harmful and intrusive spirit forces. 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, to the body, thereby restoring health and balance. Shamanism has developed within the political-economic context of colonialism, dealing as it can with the sicknesses produced by its impact. Shamanism has become a commodity in the global market, compromising the authenticity of spiritual experiences sought by persons seeking treatment.

**Modules 3 – 6** present an historical panorama of several of the best-known, non-Western healing traditions where there were and often still are, open connections between religious belief and medicinal practice. These are cultures with highly developed medical systems that are still intimately tied to the sacred, to ecology, and above all, to notions of a divine 'life-force' or 'vital principle', and 'balance' that must be maintained between one's inner self and external environment. Modules 3 and 4 present traditional

Mayan and Chinese Medicine, while Module 6 focusses on the ancient “Four Tantras” traditions of Buddhism. The Ayurvedic Tradition of Medicine associated with Hinduism is presented in Module 5. Both it and Buddhism teach that disease is the result of excess, and that the “Middle Way” is the path to maintaining good health. In the four traditions, the extensive knowledge of natural elements and their properties, the combinations of minerals and plants in complex remedies, has been inherited from a “classic” past. In the context of the contemporary world, each tradition has a variable relation with the secular state and Western biomedicine

**Modules 7 – 9** explore the history of healing beliefs and practices in the so-called Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) from Biblical times to the present. “Holistic healing” in contemporary Judaism presents an important critique of modern patient-doctor relation that have become bereft of qualitative human experiences. In Charismatic Catholicism, healing is predicated on the patient’s experience of engagement with performances by specialists. In the Sufi healing tradition called *qawwali*, musical performance is combined with healing and devotion to the saints, along with the ‘unseen power’ that restores harmony and balance.

**Module 10** centers around Naturopathic Medicine. The use of herbal remedies and other natural procedures was a predominant form of treating illness in the US until the 1920s and ‘30s, when Western Biomedicine assumed a claim over the field. Afterwards, there was a campaign to purge any lingering ‘ancient knowledge’, ‘folk knowledge’, and spirituality, from the politically and economically dominant, biomedicine-technology model. Since then, the biomedical model has demonstrated its strengths and weaknesses. There seems to be a growing tendency today towards an “Integrative” Medicine that does not close its doors to ‘alternative’, ‘non-conventional’ forms of medicine, but rather, adopts a cautious approach of inclusion.

In much scholarly writing, it has been demonstrated that the contemporary “disconnect with nature” has resulted in numerous modern-day sicknesses (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression). Western societies have produced massive alterations of the natural environment and this, predictably, has had major health consequences for societies impacted by these changes. **Module 11** explores how the concepts of the ‘healing powers of nature’ and the ‘natural order’ have been discussed in the recent history of Western thought. Various contemporary forms of therapy have been developed that seek to re-connect communities with their natural surroundings. Indigenous peoples’ recovery of their traditional territories has provided healing both the physical territory itself and its aboriginal caretakers.

Finally, **Module 12** explores the international recognition of the rights of indigenous and traditional peoples to keep their medicinal knowledge intact. This stands in stark contrast with its actual rapid disappearance, highlighting the importance of legal measures to ensure the recovery and/or re-vitalization of traditional knowledge and practice.

#### IV. Readings:

Students are held responsible for all materials and related information posted on the course website. The required E-textbook for the course, titled *Religion, Medicine, and Healing – Contemporary Perspectives* (Kendallhunt, 2014) contains most of the reading material for the course. Other Reading assignments are uploaded to the Modules pages of the course website.

## V. Expectations:

**Our Responsibilities:** To present a solid review of the subject matter. The Instructor and Teaching Assistant(s) are committed to helping you understand the material. If you have any questions regarding course materials, policies, grading, and technical problems, do not hesitate to contact one of us. You are encouraged to ask questions through the course web page Discussion tab.

**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 you are encouraged to keep up with the “Lecture and Assignments Schedule” provided in the Course Materials tab. You are expected to submit your assignments in the appropriate place. **DO NOT** send us any assignment through personal emails nor leave a hard copy at our offices.

## VI. Assignments:

**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>

**Midterm and Final Exam:** Both Midterm and Final are designed to assess the student’s capacity for identifying, distinguishing, and critically evaluating the material presented in each half of the course. The midterm exam will consist of a combination of question types: defining key terms, multiple choice, and short essays. The essays require the students to distinguish key concepts and features in each tradition and to compare among the traditions. The material to be covered by the midterm includes everything from Day 1 of the course until mid-semester. The Final exam will be structured similarly to the Midterm and will cover all material from midterm until the last day of class. Plagiarism, of course, is unacceptable and will automatically receive a failing grade. (see link on website for UF policy on plagiarism.)

**Quizzes:** There will be a total of four (4) participation quiz assignments. The Quizzes are designed to evaluate the student's capacities for Critical Thinking and identification of Content. Students will need to go to the Assignments tab and take a **multiple-choice quiz** on the date indicated on the Lecture and Assignments Schedule. Quizzes open at 12:00 am and close at midnight of the same day. Do not attempt to take the quiz at 11:50 pm because the due date is at midnight and the assignment will close at that time. The quizzes will cover the material from the readings, lectures, lecture notes, and films.

Quizzes are intended to be "participatory" in the sense that students are encouraged to connect and discuss the possible answers to each of the Questions. Students should use the appropriate tab for the purpose of communicating ideas and substantively contributing to the Discussions. Part of your final grade (20 pts.) will be assessed by participation in these Discussions. "Participation" means demonstrating knowledge on the questions by justifying the selection of one possible answer over another (of the type: "I feel answer 'x' is the best because...") and be prepared to defend your suggested response utilizing material from the readings and lecture. On the following day, each student will then individually enter her/his answers.

**Reflection Papers:** The Reflection Papers are designed to assess the student's capacity for understanding content, for critical thinking and communication of ideas. There are two "Reflection Papers" required for the course. Students choose **any two (2) of the topics** listed in the "possible Reflection Paper Questions" found in the Assignments tab. You are asked to reflect on any two of the videos we will screen this semester. These can be found as links on the Modules pages. Students should submit their papers by the due date indicated in the Reflection Paper Questions tab. **Feedback on the Reflection Papers will be provided as written comments as soon after submission as feasible.**

Papers should seek to answer prompt questions in a clear, succinct, and original way. Simply repeating the story line is not acceptable. The prompt questions generally ask the student to reflect on the ways in which different medical traditions are still complementary, though they may differ sharply in their conceptualization of body, illnesses, health, pain, healing, not to mention their religious and philosophical foundations. Students can also reflect on the social and political contexts in which the different traditions are situated. Students are presented with ample choice for selection of which medical tradition they will write about. Thus, the Reflection Papers provide ample space for Critical thinking and integration of ideas.

Each paper should be 4 pages (1,000 words) in length, typed, saved as .doc, or .docx, using 12-size Times New Roman font in a double-spaced format. A published writing

rubric will serve as reference (see Writing Assessment Rubric  
undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/media/undergradaaufledu/gen-ed/wr-  
courses/example\_writing\_assessment\_rubric.pdf

**Extra Credit Essay:** The wealth of material available on all topics related to the Modules 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 selected topics, extra credit points can be garnered (20 total) to add to your grade at the end of the semester. These essays require the student to reflect on key questions in the relations between Western and non-Western medicine. The essays will be assessed for content, for critical thinking, and for communication. The questions for the essays are available altogether under the Assignments tab where you can also submit your papers. Papers should be 750 words in length and in .doc format. Extra credit essays will be evaluated according to the same rubric as the Reflection Papers. Feedback on the Essays will be provided as written comments as soon after submission as feasible.

**Writing:** The writing for this course is evaluated on content and critical thinking, organization and coherence, effectiveness, style, grammar and punctuation. Assignments will be returned to students with a grade and comments that address the students' writing skills. Feedback on all assignments will be provided by the last day of class, or, if provided electronically, by the end of finals.

The writing assessment rubric adopted for this course can be found at: [https://assessment.aa.ufl.edu/media/assessmentaufledu/value-rubrics/critical\\_thinking-value\\_rubric.pdf](https://assessment.aa.ufl.edu/media/assessmentaufledu/value-rubrics/critical_thinking-value_rubric.pdf)Links to an external site.

### **Recommended Writing Guide and Information About Citations:**

Strunk, William, and Elwyn B. White. 2014. *The Elements of Style*. Pearson, Boston MA.

Citation Management Guide from UF Libraries:  
<http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/citationsoftware>

### **VII. GRADES, GRADING DISTRIBUTION, AND GRADE POINTS:**

Grades for the course will be calculated through evaluation of the following assignments:

- Two Reflection Papers - each worth 50 points= 100 points
- Midterm Exam= 100 points
- Final Exam= 100 points
- Four Participation Quizzes – each worth 20 points= 80 points
- Discussion Participation= 20 points
- Extra Credit= 20 points

Your final grade will be based on the sum of the Reflection Papers, Midterm Exam, Final Exam, Participation Quizzes and, where applicable, the Extra Credit, divided by total possible number of points (400). Expressed in % values, Final Grades will be assigned based on the following chart:

A 93-100

A- 90-93

B+ 87-90

B 83-87

B- 80-83

C+ 77-80

C 73-77

C- 70-73

D+ 67-70

D 63-67

D- 60-63

E 0-60

Grade points are assigned based on University of Florida policy:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Please Note:**

We do not offer any kind of special treatment or adjust grades on an individual basis. However, if you are having problems with the course material or health related problems, please contact the lead instructor as soon as possible. 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.

### **VIII. Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-3928565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

### **IX. Email Communication**

All email correspondence to course instructor and Teaching Assistant(s) must be sent through Canvas course website. Correspondence regarding the lecture, homework, and the overall course should be posted on the "General Course Questions" under the Discussion tab. Anything related to grades and personal matters should be sent using the emails of the Instructor ([baniwa05@ufl.edu](mailto:baniwa05@ufl.edu)) and TAs (Please do not post anything related to personal matters on the Discussion tab).

### **X. Academic Honesty and the Honor Code**

#### **Plagiarism or cheating:**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code ([sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/](http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

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. 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> (Links to an external site.)[Links to an external site.](#) for more information on UF policies.

## **XI. Online Course Evaluation by Students:**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations 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/results/>

## **XII. Campus Resources:**

### Health and Wellness

*U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [umatter.ufl.edu/](http://umatter.ufl.edu/) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit [counseling.ufl.edu/](http://counseling.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

*Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit [shcc.ufl.edu/](http://shcc.ufl.edu/).

*University Police Department:* Visit [police.ufl.edu/](http://police.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

*UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center).

## **Academic Resources**

*E-learning technical support:* Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

*Career Connections Center:* Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services [career.ufl.edu/](http://career.ufl.edu/).

*Library Support:* [cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask](https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask) various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

*Teaching Center:* Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. [teachingcenter.ufl.edu/](https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/)

*Writing Studio:* 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. [writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/](https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/)

*Student Complaints On-Campus:* [sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/](https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/)

*On-Line Students Complaints:* [distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/ /](https://distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/)