

## Syllabus

### MYTH AND RITUAL

REL3022(Sect. 0333)/ANT3930 (Sect.01H8)/RLG5937/ANG6930

General Education: Humanities (H) and Writing (2000 words)

**Instructor:** Dr. Robin Wright, Department of Religion. Anderson Hall 107C.  
<https://wrightrobin.academia.edu/>; <https://religion.ufl.edu/faculty/core/robin-m-wright/>

Meeting Time: MWF (Period 7 - 1:55-2:45)

Meeting location: AND0013

Office: Anderson Hall 107C

Office Hours: In-person (MWF 12:00-1:55) /remote (by arrangement)



Source: <https://www.wisdomlib.org/mesopotamian/book/babylonian-religion-and-mythology/d/doc7089.html>

### Course Description

This course examines anthropological and religious studies approaches to myths and rituals using examples from indigenous Americas (North, Central, and South) and other regions of the globe, as well as from non-indigenous contexts, such as popular myths and rituals in contemporary North American culture. Students can expect to learn how scholars have interpreted the symbolism and meanings of myths and rituals. We will discuss the important place that myth and ritual have in mediating historical change. Of special interest this semester are political rituals, and rituals of spiritual transformation through entheogens or through collective catharsis. Finally, we shall consider the topic of the preservation of intangible heritage (myths and rituals), which is a topic of vital concern to many traditional peoples.

### Course Objectives:

Students will be taught how to interpret the symbolism and meanings of myths and rituals. Myths, or sacred stories in the traditional sense, embody the worldview of a given culture. Rituals perform meaning through key symbols that are also found in the myths. We will discuss the place of myth and ritual in both traditional and non-traditional societies. This course also discusses mythic themes that are central to contemporary cinematic

production as well. Throughout the course, films will be used to illustrate the variety of ways in which ritual and myth embody the central values of a society's religious traditions.

Ritual and myth are sensitive to their historical context in such a way that both internal and external change are meaningfully incorporated into a society's central symbols and symbolic practices. Moreover, ritual and myth are understood to be a traditional society's way of controlling such change. How they do this is the focus of our exploration in this course. In addition to understanding the study of myth and ritual, the course is focused on helping students develop critical thinking and communications skills.

### *Role in Curriculum*

This course serves as an elective for Religion and Anthropology majors and minors.

### *Course Contract*

By accepting this syllabus, you are agreeing to participate in frank discussions of many matters that are commonly avoided in public and considered offensive or disturbing by some. These include—but are by no means restricted to—unusual ritual practices and forms of social organization, and alternative approaches to sexuality, gender, and child rearing. If you are not ready to critically discuss such matters, do not take this course.

## **Assignments and Grading Rubric**

### *Assignments*

- Attendance (tracked in class)
- Reflection papers (3; 750 words ea.)
- Writing: two papers: a 5-page academic paper and a 10-page academic research paper
- Other small individual and group assignments

### *Assignment Description*

1. Course participation and attendance (15% of grade). Includes attendance and contribution to class discussions. To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment.

2. Papers: (70% of grade)

- 5-page paper (100 points). Write a five-page paper on the study of myth, applying one or more of the theories discussed in class or reading (1200 to 1500 words plus bibliography).

- Final paper (200 points). Write a research paper on the study of myth and ritual, of approximately 2,000 words, not including references. A proposal for this paper makes up 50 points of the paper grade.

3. Other Assignments (15% of grade)

- Reflection papers (2; 15 points each). Write 750 words in response to prompts.
- Oral presentation (20 points)

### *Paper Format*

One of the goals of the class is to familiarize you with and give you practice applying humanities research methods. We will be using APA style, which is commonly used for humanities research. We will be going over the paper requirements in detail, and a rubric will be posted online.

### *Grading Policies*

The course follows the standard UF grading scheme.

- o A 94 to 100
- o A- <94 to 90
- o B+ <90 to 87
- o B <87 to 84
- o B- <84 to 80
- o C+ <80 to 77
- o C <77 to 74
- o C- <74 to 70
- o D+ <70 to 67
- o D <67 to 64
- o D- <64 to 61
- o E <61 to 0

The course instructor reserves the right to lower or raise course grades based on classroom contributions or upon absences. There is no A+ grade. Grades are not rounded up; for example, a 93.85% is an A-and not an A; grades are consistent with UF policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### *Late or Missing Assignments*

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit.

### **Course Policies**

#### *Communication with Instructor*

Communication and grading will take place online through Canvas. Please enable Canvas to forward all course announcements and instructor communications to your email so that you stay informed. You may email me directly but communication through Canvas is preferred.

#### *Use of Technology*

During class, electronic devices may be used only for notetaking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings or completing online polls. Headphones may not be worn in class.

### *Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations (including those involving the use of technology) is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center 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. The Disability Resource Center may be contacted here: 352-392-8565; <https://disability.ufl.edu/>

### *Attendance and Participation*

**Class attendance is required.** Please make the classes on time, and let me know about any planned absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible, and at least 24 hours in advance. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let me know as soon as possible and provide paper or electronic documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if possible. While some absences are unavoidable, if you expect to be unable to make classes on a regular basis, you must receive permission in advance. 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.

### *COVID-19 Protocols*

In response to COVID-19, the following practices are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- **Vaccines** are readily available at no cost and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit this link for details on where to get your shot, including options that do not require an appointment: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/vaccinations/vaccine-availability/>.

- It is recommended that you wear approved **face coverings** during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated. Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.

- o sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.

- o Hand sanitizing stations are located in every classroom.

- If you are sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email [covid@shcc.ufl.edu](mailto:covid@shcc.ufl.edu)) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus. UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website for more information.

o Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

o If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.

• Continue to regularly visit [coronavirus.ufhealth.org](https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org) and [coronavirus.ufl.edu](https://coronavirus.ufl.edu) for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and vaccination.

All lectures will be recorded for the benefit of enrolled students who may miss class for excused reasons, such as illness or quarantine. Students with an excused absence may be allowed to make up classes via recorded lectures. However, those without a valid excuse can only receive credit for attendance by attending class in the classroom. I am not offering a hybrid option for this course.

### *Returned Assignments*

Assignments will usually be graded no later than one week after they were due.

### *Academic Honesty and the Honor Code*

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 may 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 the policy website (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) for more information.

### *Course Evaluations*

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations during the available interval. Summary results of these assessments will be available to students.

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### **Reading Assignments and Course Schedule:**

Most Reading Assignments are Available on Canvas. There are two texts that must be purchased:

- *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*, by Catherine Bell (Kindle e-book, Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Kindle copy of the *Popol Vuh* [Translated by Michael Bazzett. Milkweed Editions, 2018].

Day	Topic	Readings	Assignments
Week 1 Wed. Aug. 24	Syllabus and Student Learning Goals		
Week 1 Fri. Aug. 26	Methodological Overview: Myth	Jeffrey Kripal ch. 4, "The Creative Functions of Myth and Ritual" 111-125	Group discussion (in class): What are myths?
Week 2 Mon. Aug. 29	Methodological Overview: Ritual	Kripal 125-133	Due before class: A ritual is like... (online assignment)
Week 2 Wed. Aug. 31	Myth and the Sacred	Mircea Eliade, "The Structure of Myths," pp. 1-20, in <i>Myth and Reality</i> .  John Mohawk, "The Sacred in Nature. Mythology Can Change Our Minds"	
Week 2 Fri. Sept. 02	What Is Myth?	William Doty, <i>Mythography</i> , ch. 2, "The Nature of the Mythical Beast", pp. 31-65.	
Week 3 Wed. Sept. 7	Psychological approaches to Myth	Robert A. Segal, <i>Myth</i> , "Myth and Psychology," 82-99.	
Week 3 Fri. Sept. 9	History of the Study of Myths	Scott Leonard and Michael McClure, "The Study of Mythology," pp. 51-62;	
Week 4 Mon. Sept. 12	Myth and the Sustaining of Belief	Sarah Isles Johnston, "How Myths and Other Stories Help to Create and Sustain Beliefs," pp. 141-156 in <i>Narrating Religion</i>	
Week 4 Wed. Sept. 14	The Web of Greek Mythology	Johnston, "The Greek Mythic Story World," ch. 4 in <i>The Story of Myth</i> , 121-146.	
Week 4 Fri. Sept. 16	Middle Eastern and Greco-Roman Creation Myths	Andrew Fiala, "Creation Myths of the Ancient World"	

Week 5 Mon. Sept. 19	Indigenous North American Creation Myths 1	John C. Mohawk, <i>Iroquois Creation Story</i> Foreword and pp. 1-21	Watch in class: "Iroquois Creation Story"  <b>Reflection Paper topics available in Assignments tab</b>
Week 5 Wed. Sept. 21	Indigenous North American Creation Myths 2	John C. Mohawk, <i>Iroquois Creation Story</i> pp. 22-73	
Week 5 Fri. Sept. 23	Indigenous North American Creation Myths 3	John C. Mohawk, <i>Iroquois Creation Story</i> pp. 74-97  Optional: Kroeber: "Unaesthetic Imaginings: Native American Myth as Speech Genre"	
Week 6 Mon. Sept. 26	Indigenous Central American Creation Myths 1	K'iche Maya, <i>Popol Vuh</i> (Bazzett transl.), Introduction	Watch <i>Popol Vuh</i> video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOEQNo5m4rg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOEQNo5m4rg</a>  <b>Reflection Paper on Iroquois due</b>
Week 6 Wed. Sept. 28	Indigenous Central American Creation Myths 2	K'iche Maya, <i>Popol Vuh</i> (Bazzett transl.), Parts 1-2	<b>Reflection Paper on <i>Popol Vuh</i>: prompts in Assignments tab</b>
Week 6 Fri. Sept. 30	Indigenous Central American Creation Myths 3	K'iche Maya, <i>Popol Vuh</i> (Bazzett transl.), Parts 3-4	
Week 7 Mon. Oct. 03	Indigenous South American Creation Myths 1	Terence S. Turner, <i>The Fire of the Jaguar</i> , chs. 1 and 2, pp. 3-17.	<b>Reflection Paper on <i>Popol Vuh</i> due</b>
Week 7 Wed. Oct. 05	Indigenous South American Creation Myths 2	Robin M. Wright, Chapter 6, "The Birth of the Child of the Sun, <i>Kuwai</i> ", <i>Mysteries of the Jaguar Shamans</i> , pp. 233-246.	
Week 7 Fri. Oct. 07 <b>Homecoming (No Class)</b>			
Week 8 Mon. Oct. 10	Indigenous South American Creation Myths 3	Wright, Chapters 7 and 8, <i>Mysteries of the Jaguar Shamans</i> , pp. 247-294.	<b>Topics for Paper on Myth available in Assignments tab</b>

Week 8 Wed. Oct. 12	Myth, Film and Politics  <b>Indigenous Peoples Day</b>	Taylor, Avatar and Nature Spirituality, “Epilogue: Truth and Fiction in Avatar’s Cosmogony and Nature Religion”, pp. 301- 36.	<b>Watch before class: “Avatar” (2009 film); prompts available</b>  In class: Faithkeeper Oren Lyons “God, Glory, Gold”
Week 8 Fri. Oct. 14	Myth and Nationalism	Eric Hobsbawm, The Invention of Tradition, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” pp. 1- 14.	
Week 9 Mon. Oct. 17	Introduction to Ritual	Catherine Bell, <i>Ritual</i> , ch. 3, “Ritual Symbols, Syntax, and Praxis, pp. 61-89.	<b>Reflection Paper due: “Avatar”</b>
Week 9 Wed. Oct. 19	Ritual Genres	Bell, ch. 4, “Basic Genres of Ritual Action.” <b>Required:</b> 93-120; <b>Optional:</b> 121-137.	
Week 9 Fri. Oct. 21	Performance and Ritual	Barry Stephenson, <i>Ritual: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 6, “Ritual as Performance,” 86-101.	<b>Due before class: Paper 1 on Myth</b>
Week 10 Mon. Oct. 24	Performance and Ritual 2	Edward Schieffelin, “Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality” 707-724.	
Week 10 Wed. Oct. 26	Rites of Passage	Victor Turner, <i>The Ritual Process</i> , ch. 3, “Liminality and Communitas,” 94-108.	
Week 10 Fri. Oct. 28	Rites of Passage 2	Eliade: Rites and Symbols of Initiation, pp. ix-20.	
Week 11 Mon. Oct. 31	Calendric Rites	Ronald Hutton, Ch. 6 “SAMHAIN,” in <i>Stations of the Sun</i> .	<b>Topics for Final Paper on Ritual available</b>
Week 11 Mon. Nov. 2	Rites of Renewal	Talamantez, “Contemporary Mescalero Apache Ceremonialism” pp. 142-159.	<b>Watch:</b> “The Sunrise Dance” (Apache) (prompts available) <a href="https://ufl.kanopy.com/s?query=The%20Sunrise%20Dance">https://ufl.kanopy.com/s?query=The%20Sunrise%20Dance</a> .



Week 11 Wed. Nov. 4	Ritual Efficacy	Stanley Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," pp. 175-208.	
Week 12 Mon. Nov. 7	Therapeutic Ritual	Dominique Buchillet, "Nobody is There to Hear: Desana Therapeutic Incantations," pp. 211-227.	<b>Due before class: Paper proposal with thesis and list of sources</b>  <b>Reflection on "The Sunrise Dance" due</b>
Week 12 Wed. Nov. 9	Ritual and Change	Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change," ch. 6 in <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i> , pp. 142-69.	
Week 12 Fri. Nov. 11 <b>Veterans' Day (no class)</b>			
Week 13 Mon. Nov. 14	New Rituals: Global Ayahuasca	Evgenia Fotiou, "'One Heart,': Personal Insights into Spiritual Dimensions of Participation in Contemporary Ayahuasca Rituals," pp. 71-96.	<b>Prompts for "Wine of Souls" available</b>
Week 13 Wed. Nov.16	New Rituals: the Internet	Cheryl Casey, "Virtual Ritual, Real Faith: The Revirtualization of Religious Ritual in Cyberspace," pp. 73-85.	
Week 13 Fri. Nov. 18	New Rituals: Burning Man 1	Sarah Pike, "Performing Grief in Formal and Informal Rituals at the Burning Man Festival," 363-376.  Pike, "No Novenas for the Dead," pp. 195- 211 in Burning Man.	<b>Reflection Papers on "Wine of Souls" due</b>
Week 14 Mon. Nov. 21	New Rituals: Burning Man 2	François Gauthier, Ch. 8 "The Enchantments of Consumer Capitalism: Beyond Belief at the Burning Man Festival" Pp. 143-58.	Podcasts: (1) Tanya Luhrmann, "Ritual Practice and Mental Health"; (2) "Revelry and Reverence Burning Man's Temple."

<b>No Class Nov. 23-26: Thanksgiving break</b>			
Week 15 Mon. Nov. 28	Oral presentations		
Week 15 Wed. Nov 30	Oral presentations		
Week 14 Fri. Dec. 2	Oral presentations		
Week 15 Mon. Dec. 5	Evaluations & Course Summary		
Week 15 Wed. Dec. 7	<b>Final paper due (online)</b>		

## **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](http://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/](http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/)

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

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

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