

**The Supernatural:  
Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion  
Anthropology 4751  
Spring 2017**



**Class Sessions:** T/Th 9:30-10:50 AM

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**Course Description**

This course is devoted to the study of the supernatural as a social and cultural phenomenon: how the practices and beliefs that we often term *religion* are lived out and practiced among groups of human beings, and how they affect other aspects of human life, from kinship to politics to how we obtain food. As the vast majority of humanity affiliates with religion on some level, an understanding of the diversity, forms, and impacts of religion is a vital element of a thorough education for anyone seeking to understand or work with human beings.

In this course, we take an anthropological approach toward understanding religion. Rather than solely a survey of the largest religions, we will cover both extremely large and extremely small religions. We will explore rituals and texts of organized religions but, additionally, practices such as magic and witchcraft which also constitute important elements in the tapestry of human religiosity. In fact, we will cover supernatural practices from every inhabited continent. In doing so, we will take a topical approach, exploring such topics as ritual, worldview, and magic using examples from many cultures, exploring both the similarities and differences in what it means to be religious and what it means to be human.

<sup>1</sup> <http://thecripplegate.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Religion.jpg>

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Students will understand fundamental approaches of the anthropology of religion.
2. Students will comprehend recurring elements that occur within religion and variations in their form cross-culturally.
3. Students will synthesize the significance of religion to human societies and cultures, especially as these relate to contemporary issues and events.
4. Students will develop “religious literacy”: the ability to understand religious phenomena using anthropological approaches, and in particular cultural relativism and context.

## **Required Texts**

1. Stein, Rebecca and Philip Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Routledge.
2. All other readings will be made available through Blackboard.

**Grading Scale:** 900-1000 A / 800-899 B / 700-799 C / 600-699 D / 0-599 F

## **Grade Components**

Reflections (6 x 40 pts.).....	240 Points
Midterm Exam.....	250 Points
Religious Literacy Paper.....	250 Points
Paper Topic Selection.....	10 Points
<u>Final Exam.....</u>	<u>250 Points</u>
Total.....	1000 Points

## **Assignments:**

- **Reflection Posts:** Throughout the semester, students will write six reflection posts. The topic and length of these will be specified on Blackboard, but they will typically be one to two paragraphs in length. These will always be due at the start of class on the dates listed. **Dates: As listed below, by start of class.**
- **Midterm Exam:** On 03/02/2017 students will take a midterm exam in-class. **Date: 03/02/2017, in class.**
- **Religious Literacy Paper:** Students will complete a 5-7 page (double-spaced) essay, detailing the ethnographic context of a religious practice or belief. The topic must be approved by the professor. Additional details and a rubric will be provided in class. **Due: 04/04/2017, by midnight.**
- **Paper Topic Selection:** Students must submit through Blackboard their proposed paper topic for clearance by the professor. **Due: 02/09/2017, by midnight.**
- **Final Exam:** On 05/11/2017 you will come to the classroom and take a final exam. **Date: 05/11/2017, 8:00-10:00 AM.**

## **Assignment Due Dates**

- 01/24: Reflection #1
- 01/31: Reflection #2
- 02/09: Paper Topic Selection
- 02/14: Reflection #3
- 03/02: Reflection #4
- 03/07: Midterm Exam
- 03/23: Reflection #5
- 04/04: Religious Literacy Paper
- 04/13: Reflection #6
- 05/11: Final Exam (8-10 AM)

### **Course Policies**

**Withdrawal:** If you are unable to complete this course, you must officially withdraw by the University-designated date (for a "W" with instructor approval). Withdrawing from a course is a formal procedure that YOU must initiate. I cannot do it for you. If you simply stop attending and do not withdraw, you will receive a performance grade, usually an "F".

**Attendance:** There is no attendance requirement; however, without attendance you will likely learn much less, miss announcements, and do poorly on the assignments and exams. Miss class at your own risk.

**Make up Work:** I do not allow make-up work for assignments missed.

**Extra Credit:** There is no extra credit planned at this time; however, I will notify you if this changes.

**Acceptable Student Behavior:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.deanofstudents.unt.edu](http://www.deanofstudents.unt.edu). In this classroom, "acceptable student behavior" includes (but is not limited to):

Being respectful of others' thoughts, opinions, experiences, and perspectives.

Giving every student a chance to participate by not dominating discussions.

Arriving to class on time.

Refraining from engaging in side-conversations.

No usage of electronics unless directed by the instructor.

**Contacting the Professor:** When emailing me you must indicate your course and full name to facilitate my response. You must also use your official UNT email (not a private email). Understand that I have hundreds of students and may not respond immediately. However, if I have not responded within 24 hours (72 hours on the weekend), feel free to email me again to make sure I have received your email.

**Do Not Miss Essays or Exams:** If you have a conflict with any due date or exam date, it is your responsibility to make alternative arrangements ahead of time – NOT the week of the due date. **The exams cannot be taken late without either (a) prior written approval from the instructor or (b) an officially University documented emergency. Allowing alternative arrangements is up to the discretion of the instructor.**

**Late Work:** Unexcused submissions of late work will incur a 10% loss of points per calendar day, including the day the assignment was due [i.e. if you turn a reflection in after class on the day it was due, that is 1 day late; the next day is 2 days late]. In the case of medical or other emergencies that prevent timely completion of work, you must immediately speak to the professor and provide documentation, **with extensions made at the discretion of the professor.**

**Academic Misconduct:** The Department of Anthropology does not tolerate plagiarism, cheating, or helping others to cheat. Students suspected of any of these will be provided the opportunity for a hearing; a guilty finding will merit an automatic "F" in the course. In addition, I reserve the right to pursue further disciplinary action within the UNT legal system, which may result in dismissal from the university. Plagiarism is defined as misrepresenting the work of others (whether published or not) as your own. It may be inadvertent or intentional. Any facts, statistics, quotations, or paraphrasing of any information that is not common knowledge, should be cited. For more information on paper writing, including how to avoid plagiarism, and how to use citations, see <http://www.unt.edu/anthropology/writing.htm>. For information on the University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty, see the UNT Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, <http://www.unt.edu/csrr/>.

**ADA:** The Anthropology Department does not discriminate based on an individual's disability, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Our program provides academic adjustments or help to individuals with disabilities, and attempts will be made to meet all certified requirements. Please see me if you have a documented disability so that appropriate arrangements can be made to help you get the most out of this class. In such cases, please make sure to obtain documentation through the Office of Disability Accommodation.

## Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Stein & Stein Textbook Reading	Reading on Blackboard	Assignment Due
<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Core Concepts</b>			
01/17, 01/19	Anthropology and Religion			
01/24, 01/26	Foundational Theories	Chapter 1	Durkheim, <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> Excerpt	<u>Reflection #1 Due (01/24)</u>
01/31, 02/02	The Global Religious Landscape			<u>Reflection #2 Due (01/31)</u>
<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>Systems of Meaning</b>			
02/07, 02/09	Worldview and Myth	Chapter 9	Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus"	<u>Paper Topic Selection (02/09)</u>
02/14, 02/16	Worldview and Myth (Continued)	Chapter 2		<u>Reflection #3 Due (02/14)</u>
02/21, 02/23	Religion and the Environment		Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree"	
02/28, 03/02	Ritual and Religious Symbolism	Chapters 3 & 4	Eck, <i>Darsan</i> Excerpt	<u>Reflection #4 Due (03/02)</u>
<b>03/07</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>			<b>Midterm Exam</b>
<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>Accessing the Supernatural</b>			
03/09	Magic			
03/21, 03/23	Magic (Continued)	Chapter 7	Lurhmann, "The Magic of Secrecy"	<u>Reflection #5 Due (03/23)</u>
03/28, 03/30	Witchcraft and Sorcery	Chapter 10	Evans-Pritchard, "The Notion of Witchcraft"	
04/04, 04/06	Shamanism and Divine Communication	Chapter 6		<b>Religious Literacy Paper (04/04)</b>
04/11, 04/13	Shamanism and Divine Communication (Continued)	Pp. 147-156	Kendall – Shamanism Reading	<u>Reflection #6 Due (04/13)</u>
<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>The Supernatural in the Contemporary World</b>			
04/18, 04/20	Change, Part 1: Syncretism and Revitalization	Pp. 230-243	Meyer, "If You are a Devil, You are a Witch" (Pp. 103-123)	
04/25, 04/27	Change, Part 2: Secularism, Fundamentalism, and Pluralism	Pp. 244-255	Jost, "Understanding Islam"; <u>Optional:</u> Bellah "Civil Religion"	
05/02, 05/04	Conclusions; Review			
05/11	<b>Final Exam</b>			<b>Final (8:00-10:00 AM)</b>

**Note:** The schedule and syllabus are subject to change at instructor discretion. Please regularly check Blackboard and your email for announcements of changes, in addition to attending class regularly.