

**The Supernatural:  
Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion  
Anthropology 4751  
Spring 2018**



1

**Table of Contents**

Contact Information.....1  
Course Description-.....2  
Required Texts.....2  
Learning Objectives.....2  
Skills Development.....2  
Assignments.....3  
Grading Scale.....3  
Policies.....4  
Schedule.....6

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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 group under the term “religion” are lived and practiced among human groups, and how they affect other aspects of human life, from gender to politics to environmental sustainability. An estimated 5 in 6 people are affiliated with a religion (with a significant number of the remaining holding supernatural beliefs) and supernatural worldviews profoundly shape both world events and daily realities for many humans. As such, an understanding of the diversity, forms, and impacts of religiosity is a valuable element in any undergraduate education.

In this course, we take an anthropological approach toward understanding religion. Rather than a simple survey of the largest religions, we will cover both extremely large, and extremely small, religions; we will explore the public rituals of organized religion and also practices such as magic, shamanism, and witchcraft, which also constitute important elements in the tapestry of human approaches to the supernatural. 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.

**Class Sessions:** T/Th 9:30-10:50 AM, Th 121

## **Required Texts**

1. Stein, Rebecca and Philip Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 4<sup>rd</sup> edition.
2. All other readings will be made available through Blackboard.

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Students will understand and apply major analytical approaches in the anthropology of religion.
2. Students will comprehend central elements across religions and variations in their forms cross-culturally.
3. Students will synthesize the significance of religion to human societies and cultures.
4. Students will develop religious literacy: the ability to understand religious phenomena using anthropological approaches.

## **Skills Development**

In addition to the aforementioned learning objectives, this course is intended to offer students opportunities to enrich the following competencies:

1. Analytical thinking
2. Written and verbal communication
3. Research and synthesis
4. Effective argumentation
5. Evaluation of information sources

## Assignments

<b>Points</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
300	<b>Reflection Posts:</b> 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. <u>These will always be due at the start of class.</u>	See below (by start of class)
10	<b>Paper Topic Selection:</b> Students will submit their selected paper topic.	02/06/18 (midnight CST)
250	<b>Midterm Exam:</b> Students will take an in-class midterm exam. <sup>29</sup>	03/08/18 (in class)
240	<b>Religious Literacy Paper:</b> Students will submit through Blackboard a 5-7 page (double-spaced) research essay contextualizing a specific religious practice within its ethnographic/cultural context and meaning. Additional details and a rubric will be provided in-class.	04/03/18 (midnight, CST)
200	<b>Final Exam:</b> Students will complete an online final exam through Blackboard.	05/07/18 (midnight, CST)
<b>1000</b>		

## Assignment Due Dates

01/23: Reflection #1  
01/30: Reflection #2  
02/06: Paper Topic Selection  
02/15: Reflection #3  
02/27: Reflection #4  
**03/08: Midterm Exam**  
03/27: Reflection #5  
04/03: Religious Literacy Paper  
04/17: Reflection #6  
**05/07: Final Exam**

## Grading Scale

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

## Course Policies

- 1. 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”.
- 2. Attendance:** There is no attendance requirement; however, without attendance you will likely learn less, miss announcements, and do poorly on the assignments and exams. Miss class at your own risk.
- 3. Discussion Participation:** Students are expected to complete required readings and to be prepared to discuss these in class. Discussion will play a critical role in this class.
- 4. Contacting the Professor:** Please feel free to come by office hours for assistance. Otherwise, email is the best way to reach me outside of class: adam.dunstan@unt.edu. In the email, you must indicate your course and full name to facilitate my response. You must also use your official UNT email, not a private email. Please understand that I have many students and may not respond immediately. However, if I have not responded within 24 hours (72 hours on the weekend), email me again to make sure I have received your email.
- 5. Due Dates:** If you have a conflict with any due date or exam date, it is your responsibility to make alternative arrangements ahead of time – not after the fact. **Students may NOT take exams late unless there is written permission from the instructor before the exam date or there has been a documented medical emergency. Allowing alternative arrangements is up to the discretion of the instructor.**
- 6. Late Work:** Unexcused submission of late assignments will incur a 10% loss of points per calendar day (including the day the assignment was due, if turned in past a deadline). For the policy on exams, see Policy #5.
- 7. 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/>.
- 8. 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. The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to

implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://disability.unt.edu/>. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

**9. Extra Credit:** I will notify you of any extra credit opportunities that may arise.

**10. 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.

Refraining from engaging in side-conversations.

Arriving to class on time.

No usage of electronics unless directed by the instructor.

**11. Schedule Changes:** The Course Schedule (including assigned readings and due dates) may be changed at the discretion of the instructor. In particular, readings may be added based on instructional need. Please check Canvas and email regularly to be made aware of any changes.

## Course Schedule

**Please Note:** The schedule may be changed at the discretion of the instructor; please attend class and check Blackboard and email regularly to be made aware of any changes.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Stein &amp; Stein Reading</b>	<b>Blackboard Reading</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Core Concepts</b>			
01/16, 01/18	Anthropology and Religion	Chapter 1, Pp. 1-18		
01/23, 01/25	Foundational Theories (Part 1)	Chapter 1, Pp. 18-27	<p>Durkheim “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (Excerpt) (25 Pp.)</p> <p>Kalberg, “Introduction to the <i>Protestant Ethic</i>” (Excerpt) (4 Pp.)</p> <p>Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of the Right” (Excerpt) (1 Pp.)</p> <p><i>Total Pages of Reading: 40</i></p>	<b>01/23:</b> Reflection #1
01/30, 02/01	Foundational Theories (Part 2)		<p>Sanders, “Buses in Bongoland: Seductive Analytics and the Occult” (18 Pp.)</p> <p>Scheper-Hughes, “Death Without Weeping” (5 Pp.)</p> <p>Turner, “The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?” (4 Pp.)</p> <p><i>Total Pages of Reading: 27</i></p>	<b>01/30:</b> Reflection #2
<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>Systems of Meaning, Systems of Power</b>			
02/06, 02/08	Worldview and Mythology	Ch. 9	<p>Douglas, “The Abominations of Leviticus” (11 Pp.)</p> <p>Ortner, “Sherpa Purity” (13 Pp.)</p> <p><i>Total Pages of Reading: 48</i></p>	<b>02/06:</b> Paper Topic Selection
02/13, 02/15	Worldview and Mythology (Continued)	Ch. 2	<p>Murphy &amp; Murphy, “Women of the Forest” (8 pp.)</p> <p><i>Total Pages of Reading: 31</i></p>	<b>02/15:</b> Reflection #3

02/20, 02/22	Ritual and Symbolism	Chapter 4, Pp. 82-103	Turner, “Betwixt and Between” (14 pp.)  Henkel, “Between Belief and Unbelief Lies the Performance of Salat: Meaning and Efficacy of a Muslim Ritual” (16)  <i>Total Pages of reading: 52</i>	
02/27, 03/01	Ritual and Symbolism (Continued)	Chapter 3, Pp. 58-73	Eck, “Darsan” (Excerpt) (11 pp.)  <i>Total pages of Reading: 26</i>	<b>02/27:</b> Reflection #4
03/06	Religion and Ecology		Darlington, “The Ordination of a Tree” (13 Pp.)  Sponsel, “Spiritual Ecology: One Anthropologist’s Reflections” (9 Pp.)  White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” (7 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 29</i>	
03/08	<b>Midterm Exam</b>			<b>03/08:</b> Midterm Exam
03/13, 03/15	Spring Break			
<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>Accessing the Supernatural</b>			
03/20, 03/22	Magic	Chapter 7, Pp. 145-153	Morgain, “The Alchemy of Life: Magic, Anthropology, and Human Nature in Pagan Theology” (18 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 27</i>	
03/27, 03/29	Magic (Continued)		Luhrmann, “The Magic of Secrecy” (31 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 31</i>	<b>03/27:</b> Reflection #5
04/03, 04/05	Evil Magic: Learned and Innate	Chapter 10	Evans-Pritchard, “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events” (18 Pp.)  Bawa Yamba, “Cosmologies in Turmoil: Witchfinding and AIDS in Chiawa, Zambia” (21 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 54</i>	<b>04/03:</b> Religious Literacy Paper

04/10, 04/12	Shamanism and Other Forms of Supernatural Communication	Chapter 6	Kendall, “Wives, Lesser Wives, and Ghosts: Supernatural Conflict in a Korean village” (10 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 25</i>	
<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>The Modern Supernatural</b>			
04/17, 04/19	Religious Change: Revitalization, Hybridity, and Syncretism, Oh My!	Chapter 11, Pp. 252- 266	MacKenzie, “Judas Off the Noose: Sacerdotes Mayas, Cosumbistras, and the Politics of Purity in the Tradition of San Simón in Guatemala” (19 Pp.)  Warrier, “Modern Ayurveda in Transnational Context” (10 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 43</i>	<b>04/17: Reflection #6</b>
04/24, 04/26	Religious Diversity and Human Rights	Chapter 12	Dunstan, “Legislative Ambiguity and Ontological Hierarchy in US Sacred Land Law” (12 Pp.)  <i>Total Pages of Reading: 25</i>	
05/01, 05/03	Conclusions			
05/07	<b>Final Exam</b>			<b>Final Exam Due by Midnight</b>