

Course Description:

Since the inception of anthropology in the late nineteenth century, questions of religion have been central to the discipline. This course examines the range of anthropological approaches to the study of religion that have been developed and refined over the past hundred years. It focuses on both the variety of religious phenomena found through out the world and the methodological and theoretical techniques anthropologists use to account for them. It focuses particular attention on the explanatory power of major theoretical approaches as well as their weaknesses; the course examines the evolution of theory in anthropology, as the debate over religion is refined during the twentieth century. The course also takes as its starting point some fundamental questions about the role that religious institutions and commitments play in shaping contemporary social, cultural, and political issues. These include, but are not limited to: "In what ways do symbols and rituals shape a community's moral outlook?"; "How is 'the person' variously conceived as a member of a specific religious tradition?"; "How can explanatory methods developed in the West be applied to the seeming diversity of 'religious' phenomena in the world," and "What sense can we make of approaches to 'the divine' in an age of uncertainty?"

In the spirit of answering these difficult questions, this course examines the epistemological assumptions inherent in conventional theories, showing the disciplinary overlap between anthropology, sociology, political science, critical theory, cultural studies, literary theory, and the humanities. We conclude by identifying some new theoretical directions and new areas for field research in anthropology, in addition to speculating on what role greater religious understanding among diverse peoples might play in re-shaping global civil society.

Course Requirements:

1. *Class Participation.* This is a reading and discussion intensive course.
2. *Response Journal.* Students will keep a reading response journal that will be collected twice during the class. This is an informal exercise, a way for students to jot down ideas that can spurn on conversation during class meetings.
3. *Participation in Group Activities.* In the latter half of the class, group assignments will be distributed in which students will be responsible for a creative or reflective presentation that demonstrates important elements of the readings.
4. *Final Essay.* Students will be responsible for a final, synthetic, and comparative project in which they will respond to a question posed by the instructor.

Course Outline:

- A. Introductions: What is "Religion"? What is the Study of Religion, on a global scale? How to Proceed?
- B. Symbols and the (semantic? sympathetic?) Work they Do.
- C. Modeling Morality and Affecting the World: The Folklore of Witchcraft.
- D. Enter History, Politics, and Polemics: The Moral Orders of Resistance
- E. Imagining, Enacting, and Speaking the Universe: Cultures and Cosmology
- F. Persons and their Rituals
- G. Religion in the Post-Colony I: Oppression, Redemption, Dependence, and Creation.
- H. Religion in the Post-Colony II: New Civil Orders
- I. Final Essay Due.