Religion, Ritual and the Arts 3938, Fall 2017

Rodney Sebastian (Religion Dept., University of Florida)

Class Time & Location
Tuesday, (3pm to 4.55pm)
Thursday, (4.05pm to 4.55pm)
Location: AND 134

Office Hours & Contact Information
Tuesday and Friday 12:00–1:45 pm, and by appointment; 123 Anderson Hall; tel: (352) 278 4797; email: r.sebastian@ufl.edu (to be used for all written communications).

Course Description
This course is designed to familiarize students with religious rituals, artistic expressions and cultural performances in diverse religious traditions. We will explore expressions of religion through various aesthetic performances such as art, music, dance, trance, healing, ritual and pilgrimage. We will look at how Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American religions contact the divine through the body and the environment. During the course, we will also interact with religious performers and ritual specialists, who will be invited to demonstrate and share their experiences. Students will be encouraged to participate in this exploration as we analyze different types of performance in diverse religious traditions, and discuss how these performances take on various religious, social and political meanings. We will also examine performance theories and concepts related to the study of religion.

Objectives
1) Students will develop an understanding of how religious practitioners engage in performances through ritual, dance, theatre, trance and pilgrimage.
2) They will also be able to discuss how social, political and localized tropes emerge from or influence such performances.

Prerequisites
There are no formal prerequisites.
**Assignments and Requirements**

1. Reading of assigned materials, class attendance, participation in class discussions and activities (10 % of the final grade).

   Students are expected to attend all the classes, do all readings, and participate in discussions.

2. Class Presentations, and leading of discussions (15 %)

   When students are responsible for leading weekly discussions, they have to prepare a 400-500 word summary and response to the assigned readings. The reading response must be uploaded on e-learning by 10am on the day of the class. It should contain a brief summary of the readings, critical response and discussion topics for the class.

3. Reading Responses (30%)

   Students are required to post their 150-200 word reflections on the readings in the course website for each week. Each student will be allowed to miss two weeks of readings without having points deducted.

4. Paper abstract and annotated bibliography or film project proposal (10%) due by 16 Nov 2017, 10pm.

   The abstract and bibliography must clearly state the topic of the final paper. It should contain a short 250 words abstract of the paper and at least 10 titles of academic publications relevant to the topic. Each of them should be annotated with 2-3 lines about the content and how it is relevant to the topic. Students doing the film project should submit a one-page proposal with IRB approval (if necessary).

5. Final Research paper (35%)

   The final paper should be about 3000 – 4000 words inclusive of notes and references. Students are recommended to submit early drafts of their papers for feedback. On week 16, the final week, students will present their research for about 5 minutes. This will comprise 5% of their grade. Final papers are due on 12 Dec.

   The ethnographic film should be about 10 – 15 min on a religious ritual, dance or drama performance. If interviews are going to be conducted students should go through the IRB process. Films will be shown during the last week of class.
**Course Schedule and Discussion Topics**

**Week 1, Aug 22: Introduction and syllabus overview**

Why is it important to study rituals, dance, and trance?

Film: Urgan, Child of the Himalayas directed by Corine Glowacki and Philippe Bigo, 2004

**Week 2, Aug 29: Ritual and Performance Theories Overview**

How do we define "ritual" and "performance" in the study of religion?


**Week 3, Sep 5: Ritual and Society**

What is the relationship between ritual and society?


Film: Chinese burial rituals https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4042M36A1hQ

**Week 4, Sep 12: Ritual and Power**

What is the relationship between ritual and power?


**Week 5, Sep 19: Rituals and Aesthetics**

How does aesthetics affect ritual performances?


**Week 6, Sep 26: Ritual and Trance**

How does trance possession serve as a performance?


Film: *N/um Tchai: The Ceremonial Dance of the !Kung Bushmen*

**Week 7, Oct 3: Ritual and Drama**

What role does drama play in religious rituals?

Visit to St. Augustine Catholic Church


**Week 8, Oct 10: Ritual and non-Human Communication**

How does ritual serve to communicate with other-than-humans?


**Week 9, Oct 17: Ritual and Healing**

How is performance involved in religious healing rituals?


Film: Fate of the Lhapa

Film: Ritual and Healing: Blue Buddha Lost Secrets of Tibetan Medicine: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orVH_RwGJe0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orVH_RwGJe0)

**Week 10, Oct 24: Dance and Cultural Preservation**

How do cultural dance performances serve to preserve tradition? What are the issues involved in cultural preservation?
Week 11, Oct 31: Dance and Transformation

What are the issues that emerge in the interplay of text, dance traditions and modernity?


Film: The Dancer and the Dance directed by Felicia Hughes-Freeland, 1988


Week 12, Nov 7: Art and Religious Meaning

How has art transmitted religious meanings?


Activity: Field trip to A Nan Buddhist temple

Week 13, Nov 14: Pilgrimage and Performance

How is pilgrimage a transformative ritual and a site of performance?

Turner, Victor. "Pilgrimages as Social Processes." In *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* -

Swami, Radhanath "Journey Home" Selected chapters.

**Week 14, Nov 21: Music and Religion**

*How are Islamic concepts expressed through music?*


**Week 15, Nov 28: Course Review: Theoretical Reflections**


**Week 16, 5 Dec: Student Presentations (End)**
Grading and Academic Policies

Grades and Grading Policies

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

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In addition, please familiarize yourself with the official UF policies on how grade points are assigned: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/Pages/home.aspx

Academic Honesty

Students must conform to UF’s academic honesty policy regarding plagiarism and other forms of cheating. This means that 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 university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php and http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html.

All students found to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in any assignment for this course will be prosecuted to the full extent of the university honor policy, including judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code.

For serious violations, you will fail this course.

Students with Disabilities

Please do not hesitate to ask for accommodation for a documented disability. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office.

(http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/).

The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting
accommodation. Please ask the instructor if you would like any assistance in this process.

Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures

– Richard Schechner