

# SYLLABUS FOR REL2388/ANT3930

## INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAS

Spring, 2021 MWF Period 5 (11:45 AM - 12:35 PM)

PROFESSOR ROBIN M. WRIGHT

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[This Course is Entirely Online]

**Objectives of the Course:** This course introduces the student to the historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices of Native peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean. With such a vast and diverse universe to study, our approach will (1) highlight key features of indigenous religious traditions throughout the Americas; (2) discuss central features of religious traditions in various of the major historical civilizations in the Americas; and (3) focus on religious ethnographies of contemporary native peoples in all four macro-regions.

Thus, the course is a mix of what we understand about the religions of the historic great civilizations of the Americas, and what we understand about contemporary indigenous religiosities. The main emphasis in all three objectives is on historical change and continuity in indigenous religious traditions. **This course is required for those who intend to minor in American Indian and Indigenous Studies or are in the Interdisciplinary Studies Major.**

## Reading List:

- Vine Deloria, *God is Red*. 2003. Fulcrum Press.
- David Carrasco. *Religions of Mesoamerica*. 2014, Second Edition, Waveland.
- Davi Kopenawa & B. Albert, *The Sky is Falling*. 2013. Harvard.
- Jose Barreiro, *Dreaming Mother Earth*. 2018, Campana.
- All other Readings are provided in pdf format, in the Modules section.

## Course Requirements:

1.) Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to each class meeting. Class participation does count (10%) in final grade evaluation. Discussions will be scheduled on Fridays of every week.

Continued absences will not be tolerated: following the third unexcused absence, 3 grade points will be taken off the final grade for each day of absence. More than 6 absences will lead to administrative withdrawal from the course;

2.) Four papers (5-7 pp. apiece, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt) on indigenous religious traditions in each of the geographical areas studied in the course. Topics emerging from the Readings/ Videos/ Discussions will be distributed beforehand.

Each paper should be uploaded to the **Assignments** tab on the website during the week following the final day of each of the four major sections. Each paper is worth 20% of the final grade; the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on the student's written assignments with respect to organization and content of ideas, clarity and coherence in the presentation of ideas, grammar and punctuation in any written assignments. A Writing Rubric can be downloaded from the Assignments tab;

3.) A short Reflection paper, 3 pages in length, worth 10%, same format as above, that focusses on one or more of the videos watched during the course. Ideas will be posted in the Assignments tab.

## GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

20% for each short paper (T = 80%); 10% for Reflection paper; 10% class participation

A: ≥94 of X; A-: ≥90 of X; B+: ≥87 of X; B: ≥83 of X; B-: ≥80 of X; C+: ≥77 of X; C: ≥73 of X; C-: ≥70 of X; D+: ≥67 of X; D: ≥63 of X; D-: ≥60 of X; E: below 60.

## CONTENT OF THE COURSE

This course seeks to present an in-depth understanding of the cosmogonies (views on creation), cosmologies (the spatiotemporal structures of the universe), anthropologies (relations among all living beings, what constitutes a 'person', and what constitute 'religious specialists'), and eschatologies (views on death and regeneration) of the native societies studied. The methodologies this course adopts are comparative, historical, and interpretive.

The Introductory section (Part I) discusses key features of indigenous religious traditions in general: the creation narratives; an inter-subjective and multi-tiered cosmos, with multiple dimensions of time and space; an holistic cosmos, featuring deep connections among spirits, deities, and humans; the central importance of religious specialists, ceremonial leaders, spiritual leaders, and prophets; reciprocity as a founding principle of religious & social life; the adaptability of religious beliefs to change; and spirituality in politics.

While the course highlights the diversity and the resilience of indigenous religions, it also discusses the principle threats to their continuity, among which are: the

appropriations by non-indigenous peoples of indigenous beliefs and practice, land loss and heritage destruction, the shattering of religious institutions during the conquest, the imposition of Christianity. Despite these, indigenous spiritualities have demonstrated their remarkable capacities to adapt which can be seen in processes of healing, the resurgence of religious traditions, and the spiritualization of political change.

Following the Introduction, the 4 main sections of the course will cover the following: (1) Native North American Religious traditions, including creation narratives, sacred landscapes, contemporary ceremonialism, and the spiritual foundations of political activism; (2) Native Central American Religions, the most highly-developed indigenous theologies in the Americas, past and present; (3) Native South American Religions, including the Andean Highlands but more especially, Lowland Amazonia (where the Instructor has realized most of his fieldwork and research), especially religious specialists; and (4) Native Religions of the Caribbean, especially narratives of creation, sacred landscapes, ritual specialists, religious and ethnic resurgence.

**Materials for the Course:** The films and readings are designed to provide both scholarly and accessible views on the religious cultures of indigenous peoples, and the challenges they face today. Films will illustrate how native peoples have creatively forged solutions to contemporary problems posed by political and economic changes.

The materials for the course consist of the readings (articles scanned and included in the **Modules** section) and books to purchase in bookstore or by Amazon.com, powerpoint lectures, and films. Some **Films** can be accessed through UFL Library Proxy. Some of the Readings are placed on Reserve in Smathers Library.

## PROGRAM OF LECTURES, READINGS, FILMS, AND DISCUSSIONS:

01/11: Course presentation and Readings;

### INTRODUCTION TO INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAS

01/13: A Continental Perspective: connections and exchanges

(powerpoint of "Maps of Native Peoples of the Americas")

01/15: Ceremonial Life and Mythology as Sacred

**Readings:** "Religion", George Tinker, *Encyclopedia of Native American Religion*; and "The Sacred in Nature: Mythology can change our minds", in John Mohawk, *Thinking in Indian* [pdfs in Modules tab]

### 01/18: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY - NO CLASS

01/20: Ontologies and Perspectives

**Readings:** A. I. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, behavior and worldview";

## **PART I. NATIVE NORTH AMERICA**

01/22: Cahokia - the great culture of the Mississippi

**Readings:** Pauketat, *Cahokia. Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi*, Chs. 1-3.

**Watch:** "Cahokia. America's Lost City" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_ddTW7CADo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_ddTW7CADo)

01/25: Historical Overview of Native North America during US Expansionism - 1

**Reading:** Young, *Quest for Harmony*, Ch. 1 [pdf in Modules tab];

**Watch:** (highly recommended) "Doctrine of Discovery. Unmasking the Domination Code" (\$5.00 to rent; watch with fellow students) <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/dominationcode>

01/27: Historical Overview of Native North America during US Expansionism - 2

**Reading:** Young, *Quest for Harmony*, Ch. 1 (cont.);

01/29: "Thinking in Time and Space";

**Reading:** Vine Deloria, *God Is Red*, Chapter 4;

**Watch:** "In the Light of Reverence. Part 1: Devil's Tower" (30 min.);

02/01: "The Problem of Creation";

**Reading:** Vine Deloria, *God Is Red*, Chapter 5;

**Watch:** "The Mystery of Chaco Canyon" (55min.)

02/03: "Tribal Religions and American Culture";

**Reading:** Vine Deloria, *God Is Red*, Chapter 14;

**Watch:** "In the Light of Reverence. Part 2 - Hopi Land" (29 min.)

02/05: "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility";

**Reading:** Vine Deloria, *God Is Red*, Chapters 16;

**Watch:** "In the Light of Reverence. Part 3 Mount Shasta" (33 min.)

## **PART II: NATIVE CENTRAL AMERICA: OLMEC, AZTEC, MAYA**

02/08: Introduction

**Readings:** Introduction & Chapter 1 in Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*

02/10: The Olmec, Teotihuacan, Classic Maya

**Readings:** Carrasco, Ch. 2;

02/12: Religion of the Aztecs

**Readings:** Carrasco, Ch. 3;

**Watch:** "The Five

Suns" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQcy2D\\_MBUg&t=1622s&ab\\_channel=CalmeCacXochipilli](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQcy2D_MBUg&t=1622s&ab_channel=CalmeCacXochipilli)

### ***NOTE: PAPERS FOR PART I DUE TODAY***

02/15: Maya Religion

**Readings:** Carrasco, Ch. 4;

02/17: "The Popol Vuh"

**Readings:** [reading selection from the Popol Vuh to be posted]

**Video:** "Popol

Vuh" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOEQNo5m4rg&t=918s&ab\\_channel=PhilHarriS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOEQNo5m4rg&t=918s&ab_channel=PhilHarriS)

02/19: Contemporary Religions

**Readings:** Carrasco, Ch. 5;

### **PART III: NATIVE PEOPLES OF HIGHLAND & LOWLAND SOUTH AMERICA & THEIR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

02/22: Ancient Civilizations - 1

**Watch at home:** BBC documentary on Chachapoyas "People of the Clouds" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvGf0Jlat0s&t=3s&ab\\_channel=HuhBub](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvGf0Jlat0s&t=3s&ab_channel=HuhBub)

02/24: Tiwanako Ceremonial Life

**Watch:** BBC documentary on Tiwanako: "The Stone at the Centre": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmTOIBSc54o>

02/26: Ancient Civilizations - 2

**Watch at home:** History Channel documentary on Chavin de Huantar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfWJkOOnuhY>

**NOTE: PAPERS FOR PART II DUE TODAY**

03/01: Amazonian Indigenous Religious Traditions

**Readings:** Gomes, Denise. "Santarem: Symbolism and Power in the Tropical Forest"; [pdf in Modules].

**Highly recommended:** Gomes, D. "Indigenous Societies in Brazil before the European Arrival" [pdf in Modules].

03/03: Introduction to the Yanomami of the Amazon

**Reading:** Hutukara, "The Yanomami in Brazil" (pdf in Modules);

03/05: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 1, "Drawn Words", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/08: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 2, "The First Shaman", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/10: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 3, "The *Xapiri's* Gaze", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/12: **A Shaman's Quest**

**Readings:** Ch. 4, "The Animal Ancestors", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/15: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 5, "The Initiation", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/17: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 6, "Spirits' Houses", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/19: A Shaman's Quest

**Readings:** Ch. 7, "Image and Skin", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules][pdfs in Modules];

03/22: A Shaman's Quest

**Reading:** Ch. 8, "The Sky and the Forest", in Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky* [pdf in Modules]

03/24: **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PART III**

## **PART IV. TAINO AND THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE CARIBBEAN**

03/26: Long-range History of the Island Cultures

**Watch at home:** "The People Who Greeted Columbus" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2Zc9NhcO8I>

03/29: What do the sources tell us about Taino Society and Religion at the Time of Columbus' Landing?

### **Readings:**

03/31: The Modern-Day Resurgence of "Taino" Ethnicity

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, Introduction, pp. 17-37;

### **PLEASE NOTE: PAPERS ON PART III DUE TODAY**

04/02: Biographical history

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 37-74;

04/05: Life and Teachings

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 75 - 95;

04/07: Teachings

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 96 - 107;

04/09: Teachings

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 108 - 116;

04/12: Life and Teachings

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 116 - 126;

04/14: Life and Teachings

**Readings:** Barreiro, *Dreaming*, pp. 129 - 63; and 164-83

04/16: **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PART IV**

**Recommended Reading:** Jose Barreiro, "Beyond the Myth of Extinction"[pdf in Modules]

04/19 -04/21: **INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS AND READING**

## FINAL PAPERS DUE BY END OF FINAL EXAM WEEK

### RULES OF THE COURSE

1. Plagiarism or cheating: 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 will 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

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm> <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> for more information on UF policies.

2. Incompletes are strongly discouraged and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.

3. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. **Please turn phones and pagers off during class. Texting is not permitted during class, and any internauting during class-time that is not related to the material being discussed will be penalized.**

4. Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

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