Religions of Africa
REL 3370, RLG 5937, AFS 4935, & AFS 6905
Fall 2019

Instructor: Benjamin Soares
Office: 107B Anderson
Phone: (352) 273-2945
Email: benjaminsoares@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Tues., 3-4 pm, Thurs. 1-2 pm, & by appointment

Course Time:
Tues., Period: 7 (1:55 – 2:45 pm)
Thurs., Periods: 7 (1:55 – 2:45 pm) & 8 (3:00 – 3:50 pm)
Classroom: MAT 2

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the study of religion in sub-Saharan Africa as a contemporary phenomenon as well as the outcome of historical processes. We will examine so-called African traditional religions, spirit possession, divination, mediumship, Islam, Christianity, and religious encounters. Through the close reading and discussion of selected articles and monographs and viewing of films/videos, religions in various societies, past and present, will be explored in their complexity and diversity. The course familiarizes students with research methods and identifies empirical and theoretical shifts in the anthropological, comparative, and historical study of religion in Africa.

Course Objectives:
By the end of this course students should have:
• an overview of religion and some of the various religious traditions in Africa;
• an understanding of the diversity and complexity of religion in Africa;
• learned how to think about religion in Africa from anthropological, historical, religious studies, and comparative perspectives;
• an understanding of how religious practice in Africa can intersect with social, cultural, political, and economic factors.

Course Contract: By accepting this syllabus, you are agreeing to participate in frank discussions of some matters that are sometimes avoided in public and considered offensive or disturbing by some. These include—but are by no means restricted to—unusual ritual practices and forms of social life. If you are not ready to learn about and critically discuss such matters, do not take this course.

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:
The final grade will be determined by:
• Attendance (10%);
• Course participation (15%);
• Response paper #1 (ca. 1,500 words, 25%);
• Response paper #2 (ca. 2,500 words, 25%);
• Group project, digital presentation, & summary (ca. 1,000 words) (25%).

**Attendance Guidelines:** All students are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in a five-point deduction from the overall attendance and participation grades. Students with five or more unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. Absences will be considered excused only if a written request is submitted and accepted in advance or if written explanations are submitted and accepted with valid documentation.

**Course Participation Guidelines:** To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment. Students must read the material carefully before coming to class. In-class presentations include brief presentations (7 to 10 minutes) on selected topics/readings (from additional assigned readings). Everyone will make at least one **individual presentation** and participate in a **group presentation**.

**Use of technology:** During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or for accessing course readings. Students who use electronic devices for non-course purposes may be asked to put devices away and take notes on paper. Participation grades are tied to appropriate use of technology.

**Response Papers** (4,000 words in total): These response papers will address key issues and methodological and theoretical questions raised in the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The objective is to encourage students to read the materials closely and articulate their own informed and analytically nuanced perspectives. The format for papers is double spaced with font size 12. All papers should be uploaded via e-learning.

**Group Project:** In consultation with the instructor, each group will select a particular religious tradition or religious group or movement and work together on a group project, prepare a digital presentation of sources about the object of study (e.g., images, videos, text, etc.), and provide a narrative summary (ca. 1,000 words).

**Grading Policies:**
On UF policy: [https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx)

**Grading Scale:**

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Readings:
The following **required** books are available for purchase:


**All other readings** will be available either in electronic format through the UF library website or via e-learning.

Other resources/background reading/reference books:


**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**20 August**: Introduction & Orientation


**PART ONE: "TRADITIONAL" RELIGION**

*Topic 1: Witchcraft, Sorcery, & “Medicine”*

**22 August**:


**27 August**:


**29 August**:

Film: *Witchcraft among the Azande* (André Singer, director, 1982, 52 min.)

**3 September**: Frédérick Madore, guest lecture about Omeka.net for group projects

**5 September**: Group meetings

*Topic 2: Spirit Possession*

**10 September**:

12 September:
Film: *Les Maîtres Fous* (Jean Rouch, director, 1954, 29 min.)

*Topic 3: Possession & Divination*

17 September:

19 September:

24 September:

*Week 4: Mediumship & Mami Wata*

26 September:

1 October:

3 October:
Film: *Mamy Wata: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria* (Sabine Jell-Bahlsten, director, 1989, 59 min.)

8 October: Group meetings
PART TWO: WORLD RELIGIONS & RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS


***1st Response Paper Due: Friday, 11 October at 5 pm***

**Topic 5: Islam**

15 October:


17 October:


**Topic 6: Christianity**

22 October:


24 October:
Film: Rise Up and Walk: The Life and Witness of the African Indigenous Churches (John Ankele, director, 1988, 55 min.)

Roman Catholicism
29, 31 October & 5 November

Pentecostalism
7 November:

PART THREE: GLOBALIZATION, MEDIA, CONFLICT

Topic 7: Religion & Media
12 November:

Topic 8: Religion & Conflict
14 November:

**19 November:**

**21 November:** Group meetings

***2nd Response Paper Due: Friday, 22 November at 12 pm***

**26 November:** Group project presentations

**28 November:** Thanksgiving break

**3 December:** Wrap Up

***Group Project Due: Wednesday, 4 December at 5 pm***

Policies, Rules, Expectations, and Resources:

1. **Multi-tasking**: Given the prevalence of technology and its attendant effects (fragmentation, interruption, poor concentration, distraction) the use of electronic devices in class is for classroom use only. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned to vibrate during class (in order to be available for the UF emergency system).

2. **Handing in Assignments**: Response papers and group writing assignments should be uploaded to e-learning.

3. **Late Assignments**: You may receive an extension only in extraordinary circumstances. If you do not receive an extension from the instructor, assignment will be marked down a half grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.

4. **Completion of All Assignments**: You must complete all written and oral work and fulfill the requirement for attendance and class participation in order to pass the course.

5. **Honor Code**: UF students are bound by the Honor Code (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scrr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/), and all students have agreed to follow this Code, meaning they will not give or receive unauthorized assistance in completing assignments.
6. **Writing Tips & Plagiarism:** On writing strategy and how to avoid plagiarism, see the resources here: https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/for-students/video-resources/rhetoric-strategy/. A grade of zero will be assigned to any assignment that breaks the UF Honor Code; in such cases an incident form will also be sent to the Office of the Dean.

7. **Course Evaluation:** Students are expected to provide feedback on the course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu.

8. **Students Requiring Accommodation:** Students with disabilities requesting accommodation should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.