ANTH 4302 Myth, Magic and Religion
3 SCH
No prerequisites

**Course Description**

Why have humans populated their universe with unseen beings, imagined places, and supernatural powers? Why have they created elaborate rituals and mythic stories that must be believed in if human life is to prosper? Humans have been trying to find order and meaning in the universe for thousands of years, and their attempts to do so—belief in the supernatural, stories to explain the unknown, and all the types of the behaviors these manifest—are as diverse and creative as anything you can find in popular books and movies.

Unlike other disciplines, anthropologists tend to look at religious beliefs very broadly because we seek to identify general patterns in human behavior. Cultural anthropologists examine religious beliefs and practices as we find them in living communities around the world. We then compare them and seek patterns that explain those beliefs and practices as a response to the environment and to the need that humans have to connect with the cosmos.

**Justification:** This course has been offered for the last five years as a Special Topics course. This is often a required anthropology course in other schools and since it is so popular among students at TAMIU, it should be offered as a regular feature of the minor curriculum.

**Lecture style**

**Learning outcomes:**

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the major elements of myth, magic, and religious beliefs and behaviors and be able to identify them cross culturally.
2. Demonstrate an appreciation of the ways in which culture, geography, history and economy shape an individual’s (including your own) beliefs in the supernatural.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the major theoretical approaches to understanding religious beliefs and behaviors.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the major theories and methods used in development and disaster studies and be able to apply them to new problems.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of the basic tenets of at least three of the major religions of the world and at least three indigenous religions.

Syllabus is attached.

**Program:** Add: _____ Change: _____ Attach new/changed Program of Study description and 4-year plan. If in current catalog, provide change and attach page with changes in red.

**Minor:** Add: _____ Delete: _____ Change: _____ Attach new/changed minor. If in current catalog, provide change and attach page with changes in red.

**Faculty:** Add: _____ Delete: _____ Change: _____ Attach new/changed faculty entry. If in current catalog, provide change and attach page with changes in red.

**College Introductory Pages:** Add information: _____ Change information: _____ Attach new/changed information. If in current catalog, provide change and attach page with changes in red.

**Other:** Add information: _____ Change information: _____ Attach new/changed information. If in current catalog, provide change and attach page with changes in red.

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**Approvals:**

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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| Chair, Department Curriculum Committee | Mehnaaz Momem | Digitally signed by Mehnaaz Momem  
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ANTH 4302
MYTH, MAGIC & RELIGION
Texas A&M International University

Man can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with, but he cannot deal with Chaos.
--Langer, quoted in Geertz 1973:99

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Course Description

Why have humans populated their universe with unseen beings, imagined places, and supernatural powers? Why have they created elaborate rituals and mythic stories that must be believed in if human life is to prosper? Humans have been trying to find order and meaning in the universe for thousands of years, and their attempts to do so—belief in the supernatural, stories to explain the unknown, and all the types of the behaviors these manifest—are as diverse and creative as anything you can find in popular books and movies.

Unlike other disciplines, anthropologists tend to look at religious beliefs very broadly because we seek to identify general patterns in human behavior. Cultural anthropologists examine religious beliefs and practices as we find them in living communities around the world. We then compare them and seek patterns that explain those beliefs and practices as a response to the environment and to the need that humans have to connect with the cosmos.

NOTE: Please keep in mind that this class requires intellectual integrity and a willingness to explore, not only other belief systems, but also your own with an open mind. It demands respect for all sincere beliefs and respect for the scientific approach to the study of the supernatural, i.e. an approach that is objective and unsentimental.

Course Requirements

Text: Anthropology of Religion, by Richley Crapo
Witchcraft: The Old Religion by Leo Louis Martello

Participation: We will be doing a lot of discussion in this class and some occasional informal class activities, so come to class regularly, keep up with the readings, and participate in class discussions. This is a senior-level course so your active participation in class is expected and is a component of your overall grade.

Research paper: A 6-8-page research paper on an approved topic
Occasional field assignments: A few times during the semester you will collect and analyze information using anthropological fieldwork methods, which you will then submit in the form of field notes.

Exams: Two exams and a final, which will cover material from lectures, class discussions, and readings. Questions will be short-answer and discussion.

Your grade will be calculated from the following:
Class participation 10%
First exam 15%
Mid-term exam 25%
Research paper 20%
Final exam 30%
Course Goals

You will have succeeded in this course when you are able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the major elements of myth, magic, and religious beliefs and behaviors and be able to identify them cross culturally.
2. Demonstrate an appreciation of the ways in which culture, geography, history and economy shape an individual’s (including your own) beliefs in the supernatural.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the major theoretical approaches to understanding religious beliefs and behaviors.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the major theories and methods used in development and disaster studies and be able to apply them to new problems.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of the basic tenets of at least three of the major religions of the world and two indigenous religions.

The fine print

ASSIGNMENTS: All assignments must be submitted in order to receive a passing grade for the class. Late papers will be penalized by one grade-step (from B+ to B, etc.) for each day they are late, unless you have arranged with me for an extension well in advance of the due date.

ATTENDANCE: Missing five or more classes may result in a failing grade for the course. Remember that classroom participation counts towards your final grade, and you can’t participate if you’re not in class.

ABSENCES: If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from one of your classmates. I will, of course, work with you if you have to miss a lot for an acceptable reason but, otherwise, you are on your own to find out what you missed.

VIDEOS: Anthropological films are one of the best ways to learn about other cultures—especially when you cannot actually go to study them in person. Keep in mind that these films are not being shown for your entertainment. Watch, listen, and take notes with the same degree of attention that you would give to an important lecture.

NOTE: If you find that you are having trouble in this class, come by my office and talk to me about it. If you can’t make it during my office hours, we can arrange another time. Or email me if you would prefer. Or consider checking in with the Writing Center for tutoring help. Or drop by Student Counseling Services, located in the Student Center, for counseling of a more personal nature. Part of your tuition money each semester goes to these programs, which are designed specifically to help you do your best here. Get your money’s worth out of them!
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25-27</td>
<td>Religion as a physical activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 3-8</td>
<td>Religion as a mental activity: Buddhism</td>
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<td>Sep 10</td>
<td>Various approaches to understanding religion, the logic of Pascal's wager</td>
<td>Crapo 1</td>
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<td>Sep 15-17</td>
<td>Common beliefs and behaviors of diverse religions</td>
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<td>Sep 22</td>
<td>The psychology of religion, scientific explanations for belief in the supernatural</td>
<td>Crapo 3</td>
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<td>Sep 24-29</td>
<td>Myths and symbols</td>
<td>Crapo 4,5</td>
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<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Myths we live by</td>
<td>Crapo 6</td>
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<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Research topic proposal due</td>
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<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>FIRST EXAM</td>
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<td>Oct 8-15</td>
<td>Rituals</td>
<td>Crapo 7</td>
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<td>Oct 20-22</td>
<td>Ancient religions, goddess worship</td>
<td>Handout</td>
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<td>Oct 27-29</td>
<td>Demons and dark forces at play in the world (in honor of Halloween)</td>
<td>Crapo 8</td>
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<td>Nov 3-5</td>
<td>Witchcraft</td>
<td>Martello</td>
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<td>Nov 10-12</td>
<td>Cults, covens, churches, and rules</td>
<td>Martello</td>
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<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>Adam, Eve and the Serpent</td>
<td>handout</td>
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<td>Nov 19</td>
<td>SECOND EXAM</td>
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<td>Nov 24</td>
<td>Religion and politics</td>
<td>Crapo 9</td>
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<td>Nov 26-29</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</td>
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<td>Dec 1</td>
<td>Research papers due</td>
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<td>Dec 1-3</td>
<td>Religion transcending</td>
<td>Crapo 10</td>
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<td>Dec 7</td>
<td>Death and Rebirth: Winter solstice celebrations</td>
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<td>Dec _____</td>
<td>FINAL EXAM</td>
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