The Body Of Religion
HONORS 4900
Spring 2019

Professor Erik Stern
Three Credit Hours
Tuesday/Thursday 10:30-11:45am
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Course information: CANVAS

A friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. - Mohandas Gandhi

COURSE OVERVIEW
The Body Of Religion is concerned with how the body is used in religious ritual, and how people experience these bodily expressions. The course draws on a range of sources: readings, guest speakers, discussion, movement sessions, video, on-site observation, written assignments, and student research, all of which intersect with:

- Senses, Arts and Aesthetics
- Anthropology & Religious Studies
- Basic neuroscience

This course connects experiential knowledge and inquiry. Guest presentations will be from those who have lived in and experienced a religious culture. They are not experts, so part of the class’s challenge is to ask questions about the role of the body in their experiences.

Therefore, a fundamental part of the learning process in this course is student research and short presentations. Students develop the skill of devising questions from course materials that relate to course themes. From those questions, students develop lines of inquiry and identify articles, books, credible online sources and more.

The course investigates the statement:

. . . at the bottom of all our mystical states there are techniques of the body . . . I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into ‘communication with God.’ – Marcel Mauss
The mission of the WSU Honors Program is to provide a welcoming community for intellectually curious, academically adventurous students.

- We nurture excellence in this community, regardless of prior academic preparation.
- We build this community by offering small, creative, rigorous classes; leadership opportunities; and other innovative learning experiences.
- We open this community to the university as a whole by organizing events that catalyze far-reaching conversations about significant issues relevant to contemporary society.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will:

- Practice clear and compelling written and/or creative expression;
- Engage in critical thinking that is open-minded, objective, and as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition;
- Undertake the comprehension of abstract arguments and the ability to move between the general and the particular;
- Encounter a variety of human experience, exploring both its universality and its diversity.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

When investigating a particular ritual, writing etc., some questions to help get started:

1) How are the body and senses used?
2) How does the body feel or experience? What purpose does it serve?
3) What are the underlying beliefs or theories about the body associated with this practice?
4) How does this compare and/or contrast other traditions?
5) How does it operate?
6) What remains unanswered or mysterious? How best to further research this aspect?
7) What sort aesthetic does it reveal?

**REQUIREMENTS**

Refer to course CANVAS page for assignments, grades, and other information.

1. Students will attend two services, ceremonies or rites from outside their personal experience. A list of places to attend will be provided. Students are welcome to suggest places to attend, which are subject to instructor approval.

2. Three absences are allowed. After that each absence lowers the grade (e.g. from an A to an A-, etc.) Three times tardy equals one absence. Late assignments will be handled on a per case basis, but students should assume that points will be subtracted.
3. Assignments include short reflections, mini oral presentations, two papers, midterm, final presentation (see # 6), and final reflection.

4. Active participation in discussion, movement sessions and other presentations is expected and influences the final grade. Movement sessions will be announced in advance.

5. Notebooks. Since there is no single text, students take thorough notes in class, on readings, and on personal reflections. Notebooks will be handed in toward the end of the semester.

6. Each student will give an oral presentation related to the course theme. Ten minutes in length (plus question and answer), it may include 1-3 minutes of video or sound, and should address the course theme through concepts we study. Subject matter and format are decided in consultation with the professor. Two published sources are required. Submit a bibliography and outline on day of presentation.

EVALUATION
The following types of assignments are factors into the final grade

   Attendance (required)
   Papers
   Final Presentation
   Notebooks
   Final Reflection
   Discussions, mini presentations

RESPONSIBILITIES

Studying cultural practices and perceptions may lead to students encountering material perceived as adult or controversial. While warning will be given when deemed appropriate, it is not possible to anticipate student norms. If students have questions or concerns, please make an appointment with me or see me after class.

Accommodations
Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in room 181 of the Student Services Center. SSD can also arrange to provide course materials (including this syllabus) in an alternative format if necessary. You must make your request for accommodation no later than the beginning of the second week of classes.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is required as per the Student Code. Please refer to http://documents.weber.edu/ppm/6-22.htm for clarification of the Student Code. Weber State University Student Code: The Student Code is spelled out in the Student Policy and Procedure Manual (SPPM). Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the code. The code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article IV Section D) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. Students will receive sanctions for violating one or more of these proscriptions.
COURSE SCHEDULE

The order of religious rituals and traditions studied will be influenced by the availability of guest speakers. An exact schedule is not available yet. Knowing the importance of planning for students, below are key dates, followed by a list of prospective traditions to be covered. As other guest speaker dates are arranged, the schedule will be updated.

Tuesday, January 22 – guest artist Lorin Hansen, movement session on Candomblé
Thursday, January 24 – guest speaker, Umbanda practitioner Jeni Claudio
February 7 or 12 – first paper due
March 21 or 25 – second paper due
March 28 through April 11 – Oral Presentations
April 16 (last week of classes) – in-class short written exam
Finals – take home written assignment

Introduction
- The body, religion & ritual
- Breath & sound

Movement and Religion – The power of the body
- Candomblé and other body-based practices

The Body and Religion – Walking the fine line
- Christianity
- Islam and Judaism

Other forms of expression
- The Vedic tradition: Hinduism, yoga and Devadasi
- Buddhism

Syncretism