

ANTH 5H: HONORS MAGIC, SCIENCE & RELIGION

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2025
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture per week (48 total per quarter)
Advisory:	Not open to students with credit in ANTH 5.
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 4: Social & Behavioral Sciences
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to apply anthropological principles for solving human problems on the local, regional and world scales, particularly through an understanding and awareness of holism, ethnocentric biases, anthropological methods and the value of practicing cultural relativism.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast elements of religion such as symbolism, mythology, ritual, magic, divination, religious specialists, shamanism, traditional healing practices, witchcraft, supernatural entities, and religious revitalization movements, as well as expressions of these religious elements found in small-scale and complex societies from the past and present around the world.
- Students will recognize and articulate key terminology, theoretical orientations, guiding principles and methods of anthropology in understanding human behavior in small-scale and more complex societies.
- Students will recognize, articulate and apply an anthropological approach to the study of religion in a socio-cultural context, including understanding the role of culture in shaping the ways humans know about and perceive their world.

Description

An introduction to the anthropological study of religion and belief systems. This course is a cross-cultural exploration into the ways humans around the world and through time have conceptualized their relationship between their natural and social worlds and the supernatural, beginning with prehistoric times and concluding with modern day society and the contemporary world. Cross-cultural study of the beliefs about the nature of reality, spirituality, death, magic, science and healing. As an honors course, it is focused on reading and critically analyzing ethnographies and literature from the anthropology of religion and engaging in ethnographic research.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Recognize, articulate and apply an anthropological approach to the study of religion in a socio-cultural context.
- Understand the role of culture in shaping the ways humans know about, perceive, and interact with their world.
- Define religion and associated concepts dealing with the supernatural using a cross-cultural, anthropological perspective.
- Compare and contrast elements of religion such as symbolism, mythology, ritual, magic, divination, religious specialists, shamanism, traditional healing practices, witchcraft, supernatural entities, and religious revitalization movements, as well as expressions of these religious elements found in small-scale and complex societies from the past and present around the world.
- Recognize the value of anthropological principles for resolving conflict and solving human problems on the local, regional, and world scales, particularly through an understanding and awareness of holism, ethnocentric biases, anthropological methods, and the value of practicing cultural relativism.

Course Content

- Introduction to the anthropology of religion
 - Anthropology as a discipline, and the 4 fields
 - The anthropology of religion as a sub-field, and how it is integrated with the 4 fields
 - The bio-cultural approach to religion
 - Physical anthropology—religion from an evolutionary perspective
 - Archaeology—methods and approaches to study the religions of peoples of the past
 - Linguistic anthropology—the role of language and linguistic expression in belief systems
 - Cultural anthropology—religion as an element/component of culture
 - Anthropological perspectives
 - Concept and characteristics of culture and cultural systems
 - Holism and the holistic approach to studying religion
 - Naive realism and avoiding ethnocentrism
 - Cultural relativism and the cultural relativism dilemma
 - Etic vs. emic perspectives
 - Ethnographic fieldwork methods and ethics
 - Anthropological approaches to studying religion
 - Attempts at defining religion
 - World religions vs. religions of the world
 - Animism, monotheism, polytheism, atheism
 - Cross-cultural (etic) concepts associated with supernatural beings and forces
 - Theoretical approaches to the study of religion
 - The biological basis of religious behavior
- Myth and mythology
 - The nature of myths
 - Myths and the construction of worldview
 - Myth as a form of folklore
 - Understanding and analyzing myths
 - Common themes and motifs
 - Approaches to the analysis of myths
 - Joseph Campbell's monomyth and hero cycle

- e. Mythology applied: the importance of understanding myth in today's global world
- 3. Religious symbols and symbolism
 - a. The nature of symbols and the construction of meaning
 - b. Survey of key religious symbols
 - i. Master or key symbols
 - c. Sacred art, music and dance
 - d. Sacred time and space
- 4. Ritual, pilgrimages and rites of passage
 - a. The basics of ritual performance
 - b. Typologies of religious ritual
 - c. Survey of ethnographic examples of ritual
 - d. Rites of passage
 - e. Pilgrimages
 - f. Function and effect of ritual performance on the individual and collective
- 5. Altered states of consciousness (ASC)
 - a. The nature of ASC
 - i. The biological basis for ASC
 - ii. Modes of consciousness
 - iii. Methods and cultural explanations for inducing ASC
 - b. ASC and the religious experience
 - c. Ethnographic examples of ASC
- 6. Religious specialists
 - a. The diversity of religious specialists
 - i. Classifications and typologies of religious specialists
 - b. Shamans and shamanism
 - i. Definitions and characteristics of shamans and shamanism
 - ii. Ethnographic examples from diverse cultural areas
 - iii. Neoshamanism
 - c. Priests
 - d. Prophets
 - e. Healers, diviners, and other religious specialists
- 7. Magic and divination
 - a. Magic vs. religion vs. science
 - b. The laws of magic
 - i. Law of sympathy
 - ii. Law of contagion
 - c. The function of magic
 - d. Divination
 - e. Ethnographic examples from small scale and complex societies
- 8. Souls, ghosts, ancestors, and death rituals
 - a. Cultural concepts and constructs of the human soul
 - b. Beliefs and rituals associated with the afterlife
 - c. Ancestor worship and veneration
 - d. Cross-cultural survey of death rituals
- 9. Witchcraft
 - a. The cross-cultural concept and function of witchcraft
 - b. Euro-American witchcraft beliefs
 - i. The Witchcraze in Europe, England, and the United States
 - ii. Pagan and neopagan religions
- 10. Ethnomedicine and religious healing
 - a. Ethnomedicine vs. religious healing vs. biomedicine
 - i. Concepts of health
 - ii. Etiology of disease/illness

- iii. Treatment
- iv. Specialists
- b. Medical anthropology
- 11. Religion in contemporary contexts
 - a. Adaptation and change
 - i. Processes and dynamics of culture change
 - ii. Syncretism and syncretic religions
 - iii. Religious diaspora
 - b. Revitalization movements
 - c. Fundamentalism and New Religious Movements
 - d. Religious associations with political movements, terrorism, and conflict
 - e. Secularism, atheism, and irreligion

Lab Content

Not applicable.

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

When taught as an online or hybrid distance learning section, students and faculty need ongoing and continuous internet and email access.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

Written assignments

- 1. Weekly reflections on readings
- 2. Term paper on field research and/or secondary source research based on ethnographic sources
- 3. In-class writing

Oral presentations

- 1. In-class discussion
- 2. Group and individual presentations

In-class quizzes and exams

- 1. Quizzes
- 2. Mid-term exams
- 3. Final exam

Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Lecture

Discussion

Cooperative learning exercises

Field work

Oral presentations

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Stein, R., and P. Stein. The Anthropology of Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, 4th ed.. 2017.

Bowen, John. Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of Religion. 2017.

Winzeler, Robert. Anthropology and Religion: What We Know, Think, and Question, 2nd ed.. 2012.

Hicks, David. Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion, 3rd ed.. 2010.

Bowie, Fiona. The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction. 2005.

Lambek, M.. A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, 2nd ed.. 2008.

Lehman, A.C., and J.E. Myers. Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, 7th ed.. 2008.

Moro, Pamela. Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, 9th ed.. 2013.

Winkelman, Michael, and John Baker. Supernatural as Natural: A Biocultural Approach to Religion. 2010.

Although some texts are older than the suggested "5 years or newer" standard, they remain seminal texts in this area of study.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Reading assigned texts, articles, or handouts and studying class notes.
2. Doing various homework, including writing reading response essays and short papers.
3. Preparing an oral presentation or written research paper based on individual or group research or fieldwork.
4. Conducting research based on secondary sources.
5. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a local setting.

Discipline(s)

Anthropology