

SYLLABUS  
R.133 (Z.PM) Native American Religions  
Spring, 2010

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Ofc. Hrs:  
WF 12:30-1:00 p.m.; M. 6-6:30pm  
T-Th 1:30-2:00 p.m.  
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Course Description. A study of traditional myths, rituals, religious experiences and lifeways of select indigenous peoples of North America. Studies of the religious life and experience of representative groups from the Eastern Woodlands, Southwest, Northern Boreal Forests, and Plains cultural-geographical regions will be highlighted this semester.

Course Format. Lecture/Discussion.

Learning Objectives. To provide the student with a basic understanding of the worldviews, including beliefs and practices, of several indigenous religious traditions, to become familiar with approaches to the study of such traditions, and to develop the imaginative and analytical skills needed to enter into the world of "the other," and to foster reflection on the cultural forces that have shaped one's own attitudes, values, and sense of self.

Attendance Expectations. Students are expected to come to each class prepared to enter into the discussion or otherwise to participate in the class. Roll will be called. Since this class meets only once a week, absences will be taken seriously. More than one missed class without a serious reason will result in the loss of a grade point. If one skips the second half of class it will be counted as a complete absence.

Electronic Devices. Please do not twitter, twirl, tweet, text or twist while in class. Turn off cell phones, etc.

Snow or Illness Policy. Even when blizzard conditions prevail, if the college has not declared itself officially closed, students should assume that classes will be held (off-campus residents should exercise prudence, however). Please check the college website for evening college cancellations or call the weather hot-line. If class is cancelled, please read the assignment for the next class.

Course Evaluation.

1) Writing-to-Learn Assignments. Either written prior to class at home or in class, these one-page exercises are intended to improve classroom participation, indicate to the teacher if a student is having problems with the work and help the student to keep up with the reading assignments. They will be marked with a "S" or a "U". If you are absent you receive a "U" if a writing assignment is given in class. There will be no make-up writing assignments with rare exceptions. At the end of the semester, if you receive an "S" on 80% or more of your papers, your final grade for the course will be raised one notch (ex. B- to B). Between 60 and 79%, your final grade does not change. If fewer than 60% are "S," your final average grade for the three essay exams drops one notch (ex. B- to C+). 2) Essay Exams. There will be three essay exams, weighed equally and they will be non-cumulative except for the final where the instructor reserves the right to ask one question on overall course content, theme or method.

Required Texts

Grim, John. *The Shaman*  
Neihardt, John. *Black Elk Speaks*  
Nelson, Richard K. *Make Prayers to the Raven*  
Sandner, Donald, M.D. *Navaho Symbols of Healing*  
Tooker, Elisabeth *Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands*

## OUTLINE

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Reading Assignment</u>
Introduction to the Course Is there such a “thing” as “religion”? How define or describe it? How study it? Who were/are the indigenous people of North America? Why study their religions? How study their traditions? Shamanism—what is it? How old is it? How does it relate to other religious phenomenon and other religious types (prophets, mystics, priests, healers) Grim, pp. 3-14; 26-32;	<u>January 18</u>	

### **I. EASTERN WOODLANDS THE OJIBWAY AND THE STUDY OF SHAMANISM**

*The shaman and shamanic practices are at the core of most religious experiences of indigenous peoples. Shamans, through their communion with spirit beings and forces of the cosmos, are able to bring wisdom and power to their people. Through their dream-vision and trance states, they enter into contact with spirit beings and powers and are able to advise and heal their people in time of need. Since the shaman is historically the earliest religious specialist, understanding his or her role and the symbol system surrounding and legitimating their power offers many insights into the nature of religious experience in general, the further elaboration and development of religious ways of knowing by the mystic, prophet and priest, and its connection to the wider universe whose sacred dimension continues to nurture the human spirit.*

#### January 25

* Siberia: Archaic Shamanism	Grim, Ch. 2
* Ojibway Cosmology and the Shaman's Vocation Video: Millenium Pt. 4. Colombian Shaman	Grim, Chs. 4& 8

#### February 01

*Shamans and their Communities	Grim, Ch. 5
*Ritual Reenactment of Religious Experience	Grim, Ch. 6

#### February 08

* Trance Experience and Healing	Grim, Ch. 7
*Video. Millenium. Pt.8. Huichol Shaman	

### **II. EASTERN WOODLANDS: IROQUOIS (HO-DE-NO SAU NEE)**

*The Iroquoian peoples in their great mythic tale of the origins of natural life and of human society imagine this world as infused with sacred power (orenda) given by beings from the world "above." They combine myths of a fall from heaven, of the earth diver, and of the warring twins to capture the dynamics and mystery of their world. In their dreams they experience guidance and power from the spirit beings of the three levels of the cosmos. Even the Evil Twin can aid humans if they know how to reverse his power and turn it to their benefit. The dream-vision experiences of the Iroquoian peoples exemplify and "democratize" this basic shamanic source of revelation and power, making it available to all people and functional in the most concrete aspects of human life.*

\* Dekandawidah, Hiawatha & The Iroquois Nation

T.B.D.

\* Iroquois Cosmology

Tooker, pp. 31-58

\* Clans & the Condolence Ceremony

Handout

Video: "The Woodland Indians"

### February 15

\* Sacred Dreams: Meaning & Impact

St. John, "The Dream Vision"

Tooker, pp. 84-98

\* Shamanic "Medicine Societies"

Tooker, Ch. IV Menominee

St. John "Medicine Societies"

### February 22

\* Thanksgiving Address & Calendrical Ceremonies

Tooker, pp. 58-68

Tooker, Ch. VIII

\* The Seneca Prophet and the Longhouse Religion

St. John "Handsome Lake"

St. John, "Longhouse Religion"

**FEB. 23 Film "Woven Ways" on the Navaho. 7:30 p.m. UBC Rm**

**TAKE-HOME EXAM**

**Due Back by Friday, 26<sup>th</sup>, noon**

### **III. THE SOUTHWEST: NAVAHO (DINEH) CHANTWAYS & SYMBOLIC HEALING**

*The Navaho of the Southwest use their rich mythic cycle to support and guide their Chantways (elaborate healing rituals) which bring the power of the origins to rebalance relationships between inner and outer, depth and surface and to bring harmony among humanity, nature and the holy people. The ideal for the Navaho is hozho (balance,*

harmony), both a balance around a center and the harmonious change that lives between opposites. *Changing Woman*, the major mythical being in the Navaho origin myth, weaves earth and home into a rich tapestry.

**March 01**

- \* Introduction to the Southwest Peoples
- \* Chantways and Symbolic Shamanism Symbols: Presentational Sandner, Ch. 1
- \* Navaho Chantway. The Parts. Sandner, Ch. 3.

**MARCH 08 SPRING RECESS**

**March 15**

- \* Navaho Chantway: The Whole Sandner, Ch. 4
- Video: "Touching the Timeless" (Segment. M.6)
- \* Healing and the Return to Origins Sandner, Ch. 6
- Video: "At the Threshold" M.10

**March 18 Film, "Crude" Ecuadorian Indigenous People and Big Oil's Impact on the Rainforest  
Prosser, 7:30 p.m.**

**March 22**

- \* Healing and the Death-Rebirth Experience. Sandner, Ch. 8

**IV. SUB-POLAR: KOYUKONS  
SACRED ECOLOGY**

*The Koyukon of present day Alaska have traditionally lived a life dependent on trapping, hunting, and fishing. They had a highly sophisticated and broad knowledge of the mammals, fish, and fowl of the boreal forests and streams, and they were familiar with the cyclical nature of their presence or absence: seasons, years, decades. Their relations with all beings and the land itself was based on stories of the Distant Time and regulated through a complex set of ethical rules linked to a belief in the spiritual dimension to all things.*

- \* The Koyukons of Alaska Nelson, Ch. 2, 12
- Video: "Make Prayers to the Raven" #1

**March 29**

- \* Hunting, Trapping and Conservation Nelson, Chs. 6, 9, 10
- Videos: MPTR #3, 4, 5

**April 05**

- \* Koyukon Sacred Ecology Nelson, Ch. 11, 13
- Video: MPTR, #2

**In-Class Exam 8:00-9:30**

**V THE NORTHERN PLAINS  
RESISTANCE: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION**

*Black Elk of the Lakota Sioux serves as a bridge between the shaman and the prophet. His great vision as retold to John Neihardt displays the shamanic visitation by spiritual beings fundamental to the Lakota cosmology and his ritualization of this vision so that his people might participate in the power and guidance contained in his vision. Occurring during a time of historical crisis experienced by the Plains Indians, Black Elk's vision reminds his people of the power contained in their traditions while warning of a black road that lies ahead.*

**April 12**

- \* Plains Culture , Kinship and History  
Video: "Plains Indians, Pt. II"
- \* Black Elk's Vision
- \* Crazy Horse, Custer and Little Big Horn

Handouts

Neihardt, Chs 1-3

Neihardt, Chs. 8-9

**April 19**

- \* Ritual Reenactments
- \* Lakota Vision Quest and Healing
  
- \* The Girl's Puberty Ritual  
Video: Millenium 3.1 & 3.2

Neihardt, Chs. 13-16

Neihardt, 17 & 18

Handout "Vision Quest"

Handout

**April 26**

- \* Buffalo Bill, the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee
- \* The Boarding School and the Destruction of Culture  
Video: "Attack on Culture"

Neihardt, Chs. 19-end

**TAKE HOME EXAM #3**

**Note: This syllabus is subject to change. Major changes will be discussed with students.**

