**Course Description:**

This seminar is designed to introduce students to some of the central aspects of African Traditional Religion(s) presented in selected, influential studies by African scholars of religion. Utilizing interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approaches, we will examine the profile of religious plurality in Africa and pursue reading in the literature of the field.

**Course Requirements:**

Regular class attendance and reading that is complete, careful and on schedule are essential for this seminar, since the format is one of discussion. To help promote lively, meaningful exchange, each student must be prepared to talk 3 - 5 minutes about the required reading each Tuesday, beginning September 12, 2000. Notice that assignments vary in length. Plan ahead so that you can keep up with the reading. If in any given week the entire assignment is too much, students should at least read the first one hundred pages in order to complete the required "talking paper."

Make two copies of each "talking paper." One copy is for the professor's files and the second copy is for a seminar colleague. The reader of the "talking paper" should write down her/his response to the reflections. The responses can include questions, ideas you liked, disagreements, analogies to other readings, bibliographical suggestions, etc. Include your signature at the end of your comments.

On the following class session, the reader should return the "talking paper" to the original author. The author should read the comments and respond in writing to any comments that serve as a catalyst for further development of ideas and refinement of thought. Ideally, each student should have responses from each member of the seminar by the end of the semester.

In addition, everyone must participate in the research paper updating process. The final draft of the research paper is due December 12, 2000 (in duplicates). The research paper should meet the usual formal requirements of term papers, on some aspect of African Traditional Religions. A cogent paper (20 pages well done) is desirable; the emphasis is on creative analysis and critical thinking, not copious writing.

**Course Procedure:**

This foundation seminar will meet weekly for a period of two and a half-hours. A discussion style will be used to place the reading into a "dance of redemption" framework. Each student will be responsible for writing a weekly "talking paper" which will include the following:

a) **conscientization** - write a free-style, felt-sense response to the required reading, whatever that may be, without critical constraint;

b) **emancipatory historiography** - identify a sentence with which you agree or a sentence that causes you to struggle, stumble, or resist and research the religious principle, norm, value or taboo implicit or explicit in the statement;

c) **methodological investigation** - the questions that follow are representative of the questions that may be brought to any ethical research. The use of these questions will provide continuity in the study of
African Traditional Religions. However, not all of them are equally important for all thinkers. Students should answer questions 1, 2, and 3 each week, then choose at least five other questions that are most significant for each assignment. This list is aimed to suggest, not limit styles of methodological inquiry.

1. Who is the author and what is the author’s thesis?
2. How did you discover this scholar’s method? Does the author explain or did you find the methodology by analyzing the actual evidence used to substantiate her/his general approach to the subject? Briefly discuss.
3. What types of source material contribute to the scholar’s overall argumentation?
4. What about these sources are distinctively African?
5. What constitutes authority for this writer?
6. What aspect of the author's viewpoint is intended to be persuasive regarding religious obligations?
7. Is there a difference between "we should" and "we ought"?
8. What contribution does the author make for adjustment to changing circumstances?
9. What does the author state about conflict?
10. Are there rewards and punishments in this text?
11. What are the writer’s important unexpressed presuppositions?
12. What facts does the author ignore in order to promote her/his own scheme of organization?
13. Are there useful footnotes and bibliography?
14. Is the documentation convincing?
15. What difficulties do you find in this work?
16. What do you find helpful in this work?

d) norm clarification - What contribution does this scholar make to spark new considerations regarding African Religions? If the author were to visit our seminar, what questions would you like to address to her/him? After the second week of required reading, include hypothetical questions to today’s author from other authors studied in the seminar.

Criteria for Evaluation:
--- accuracy and precision of scholarship
--- clarity of oral and written presentation
--- completion of assignments on the due dates
--- contribution to the group process of inquiry and discussion
--- creativity, critical judgment, and imagination

Required Books:


Recommended Books:

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

September 5
INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMINAR
Documentary Film:

September 12
TRADITION and INITIATION

or


*DUE: Talking Paper

Supplementary reading:

September 19
AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

*DUE: Talking Paper

Supplementary reading:
September 26

**ORAL SCRIPTURE/ARCHITECTONIC TEXTS**


* DUE: Talking Paper and Research Paper - draft - section 1 - Select an ethical category in African Traditional Religions which in your opinion presents an important research question for you to work on and write an abstract that clearly states the origin of the idea and the focus of your research investigation this semester.

Supplementary reading:

October 3

**HUMAN EXPERIENCE**


* DUE: Talking Paper

Supplementary reading:
October 10  NATURE OF REALITY
*DUE: Talking Paper and Research Paper –draft- sections 1 & 2 - State why your topic is worthy of responsible scholarly research and discuss significant prior research (at least three annotated sources).

Supplementary reading:  

October 17  COSMOLOGY
*DUE: Talking Paper

Supplementary reading:  

October 24  REVELATION
*Due: Talking Paper and Research Paper (draft - sections 1, 2, & 3 - a copy for each seminar participant) Define your scope, limitations, and key assumptions and list up to five bibliographical sources which you intend to use in your research paper.
Supplementary reading:

October 31
LOGICAL CONSISTENCY (Part I)
*DUE: Talking Paper

November 7
LOGICAL CONSISTENCY (Part II)
*DUE: Talking Paper

November 14
*DUE: Research Paper (draft - sections 1, 2, 3, & 4 a copy for each seminar participant)
Write an outline and a discussion of your process of data analysis as precisely as possible.


November 28 Documentary Film
December 5 Closure and Evaluation

December 12 *Due: Final Draft of Research Paper (in duplicate)