

RELG2413 INTRODUCTION TO RITUAL STUDIES I
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
FALL 2005 WF 9:00-10:20 AM

Instructor: Dr. Lavanya Vemsani

Office: EC 207

Phone: 506-452-0438

E-Mail: vemsani@stu.ca

Office hours: F 11:30-12:20

Students are welcome to contact me on e-mail or phone or drop by my office.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to Ritual studies theory and research methods, focussing on the experience, knowledge and research. Questions to be investigated include but are not limited to, what does ritual mean? What is the relation between experience, practice and theory? How does a researcher negotiate balance between the research and the researched? How can the researcher be responsible for the researched across differences of culture, geography, and history. The methodological approaches to be examined include ethnography, activist and participatory research, narratives and mythology. Students in this course will be active participants, learning how to do library and activist research, interviews or surveys, peer, and literary reviews. The main focus of this course is to familiarize students with theory and field methods of ritual religion and prepare students for major research endeavour in advanced study. While the Ritual Studies I, concentrates on studying the theories of ritual studies and practice researching the secondary sources, the Ritual Studies II, introduces the field methods practicing and conducting field research.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Examine major theories of ritual studies.
2. Compare and contrast current perspectives and research.
3. Practice field research methods.
4. Utilize research and review methods to complete a project.
5. Inculcate personal and peer experiences in research.

COURSE TEXTS

Ronald L. Grimes. *Deeply into the Bone*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Additional readings on required topics are handed in the class are placed on the library reserve and the Web.

The course texts are available on campus for sale at University of New Brunswick bookstore.

COURSE METHODOLOGIES AND REQUIREMENTS

This course is designed to integrate research and field methods. Therefore it is organised as a seminar course which requires intensive group participation. If you do not like group work or writing then this course is not for you.

Methodologies

We will be doing three things in this course.

1. Critically examine and study the course material. You submit your critical analysis of the assigned reading each week to which some of the other students respond. Each student responds to at least one other student's review. You will bring a hard copy to the class even if you have posted your electronic version on the Web.
2. Group project: Students form groups of 3-5 members and members collaborate and relate their critical analyses and work together to arrive at a comprehensive summary of views on an assigned subject, which will then be discussed with the other groups in the class. Groups also develop and present an independent research project to the class.
3. Construction of a ritual: Groups contribute their ideas to construct an initiation ritual for the Ritual studies class as a community, which we will use as initiation ritual at the beginning of the Ritual studies II in the second term.

Requirements

Class participation: Class participation is absolutely necessary. This course differs from the content and lecture based courses in that it utilises personal experiences, expressions and discussions as much as the theoretical content of the course. The theoretical content provides the context and acts as a spring board for our discussions and further research. The presentation of each of your ideas, perspectives and experiences are essential as much as interaction and reception of those of others. Missing more than one assignment incurs penalty and leads to decreasing the base grade.

Attendance

Because this is a discussion oriented active learning class attendance is requisite. Absences lead to penalty unless accompanied by medical note. Missing more than one week of classes incurs penalty and leads to decreasing grade.

WEBCT

This course uses Web CT to post your thoughts, questions and your reactions to others ideas. Apart from your class a few other students and faculty of the Dept. of Religious Studies are on the list, forming a small and friendly community.

For Web CT and Class discussions and reviews please be guided by these rules:

1. Constructive Criticism only.
2. Be Polite. Write clearly and append your name and topic to the posted message.
3. No personal comments: Please read the messages as they are addressed to the subject of your message but not intended at you personally.

COURSE EVALUATION

Review of literature 20%
Peer reviews 20%
Group Project 30%
Construction of Ritual 20%
Participation 10%

COURSE SCHEDULE

| Class | Topic | Assignment (Due in the next class) |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9. Sept. 2005 | Presentation of the course. Objective, scope and nature of Ritual Studies. Formation of Groups. | Write one page description of a personal ritual or a ritual recently attended by you. |
| 14. Sept. 2005 | What is ritual? Characteristics and nature of ritual. Discussion of personal ritual notes. Planning Group activities and work. | Read and Review Grimes 2-13. |
| 16. Sept. 2005 | Characteristics of Ritual. Group Discussion on individual analyses. | Think about ritual characteristics. Write about your birth or any recent birth which happened in your immediate family. |
| 21. Sept. 2005 | Intro to Birth Rituals. General characteristics. | Read Grimes 16-29. |
| 23. Sept. 2005 | Rituals of Birth and Birth | Grimes 29-49 |

| | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | ideologies across cultures. | |
| 29. Sept. 2005 | Basic typologies and concepts of Ritual- Compare Grimes and Bell. | Read Catherine Bell, "Basic Genres of Ritual Action," To be Handed out in Class. |
| 30. Sept. 2005 | Birth and social construction Group work and Constructing Ritual | Grimes 49-71. |
| 5. Oct. 2005 | Library trip and selecting research topics for groups. | Group work on selected subject. |
| 7. Oct. 2005 | Planning group presentations and organizing. | Robbie Davies Floyd. To be handed in class. |
| 12. Oct. 2005 | Discuss Floyd. Originality and continuity in modern birth rites | Write a personal account of rites of passage. |
| 14. Oct. 2005 | Discuss rites of passage personal accounts. | Grimes 88-100. |
| 19. Oct. 2005 | Rites of passage and socio-cultural perspectives | Arnold van Gennep: To be handed in class. |
| 21. Oct. 2005 | Discuss Gennep. Discuss coming of age stories. | Victor Turner. To be handed in class. |
| 26. Oct. 2005 | Discuss Turner. Planning construction of ritual. | Grimes 111-121. Read personal coming of age stories and respond. |
| 28. Oct. 2005 | Coming of age narratives. Construction of ritual. | Prepare a comprehensive account of rites of passage. |
| 2. Nov. 2005 | Compare Gennep, Bell, Turner, Grimes and Davis-Floyd. | Grimes 127-136 |
| 4. Nov. 2005 | Grimes. | Read Grimes. 136-145 |
| 9. Nov. 2005 | Coming of age and Socio-religious perspectives. Groups. | Group work on RS ritual construction to begin. |
| 11. Nov. 2005 | Remembrance Day. No Classes. | Group work on construction of a ritual and presentation- |
| 16. Nov. 2005 | Group presentations begin. Final work on ritual to begin. | Each group to work on an assigned aspect of ritual construction. |
| 18. Nov. 2005 | Group Presentation. | |
| 23. Nov. 2005 | Group Presentation. | Prepare for construction RS. Initiation ritual |

| | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 25. Nov. 2005 | Group Presentation. Work on Ritual of Initiation. | |
| 30. Nov. 2005 | Preparation of Ritual of Initiation. Material preparation and group presentation. | Prepare to put together all your work for this course- your own reviews, responses to others reviews, and personal descriptions of birth and initiation etc. Good Luck. |
| 2. Dec. 2005 | Final class. Peer Review. Learning reflection. Submit your journal with all your course work throughout this term. | Happy New Year and Enjoy your holidays. |