Religion, Ritual and Magic

Instructor

Ron Grimes  
Department of Religion and Culture  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5T8  
grimes@wlu.ca

Institution

Wilfrid Laurier University  
Provincial University; enrolment: 6000 undergraduates, 1000 graduates

Course Description

From the calendar: "The study of private and public rituals which relate society to the supernatural; magical beliefs and practices and the sociological and epistemological dimensions of witchcraft."

This is an advanced course in the anthropology of religion. Because the course is designed on an experimental, debate / dialogue model, having taken two or three religion or anthropology courses, or being an honours student in either field, will be beneficial.

Course Goals

1. To explore four of the most central questions in the anthropology of religion.
2. To develop the skills for carrying on debates and entering into dialogues.

Course Requirements

The course is built around 4 questions and three ways of demonstrating your ability to answer them.

You will explore 1 question by participation in the debate process. Group members will assist in the evaluation process. After your team finishes, you will be given a tentative mark. At the end of the course, that mark can have as many as 10 percentage points added or subtracted it (it may also remain the same), based on evaluative
questions such as: Which group (pro or con) won the debate? Which team did the best job with its question? Who most facilitated your learning? Did you attend class and participate in discussions? 1/3 of your final grade.

You will consider 1 of the questions in a written paper in dialogue format (8 pp. maximum, not counting endnotes and bibliography). PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS, APRIL 3. You may submit it earlier if you wish. 1/3 of your final grade.

You will answer at 2 of the four questions on the final examination. The final will contain all four questions, but you may (or, have to) answer only the two that you have not yet dealt with. FINAL EXAM DATE SET BY REGISTRAR. 1/3 of your final grade.

Required Readings


3. Ronald Grimes, ed., Readings in Ritual Studies. A collection of key writings on the topic. The longest book, but only some of it will be read; has abstracts. The following selections are probably the ones most relevant to the dialogue / debate question: Bergesen, Crapanzano, d'Aquili, Davis-Floyd, Douglas, Driver, Durkheim, Freud, Geertz, Gill, Goffman, Grimes, Jennings, Kertzer, Laird, Levi-Strauss, Myerhoff, Rappaport, Schechner, Smith (J.Z.), Staal, Turner (x 2).


Reserve: On reserve as some books about debating. It is worth spending a couple of hours with one of them.

Course Outline

The course is structured around four five-week cycles:

January

7 INTRODUCTION
9
14
16 QUESTION 1 CYCLE BEGINS
21
23
28
30 Debate on question 1

February
The Debate-Dialogue Team Structure

The class will be organized into 4 teams of approximately 12 members each. The job of each team is to facilitate the class's exploration of its question. The debate / dialogue is the main way of accomplishing this task, but others are possible, e.g., handouts, annotated bibliography of secondary resources, study suggestions regarding key articles, crucial quotations, etc. Each team is responsible for presenting a debate or dialogue in class on one of the following questions or a variant of it:

Team 1: The fieldwork question, e.g., Should field workers be objective? Should fieldworkers maximize
their participation in the religions they study? Should fieldworkers practice "methodological atheism" (Young, p. 325)? Can fieldworkers "go native?" Should they? Are "extraordinary experiences" a proper subject matter for scholarship? Primary resource: Young and Goulet, Being Changed. Dates of this cycle: Jan. 16, 21, 23, 28, 30.


Team 3: The ritual definition question, e.g., Is ritual necessarily (that is, by definition) religious, repetitive, traditional? What is ritual? What are the qualities of ritual, What kinds, phases, and "parts" ("elements," "building blocks") of ritual are there? Of what wholes is ritual a part? Primary resources in Grimes: Bynum, Campany, Davis-Floyd, Durkheim, Eliade, Erikson, Freud, Goethals, Goffman, Handleman et al., Hardin, Jennings, Macaloon, Pena, Rappaport, Schechner, B. Smith, J.Z. Smith, Staal, Tambiah, Turner (x 2), van Gennep. Dates of this cycle: Feb. 27, Mar. 4, 6, 11, 13.


1. Each team will be divided into 2 groups of 6 members each: a pro group (that is, would answer the questions "yes") and a con group (would answer it "no"). It is not necessary to be in the group you think is right.

2. Members of each group will have to work closely together but may wish to work out a tentative or preliminary division of labor. For instance, here is one possibility:

1 researcher-writer, who does research and writes the brief. Needs good research and writing skills.

1 coordinator, who convenes meetings, acts as liaison with the other group, and leads the pro and con meetings. Needs good organizational skills.

4 presenters, 2 of whom make the constructive presentations in the debate; 2 of whom present rebuttal

OR, ALTERNATIVELY

3 researcher-writers

1 coordinator

2 presenters who handle both constructive and rebuttal phases

3. Except for 4 introductory and concluding sessions, the course will be devoted to preparation and presentations of the four questions. Each team will have at its disposal 5 class sessions. Although they may be used in any way the team wishes, a suggested cycle is this:

Session 1: an introduction by the professor in which the question is framed (and sometimes voted on) and the definitions stipulated or negotiated.
Sessions 2 & 3: Pro and Con brainstorming and planning, led by the coordinator. Non-team member classmates may attend either session. Prof and TA will be available as resources.

Session 4: presentation of the debate or dialogue, by presenters.

Session 5: open discussion of the debate, led by prof or TA.

4. The debates

These happen in the last session of each cycle. They should take a little over an hour.

Debates

Advantages

Actively involves more people than a dialogue.

Often has a dramatic quality; stirs up emotions.

Helps you learn to think on your feet.

Disadvantages

Can falsely polarize a question.

Can get out of hand, get sidetracked, stir up emotions.

Makes you think on your feet.

Work best when a yes/no, pro/con, answer to the question is possible, and when the question is controversial.

The debate structure

1st affirmative, 10 min.
1st negative, 10 min.
2nd affirmative, 10 min.
2nd negative, 10 min.
1st negative rebuttal, 5 min.
1st affirmative rebuttal, 5 min.
2nd negative rebuttal, 5 min.
2nd affirmative rebuttal, 5 min.

The vote

Formalities
Dispense with verbal formalities.
You have control over physical environment.
Strict adherence to time limits.
The brief or dialogue (distributed within a week after the debate.
Establish definitions in initial, constructive presentations.
Prepare rebuttals, but employ teamwork during the debate.

**Dialogues**

**Advantages**

More precision of wording
More control over group dynamics; can be kept on track
Can be distributed if written

**Disadvantages**

Takes more time, especially if written or videotaped.
Involves fewer people in presentation.
Works best when clear yes/no divisions seems forced or nonsensical.
Works best when scripted and/or acted out.

There is no typical sequence except perhaps the very general one: polarized disagreement, refining the question, resolution or standoff.

5. Evaluations

Each debate is evaluated by use of a ballot. You are required to fill it out and to provide comments. These are for evaluating teams, not individuals.

Each team member is evaluated by other team members by yourself. You are required to fill out an evaluation that is both descriptive and evaluative. These are for individual group members.

The quality and quantity of your comments on both of these is taken into account in your final mark.

6. The Gallery

The gallery consists of students not on the current debate team.

Gallery members should attend the Pro and Con planning sessions but should not pass on information from one group to the other.

Gallery members may be asked to participate in discussions in both planning sessions and debates.
Occasionally, they may be asked to refrain from participating.

As a gallery member, you should take notes during the debate or when your memory is still fresh, so as to

enable you to write useful comments on ballots

enable you to compare the debates and select the best one at the end of the term

help you write good dialogues and final exams on the topic

7. Class-, Team-, and Group-Communication

The computerized discussion list is fast becoming a standard device for scholarly discussion at a distance. On mach1 I have set up a discussion list for members of this course. It is called AR (for: anthropology / religion). Instructions for using it are appended to this syllabus. You should subscribe to it immediately. It is for general discussion and debate, also for coordinating teams and groups.

Teams, because they are large, may find it best to "converse" over this list rather than trying to find a meeting time. Groups too can converse over the list, but they will be more effective if they find a time for two or three face-to-face meetings. When you are querying a specific subdivision of the class, you will make it easier for all of us if you identify your message in the subject line as "TEAM 1," "TEAM 4, GROUP B," etc. If a group wants to have private e-mail discussion, consult Computing Services Help Desk about how to create a group in your Pine mailer.

Dialogue Writing Guide

A dialogue is not the same as a conversation, transcript, or interview.

A conversation usually meanders. It has dead ends, is repetitious, drifts among topics, and does not move directly to the heart of the matter. In contrast, a dialogue is written and edited to minimize deadens and small talk. It has a clear focus, moving toward a specified question.

An interview is a conversation in which one party functions as question-asker; the other, as answer-giver. Typically, the interviewer's lines are short; the interviewee's, long and speech-like. A dialogue, on the other hand, aims at mutual interchange.

A transcript is the written record of an actual conversation or interview. A dialogue, however, is edited and shaped; in this sense it is fictional, an imagined discussion, even if based on a real interview, real character, or real author.

The following are criteria upon which dialogues will be judged:

**SCHOLARSHIP**

**Focus:** Is the topic appropriate for the course and for this assignment? Is it focused on a major rather than a minor issue? Is the length appropriate?

**Comprehension:** How deeply has the paper grasped basic concepts? How insightful are the questions raised? Does it respect the complexity of issues, or does it oversimplify, providing cheap, easy resolutions?

**Originality:** Does the dialogue present and develop your own images, experiences, or ideas? Is
there original and/or critical thinking in it? Do you develop an informed, overt position on major issues? Does the dialogue go beyond class discussion?

**Research:** Does the dialogue show evidence of detailed and thoughtful reading of the text or other resources? Does it show evidence of further research in outside the required readings?

**WRITING**

**Continuity:** Does the dialogue have continuity, or is it a disconnected patchwork? Is the logic sound? Are the transitions well handled with appropriate connective devices?

**Documentation:** Does the dialogue document fairly and fully quotations, ideas, and phrasing borrowed from its sources? Does the dialogue use a standard format for documentation, end- or footnotes, and bibliography? Note: like standard research papers, dialogues require notes and bibliographies.

**Style:** Are the writing style, grammar, spelling, syntax, and typing clear and unobtrusive? Is the format correct (title, name, 1" margins, 12 point type, single-spaced within entries, double-spaced between entries, speakers set off by colons, etc.)?

**CHARACTERS** (in dialogues)

**Balance:** Have the characters been evenly developed? Or is one of them used as a mere foil to set up questions for the other? Does genuine dialogue and engagement occur, or do the characters make speeches, talk past one another and thus engage in monologue?

**Appropriateness:** Are the questions and replies of the characters appropriate to them? Does the dialogue accurately represent the attitudes and tones of voice of each character? Does the dialogue avoid caricature, stereotype, and distortion?

**SIDES** (in debates)

**Balance:** Have the pro and con sides been fairly developed? Or is one of them caricatured and manipulated, made a foil for the other? Do the two sides really engage one another, or do they talk past one another?

**Appropriateness:** Are the questions and replies from the two sides appropriate? Does the debate accurately represent the attitudes and views of each side? Does the debate avoid caricature, stereotype, and distortion?

**Sample Page from a Dialogue**

Cecilia: I thought that the two discussions might work well together. I think that the most powerful message in *Black Elk Speaks* is one of partnership, between two men who were able to bridge a vast gap in order to communicate and offer something valuable to both of their cultures.

Johnstone: I agree that their collaboration was unusual, but I also think that the differences between them create textual problems for later readers, both Indian and white.

Cecilia: What are the specific problems you see? Although the men spoke different languages and were part of disparate cultures, they created a book which has helped preserve one man's life story and spiritual vision, as well as an account of Lakota spirituality for younger generations. It's part of the "canon" of native literature
now; Vine Deloria called it a "Bible".

Johnstone: But is the representation of that culture and of the Black Elk's life valid? Cecilia, you are ignoring all of the gaps in Neihardt's narrative, all of the misrepresentations and blatant omissions that obscure parts of Black Elk's life.

Cecilia: Are you referring to his role as a catechist in the Roman Catholic Church?

Johnstone: To that, yes, but more specifically to the way he used the English language to represent Black Elk, and...

Cecilia: Wait. Stop. Let's deal with this issue first. DeMallie (1984) suggests that the period of Black Elk's Catholicism presents the biggest gap in our understanding of the man. However, in the same article he refers to Black Elk's feeling that Neihardt had been sent to--and I think these are DeMallie's words -- "save his vision for the world" (DeMallie 1984: 118). Neither Black Elk nor Neihardt was interested in discussing Catholic religion. Black Elk wanted to transmit his vision, and Neihardt wanted to learn about Lakota religion and the Ghost Dance.

Johnstone: Your point is well taken. However, I still question the validity of a lifestory that ignores thirty years of a man's life. But I don't want to become sidetracked into a discussion of Catholicism. Let's look at the gaps within the actual narrative. For one thing, Neihardt minimized the emphasis on warfare in the vision, and foregrounded the parts of the vision that had to do with the power to heal (53). So this great vision that Indians and whites find so enchanting is missing integral elements of the old Lakota society.

Cecilia: Yes, Johnstone, but you forget that I've read the same article. On the next page DeMallie suggests that the warlike themes were suppressed by both Black Elk and Neihardt, albeit for different reasons, and that they developed a similar understanding of the vision (54). I really don't understand why you are trying to depreciate the value of this book. Over and over I hear critics speak of the powerful relationship between these two men.

Johnstone: I'm not trying to undermine the book, but I don't think we ought to get sentimental about what a wonderful heritage it is for young Indians to have this great work, and how fortunate it is that Neihardt happened to find Black Elk interesting and valuable. It is dangerous to ignore issues of power and control, even if there was a deep understanding between the two men. The book is still an example of a white man representing a colonized culture in white language; it is a white man's interpretation of Black Elk that is forming the so-called canon of American Indian literature.

Cecilia: I can't believe that you hold such a cynical view, that you completely ignore the energy between these two men. What about Neihardt's statement that there were times when "barriers of language" disappeared (Iverson 1994: 106), or DeMaille's suggestion that they had "kindred mystic souls" (DeMaille 1984: 124)?

Johnstone: I appreciate your admiration of the rapport these two men established, but you can't deny that Neidhardt had control of this situation. Black Elk narrated the story, but Neihardt had unchecked authority over the resulting narrative. And regardless of his best intentions, his position in the culture of power influenced the way he wrote the book.

The Computer List

There is a computer list for this course. It will allow us to communicate electronically about the content and learning process taking place in RE/AN322. After you have subscribed to this list, feel free to contribute to it in whatever ways seem best to you. If you contribute well, that is, in a way that enhances other people's learning, additional points may be added to your final mark.
Here's how to subscribe to this list:

1. You need a WLU computer account for Mach 1. Mach 1 allows is the university's mainframe computer, which includes electronic mail and Internet. Once you are registered at WLU, it's quite easy to get a computer account (it's also free). The computer folk (central office on the main floor of the Woods building) have prepared a registration information sheet. All it takes for you to get an account (once you're registered) is to sit in front of a computer for 10 minutes and follow the instructions on this information sheet. You will probably also want to open a Banyan account (in order to gain access to a more recent version of Word Perfect, Windows, and other programs), but email and this computer list run through Mach1.

2. Computers are available for your use in several places on campus (see the information board next to the computer office), including two rooms in the library which are accessible around the clock (L201 and L236). Your own computer with a modem can also easily access the mainframe from home.

3. You also need some familiarity with Pine, which is the e-mail (= electronic transmission of mail) system used at WLU. You can easily acquire this familiarity on your own or with the help of others (one of your classmates, or a WLU computer consultant in one of the introductory courses they offer).

4. Drop by the computer office and pick up an information sheet on pine. Set it up beside your computer and allow yourself 30 minutes of experimentation time with the program in order to learn how to use it (it's not difficult). After you've logged into your account (i.e. after typing the name and password you've used to create your account), you'll be faced with a dollar prompt on screen ($). When you see this, type "pine" (without quotation marks) then press the Enter key, and you'll enter the Pine program. Explore. Play.

5. After logging in, type "wluinfo" at the $ prompt (then press the Enter key). A screen of options will appear. Select (with the arrow buttons on the bottom right of your keyboard): "Computing and Communication Services" and press Enter. Another screen of options will appear. Select "Classes" and press Enter. This should allow you to locate the time and place of the next (free) introductory course on pine (they last about 2 hours). If you find this process too confusing, simply ask the folk in the computing office on the main floor of the Central Teaching building.

6. Once you've opened your account, and are able to access the pine system, here's what you do to join the list:

   a) Log into your account (involves typing in your computer name and password; you will have gone through this process in signing into your account). What you'll get is the dollar prompt ($) on your screen.

   b) At the prompt type "pine" then the Enter key, which will bring you to the e-mail system.

   c) The pine menu will appear on screen. Press c (then Enter) to enter the compose mode. The cursor will be on the "To" line. Type listproc@wlu.ca. Use small letters; omit spaces. Press Enter four times to move the cursor down to the Message section (you may also move the cursor up or down using the arrow keys).

   d) With the cursor in the message section type: subscribe AR firstname lastname (include spaces where I've done so, and, of course, replace firstname and lastname with your own; press Enter when you've got it right (the Backspace key will allow you to correct mistakes).

   e) Press the Ctrl (bottom left of keyboard) and x keys together in order to send this message. A
question will appear on your screen: Send message? (y) (prompting you to type y for yes, while allowing you to type n for no if you've made an error). Type y and your message will disappear (as it should!).

f) In a minute or two you'll receive a message which will tell you that your request has been approved. In case you don't, wait. The machine may need ask me for my approval. After I tell the system to let you in, you'll receive the message: You have been added to list AR@wlu.ca. That message will confirm that you've joined the list.

g) Having joined the list you may now contribute to it by sending mail to AR (the part that follows, @wlu.ca, will automatically be inserted). Your contributions will automatically be sent to all the others who have joined the list, and theirs will automatically be sent to you for reading and response. When you send a note, you'll not receive a copy yourself; don't worry about this, for if you've made an error (e.g., by typing the list name in capital letters) your message will come bouncing back to you.

Instructions for List Members

How users can subscribe themselves

When a list is created, the list owner can specify to the person who creates the list that it be created as a "self-subscribing" list. This means prospective members can subscribe themselves.

1. Prospective members MUST go into the mailing program they expect to use when reading and sending mail to the list (e.g.: Pine, Eudora, Netscape Mail etc)

2. They must address an e-mail message to: listproc@wlu.ca

3. The body of the message must contain just ONE line, which will be:

   subscribe list-name firstname lastname

   e.g.: subscribe AR David Jones

How to send a message to the list

Members will send their messages to all the other members of the list by addressing an e-mail message (Pine or other e-mail package) to: list-name@wlu.ca

   e.g.: To: AR@wlu.ca

How to find out who the list members are

Any member of the list can find out names of all other members by sending an email message to listproc@wlu.ca

The message must read:

   review list-name

   e.g.: review AR

How to receive mail from the list in digest form
Normally, list members receive each message posted to the list within moments of its being posted. If you prefer, you can ask that the day's messages be bundled and sent out as a digest, once a day. To do this, send a message to:

listproc@wlu.ca

and the message must contain only the following line:

set list-name mail digest

  e.g.: set AR mail digest

Those NOT on Team 1: Remember that, if you are not on Team 1, you need to decide whether to write a dialogue on THE FIELDWORK QUESTION. If you are, it is due FEB. 4 (see syllabus), after the discussion following the actual debate. If you are not going to write a dialogue on the fieldwork question, it automatically becomes one of your final exam questions.

Come and listen to the discussions of Team 1's Pro and Con groups. Remember that you will not be writing a debate but rather a dialogue, and your dialogue must not merely imitate the debate (any more than you can write a paper which imitates one of your sources); use the debate as a source just as you would a book; give credit where credit is due. So take note of provocative and problematic interchanges.

Example of an interchange:

A: Let's use the term "extraordinary experiences."

B: The problem with that phrase is that it's too broad (it could include murder, for instance) and it's too dependent on perspective (extraordinary in whose view?).

A: But if we say "religious experiences," there's no necessary reason why the appearance of a bear in a fieldworker's dream would be regarded as religious in the way it might in a shaman's dream.

If you are planning to write a dialogue or use dialogue style on the exam, the discussions among group members may help you as much as the debates themselves.

Since the question has arisen: For a written dialogue, provide the basic question you are working on in the title. You may also, if you like, frame the question in a brief prose introduction or in the opening portion of the dialogue itself. You may wish to reframe the question. The question need not be identical with the debate resolution on the same topic, but it does need to be on the same general topic, e.g., fieldwork on extraordinary experiences, definitions of ritual, etc. Sub-questions arise in dialogues, and that is fine, but they should be related to your central question. A good dialogue does not jump around among various topics.

Also in response to a student query about dialogue characters: Work to create characters capable of challenging each other; they need to think differently from one another. Like a good play, a dialogue needs dramatic tension. Don't merely echo the author(s) of the book you are reading. Try to gain critical perspective. A dialogue is not just a place to summarize what you've read in a book or heard in a debate but rather a way to push at a topic's boundaries and an author's assumptions; in this respect, it is akin to a debate. Using other sources is one way to get some critical perspective; try to think through your author's claims, or your own, through the eyes of another writer.

How to unsubscribe from a list
Send an e-mail message to listproc@wlu.ca

The message must contain only the following line:

    unsubscribe list-name

e.g.: unsubscribe AR

How to get acknowledgment of mail you send to the list

Normally, when you send e-mail messages to the list, you do not receive a copy of your own message. To get copies of your own messages, send an e-mail message to listproc@wlu.ca

The message must contain only the following line:

    set list-name mail ack

e.g.: set AR mail ack

How to STOP getting acknowledgment of mail you send to the list

Send an e-mail message to listproc@wlu.ca

The message must contain only the following line:

    set list-name mail noack

e.g.: set AR mail noack

Notes to the Gallery:

If you are not on a team that is currently working, you need to decide whether to write a dialogue on this team's question. If you are, it is due not long after the actual debate or dialogue. If you are not going to write a dialogue on the fieldwork question, it automatically becomes one of your final exam questions.

Come and listen to the discussions of Pro and Con groups. Remember that you may not be writing a debate but rather a dialogue, and your dialogue must not merely imitate the debate (any more than you can write a paper which imitates one of your sources); use the debate as a source just as you would a book; give credit where credit is due. So take note of provocative and problematic interchanges.

Example of an interchange:

A: Let's use the term "extraordinary experiences."

B: The problem with that phrase is that it's too broad (it could include murder, for instance) and it's too dependent on perspective (extraordinary in whose view?).

A: But if we say "religious experiences," there's no necessary reason why the appearance of a bear in a fieldworker's dream would be regarded as religious in the way it might in a shaman's dream.

If you are planning to write a dialogue or use dialogue style on the exam, the discussions among group members may help you as much as the debates themselves.
Notes

1. **THE FINE PRINT**: 1. Late papers unaccompanied by a letter from a doctor, counselor, or funeral director will be docked 10% per day. 2. Do not leave papers in my mailbox or put them under my door without having the department secretary to date and sign them. Otherwise, they are dated by me when I have them in hand. 3. Papers occasionally get lost, so you are required to retain a copy of your paper. Do not hand in your *only* copy.

2. Note that these page numbers refer to original page numbers. Assigned reading closely follow order of material as arranged in anthology.

3. **THE FINE PRINT**: 1. Late papers unaccompanied by a letter from a doctor, counselor, or funeral director will be docked 10% per day. 2. Do not leave papers in my mailbox or put them under my door without having the department secretary to date and sign them. Otherwise, they are dated by me when I have them in hand. 3. Papers occasionally get lost, so you are required to retain a copy of your paper. Do not hand in your *only* copy.

4. An important note on "the question." Each question is stated as simply as possible, the way a child or reporter might put it. Questions can be misleadingly posed, so in the process of debating and dialoging, they are often refined or reframed. Working on a well thought out version of a question is essential to good debate and dialogue. In working on any of these questions, in any of the specified forms, you or your team may recast the question, provided you are clear and overt about it, and provided you do not merely evade it (like a politician). One caution however: in an unrehearsed, public debate if one side recasts the starting question without the consent of the other side, they will merely talk past one another.

5. You may use either endnotes, footnotes, or parenthetical notes like these provided you know how to use the form correctly. Notes such as these would require a bibliography at the end.

6. It is not entirely clear whether this view is DeMaille's, Black Elk's, Neihardt's. [a typical, substantive footnote.]

Select a location

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/religion_ritual_magic-grimes.html

Latest update: August 02, 2002
Number of accesses since April 15, 1998: