

**ANTH 13 - Magic, Witchcraft and Religion****Catalog Description****Transfer Status:** CSU/UC**Unit(s):** 3.00**Lecture:** 51.00 Contact hours/102.00 Out of class hours/153.00 Total hours/3.00 Unit(s)**Total:** 51.00 Contact hours/102.00 Out of class hours/153.00 Total hours/3.00 Unit(s)

**Course Description:** This course is a cross-cultural study of the forms and functions of supernatural beliefs and rituals in contemporary and historical societies. Various methods, theories, and models from anthropology and related social sciences are applied to the cross-cultural study of belief systems. An anthropological perspective, emphasizing holism and cultural relativism, is taken to demonstrate how belief in supernatural forces reflects other cultural patterns of behavior and thinking, such as subsistence practices, social organization, and cultural change. Students will gain a comparative understanding of diverse belief systems and their cultural significance.

**Objectives**

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Define and describe the basic anthropological approaches (method and theory) to the cross-cultural study of religion.(i.e. belief systems).
2. Identify and critically analyze the work of scholars who have studied religious belief systems from an anthropological perspective.
3. Explain anthropological approaches to change in supernatural belief and practices as a result of cultural contact, with a particular emphasis on colonialism, transnationalism or globalization.
4. Explain anthropological approaches to the politics of the religious and cultural identities in wider, socio-cultural contexts.
5. Integrate the role of belief and ritual into an understanding of other aspects of society, including economics, social organization, subsistence cycles, political organization, and medical and curing practices.
6. Interpret and describe differing religious and magical belief systems in a relativistic and holistic manner using ethnographic and/or historical examples.

**Course Content**

| Topic Titles / Suggested Time Topic                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                |
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| <u>Lecture</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                |
| <u>Topics</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <u>Lec Hrs</u> |
| Introduction to Anthropology: Foundational Concepts and Field Methods                                                                                                                                                                      | 6.00           |
| The Historic Development of Anthropological Approaches to Understanding Religious Belief and Practice: Myth, Rituals, and Taboos                                                                                                           | 4.00           |
| Forms and Functions: Theoretical Approaches, such as analytical, functional, structural, and symbolic approaches. Concepts of Culture, including discussions of foundational scholars like Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, EB Tylor, and others | 5.00           |
| Shamans, Priests, and Prophets: Religious Practitioners from a Crosscultural Perspective                                                                                                                                                   | 4.00           |
| Subsistence, Social Organization, and Other Aspects of Culture: evaluating the interconnectedness between belief systems and other elements of culture                                                                                     | 12.00          |
| Religion and Healing: Traditional Healers as Religious Practitioners                                                                                                                                                                       | 4.00           |
| Witches, Ghosts, Demons and Ancestors                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 4.00           |
| Religious Adaptation and Change: revitalization movements, messianic movements, new religious movements, and the association with culture change                                                                                           | 4.00           |
| Religion and Culture Contact                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 4.00           |
| Religion and Conflict: fundamentalism, terrorism, violence, and peace as evidenced in selected contemporary issues such as conflict in Northern Ireland and the Middle East                                                                | 4.00           |
| <b>Total Hours: 51.00</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                |

**Methods of Instruction**

- A. Collaborative Group Work
- B. Discussion
- C. Homework: Students are required to complete two hours of outside-of-class homework for each hour of lecture
- D. Lecture
- E. Multimedia Presentations
- F. Problem-Solving Sessions

## Methods of Evaluation

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- A. Exams/Tests
- B. Quizzes
- C. Research Projects
- D. Essays and research papers

## Examples of Assignments

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### Reading Assignments

1. Read the article from your supplemental text that deals with “syncretism.” This concept is often confused with “acculturation” and “cultural blending.” Be prepared to discuss in class what syncretism is and provide a few ethnographic examples (e.g. Maya , Tarajumaran, and Kayapo syncretism).
2. Read the article from your supplemental text that deals with anthropological definitions of religion and belief. Be able to discuss why anthropological approaches to belief systems have allowed for significant insights into the religious beliefs and practices of hunter-gatherer societies found in different parts of the world (e.g. in Australia, the Kalahari Desert and the more remote areas of the Amazon Basin).

### Writing Assignments

1. Write a three-page essay focusing on animism. What is animism? How does an animistic world view influence perceptions of other aspects of life (e.g. subsistence, social organization, and ritual life).
2. Write a three-page summary outlining the basic characteristics of shamanism. Focus on shamanic practices in Peru. Include references to Brujos and Brujas. How do these specialists retain aspects of traditional shamanism?

### Out-of-Class Assignments

1. After a discussion of the importance of myth and its role in supernatural belief systems, and cultural systems more broadly, apply the principles of analyzing myths to original examples. To do this, find your own myth. Bring the myth to the next class session for group work, where we will select a myth to apply the several established paradigms and perspectives to make sense of the myth. These paradigms are: a. Functionalism b. Structuralism c. Symbolic or Interpretive d. Culture and Power Perspective. Share your group work out with the class and lead the way for a discussion of the major paradigms in thinking about mythology and religion in general.
2. Healing and medicine are often connected with and dependent upon religious beliefs. Please use your supplemental text as well as one source from the Butte College Library to discuss the ways in which healing and medicine are intertwined with belief systems. Compare and contrast your examples with mainstream American ideas of healing and medicine. Please bring a list of 5 examples from your research and critical analysis to class to discuss with your classmates.

## Recommended Materials of Instruction

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Hicks, David ed. (2010). Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion. *AltaMira*, 3rd. 9780759111561.

Rebecca L. Stein and Philip L. Stein. (2025). The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft. *Routledge*, 5th. 9781032572994.

Pamela Moro. (2012). "Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion". *McGraw Hill*, 9th. 978-0078034947.

### Zero Cost Textbook

Amanda Zunner-Keating, Madlen Avetyan, and Ben Shepard. Beliefs: An Open Invitation to the Anthropology of Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion (OER)

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Anthropology/Cultural\\_Anthropology/Beliefs%3A\\_An\\_Open\\_Invitation\\_to\\_the\\_Anthropology\\_of\\_Magic\\_Witchcraft\\_and\\_Religion\\_\(Zunner-Keating\\_Avetyan\\_and\\_Shepard\)](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Anthropology/Cultural_Anthropology/Beliefs%3A_An_Open_Invitation_to_the_Anthropology_of_Magic_Witchcraft_and_Religion_(Zunner-Keating_Avetyan_and_Shepard))

## Minimum Qualifications

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Anthropology (Masters Required)

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**Created/Revised by:** Bynoe, Cynthia

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