THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MAGIC, RELIGION, AND WITCHCRAFT

WELCOME TO ANTHROPOLOGY 11! This course is a cross-cultural and evolutionary survey of the supernatural. It includes an examination of magic and witchcraft practices and the functions they play in various world societies, including hunting and gathering groups and tribal level and state level societies. Religious beliefs, symbolism, and ritual are explained from an anthropological perspective.

Ideally, I envision the class meetings to consist of dynamic discussions in which the students actively participate. However, I know that, for a variety of reasons, most of you are not that enthusiastic about this proposition. Just be assured that, in my class, your ideas are welcome. The material from the readings and the videos is extremely interesting. The purpose of class discussions is to enable us to make sense of what might seem, at times, strange and irrational beliefs and practices. My sincere and humble request is for you to keep an open mind, DO THE READINGS!!!, and participate in class discussions.

The following is an outline of the course objectives. It constitutes a list of the major concepts you should thoroughly understand by the completion of the semester.

1. Provide examples of ethnographic case studies to illustrate how the theoretical frameworks of the evolutionary, functional and psychoanalytic perspectives would approach the study of religion.
2. Compare and contrast the various levels of religious participation found in individualistic, shamanistic, communal and ecclesiastical organizations.
3. Define and describe the terms animism and animatism and include cultural examples of each concept.
4. Contrast the ways in which the roles of shamans and priests reflect egalitarianism and stratification respectively.
5. Explain and evaluate the importance of altered states in religious practices and provide an ethnographic example to illustrate your understanding.
6. Define the term symbol and provide a description of a religious symbol.
7. Describe the difference between witchcraft and sorcery and provide an explanation of how these beliefs function in society.
8. Contrast the concept of witchcraft in traditional societies with that of Euro-American beliefs.
9. Explain the importance of myth and ritual, making reference to the function of each in society.
10. Identify and describe the various types of revitalization movements and explain the circumstances surrounding the origins of these movements.
The following Student Learning Outcomes have been developed for the course. By the fourteenth week of class, the students should be able to understand the requirements outlined below.

**SLO #1: Animism and Animatism** (The two Aspects of the Supernatural)—In a class-written assignment, students will demonstrate a conceptual understanding of the supernatural by (1) defining the terms animism and animatism; (2) outlining and explaining each of the characteristics of animistic beings; and (3) providing one culturally relevant example for animism and another for animatism.

**SLO #2: Shamans and Priests**—In an in-class assignment, students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between religion and social structure by discussing the ways in which the roles of shamans and priests reflect egalitarianism and stratification, respectively.

**SLO #3: Rite of Passage**—In an in-class assignment, students will demonstrate their understanding of a rite of passage by defining the process and explaining each of its stages.

The following Program Level SLOs have been developed for the program. By the fourteenth week of class, the students should be able to understand the requirements outlined below.

**PLO #1: Four-Field Approach**—Students will demonstrate an understanding of the four-field approach in anthropology by outlining each field, identifying which aspects of the study of human beings each field addresses and providing two examples of specializations within each field.

**PLO #2: Holism**—Students will demonstrate an understanding of the holistic approach by identifying how it applies to anthropological research.

**PLO #3: Stages of Research**—Students will demonstrate an understanding of the stages of research in the discipline of anthropology by properly identifying each step and its critical significance.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**


Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Any publisher, any edition (I will refer to this book as *TFA* in the schedule of classes)
In addition to the required sources indicated above, students will need to read seven articles which could be accessed at the Reserve section in the college library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) There will be three in-class exams, each of which will consist of multiple choice questions, short answers, and essays. Each exam will be worth 100 points.

(2) Students will be graded for the completion of 8 written assignments totaling 56 points (7 points each). You will need to submit typed answers to Focus Questions (I will provide these) for 7 articles. The dates for submission will be announced in class. Please, keep in mind that I consider these assignments to be a very important component of the course; I grade them on the basis of detail and on how much they reflect your understanding of the readings.

(3) In addition to the exams and written assignments listed above, students will receive points on the basis of participation. The criteria for participation includes (but it is not restricted to) the following: attendance; good behavior and participation while in class; and the maintenance of consistently good grades or, at least, the gradual improvement of performance as exhibited by the scores achieved in exams. I will keep track of those students who are actively involved in discussions, mainly through answers to questions that I pose in reference to the readings assigned for the class (The maximum points allotted for participation will be 20).

Notes:

(1) Attendance is mandatory. Students with more than five absences will be dropped, regardless of student performance and how advanced in the semester we are. Keep in mind that a tardy is equivalent to ½ absence.

(2) In the event that extra credit assignments are offered, students who have missed more than four meetings will not be eligible for possible extra credit points (no exceptions).

(3) Scantrons (Form 882-E) and #2 pencils will be needed for all exams. You will also need blank sheets of paper on which you will write the answers to essay questions. Exams schedules will not be extended beyond the allotted time, so you should arrive on time.

(4) Exams are based on text, lecture, and video material. Make-ups will be given on exceptional circumstances only (which will be assessed by me), and only when consultation with me, the instructor, is made no later than 24 hours after the exam, no exceptions.

(5) Cheating is absolutely prohibited. If a student is caught cheating during and exam, an “F” will be assigned to the exam.

(6) Please turn all cell phones off before entering the classroom. NO TEXTING DURING CLASS TIME IS PERMITTED (Failure to comply with this rule may lead to suspension from class).

(7) Students are expected to remain in the class for the whole length of the meeting. Those who leave early without previous consultation with the instructor will be marked absent. (Please, do not leave the classroom in order to answer a
phone call. If you do so, you will not be allowed back in for the remaining of the lecture.

(8) **Any changes to this syllabus will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to know of those changes.**

**ADA Statement:** El Camino College is committed to providing educational accommodations for students with disabilities upon the timely request by the student to the instructor. A student with a disability, who would like an academic accommodation, is responsible for identifying herself/himself to the instructor and to the Special Resources Center. To make arrangements for academic accommodations, contact the Special Resources Center.

**GRADING:**

Grading criteria is as follows:

Three Exams @100 points each-----------------------------300
Written Assignments (Answers to Focus Questions)------ 56
Participation----------------------------------------------------- 20
**Total possible points--------------------------------------376**

A= 100-90% of total possible points (376-335)
B= 89-80% (334-298)
C= 79-70% (297-260)
D= 69-60% (259-222)
F= 59% and below (221 and below)

**LECTURES, READINGS, AND EXAM SCHEDULE**

*(Depending on availability and scheduling, some of the films may be substituted)*

*(Labor Day Holiday, Monday 9-5, Campus Closed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Text:</th>
<th>WA:</th>
<th>Video:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 29, 31</td>
<td><strong>Introduction to the course</strong></td>
<td>Chapter 1 (pp. 1-14)</td>
<td>“Body Ritual Among the Nacirema” (hand-out)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 7</td>
<td><strong>Basic Concepts and Perspectives in Anthropology</strong></td>
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<td>Sept. 12, 14, 19</td>
<td><strong>The Anthropological Study of Religion</strong></td>
<td>Chapter 1 (pp. 14-28)</td>
<td>“Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians”</td>
<td>“Faces of Culture: Religion and Magic”</td>
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<td>Sept. 21, 26</td>
<td><strong>Mythology</strong></td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>“Nyoro Myth”</td>
<td>Joseph Campbell’s “Hero with a Thousand Faces”</td>
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Sept. 26, 28 Religious Symbols

Text: Chapter 3
Video: “Snake Handling at Jolo, West Virginia,”
“Snake Handling Church Service”

Oct. 3, 5 Ritual

Text: Chapter 4
WA: “Female Circumcision in Egypt and Sudan”
Video: “Faces of Culture: The Asmat of New Guinea”

Oct. 10 EXAM #1

Oct. 12 Discussion: “Traditional” vs. “Modern” Societies
Read: TFA, Chapters 1-9

Oct. 17, 19 Altered States of Consciousness

Text: Chapter 5
WA: “Hypnosis and Trance Induction in the Surgeries of Brazilian Spiritist Healer-Mediums”
Video: “From Peyote to LSD”

Oct. 24, 26 Religious Specialists

Text: Chapter 6
Video: “Warriors of the Amazon” (selected segments)

Oct. 31, Nov. 2 Religion and Medicine

WA: “Mistress of ‘Lo Espiritual’”
Presentation: “Espiritualista Curaciones”

Nov. 7, 9, 14 Witchcraft

Text: Chapter 10
WA: “An Anthropological Perspective on The Witchcraze”
Video: “Burning Times”

Nov. 16 EXAM #2

Nov. 21, 23 Magic and Divination

Text: Chapter 7
Video: “Witchcraft Among the Azande”
Nov. 28, 30  **Ancestor Worship/Vodou**  
Lecture based on notes provided to the students  
**WA:** “Vodou”  
**Video:** “The Power of Vodou”  
**Discussion:** “The Role of the Ancestors in Anthropological Perspective”  
**Read:** TFA, Chapters 10-14

Dec. 1, 5, 7  **The Search for New Meaning**  
**Text:** Chapter 11  
**Discussion:** “The Confrontation of Tradition and Modernity”  
**Read:** “TFA, Chapters 15-25

Dec. 12  Review

Dec. 14  **FINAL EXAM**

HAVE A GREAT WINTER BREAK!!!