



Native  
American  
Religions  
REL 260

Fall 2021

T/Th 1:40-  
2:55 PM

Ed Center  
219

Native religions are remarkably diverse. They are grounded in very specific languages, places, ceremonies, and communal relationships embedded in a unique ethnic history often overshadowed by the more pervasive history of religious and political oppression.

This course will introduce you to the history and contemporary realities of Native American life in North America. We will evaluate and analyze the rich cultural, ceremonial, and ideological diversity of Native American religious practices and beliefs in diverse contexts: from the Northeast to the

Great Plains, from the Southeast to the Pacific Northwest. In addition to distinct tribal traditions, we will discuss several pan-Indian religious movements, including the Ghost Dance and the Native American Church. We will analyze how historical experiences, such as contact with Euro-American missionaries, settlers, and soldiers, the dispossession of tribal lands and cultural genocide, and the development of hybrid and revitalization movements affect ritual practice and religious belief over time. Throughout, we will develop and analyze theories and methods in the study of Native American religions. We will foreground the voices of Native scholars and artists and

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consider issues of representation and authenticity. We will consider what counts as “religion” in America and how religious traditions shape and are shaped by other forms of difference (race, class, gender, age, sexuality, etc.). We will wrestle with how to appreciate cultural continuities, account for historical changes and articulate new religious combinations. At the same time, we will tackle questions of violence, asymmetrical power, colonization and the need for decolonized methodologies.

**Course Objectives**

- ♦Evaluate the religious expressions of diverse Native American communities by identifying key figures, groups, ideas, and events and synthesizing the connections between them;
- ♦Analyze religion’s intersection with politics, race, ethnicity, gender, settler colonialism, and inequity, as well as literature, art, and culture;
- ♦Develop fundamental methodological and theoretical concepts utilized in the study and analysis of Native American religion;
- ♦Develop research skills and improve ability to write analytically and comparatively about broad themes and historical moments, as well as specific texts and case studies;
- ♦Design and implement a final research project using course material, as well as outside primary and secondary sources.

**Required text**  
Suzanne Crawford O’Brien and Inés Talamentez, *Religion and Culture in Native America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will recognize and explain the major theoretical perspectives and key issues of debate in the academic study of religion, evaluated in response papers and a final paper;
- Students will demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft a persuasive argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources, evaluated in reflection papers and a final paper.

### Course Assignments

Participation	200 pts.
Discussion Questions	100 pts.
Quizzes	200 pts.
Response Papers	200 pts.
Annotated Bibliography	100 pts.
Final Paper	200 pts.

### Coronavirus

For now, this is a 100% in-person class. We do not have excessive space in our classroom and therefore cannot fully socially distance. **You must be wearing a mask at all times** and are *strongly encouraged* to get vaccinated to protect yourself and your classmates. You will not be allowed to eat in class and if you must take a drink, do so and very quickly put your mask back on. Even if you have had COVID in the past, vaccinations are the only

way that we are going to fully move away from this pandemic. Vaccinations are available for free twice a week on campus: [learn more here](#). Only students quarantining due to a COVID positive test will be allowed to join class via Zoom. If you have been exposed to COVID, get tested. “I might have COVID” is not the same as “I have COVID.” Please do not take advantage of the pandemic to simply not come to class. In-person attendance is required, this is not a hybrid course. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances.

Due to the reality of COVID, we may be required to change tactics and move the course fully online. This may include a shift in course requirements and due dates, but we will do what we need to ensure the safety of students and instructor and you will be given all necessary information in a timely fashion. We will remain flexible and vigilant—we got this!

### Participation in class, seminars and exercises (200 points)

Active student participation is crucial for the success of this course and the development of your individual learning. We learn best when we learn together. Throughout this course, we'll spend considerable time laying a foundation conducive to respectful but challenging discussion through which we can all grow. We will grapple with complicated, emotional, and thought-provoking topics as a community. In this endeavor, we will seek to be supportive of each other and to actively reflect on our own assumptions. In-person attendance is mandatory, as is participation in class discussions and work performed in groups. In discussion, aim for substantial contributions over quantity of comments. That is, comments should respond to those made by others—listen to each other, move the discussion forward, and pose new questions for consideration. **After two unexcused absences, 20 points will be subtracted from your grade for each subsequent absence. After six unexcused absences, you will receive a failing grade.** The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof. Please let me know at least a week before the religious holiday so I might make appropriate changes to group work.

### Reading Guide & Discussion Questions (100 points)

The most successful learning comes from you. It is very important that you not only **read the assigned material**, but also that **you critically examine and interrogate it**. Throughout the semester we will work to recognize and critique arguments, set primary sources in context, and compare and contrast multiple readings and authors. As you read, you should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to the discussion. **You are required to post two discussion questions to OAKS by midnight the night before class.** These questions can be drawn directly from the text or can be the result of thoughts you had by relating this specific text with previous readings you did or experiences you had. All members of the class, students and instructor alike, are responsible for understanding,

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explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion. **You must post 20 of the possible 24 times to receive full credit.** If you post fewer than 20 times, five points will be removed for every missing post.

Reading Guide:

- What is the major argument of the text? What evidence does she use to support her argument?
- From what context is the author writing? What historical moment? How might that affect his writing?
- What doesn't make sense to me? What is not clear? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their argument?
- What other readings does this piece relate to from class? From my own experiences?

Suggestions for writing discussion questions:

- Avoid yes/no questions, unless they have a strong "why" or "how" component.
- Avoid purely factual questions with short answers. Stress questions that require thinking/interpretation.
- You might quote a significant sentence from the reading and ask a question about it.
- Try to tie the reading to what we've learned about or talked about in other class sessions. For example...
- Ask questions that ask for comparison or connections between the subject of the reading and other things we've been studying.
- Ask questions that call for evidence, either from the reading or from elsewhere in the course.

## #Quizzes (200)

Throughout the semester we will have four in-class comprehension quizzes, which will assess how well you are retaining information from the course readings and lectures. These will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and one brief essay question. Each will be worth 50 points and will be completed at the beginning of class.

## #Response Papers (200)

**Task:** Reinforce and critically apply readings, class discussions, classroom exercises, and any other materials that we discussed in class in a 2-3-page paper. Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type. Chicago Footnotes, APA or MLA citations required (in-text and works cited). Upload a digital copy to OAKS before class begins on due date.

**Grading Criteria (100 Points):** *25 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *35 Points:* Engagement with sources and course material (Does the paper use sources from the course to answer the prompt? Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Does the paper use the sources to develop and support a larger argument?) *40 Points:* Development of a thesis/argument (Is there a clear thesis statement? Was the thesis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does the thesis answer the prompt? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage with the material?)

**Prompt 1:** Theorizing Native American religious traditions. What are the major concerns in the academic study of Native American religious traditions? What are some of the different sides of the debate? What issues might arise with insider or outsider approaches? What do you think? How should we go about respectfully "decolonizing" our methodologies? Be sure to analyze multiple arguments (you must cite at least two of the readings), but be clear about where you stand. Your paper should be thesis-driven and present your own ideas.

**Prompt 2:** Native relationship to land and/or animals. Reflect on an experience where you felt intimate or a "sense of kinship" with a landscape, a particular place, or an animal. After you have *briefly* described this experience, relate it to Native American worldviews of reciprocity and relationship using at least three sources from the course. How is it similar or different from particular Native examples? (Remember not all Native religions are the same, so be sure your paper reflects the nuances of Native relationships) What do reciprocity and relationship with land and non-human animals teach us? Where should we go from here? Use at least three sources from the course.

## #Annotated Bibliography (100 points)

An annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for your research project. They encourage you to critically evaluate sources as you develop a debatable, interesting, and current thesis. Writing an annotated bibliography will help you identify what has already been written about your topic, what the issues are, and what people are arguing about, in order to develop your own point of view. Due November 23.

**Task:** Identify five *academic* sources that pertain to your final research paper. You must include a summary and evaluation of each source. These annotations should be written in paragraph form (200-300 words per source) and include the following information:

1. An explanation of the main purpose of the source—what is it trying to argue? Why was it written?
2. A short summary of key findings or arguments of the source
3. The academic/intellectual credentials of the source. Does it appear in a peer-reviewed journal? Is the author someone who has expertise in the area?
4. Any shortcomings or biases you notice
5. The value of this work as a contribution to the topic you're exploring.

### #Final Research Paper: (200 points)

The final paper is the major academic enterprise of this course. It involves research and reading new material besides the assigned texts for this class, both secondary and primary sources. You have two options for your final paper:

**Prompt 1:** Legal brief and analysis. As you've learned over the semester, Native American religions are living and adaptive webs, deeply tied to particular places, practices, and objects. Yet, physical violence, assimilation policies, natural resource exploitation, and settler colonialism continue to limit the religious freedoms of Native peoples. This is often decided in the American courts. For this paper, prepare a legal brief (a document used to argue why one party should win) for a real case involving a Native American tribe and issues of religious freedom. Examples might include *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association* (1988), *Navajo Nation v. United States Forest Service* (2007), *Oregon v. Smith* (1990), or even undecided cases like *Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition v. Trump*. Here is a short article on how and why students should write briefs: <https://www.newlearner.com/courses/hts/cln4u/lawarc03.htm>.

The paper should contain the following analysis:

- Facts of the case (what transpired between the parties involved before the case was brought to court)
- Issues (the questions that are addressed by court in this specific case)
- *Ratio decidendi* (the judge's reason for deciding the way he/she did)
- Holding (the final verdict or decision of the court)
- Analysis (the student's original commentary regarding the significance of the case – this should make up for at least 1/3 of the paper and include reference to other issues both historical and contemporary in Native American religious freedoms)

**Prompt 2:** In support of academic freedom and personal interests, you may propose a research paper on any aspect of religion in Native North America of your own choosing. Your paper must be a critical analysis of your chosen topic, thesis-driven (i.e. you must argue something), based in the appropriate theory and methodology, with summary and description kept to a minimum. Start with something that interests you. You may expand on a topic we discussed in class with a different tribe or a tribe we discussed in class, but with a new topic; you may explore a movement or tribe from near your hometown or a region you've never been to; perhaps the interaction of a religious community with the government or missionaries; you may take a historical approach that illuminates the under-examined practices of a tribe or turn a critical eye to a contemporary movement. *You must seek approval from Dr. Keegan if you go this route.*

**Final Paper is Due to the OAKS drop box on December 9 at 1pm (our final exam time).** Your research should be supported by a minimum of five academic sources outside of course material. The paper must be 6-8 pages, with references and footnotes included. Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred.

## Course Schedule \*Denotes Reading in Textbook

#	Date	Topic	What to Read	What's Due
1	T 8/24	Introduction	In class: <i>Syllabus</i>	
<b>Unit 1: Theorizing Native American Religions</b>				
2	Th 8/26	Intro to Native North Amer.	*O'Brien and Talamentez (Mescalero Apache), "Practical Reverence, Radical Reciprocity" in <i>Religion and Culture in Native America</i> , 1-18.	Discussion questions
3	T 8/31	Theorizing Native Religions	Robert Niezen, "Introduction" in <i>Spirit Wars</i> , 1-11. & Settler Timeline	DQs 2
4	Th 9/2	Research & Indigenous Peoples	Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou, Maori), "Introduction," <i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i> , 1-19.	DQs 3
<b>Unit 2: Narratives and Landscapes</b>				
5	T 9/7	Sacred Lands	**"Earth" in RCNA, 19-38.	DQs 4
6	Th 9/9	Creation Stories	Sam Gill, "The Place to Begin," in <i>Native American Religions</i> , 10-26. Watch, Larry Cessapooch (Ute), "Ute Wisdom, Language and Creation Story," TEDx. <a href="https://youtu.be/gv201ILHXhc">https://youtu.be/gv201ILHXhc</a>	DQs 5
7	T 9/14	Storied Landscapes	Keith Basso, <i>Wisdom Sits in Places</i> , 105-149.	Quiz 1 DQs 6
8	Th 9/16	Place vs. Time	Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility" in <i>God is Red</i> , 271-286.	DQs 7
9	T 9/21	Paper 1	Film or Guest Speaker TBA	Paper 1
10	Th 9/23	Learning Landscapes	Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, (Nishnaabeg), "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," (2014) <i>Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education &amp; Society</i> 3(3).	DQs 8
<b>Unit 3: Reciprocity and Relationship</b>				
11	T 9/28	Traditional Ecological Knowledge	**"Climate and Conservation" in RCNA, 41-67.	DQs 9
12	Th 9/30	Reciprocity	Robin Wall Kimmerer (Anishinaabe), " <i>Mishkos Kenomagwen</i> , the Lessons of Grass: Restoring Reciprocity with the Good Green Earth," in <i>Traditional Ecological Knowledge</i> , 27-53	DQs 10
13	T 10/5	Non-Human Animals	*Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), "The Radiant Life with Animals," in <i>TEK</i> .	Quiz 2 DQs 11
14	Th 10/7	Water	**"Water" in RCNA, 71-93.	DQs 12
<b>Unit 4: Bodies and Medicine</b>				
15	T 10/12	Food	**"Food" in RCNA, 97-120	DQs 13
16	Th 10/14	Medicine	**"Medicine" in RCNA, 123-149.	DQs 14
<b>Fall Break - October 18-19 - No classes</b>				
17	Th 10/21	Gender & Sexuality	**"Gender & Sexuality," in RCNA, 153-177.	DQs 15
18	T 10/26	Paper 2	Guest speaker or in-class case study, TBA	Paper 2
19	Th 10/28	Native Women	Mary Crow Dog (Lakota Sioux), <i>Lakota Woman</i> , 1-27, 156-169.	DQs 16

20	T 11/2	Sacred Vitality	Denise Nadeau (Mi'kmaq) and Alannah Earl Young (Musikeginiwak Cree), "Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality," 13-21.	Quiz 3 DQs 17
21	Th 11/4	Death & Burial	Greg Johnson, "Tradition, Authority, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act," 355-381. & Leslie Silko (Laguna Pueblo), "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," 358-361.	DQs 18
<b>Unit 5: Encounters</b>				
22	T 11/9	Christianity	"Christianity," in RCNA, 181-204.	DQs 19
23	Th 11/11	Missionaries	George Tinker (Osage), "The Enduring Dilemma," in <i>Missionary Conquest</i> , 112-123.	DQs 20
24	T 11/16	Appropriation	Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," 329-352.	DQs 21
25	Th 11/18	Visions	Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), "Introduction to the Vision Quest," in <i>For This Land</i> , 269-272. & Black Elk (Oglala Sioux), "The Great Vision," in <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> , 16-36.	DQs 22
26	T 11/23		No In-Person Class (Professor Keegan at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting) Online film & Discussion	Annotated Biblio Due
<b>Thanksgiving Break – November 24-28 – No classes</b>				
27	T 11/30	Resistance	Greg Johnson and Siv Ellen Craft, "Protective occupation, emergent networks, rituals of solidarity: comparing Alta (Sápmi), Mauna Kea (Hawai'i), and Standing Rock (North Dakota)," in <i>The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Nature: The Elements</i> , (2018). & United Nations, "Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," (2007).	Quiz 4 DQs 23
28	Th 12/2	Concluding thoughts	*"Conclusion" in RCNA, 207-216. & Joy Harjo (Muscogee), "There is No Such Thing as a One-Way Land Bridge" and "Eagle Poem." & Luci Tapahonose (Diné), "The Kaw River Rushes Forward," and "Just Past Shiprock."	DQs 24
<b>Final Paper Due December 9 at 1pm</b>				

**The Fine Print** Oaks: OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

**Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73- 76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below. **Late Policy:** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class unless otherwise noted. Any assignment turned in after the deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10%) for each day the assignment is late, up to a week. After a week, I will not accept the assignment.

**Regarding plagiarism:** Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. Students can find the complete Honor Code and

all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>. **Technology Use in Class:** We will be busy in every class session and we don't need any electronic distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If it rings, I reserve the right to answer it. Laptops are allowed unless it becomes clear that students are misusing them.

**Center for Student Learning:** The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. The services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu>.

**Mental & Physical Wellbeing:** At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3<sup>rd</sup> Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

**Diversity Statement:** Consistent with College of Charleston's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus.

**Accommodations:** We all learn in different ways. If you know or believe that you need additional help, the College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>.

**Email etiquette:** I am happy to communicate with you via email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours during the week. If it's 3 AM and you're feeling panicked, angry, frustrated, or annoyed, that most likely is NOT a good time to send an email. Ever. To me or anyone else. Take this as an important life lesson. It will serve you well. If you are sure that your questions or comments are professional and appropriate, be sure to include these professional courtesies: 1. In the subject line please indicate the content of the email and 2. Begin your message in the following manner: Dear Professor Keegan... And finish with sincerely, best, thanks, etc. followed by your full name. Do the same for every professor you're in contact with! Professionalism goes a long way.