



Native  
American  
Religions  
REL 260

Spring 2024

T/Th 1:40-  
2:55 PM

Ed Center  
114

Dr. Keegan

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 traditions 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, effect communal religious life over time. Throughout, we will develop and analyze theories and methods in Native studies. We will foreground the voices of Native scholars and artists and 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.

### What’s in this syllabus?

Course assignments	2
Schedule	4
The fine print	5

### 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 texts

- Suzanne Crawford O’Brien and Inés Talamentez, *Religion and Culture in Native America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, (Penguin Classic Deluxe, 2006).

## 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 Starters	100 pts.
Reading Quizzes	100 pts.
Response Papers	200 pts.
Cultural Regions Project	100 pts.
Annotated Bibliography	100 pts.
Final Paper	200 pts.

### 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, 2% 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.

### Discussion Starters (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.

Instructor: Professor Brennan Keegan  
Email: keeganbl@cofc.edu  
Office: 4 Glebe Street, Room 202  
Office Hours: W 2-4pm, & by appointment

Before every class period, your professor will post 3-4 guiding questions drawn from the specific readings. If you don't think you can answer the questions, re-read the texts. In class, she will randomly call on student groups to provide answers to the questions. Come prepared with a sentence or two, written down, that you can quickly read when called on. Professor Keegan will keep track of your preparedness and the depth of your responses.

### Reading Quizzes (100)

Five times throughout the semester, you will complete a brief quiz that will ask you to reflect on the readings from the previous unit. The readings are not optional but provide important background information to our in-class conversations. These will be open note (must be printed or hand-written) but know that you will not have enough time to look up every answer. Read thoroughly and critically and take notes!

### 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: Native ecological relationships.** 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? Your paper should be thesis-driven and present your own ideas.

**Prompt 2: *Ceremony*.** In Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* the narrative unfolds within the framework of Native American religious and cultural contexts. Explore and analyze the role of traditional Native American ceremonies and spiritual practices in the protagonist Tayo's journey toward healing and self-discovery. Consider the ways in which cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs intersect with Tayo's personal experiences, traumas, and the broader historical context. Examine the novel's portrayal of the dynamic relationship between Native American religions and the natural world, as well as the impact of colonization on Indigenous spirituality. Drawing upon specific passages and cultural references in the text, discuss how "Ceremony" contributes to a broader understanding of Native American religions, their resilience, and their role in shaping identity within the context of contemporary literature.

### #Cultural Regions Team Project (100 points)

Early in the semester you will be assigned to a team of five students. As a team, you will be responsible for one Native American cultural region in North America. Throughout the semester you will be asked to complete brief presentations to the entire class on the region and its inhabitants (no more than ten minutes). After each project you will be asked to submit a brief paragraph reflecting on your contributions to the team.

**Project 1: Ecology.** Provide an overview of the tribes, climate, landscape, and ecology of your cultural region. Provide both historical and contemporary details.

**Project 2: Religious Traditions.** Highlight two or three religious practices within the cultural region. Are there shared religious practices or perspectives across tribes in your region? How have these traditions changed or adapted over time? Provide both historical and contemporary details.

### 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.

**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. Using at least one primary source, you must (1) identify and demonstrate an understanding of the religious tradition of a particular Native community or the contours of a pan-Indigenous religious tradition within your assigned cultural region. Be descriptive, use multiple sources to provide a “thick description” of the community and religion. Be mindful of the diversity of Native American religious traditions (never say Native American religion as a singular thing), as well as the internal diversity within individual communities. (2) Analyze the impact of colonization and cultural assimilation on the religious tradition and community, not just as something of the past, but stretching forward to the present. With specifics, which particular dislocations, missionary encounters, and federal policies has this community experienced? How has the community adapted or innovated in light of the realities of settler colonial harm? (3) Reflect on the significance of Native American religious traditions in the United States. What does studying Native American religious traditions tell us about religion in the United States? Why is the study of Native religions challenging? A list of possible research topics will be provided on OAKS, but feel free to discuss a topic of your choosing with Professor Keegan.

Final Paper is Due to the OAKS drop box on April 30 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 5-7 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	1/11	Introduction	In class: <i>Syllabus</i>	
<b>Unit 1: Theorizing Native American Religions</b>				
2	1/16	Intro to Native North Amer.	*O'Brien and Talamantez (Mescalero Apache), "Practical Reverence, Radical Reciprocity" in <i>Religion and Culture in Native America</i> , 1-18.	
3	1/18	Theorizing Native Religions	Robert Niezen, "Introduction" in <i>Spirit Wars</i> , 1-11. & Settler Timeline	
4	1/23	Research & Indigenous Peoples	Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou, Maori), "Introduction," <i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i> , 1-19.	Reading Quiz 1
<b>Unit 2: Narratives and Landscapes</b>				
5	1/25	Sacred Lands	*"Earth" in RCNA, 19-38.	Team Project 1 (2 groups)
6	1/30	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>	Team Project 1 (2 groups)
7	2/1	Storied Landscapes	Keith Basso, <i>Wisdom Sits in Places</i> , 105-149.	Team Project 1 (2 groups)
8	2/6	Place vs. Time	Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility" in <i>God is Red</i> , 271-286.	Team Project 1 (2 groups)
9	2/8	Learning Landscapes	Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, (Nishnaabeg), "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," (2014) <i>Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education &amp; Society</i> 3(3).	Reading Quiz 2
<b>Unit 3: Reciprocity and Relationship</b>				
10	2/13	Traditional Ecological Knowledge	*"Climate and Conservation" in RCNA, 41-67.	



11	2/15	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	
12	2/20	Non-Human Animals	*Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), “The Radiant Life with Animals,” in <i>TEK</i> .	
13	2/22	Water & Food	**“Water” in RCNA, 71-93 and “Food” in RCNA, 97-120.	Reading Quiz 3
14	2/27	Paper 1	Film or Guest Speaker TBA	Paper 1
<b>Unit 4: Bodies and Medicine</b>				
15	2/29	Medicine	**“Medicine” in RCNA, 123-149	
<b>Spring Break - No classes</b>				
16	3/12	Gender & Sexuality	**“Gender & Sexuality,” in RCNA, 153-177.	
17	3/14	Ceremony I	Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), <i>Ceremony</i> , 1-58. Look up casebook at library	Team Project 2 (2 groups)
18	3/19	Ceremony II	<i>Ceremony</i> , 59-104.	Team Project 2 (2 groups)
19	3/21	Ceremony III	<i>Ceremony</i> , 105-163. *In class: analyze Black Elk (Oglala Sioux), “The Great Vision,” in <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> .	Team Project 2 (2 groups)
20	3/26	Ceremony IV	<i>Ceremony</i> , 164-201.	Team Project 2 (2 groups)
21	3/28	Ceremony V	Finish <i>Ceremony</i> .	Reading Quiz 4
<b>Unit 5: Encounters</b>				
22	4/2	Paper 2	Watch, <i>Reservation Dogs</i> 1.1 & 3.3	Paper 2
23	4/4	Christianity	“Christianity,” in RCNA, 181-204.	
24	4/9	Missionaries	Dennis Kelley, “Jesus as the Ultimate Sun Dancer,” in <i>Tradition, Performance, and Religion in Native America</i> , 77-94.	
	4/11	<b>No Class, Professor Keegan at Conference</b>		
25	4/16	Appropriation	Lisa Aldred, “Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality,” 329-352.	
26	4/18	Standing Rock	In class: <i>Rise: Standing Rock</i> Documentary & Discussion	Annotated Biblio Due
27	4/23	Concluding thoughts	**“Conclusion” in RCNA, 207-216.	Reading Quiz 5
<b>Final Paper Due April 30</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.