

**REL 419.001**  
**MYTH, RITUAL, AND MAGIC: THEORIES OF RITUAL**

**Time:** Tue & Thu 3:30pm – 4:45pm  
**Location:** Manly Hall 102

**Instructor:** Dr. Suma Ikeuchi  
**Office:** Manly Hall 204  
**Phone:** 348-9994  
**Email:** [sikeuchi@ua.edu](mailto:sikeuchi@ua.edu)  
**Office Hours:** Thu 2:30pm – 3:30 pm  
and by appointment



**Course Description:**

This Core Writing course explores a wide range of rituals ranging from the stereotypical to the unexpected: initiation rites, religious ceremonies, contemporary witchcraft, daily interaction rituals, and soccer hooliganism, among others. Through these case studies, we examine various theories about the definitions, meanings, and roles of ritual, sometimes by conducting mini-fieldwork to observe rituals in action. Course materials will comprise articles, books and films about rituals from all around the world, ranging from a Papua New Guinean village in the 1950s to the contemporary U.S. society.

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to:

1. explain key concepts and theories in the academic study of ritual and religion
2. describe some of the beliefs, practices, and discourses that define the forms of ritual covered by the course
3. apply the conceptual and theoretical frameworks learned in the goals 1 and 2 to analyze rituals, including the kind of actions presumed to be non-rituals
4. implement the above knowledge in writing assignments
5. develop public presentation skills by presenting in class and responding to feedback

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites for the course.

**Consultation:**

All students are encouraged to come to my office hour as listed above, set up an appointment, and/or contact me by phone or email as listed above for assistance. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact me as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations that can be made to meet their needs. These students must also contact the Office of Disability Services in Martha Parham East, 348-4285.

### **Blackboard**

ANT 419 Blackboard site will include areas for private correspondence with the teachers, an open discussion forum and areas where students will find useful files. A copy of the Syllabus will also be archived here. Assigned **Electronic Texts** will also be found on Blackboard. Exam papers and project essays will be handed in Blackboard. MS Word will be the default format for these posted documents.

### **Course Requirements and Assignments:**

#### **1. Class Attendance and Participation (20 points):**

Class attendance and participation are an important part of this class. Attendance is taken at regular intervals. You can miss **up to 3 classes** with no repercussions for participation grade (unless that makes you miss your own presentation, discussion moderation, or other responsibilities). If you need to miss more than 3 sessions for valid reasons (e.g. job interviews, health problem), please contact me prior to the day you will be missing the class and provide appropriate documentation. You may be assigned to do additional work in that case. **More than 3 absences** without a valid document will significantly impact your attendance/participation grade. If you miss **more than 6 classes**, then you will fail this course. Please make sure to be in class on time. Repetitive late attendance will count as absence.

What is distinctive about this class is that it is not a course that provides “facts” to learn but which prompts you to reflect on the subjects we explore. You are expected to understand the facts and concepts, but also to develop a critical assessment of them. Therefore, close reading of the material with a critical mind and active class participation that reflects a) an in-depth understanding of the reading material, and b) reflective thinking on the subjects we discuss are required. **Just attending will not lead to the full 10 points.** The quality of your participation and response to other students’ contributions will be assessed.

#### **2. Weekly responses posted to Blackboard Discussion Board (3 x 10 = 30 points):**

Almost every week by Monday noon, you are required to submit a one-paragraph response of at least 200 words on one of the readings for the coming week to the Blackboard discussion board. In some instances this response may be to a required video that you will watch outside of class time or on an assigned task such as a mini-analysis of a news article. The response should consist of a statement and at least one question. There are **10 weekly responses you are required to post** for this class, **out of 12 possible dates of submission** (In other words, you can choose to “take a break” from weekly response for whichever 2 weeks you desire). Each response will earn 3 point if it shows good understanding of the material and reflective thought. These responses will be graded simply as submitted/not submitted, but responses which do not exhibit the evidence of reading the material or your reflection will not earn any point. The instructor

may address questions based on the response you have posted. You cannot make up missed responses.

- Responses that do not exhibit a comprehension of the reading material and a reflection on that material will earn **no credit**.

**3. Three Two-Page Short Essays (Double-Spaced)** (30 points each, 90 in total): There will be three essay tests, each of which will ask questions about all the readings, class lectures, films, multi-media materials, and discussions up to that point. The instructor will provide students with more information on how to prepare for them during class.

**4. Ethnographic Group Project** (60 points in total)

Your project should be relevant to the class topics and based on a mini-ethnography, combined with a review of the relevant scholarly literature. I expect at least 3 site visits to complete the ethnographic portion of the project (participant observation, interviews, etc.).

**Group Project Proposal with Bibliography** (5 points). The topic for the group project needs to be approved by the instructors, and a project proposal of 300 words should be submitted with an attached bibliography. The bibliography should include at least 1 or more academic books and 4 or more academic articles related to the topic. Each group need only submit one proposal for the entire group.

**Group Project Progress Report** (5 points). A two-page progress report with a one-page bibliography needs to be submitted. Each group is expected to have conducted at least one site visit and one interview by the this time. Make sure to also post your report on Blackboard (Discussion Board).

**Group Project Presentation and Paper** (50 points). Your group will complete a 20-minute presentation, along with 10 minutes for questions and answers from instructors, and other students during the last few sessions of class. In this presentation, the group should clearly present their topic of study, why it is important, the methodology they employed to study it, the role of each group member, a summary of their ethnography and ethnographic findings, and concluding remarks. The group will also need to submit a 20-page (double-space) document of their study including the above information as well as further relevant materials and discussion. Transcripts of interviews and other materials may be added as appendices to strengthen the document, but do not count towards the 20 pages. Each group member should participate in both the presentation and the writing of the submitted document.

**Total Points: 200**

**Grading Policy:**

A+	200 – 190
A	189 – 180
B+	179 – 170
B	169 – 160
C+	159 – 150
C	149 – 140
D+	139 – 130
D	129 – 120
D-	119 – 110
F	109 – 0

**On Late and Missed Coursework:**

I do not accept any late work or make-up assignments unless there is a documented emergency (injury, sickness, job interview, urgent health problem of close family member, etc.). Computer and network issues, traffic issues, lost items, etc. are not considered as emergencies, so please plan accordingly. I reserve the right to ask for a document or email from someone who can attest to your situation. Please see “Consultation” above – then we discuss appropriate accommodation for your situation.

**E-mail Policy:**

Please write concise emails and allow 48 hours for response (longer for times when I am traveling). For substantial questions, please talk to me during office hours rather than using e-mail, as it is mutually more beneficial.

**Syllabus Revision**

This syllabus may be revised if necessary due to changes in scheduling and other factors. The most updated copy of this syllabus will always be available on Blackboard.

**UA Severe Weather Protocol:**

UA’s primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at [www.ua.edu](http://www.ua.edu). In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign up on myBama). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use WVUA 7 Storm Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

**Statement on Academic Misconduct:**

Academic misconduct is a serious offense and is taken very seriously at UA and in the class. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA’s Honor Code in this class.

## Required Texts:

1. Interaction Ritual. Erving Goffman.
2. The Sambia. Gilbert Herdt.
3. The Persuasions of the Witch's Craft. Tanya Luhmann.

## Schedule

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### 1. Introduction

#### Jan 12 (Thu)

introduction

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### 2. Initiation Ritual: Theories of Social Formation

#### Jan 16 (Mon)

✓ Weekly Response (1) Due Noon

#### Jan 17 (Tue)

The Sambia (1)

#### Jan 19 (Thu)

The Sambia (2)

#### Jan 23 (Mon)

✓ Weekly Response (2) Due Noon

#### Jan 24 (Tue)

The Sambia (3)

#### Jan 26 (Thu)

Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (BB)

#### Jan 30 (Mon)

✓ Weekly Response (3) Due Noon

#### Jan 31 (Tue)

Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life" (BB)

#### Feb 2 (Thu)

Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas" (BB)

#### Feb 6 (Mon)

✓ Weekly Response (4) Due Noon

#### Feb 7 (Tue)

Terrence Turner, "Social Skin" (BB)

#### Feb 9 (Thu)

Daniel Rosenblatt, "Antisocial Skin" (BB)

✓✓ Group Project Proposal in Class

#### Feb 14 (Tue)

Movie: In Her Own Time

✓✓ Two-Page Essay (1) Due in Class

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### 3. Ritual, Religion, and Magic: Theories of Self

**Feb 16 (Thu)**

Tanya Luhrmann, *The Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1)

**Feb 20 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (5) Due Noon

**Feb 21 (Tue)**

Tanya Luhrmann, *The Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (2)

**Feb 23 (Thu)**

Tanya Luhrmann, *The Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (3)

**Feb 27 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (6) Due Noon

**Feb 28 (Tue)**

Tanya Luhrmann, *The Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (4)

**Mar 2 (Thu)**

Boddy, Janice. "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance." (BB)

**Mar 6 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (7) Due Noon

**Mar 7 (Tue)**

Suma Ikeuchi "Accompanied Self" (BB)

**Mar 9 (Thu)**

Movie: *Order of Myths*

**Mar 10 (Fri)**

✓✓ Two-Page Essay (2) Due

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**Spring Break**

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### 4. Intention, Meaning, and Theories of Ritual Order

**Mar 20 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (8) Due Noon

**Mar 21 (Tue)**

Pravaz, "Hybridity Brazilian Style: Samba, Carnival, and Myth of Racial Democracy" (BB)

✓✓ Group Project Progress Report Due in Class

**Mar 23 (Thu)**

Roy Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual" (BB)

**Mar 27 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (9) Due Noon

**Mar 28 (Tue)**

Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (1)

**Mar 30 (Thu)**

Goffman, Interaction Ritual (2)

**Apr 3 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (10) Due Noon

**Apr 4 (Tue)**

Goffman, Interaction Ritual (3)

**Apr 6 (Thu)**

Goffman, Interaction Ritual (4)

**Apr 10 (Mon)**

✓ Weekly Response (12) Due Noon

**Apr 11 (Tue)**

- Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual” (BB)

**Apr 13 (Thu)**

Fritz Stahl, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual” (BB)

**Apr 18 (Tue)**

Group Project Presentation Preparation Time

✓✓ Two-Page Essay (3) Due in Class

**Apr 20 (Thu)**

Group Project Presentations (1&2)

**Apr 25 (Tue)**

Group Project Presentations (3&4)

**Apr 27 (Thu) Last Day to Meet in Class**

Group Project Presentations (5)

Summing Up

**May 3 (Wed)**

✓ Final Group Project Paper Due