RELI 307 - RITUAL  
(Fall 2016 Mon/Wed 1:20-2:40 pm)  
Allbritton 004

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Department of Religion, Room 209  
Office Hours: Mon 3 – 4 pm, Thurs. 1 – 4pm

Religion can be defined through beliefs or traditions or texts, but it always takes physical form through ritual. Ritual is the one universal in religion, but the question of how to understand ritual is possibly the most contested question in the study of religion. Can a ritual be read like a text? How do symbols produce effects, and how should we understand these effects? What is performative speech and how does it work? How does ritual behavior reflect and shape social relationships? This course introduces students to major approaches in studying ritual. The readings draw heavily, but not exclusively, on anthropological approaches to ritual, both classic texts and recent approaches focusing on language and embodiment. Students will be required to do practical fieldwork observations of rituals so that they can put these texts in dialogue with their research experience. The course culminates in each student producing a mini-ethnography on the ritual they have observed over the course of the semester.

Required readings:  
All required books are available at Broad St. Books. All other readings are available on Moodle and in a course packet available through the university print shop.


Fair Warnings

1. Laptops and other electronic devices are very distracting and thus are not allowed.
2. You are responsible for knowing and adhering to the University’s Honor Code.
3. Please remain in class for the duration of the class period.

Students with Disabilities:
It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Assignments and Grading:
Assignments are due in class on the due date, in a paper copy, and by email. Please be sure to include your name, page numbers and appropriate citations with a bibliography of all works cited in the assignment. Points will be deducted for failing to do so. Late assignments will automatically drop one grade per day late. There is a rigorous schedule of assignments. Falling behind will cause a ripple effect. Don’t do it!
Class Participation:
(10% of course grade)
You are expected to attend all classes and actively contribute to class discussion. Participation is not measured by how much you say, but by how much you contribute to the collective process of learning, by listening to your classmates, asking questions and encouraging a fruitful discussion. Missing more than 2 classes may be grounds for withdrawal.

Cumulative Semester Project:
There are four short ethnographic assignments spread across the semester which will be synthesized into a final research paper at the end. These assignments should all be conducted at the same ritual. You may attend any ritual, held on or off campus. It does not have to be an explicitly religious ritual. It must, however, be a ritual that is held regularly so that you can return to observe more than once. If, for your own research purposes, you would like to analyze a ritual that does not meet these criteria, please see me out of class.

Assignment 1:
(10% of class grade)
Attend the ritual and describe it. Your description should be approximately 4 – 6 pages long. Include a map of the ritual space.

Assignment 2 – 1st midterm:
(20% of class grade)
Describe and analyze the ritual using at least two of the authors in the first half of the syllabus

Assignment 3:
(10% of class grade)
2 part assignment – preparation of an informed consent statement and a list of questions generated by the previous assignments. Then, interview someone involved in the ritual. The interview should take no less than 20 minutes and no more than 1 hour. The transcribed interview must be handed in.

Assignment 4 2nd midterm:
(20% of class grade)
Describe and analyze the ritual using at least two of the authors in the second half of the syllabus

Class presentation:
A short (10-15 minute) presentation to the class on the ritual you have been working on. These presentations will be made in the last three classes. Be prepared to discuss your and other student’s work. This counts towards the final essay grade.

Final Essay:
Synthesize the previous 4 assignments into one long essay which describes and analyzes your ritual. 15-20 pp. 30% of course grade.
**Class Schedule**

1. Mon. Sept 5 Introduction and discussion of assignments

**Part 1: Classic Theories**

2. Wed. Sept. 7
   Arnold van Gennep The Rites of Passage Chap. 1,2,3 pp. 1 - 41

   Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage Chap. 6, 9. 10 pp. 65-116, 166-195

4. Wed. Sept. 14
   Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life pp. 1 – 44, 99-140

5. Mon. Sept.19

6. Wed. Sept 21

7. Mon. Sept. 26

**Assignment #1 DUE**

8. Wed. Sept. 28


10. Wed. Oct. 5


12. Wed. Oct. 12 In class discussion of projects and midterms. Additional readings may be assigned.

**Assignment #2 – Midterm Due**
Part 2: Contemporary Approaches to Ritual


Hand in informed consent statement and guiding questions for interview

FALL BREAK

15. Wed. Oct. 26th


17. Wed. Nov. 2

18. Mon. Nov. 7
In class movie: “An initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman” Laurell Kendall and Diana Lee (37 min). Assignment #3 Due

19. Wed. Nov. 9
Chapter 3 Initiating Performance: Chini’s Story in Laurel Kendall, 2010 Shamans, Nostalgias and the IMF, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (packet/moodle)

20. Mon. Nov. 14

21. Wed. Nov. 16

22. Mon. Nov. 21
Justine Quijada and Eric Stephen, 2015, “Performing ‘Culture’: Diverse Audiences at the International Shaman’s Conference and Tailgan on Olkhon Island” for a special issue edited by Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Etudes Mongoles et siberiennes, centrasiatiques et tibetaines Issue 46 (packet/moodle)

Assignment #4 Second Midterm Due
THANKSGIVING BREAK

23. Mon. Nov. 28
Final Project Presentations

24. Wed. Nov. 30
Final Project Presentations

25. Mon. Dec. 5
Final Project Presentations

Final Project Presentations

Final papers Due DEC. 14 @ 4pm in hard copy to my mailbox and by email