

**University of Calgary**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**Department of Religious Studies**  
**RELS 335-01, Fall 2004**

**Feasts, Fasts, Rites of Passage:  
Religious Rituals and Practices**

04/08/24

**Instructor:** Dr. Ayse Tuzlak (ayse.tuzlak@ucalgary.ca)  
**Class Meets:** MWF 12:00 noon – 12:50 p.m.  
**Office Hours:** Mondays, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.  
Tuesdays, 10:00 – 12:00 noon  
and by appointment (e-mail to schedule)  
**Office:** Social Science 1330, phone 220-3287

What is ritual? Must it be repetitive? (But Christians are only baptized once.) Must it be solemn? (But the main elements of the Jewish festival of Purim are laughter and play.) Must it be religious? (But that would prevent us from considering elements of national elections, civic marriages, or the Olympic games to be ritualistic.)

Many great scholars have considered these questions. The purpose of this course is to apply different theories and methodologies to rituals around the world, in the interest of refining our own thoughts about human religious behaviour.

This course will be divided into three parts. In the first, we will examine some classic approaches to ritual from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the second, we will consider some themes that are common to world rituals, such as sacrifices, meals, and competitions. In the third, we will think about what we have learned in light of cutting-edge theories that have been developed during the past twenty-five years.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** This course will help the student develop theoretical tools for understanding the world's religions. These tools are designed to apply to any religion, and you are invited to focus your final project on a religion that interests you. **However, the majority of case studies that we examine will be from the Western (Abrahamic/Mediterranean) traditions. If you chose this course because you took RELS 203 (and not RELS 201) as a prerequisite, you may need to do some extra readings to familiarize yourself with Western religions.** See the professor if you would like suggestions.

**Core Competencies:**

Students in this course will learn how to

- think critically about categories like belief/behaviour, thought/action, orthodoxy/orthopraxy, and mythology/ritual
- develop sophisticated methodologies for understanding religious phenomena
- appreciate the value of historical and comparative study of religion and culture

Please remember that the attainment of any learning endeavour requires that students commit time and energy to that endeavour. **Attend lectures, read assigned materials, and complete all course work.**

**Required texts:** Ronald Grimes, ed., *Readings in Ritual Studies* (\*)  
Michael Angrosino, *The Culture of the Sacred*  
Photocopied course reader, available from the campus bookstore

**Grading:** Weekly position papers 6 x 10% each (see below)  
Attendance and participation: 10%  
Final project (due **Friday, Dec. 17th**) 30%

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. At the end of the course, an overall letter grade will be assigned according to the following scheme.

A+	100 – 96	A	95 – 90	A-	89 – 85
B+	84 – 80	B	79 – 75	B-	74 – 70
C+	69 – 65	C	64 – 60	C-	59 – 55
D+	54 – 53	D	52 – 50	F	50 or less

All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content. Please note that **no extra credit work will be offered.**

Every student will be expected to contribute to class discussion. You are heartily encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and engage in friendly debate!

**There will be no registrar scheduled final exam.**

**The Position Papers:**

Over the course of the term, each student will be required to submit six short (2-3 page) papers on the readings scheduled for that week. I don't care which six you do, but you *must do six*. If you do more than six, the best six will be counted toward your final grade. **IF YOU DO NOT DO SIX, I WILL NOT GIVE CREDIT FOR ANY OF THE PAPERS YOU DID DO!** Pace yourself and do some papers early so that you are not stuck at the end of the semester with papers that you "have" to do. I will not have any sympathy for students who can't do their final paper due to end-of-term crush – thirteen weeks is plenty of time to do six papers, and budgeting your time wisely will help you immensely. Trust me on this.

Note that the papers are due **in class** on the **first day of the week that we are discussing the subject matter**. For example, the unit on Sacrifice goes from September 21 – October 1. That means that if you choose to do a paper on Sacrifice, you must hand it in on September 21, *before* we start talking about sacrifice in class.

Your papers must address all of the readings for that week, at least in passing, though it is natural for you to want to focus on one or two. Otherwise, the assignment is relatively freeform; you may talk about what you liked or disliked about each reading, how each article relates to other course readings, how well it applies to rituals that you have known or experienced, and so on.

Papers are due at the beginning of class. Skipping class and sticking a paper in my mailbox will get you a zero, even if it is done before class is over. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers cannot be rewritten. If you are uncertain about what I am looking for, start writing papers early so that you can improve steadily over the course of the semester.

Recording of lectures:

Recording any part of any lectures in any form must first approved be by the instructor in writing and is for individual private study only. See current Calendar, Tape recording of Lectures.

Academic Honesty:

Students should be familiar with University regulations regarding academic integrity; see relevant pages in the current University Calendar.

Academic Accommodation:

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor two weeks before the scheduled date.

Safewalk Program :

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 220-5333 and a member of the Safewalk Team will walk you to your car, the LRT, or any destination on campus. Safewalk is available to all students, staff and faculty any time of the day or night. Look for the Campus Security Help Phones located throughout the University. Please don't hesitate to call!

Withdrawing from courses:

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the current University Calendar.

Gnosis:

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: [gnosis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gnosis@ucalgary.ca) or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

## Schedule:

Readings from the Grimes book are marked with a \*. Readings from the course pack are marked with a †.

Readings from the Angrosino book are listed with page numbers.

### **September 8 – 10: Classical Approaches to the Study of Ritual**

*Reading:* Michael Angrosino, “The ritual component of the sacred,” *CotS* 91-106  
†Robert Ackerman on James George Frazer, from *The Myth and Ritual School*

### **September 13 – 17: Psychological and Sociological Approaches to Ritual**

*Reading:* \*Sigmund Freud, “Obsessive actions and religious practices”  
\*Arnold van Gennep, “Territorial passage and the classification of rites”  
\*Emile Durkheim, “Ritual, magic, and the sacred”

### **September 20 – 24: Anthropological and Phenomenological Approaches to Ritual**

*Reading:* Michael Angrosino, “Prehistoric religion,” *CotS* 27-33  
\*Mircea Eliade, “Ritual and myth”  
\*Victor Turner, “Liminality and communities”  
\*Mary Douglas, “Dirt: Purity and danger”

### **Sept. 27 – Oct. 1: Sacrifice**

*Reading:* \*Walter Burkert, “The function and transformation of ritual killing”  
\*René Girard, excerpt from *Violence and the Sacred*  
†Jill Robbins, “Sacrifice”

### **October 4 – 8: Marriage**

*Reading:* †James Redfield, “Notes on the Greek Wedding”  
\* M. Elaine Combs-Schilling, “Etching Patriarchal Rule”

### **October 11: (No classes. Happy Thanksgiving!)**

### **October 13 – 15: Ritual and Food**

*Reading:* †Mary Douglas, “The abominations of Leviticus”  
†Jenna Weissman Joselit, “Kitchen Judaism”  
†Caroline Walker Bynum, “Fast, feast, and flesh”  
Lisa LeCount, “Like Water for Chocolate,” *CotS* 35-61

### **October 18 – 22: Pilgrimage**

*Reading:* †Helene Foley, “The Eleusinian Mysteries”  
†The Homeric Hymn to Demeter  
†Simon Coleman and John Elsner, “The Centre in the Desert”

### **October 25 – 29: Death Rituals**

*Reading:* †Karen Stears, “Death becomes her: gender and Athenian death ritual”  
†Frederick Paxton, “The Mediterranean Background” from

#### *Christianizing Death*

\*Barbara Myerhoff, “Death in due time”

### **November 1 – 5: Ritual Play**

*Reading:* \*Clifford Geertz, "Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight"  
\*John McAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle"  
†James P. Carse, "There are at least two kinds of games"

**November 8 – 10: Do we live in a world without ritual? Modernity**

*Reading:* Richard Humphrey, "Religion and Place in Southern Appalachia" *CotS* 175-198  
\*Robbie Davis-Floyd, "Ritual in the hospital: Giving birth the American way"  
Michael Angrosino, "Civil Religion Redux" *CotS* 201-233

**November 11 – 14: (No classes. Enjoy your Reading Week!)**

**November 15 – 19: Fear, doubt, and failure in ritual**

*Reading:* \*Stanley Tambiah, "A performance approach to ritual"  
\*Sam Gill, "Disenchantment: A religious abduction"  
\*Ronald Grimes, "Ritual criticism and infelicitous performances"

**November 22 – 26: Maybe ritual isn't what we think it is?**

*Reading:* \*Jonathan Z. Smith, "The bare facts of ritual"  
\*Frits Staal, "The meaninglessness of ritual"  
\*Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Women's stories, women's symbols"

**Nov. 29 – Dec. 3: Ritual studies comes into its own**

*Reading:* \*Robert Campany, "Xunzi and Durkheim as theorists of ritual practice"  
\*Roy Rapaport, "The obvious aspects of ritual"  
\*Richard Schechner, "Restoration of behaviour"

**December 6 – 9: So what is ritual, anyway?**

\*Catherine Bell, "Constructing ritual"  
†Article from *theonion.com*, "Area Seventh-Grader Now A Woman"