

*Native American Religions*  
RE 208, Section 001 - Fall 2017

**Meetings:** T/R 3:40 – 5:00 p.m., Ladd 106

**Instructor:** Dr. David J. Howlett, Teaching Professor of Religious Studies, dhowlett@skidmore.edu

**Office Hours:** Wednesday, 1:30-3:00 p.m.; Friday 9:30-11:00 a.m., or by appointment  
205B Ladd Hall, (518) 580-8404 (office)

**Course Description:** This course explores Native American religious experience in diverse contexts, from the American Southwest to the Great Plains and from the far Pacific Northwest to the American Southeast. In the first half of class, we will explore specific religious rituals practiced by groups like the Lakota, the Navajo, and the Yupik. We will analyze how historical experiences, such as cultural genocide, dispossession of tribal lands, and the legacy of colonialism, have affected ritual practices over time. In the second half of class, we will switch to topics, such as Native American struggles for religious freedom, Native American access to sacred spaces, Native Americans and Christianity, and the commodification of Native American spirituality. We will consider both Native and non-Native perspectives on these topics.

**Course Goals:** Students will leave this class with

- a familiarity with the major ritual practices and religious concepts within selected Native groups.
- an appreciation for the diversity of religious experience within Native American nations.
- an ability to articulate how historical experiences, such as cultural genocide, dispossession of tribal lands, and the legacy of colonialism, have affected ritual practices over time.
- an understanding of the various approaches scholars have taken towards the study of Native American religions, from advocacy-based studies to detached observer-oriented studies.
- an ability to critically engage secondary sources through essays designed to apply critical concepts learned in class.
- an ability to write a critical book review of a scholarly work.

<b>Final Class Grade:</b>	Midterm Exam	(10/19)	25%
	Final Exam	(???)	20%
	Roundtable Paper 1	(10/3)	15%
	Roundtable Paper 2	(11/7)	15%
	Book Review	(11/16 or 12/7)	15%
	Attendance and Participation		10 %
	<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

**Midterm and Final Exams:** These examinations will consist of short identification terms and two essay questions, respectively. You will be given a review sheet one week before each examination, and we will conduct a brief review session in class.

**Roundtable Papers and Discussions:** We will conduct two roundtable discussion sessions in class. The week before the roundtable, you will be given a question, and, then, in a two- to four-page paper, you will construct your argument. To be admitted to the discussion of the topic the following week, you turn in your paper. Together, your paper and your participation in the roundtable constitute your grade on each roundtable session.

**The Unessay Option:** For your roundtable essays, you may opt to produce *one* “unessay” instead of a two- to four-page essay. In an “unessay,” you answer the prompt through an alternative medium, such as producing a work of art, composing a song, or writing a scene from a play. You may use a digital or analog medium. You may perform your unessay or submit a material artefact that you have created. Creativity is at a premium in the unessay, but so is how compellingly you answer the prompt. If you opt for an “unessay” instead of the conventional essay, you must consult me in advance. Additionally, your “unessay” must be accompanied by a typed paragraph explaining how it addresses the paper prompt.

**Book Review:** Students will complete a book review of *one* of two scholarly texts assigned in class. A separate sheet detailing this assignment is attached.

**Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions. This means that students will come to class with notes from the readings and be ready to ask questions or lead the class in a discussion. In the course of the semester, each student will be randomly asked to lead the class in a discussion on one of the articles from the week. The student will be expected to lead the discussion for ten minutes and have three questions ready. A student who is chosen to lead the discussion may pass on leading it one time in the semester. Students are expected to arrive on time. Each class will have a daily question or exercise that students are expected to complete in the first few minutes of class. Daily questions will be collected at the time of the midterm and at the last class of the semester.

**Assessment of Student Work:** Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A+	97-100%
A	94-96%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-69%
D	60-66%
D-	56-59%
F	55 and below

There is no curve for this class. Students will receive the grades they earn.

## **Classroom Procedures and Policies:**

**Academic Dishonesty:** Skidmore College's *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* defines plagiarism and its consequences as follows:

Presenting as one's own, the work of another person (for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else). Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgment, submission of another student's work as one's own, the purchase of prepared research or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging his or her academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness, and the consequences for violating the Skidmore Honor Code. **THE JUDICIAL BOARDS OF THE COLLEGE WILL NOT REGARD CLAIMS OF IGNORANCE, OF UNINTENTIONAL ERROR, AND OF ACADEMIC OR PERSONAL PRESSURES AS AN ADEQUATE DEFENSE FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE HONOR CODE.**<sup>1</sup>

Further information on the college-wide policy on plagiarism and proper citation methods may be found on pages 16-27 of *The Academic Integrity Handbook*.

**Late Assignment Policy:** Any paper not given to the instructor in person by the student on the due date is late and will have its grade automatically dropped by one full letter grade. A student will have forty-eight hours to e-mail the instructor a copy of the late paper. (The student must still submit a hard copy.) Any paper that is not given to the instructor within forty-eight hours of the due date will not be accepted, and the offending student will receive a zero for that assignment.

**Accommodations for Students:** If you are a student with an approved accommodation for your courses, please see me in private or e-mail me about the agreement that has been worked out with the Coordinator of Student Accessibility Services. If you do not have a documented accommodation and need one, contact Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will need to provide her office with documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the Office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

**Sexual- and Gender-based Misconduct and Title IX Rights:** Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available. More

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<sup>1</sup> *Academic Integrity Handbook, 2016-2017* (Saratoga Springs, New York: Office of Academic Advising--Skidmore College, 2016), 8.

information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator.

**Work Expectations:** Students should expect nine to ten hours of outside preparation work for class each week. On written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week rather than cram their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

**Textbook** (available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop)

■ Lawrence Sullivan, ed., *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Continuum, 2000).

ISBN-13: 978-0826414861

**Book to Review** (available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop)

■ Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

ISBN-13: 978-0807859353

**-OR-**

■ Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

ISBN-13: 978-0873516419

■ Other articles and chapters will be posted on Blackboard

## SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY TOPICS & STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENTS

*Native American Religions*  
RE 208 - Fall Semester 2017

All assignments are to be read before class. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the reading schedule. Should changes be made, students will be informed in advance.

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**WEEK 1**      Course Introduction

(9/7)

Topics:      Course outline

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**WEEK 2**      Who Decides what is Traditional?; Lakota Cosmology

(9/12 – 9/14)

Topics:      Cultural constructions of identity; religious studies, Native Americans, and hegemonic power; traditional Lakota social organization, foundational stories

Readings:      1) Eva Marie Garroutte, "What if My Grandma Eats Big Macs?" in *Real Indians: Identity and Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 61-81. [Blackboard]

2) Raymond DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sioux Indian-Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 25-43. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 3**      Lakota Rituals

(9/19 – 9/21)

Topics:      The *Inipi* ("sweat lodge") and the *Hanbleceya* (the "vision quest")

Readings:      1) David Martinez, "Lakota Philosophy and the Vision Quest," *Wicazo Sa Review* 19, no. 2 (2004): 79-104. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 4**      Imperialism, Religious Suppression, and the Revitalization of Ritual

(9/26 – 9/28)

Topics:      The *Wi Wanyang Wacipi* (the Sun Dance); US government bans on rituals; Wiping Away the Tears ceremony; revitalization movements

Readings:      1) Clyde Holler, "The Sun Dance under the Ban, 1883-1934/1952," in *Black Elk's Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 110-138. [Blackboard]

2) William K. Powers, "Wiping the Tears: Lakota Religion in the Twenty-first Century," in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, 104-120.

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**WEEK 5**      Standing Rock and Lakota Religious Practice; Dinè/Navajo Blessingway      **Paper 1 Due (10/3)**  
(10/3 – 10/5)

Topics:      Lakota youth, contemporary traditional practices, and activism; foundational Dinè stories; *hozho*; the Blessingway ceremony; bi-cultural medicine

Readings:      1) Saul Elbein, "The Seventh Generation" *The New York Times Magazine* (5 February 2017): 24-28.

2) Trudy Griffin-Pierce, "The Continuous renewal of Sacred Relations: Navajo Religion," in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, 121-141.

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**WEEK 6**      Dinè and Mescalero Apache Sacred Spaces  
(10/10 – 10/12)

Topics:      Comparing Southwest Native American sacrosapes

Readings:      1) Klara Bonsack Kelley and Harris Francis, *Navajo Sacred Places* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 28-50, 81-90. [Blackboard]

2) Martin Ball, "Sacred Mountains, Religious Paradigms, and Identity among the Mescalero Apache," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 4, no. 3 (2000): 264-82. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 7**      Mescalero and Rites of Passage      **Midterm (10/19)**  
(10/17 – 10/19)

Topics:      Mescalero Isanaklesh Gotal ceremony; midterm review

Readings:      2) Ines Talamantez, "In the Space between Earth and Sky: Contemporary Mescalero Apache Ceremonialism," in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, 142-59.

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**WEEK 8**      Purity, Power, and Reciprocity: Yurok and Yupik Examples  
(10/24 – 10/26)

Topics:      Yurok religion; men and women's purification ceremonies; difference versus equality; introduction to the Yupik

Readings:      1) Mary Virginia Rojas, "She Bathes in a Sacred Place," *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 129-55. [Blackboard]

2) Ann Fienup-Riordan, "Eye of the Dance: Spiritual Life of the Central Yup'ik Eskimos," in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, 181-207.

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**WEEK 13**      Colonialism, Native Americans, and Gender  
(11/28 – 11/30)

Topics:            Cultural constructions of gender; Choctaw pre-and post-contact gender norms; contemporary problems with gender equality; reconstructing Native gender roles in contemporary communities.

Readings:        1) Kim Anderson, "Looking Back: The Colonization of Native Womanhood," in *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Sumach Press, 2001), 55-78. [Blackboard]

2) Michelene Pesantubbee, "Nancy Ward: American Patriot or Cherokee Nationalist?" *American Indian Quarterly* 38.2 (2014): 177-206. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 13**      Native Americans and Christianity  
(12/5 – 12/7)

**Book Review Due Group 2: McNally, *Ojibwe Singers* (12/7)**

Topics:            Cultural genocide, hybridization, or indigenization?; Christianity and colonialism

Readings:        1) George Tinker, "Missionary Intentions, Missionary Violence" in *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993), 1-21. [Blackboard]

2) Michael D. McNally, "Introduction" and "Music as Memory: Contemporary Hymn Singing and the Politics of Death in Native America," in *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18-20, 165-193. [Blackboard]

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**WEEK 14**      Native Christianity, cont'd; Commodification, and Appropriation  
(12/12 – 12/14)

Topics:            Contemporary Native American Christianity; New Age appropriations of Native spirituality; commodification of religion; Native resistance; politics of appropriation; final reflections on the course

Readings:        1) James C. Treat, ed., *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 232-240. [Blackboard]

2) Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2000): 329-352. [Blackboard]

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**FINAL EXAM – Wednesday, 12/13, 6:00 p.m., Ladd 106**

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## Writing a Book Review

A book review is not simply a book summary. Instead, a book review summarizes an author's main argument, highlights an author's contribution, and critiques an author's work (that is, a book review analyzes an author's strengths and weaknesses). A good book review is approximately 800 to 1200 words in length. While you may use some creativity in how you organize and compose your book review, try to use the following guidelines.

Title your review as follows:

*Name of Book*. By Name of Book's Author. Place of Publication: Press of Publication, Year of Publication. Pp. xi [for forward, if applicable], 514 [total pages, including index and endnotes]. Reviewed by Your Name Here.

In your first paragraph, you should quickly tell your reader the subject matter of your book. You may also very briefly alert your reader to the background of the author. Is the author a new scholar, an independent scholar, a tenured professor? By the end of the first paragraph, you need to let your reader know the book's main thesis. You may also try to fit the author's work into a larger framework. In other words, relate how the reviewed text answers particular historiographical questions, concerns, or trends.

In your body paragraphs, you should briefly summarize the author's arguments. This summary should not be a blow-by-blow description of the work; instead, highlight the main points of the author's work and the insights that this work brings to the field.

Next, provide a summary of the reception of the author's work. You should consult and cite several book reviews by scholars in peer-reviewed journals. Use Chicago-Turabian-style footnotes for any citations. Actual published book reviews rarely (if ever) cite other reviews, but you will benefit from reading and summarizing the critiques of others. You may find book reviews for each work through the online databases ATLA and JSTOR or by simply typing in the book's title and "review" in the Skidmore Library's "Searchmore" tool (main library webpage).

Once you have documented the book's critical reception, you should offer your own critique. You might want to assess the author's work in the light of some of the following questions. Is the work well-documented? Has the author used questionable sources or made hasty interpretations? Do you find major logical faults with the author's arguments? Does academic jargon obscure the author's argument? When you make such critiques, do not clutter your text with "I think. . ." or "in my opinion." Do not be tentative. Be bold and make strong arguments. However, always try to be fair.

Finally, summarize the contribution the reviewed work makes to the broader field of Native studies or religious studies. What does this work help scholars understand in general? At this point, you may also make suggestions about the text's suitability for various reading audiences. Should this text be used in undergraduate survey courses, upper-level undergraduate classes, graduate courses, or simply by specialist historians? Conclude with a final recommendation on the book. Is this work definitive or is there much more to be studied? Does the work make a stunning contribution to the field, or is the work so seriously flawed as to merit little notice?

**Stylistic format:** double spaced, Times-New Roman font, one-inch margins, no page number on first page, all other pages numbered at the bottom (centered)

**Due date:** Varies by text chosen; consult the syllabus under "Reading Schedule"